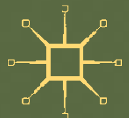
BLACK WOMEN'S LIBERATORY PEDAGOGIES

RESISTANCE, TRANSFORMATION, AND HEALING WITHIN AND BEYOND THE ACADEMY

EDITED BY OLIVIA N. PERLOW, DURENE I. WHEELER, SHARON L. BETHEA, AND BARBARA M. SCOTT



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Olivia N. Perlow • Durene I. Wheeler
Sharon L. Bethea • BarBara M. Scott
Editors

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We dedicate this volume to our foremothers, bloodmothers, and othermothers upon whose shoulders we stand and whose fighting spirits live in us today. Their impeccable foresight, fortitude, and commitment to social justice and equality has expanded our horizons and improved our communities and our lives. We continue to be inspired by them and we are honored to follow in their formidable footsteps.

Preface

This book is simultaneously a personal and political project, which are of course inextricably linked. The idea for this volume, conceived via "kitchen table" talks and sista girl check-ins, was birthed out of our relentless resistance to the continuous denial and dismissal of Black women's intellectual production and liberation projects. In these moments, we began to envision an intellectual space to celebrate the breadth of Black women's liberatory practices, contextualizing them within our lived experiences.

Over the course of this project, we have learned many life lessons, one of the most profound being that despite numerous academic and political accomplishments, so many Black women carry a *brave bruised girlchild* inside of them. She has continually been told that she is not good enough, not smart enough, and that she does not deserve to let her light shine. Even though Black women are often able to intellectualize our awareness of the negative socio-political messages constructed about us, it is not easy to escape their impact.

We came to realize that with all of our presumed sophistication, we were not exempt from this conundrum. Consequently, we found ourselves coaching many of the authors and each other through the very difficult writing process, which required collectively and radically embracing our vulnerabilities as well as our knowledge, skills, and ways of being as Black women and as scholars. By cultivating mutually empowering co-mentoring relationships with many of the Black women in this volume, we engaged in what Denise Taliaferro Baszile calls the *praxis of radical Black female intersubjectivity*, or what Mary Louise McCarthy calls a *pedagogy of*

Sistership. Guided by the spirits of our ancestors and foremothers, we invoked the bonds that stretch across time and space. In so doing, we were able to discover and/or reclaim our collective power as Black women. Acknowledging each other, we reaffirmed our own and each other's humanity.

The editorial process took unfamiliar twists and turns, leading us to places we never envisioned or experienced, but nevertheless embraced. Throughout this process, some of the women (including ourselves) experienced illness (both physical and mental), financial strain, the dissolution of partnerships, the incarceration, and even the passing of loved ones. And yet, these are the everyday lives of Black women. Although we took extra precaution to be tender with each other, if at any time we failed to be as gentle as we could've or should've been, we are truly sorry, for transcending the *culture of domination* is not always easy or straightforward.

Notwithstanding these challenges, we were able to provide, not only an intellectual space but also, in keeping with our African traditions, a spiritual and familial space in which we constructed a community of resistance as we continue to develop and hone our talents and skills as educators and activists. Within the context of such nurturing intellectual spaces, we can continue our resistance and liberatory work that challenges the Western intellectual tradition of white and male superiority, of socially constructed knowledge and exclusivity—spaces where we develop, set forth, and share strategies for liberation.

To be sure, in the final analysis, the purpose of this volume is not to appease, make comfortable nor safe, those that do not share our struggle. Rather our primary goal is to plant seeds of resistance, water the roots of transformation, and cultivate the fruits of healing for Black women, our communities, and humanity as a whole. In conclusion, for us as well as many of the authors, this volume has been about going home—a spiritual and metaphysical repatriation—an honoring and celebration of our ancestors and foremothers as well as our African roots, all of which have kept us grounded in a vision of a more just and humane world. Ashe.

Chicago, IL Olivia N. Perlow
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Liberation Pedagogies

(For the twins, Minnie Lee and Mattie Mae)

—Joy James, Williams College

Black Women's Liberatory Pedagogies provides many examples of what it means to risk to be both teacher and learner in the pursuit of freedoms that serve privileges or predations of the captor.

The authors write as liberators—for themselves, their communities, and institutions. They labor for *thinking* that revives concepts of what is *just*. The issue of justice, so central to this volume, is of course an issue of politics and power.

These first decades of the twenty-first century have been a political roller coaster ride. The breakneck speed of our perilous journey in democracy is marked by cheap thrills and screams yet offers no new destinations: We end up where we started. This book brakes at personal, national, and global impulses that shut eyes tightly against a blurred, accelerated world where carnival barkers and salesmen engineer nerve-wracking tumult with threats and violence that most—especially Black women—can neither avert nor control.

In this climate, *Black Women's Liberatory Pedagogies* becomes essential. It has the courage to call us to senses shaped by community "theorizing." Historically depicted as interlopers within the realm of "higher thinking," infantilized as entertainment and caretakers, Black women see the scope and depth of their intellectual, political, artistic-spiritual autonomy overlooked or underestimated. Still, as progressives or radicals they redefine

the academy. Re-centering its pantheon and factory, while deflecting abuse or “micro and macro aggressions,” Black women educators continue to demand accountability and insight.

Dismissive attitudes and attacks challenge Black female presence, scholarship, and integrity reflected in research, narratives, critiques, and art. However, this book moves past vilification to examine how educators turn victimization into inspiration in order to leverage a productivity that focuses on liberatory, critical thinking.

Victimization does not constitute leadership. Resistance does. In subtle and bold ways, *Black Women’s Liberatory Pedagogies* presents scholarship, insight, humor, and humility that rewrites what it means to be a thoughtful, caring person with capaciousness for thought directed toward reality rather than deceptions. In and as resistance, these writers “threaten” demagoguery and refined and vulgar violence in which capture and consumption disproportionately fixate on Black women.

In a fair fight, opponents meet you in a battle of ethical ideals and intellectualism. Fair fights are rare. With the absence of public, intellectual debate, distortions and lies are increasingly more fashionable than virtue. Recognizing precarity, this book unveils unethical ploys and rewrites the codes for obtainable freedom.

Not everyone desires pedagogies of liberation. Structures demand unwavering loyalty to themselves, at the expense of truth telling and theorizing. Yet, here readers find fidelity to forms and figures of brilliance that allow teaching with dignity and honor.

Books are not sufficient on their own to make necessary changes. Backlash and co-optation are common. The dismissals of Black women building liberation pedagogies function in a similar way to man-made CO_2 emissions. Anti-Black female intellectualism exudes a pernicious toxicity. The denigration or celebration of Black female resilience co-exists with Black women’s emotional, intellectual, biological amputations, prosthetics, and graveyards. This is why the political organizing expressed in this text is extremely important.

We celebrate this publication for varied reasons. First, because, as Audre Lorde observes, we were never meant to survive, and definitely not in the academy. Second, because, as Octavia Butler notes, with foreign bodies clearly marked by dismemberments and mutations, Black maternals disciplined by love inevitably fight captivity. Third, because collective genealogy reveals that ancestral mothers made formidable demands upon the

truth: Whenever and wherever truth was interred, they unearthed everything including their own lives to restore it.

We have all buried and will continue to bury our mothers. Some mothers raised us intellectually with spirit. Other mothers abandoned us after giving what they could spare in a rage with defeat that they thought could not be undone. The maternal lineage exists in the tutelage of Toni, Zoe, Cecile, Uvanney, Valerie, Kirsten, Andrea, Raven, Kathryn, A. Marie, Edward, Eyo, William, Loretta, Stephanie, Eve, Janaé, Derise, Lakeesha, Denise, Jennifer, and Olivia, Durene, Sharon, BarBara.

Their anthology is thorny. Its painful and devastating experiential knowledge shapes scholarship, alphabet, and grammar in a fiery critique written on the board and wall. With steely, patient kindness, these epistemologies work to refuse cheap games and offer instead a transformative thrill: Swim in the dark, cool waters of Yemoya and Oshun, and, rather than fixate on drowning, focus on the fires lit to illuminate shore.

Contents

1 **Introduction** 1
Olivia N. Perlow, Durene I. Wheeler, Sharon L. Bethea, and BarBara M. Scott

Part I Challenges to Black Women in the Academy: Pedagogies of Resistance 19

2 **The Curriculum That Has No Name: A Choreo-pedagogy for Colored Girls Seeking to Fly over the Rainbow** 21
Toni C. King

3 ***Black Skin, White Masks*: Negotiating Institutional Resistance to Revolutionary Pedagogy and Praxis in the HBCU** 45
Zoe Spencer

4 **Black Women Academics and Senior Managers Resisting Gendered Racism in British Higher Education Institutions** 65
Cecile Wright, Uvanney Maylor, and Valerie Watson

5 Stories of Migration: Passing Through, Crossing Over, and Decolonial Transgressing in Academyland 85
Kirsten T. Edwards

6 Gettin' Free: Anger as Resistance to White Supremacy Within and Beyond the Academy 101
Olivia N. Perlow

7 Black Women's Co-Mentoring Relationships as Resistance to Marginalization at a PWI 125
Andrea N. Baldwin and Raven Johnson

Part II Transformative Pedagogies: Theory, Praxis, Strategies, and Applications 141

8 Teaching and Learning Philosophical "Special" Topics: Black Feminism and Intersectionality 143
Kathryn T. Gines, A. Marie Ranjbar, Edward O'Byrn, Eyo Ewara, and William Paris

9 Teaching Reproductive Justice: An Activist's Approach 159
Loretta J. Ross

10 *Close/Bye*: Staging [State] Intimacy and Betrayal in 'Performance of Literature' 181
Stephanie Leigh Batiste

11 The Quality of the Light: Evidence, Truths, and the Odd Practice of the Poet-Sociologist 195
Eve L. Ewing

12 Black Queer Feminism as Praxis: Building an Organization and a Movement 211
Janaé E. Bonsu

Part III Pedagogies of Healing 225

13 Calling on the Divine and Sacred Energy of Queens: Bringing Afrikan Indigenous Wisdom and Spirituality to the Academy 227
Derise Tolliver Atta

14 Healing Through (Re)Membering and (Re)Claiming Ancestral Knowledge About Black Witch Magic 245
Lakeesha J. Harris

15 Another Lesson Before Dying: Toward a Pedagogy of Black Self-Love 265
Denise Taliaferro Baszile

16 Healing Circles as Black Feminist Pedagogical Interventions 281
Jennifer L. Richardson

17 Kuja Nyumbani (Coming Home): Using African-Centered Pedagogy to Educate Black Students in the Academy 295
Sharon L. Bethea

18 Afterword: Giving Life—Black Women's Liberatory Praxis 321
Helen A. Neville

Index 325

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Stephanie Leigh Batiste is Associate Professor of Black Studies and English at the University of California at Santa Barbara and Director of the Hemispheric South/s Research Initiative. Batiste co-edits the NYU Book Series Performance and American Culture and directs the UCSB Hemispheric South/s Research Initiative. Her book *Darkening Mirrors: Imperial Representation in Depression Era African American Performance* (Duke University Press, 2011) focuses on the relationship between power and identity in Black performance cultures to reimagine Black life and ways of being. She is also a creative writer, performer, and supporter of the arts.

Sharon L. Bethea is Associate Professor in Counselor Education, Inner City Studies and Coordinator of the African and African American Studies Program at Northeastern Illinois University. She serves on the National Board for the Association of Black Psychologists. Her interests are African healing systems, Black youth civic engagement, and African Diaspora study abroad with students.

Janaé E. Bonsu is an activist-scholar and organizer based in Chicago. She serves as the National Public Policy Chair of Black Youth Project 100 (BYP100), a national member-led organization of 18- to 35-year-old Black activists and organizers dedicated to creating justice and freedom through a Black Queer Feminist lens. Janaé is also a Ph.D. candidate in social work at the University of Illinois at Chicago, where her work focuses on Black women, state violence, and alternatives to state intervention.

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Eyo Ewara is a Ph.D. candidate in Philosophy at the Pennsylvania State University. His research focuses on ontology through the intersections of continental philosophy, queer theory, and critical philosophy of race. His work currently centers on questions around the conceptions of ethical comportment that resist intelligible appearance politics of civil society.

This project focuses on Afro-pessimism, Queer Theory, and Phenomenology through readings of Judith Butler, Lee Edelman, Frank B. Wilderson, and Martin Heidegger.

Eve L. Ewing is an Assistant Professor at the University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration. She is a qualitative sociologist of education whose work is focused on racism and inequality, and the impact of these social structures on American public schools and the lived experiences of young people. She is also the author of the poetry collection *Electric Arches* (Haymarket Books).

Kathryn T. Gines' primary research and teaching interests lie in Continental philosophy (especially Existentialism and Phenomenology), Africana Philosophy, Black Feminist Philosophy, and Critical Philosophy of Race. She has published articles on race, assimilation, feminism, intersectionality, and sex and sexuality in contemporary hip-hop. Gines is the author of *Hannah Arendt and the Negro Question* (Indiana University Press, 2014) and co-edited an anthology titled *Convergences: Black Feminism and Continental Philosophy* (SUNY Press, 2010). She is the founding director of the Collegium of Black Women Philosophers (CBWP), co-founder (with Shirley Moody Turner) of the Anna Julia Cooper Society, and a founding co-editor of the journal *Critical Philosophy of Race* (CPR).

Lakeesha J. Harris is the founder of Black Witch Chronicles, Sojourner's Healing Room, and Black Witch University. As a practicing and evolving Black Witch, Lakeesha is a Reiki Master Teacher, Root Worker, Diviner, Community Healer and Urban Farmer. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Women's and Gender Studies from Northeastern Illinois University and in 2011 was selected as a Student Laureate. Her political literary work, *Spirit House*, was commissioned by the Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center for the healing of the community.

Raven Johnson is a high school English teacher in Birmingham, Alabama where she was born and raised. She spent her undergraduate years at Auburn University in Auburn, Alabama where she met Dr. Andrea Baldwin. They would eventually work together to co-author this article. At Auburn, Raven gained a profound passion for minorities and minority issues. She spends much of her work as a teacher advocating for the inner city students she teaches. She is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Secondary Education from the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

Toni C. King, Ph.D., is Associate Professor of Black Studies and Women's and Gender Studies, and Director of the Center for Black Studies at Denison University. She earned a Bachelor's degree in psychology from Oklahoma State University, a Master's degree in Counseling from The Ohio State University, and a doctorate in Organizational Behavior from Case Western Reserve University. King co-edited *Black Womanist Leadership: Tracing the Motherline* (King and Ferguson, SUNY Press, 2011). Her scholarship, professional consultations, workshops, and seminars focus on relationships as a site for leadership development and recovery from oppression.

Uvanney Maylor is a professor and the Director of the Institute for Research in Education at the University of Bedfordshire. Her research interests include race, ethnicity, culture, educational equity, inclusion, and social justice. She is particularly concerned about the impact of race and culture on educational practice and student and teacher experience, identities and outcomes. She is a former member of the UK-wide Higher Education Funding Council for Education Research in Excellence Framework (2014) sub-panel for Education, and is an invited fellow of the Royal Society of Arts.

Helen A. Neville is Professor of Educational Psychology and African American Studies at University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. She is past Associate Editor of *The Counseling Psychologist* and *Journal of Black Psychology*. Her work on race, racism, and racial identity is widely published in peer-reviewed journals and books. Dr. Neville has been recognized for research and mentoring including receiving the APA Kenneth and Mamie Clark Award, the APA Division 45 Charles and Shirley Thomas Award, the Winter Roundtable Janet E. Helms Mentoring Award, The Association of Black Psychologists' Distinguished Psychologist Award, and the APA Minority Fellowship Program Dalmas Taylor Award for Outstanding Research.

Edward O'Byrn is a Ph.D. candidate in Philosophy at Penn State University. His areas of research are Ethics, Black American Philosophy, and 20th Century Existential Philosophy. O'Byrn's specific interests are in Black American Philosophy with a special emphasis on the Black Panther Party and Black Existentialism. His dissertation explores the intersections of Black American Philosophy and Existentialism. His work seeks to explore and emphasize the importance of existential thinking across

existential thought focusing on figures such as Lewis Gordon, Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, and Angela Davis.

William Paris is a Ph.D. candidate for the Dual Title in Philosophy and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Penn State University. He is currently the Forrest S. Crawford Fellow in Ethical Inquiry with the Rock Ethics Institute. His dissertation, entitled "Frantz Fanon, Sylvia Wynter, and Hortense Spillers on the Ungendering of Black Life," brings these three theorists together in order to show how they develop critical tools for understanding the violent apparatus of colonial gendering toward "Black life" post-Enslavement and Colonialism. He is planning to finish in the Spring of 2018.

Olivia N. Perlow currently serves as an Associate Professor of Sociology and the African and African American Studies and Women's and Gender Studies programs at Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago. She is also the coordinator of the Women's and Gender Studies program. She specializes in race and ethnicity, social inequalities, critical criminology, and radical pedagogies.

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Jennifer Richardson is Assistant Professor of Gender and Women's Studies at Western Michigan University. As a Black feminist and sociologist, her scholarship investigates identity and its complex and nuanced intersections. Particularly interested in exploring intergenerational healing circles, in the tradition of African ring shouts, as a methodological approach, Dr. Richardson's work focuses on bringing attention to Africana women and collective healing as a socio-political path to the recovery of self. Dr. Richardson's scholarship also brings light to the multidimensional ways Africana women negotiate the intersections of popular media, dominant discourses of beauty, and constructions of identity.

Loretta Ross started her career in the women's movement in the 1970s, working at the D.C. Rape Crisis Center, NOW, the National Black

Women's Health Project, and SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective, among other social justice organizations. She is one of the co-creators of the Reproductive Justice framework and has lectured extensively on human rights, racism, appropriate whiteness, Calling In the Calling Out Culture, and violence against women. Her most recent publication is *Reproductive Justice: An Introduction* co-written with Rickie Solinger and published in 2017. She was the co-director of the 2004 March for Women's Lives with 1.15 million participants.

BarBara M. Scott is Professor Emeritus in Sociology and Interim Director of the Carruthers Center for Inner City Studies at Northeastern Illinois University. She is the author of numerous publications including a co-authored introductory textbook and a co-authored Marriage and Families textbook which is now in its 8th edition. Dr. Scott is an enthusiastic advocate of *applying sociology* and a *feminist/womanist and intersectional analysis* to the everyday worlds in which we live. She is also a social activist who has been at the forefront of organizing among national and international women of color, both within and outside of academia.

Zoe Spencer is a Black Woman Activist Scholar from Barry Farms Projects in Southeast Washington, DC. While she currently serves as a professor of Sociology in the Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice at Virginia State University, she firmly believes that her material and academic accomplishments are only relevant to the way in which they give her the space to be heard and the opportunity to carry out her Divine Purpose, that is, nourishing the consciousness of the students, inmates, and community members that she is called to serve.

Valerie Watson has worked in education for over 30 years, initially as a school teacher then working as an adult education lecturer, trainer, director of counseling studies, and now as a head of a university counselling service for students and staff. She has maintained an abiding interest in issues of race, ethnicity, and the impact of difference on relationships, community action, and the maintenance of health through the use of and access to the arts for all. Latterly her work has focused on the potential of therapeutic work in groups and organizational reflective practice as a healing agent.

Durene I. Wheeler holds an associate professor position at Northeastern Illinois University in Educational Inquiry and Curriculum Studies. She holds a Core faculty appointment in African and African American Studies

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Cecile Wright is a professor in Sociology at the University of Nottingham. Her research and teaching interests include youth, race, social inclusion, and ethno-cultural diversity in intersection with other markers of social location, such as gender, class, age, and the complex outcomes (both individual and social structural) that such intersections can entail.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Olivia N. Perlow, Durene I. Wheeler, Sharon L. Bethea, and BarBara M. Scott

Black[1] women from all walks of life have historically been freedom fighters and catalysts for societal, institutional, and individual change. However, discourse on Black women's contemporary resistance tends to focus on public political activity (i.e. protests), overlooking the countless and varied ways in which Black women engage in less visible, yet no less significant change-making efforts (Collins, 2009, 2013; Wane & Jagire, 2013). Accordingly, Laubscher (2006) asserts that "resistance can issue rhizomatically from anywhere and everywhere" (p. 208). For example, Black women are and have historically been at the forefront of liberation efforts through both formal and informal education where they have engaged in what Rochelle Brock (2005) has termed a "pedagogy of life," teaching resistance in various capacities as community activists, ministers, midwives, artists, and healers, and in a plethora of settings such as in homes, churches, schools, parks, community centers, libraries, museums, on street corners, and through media (see, e.g., Payne & Strickland, 2008; Hine & Thompson, 1998). As such, Black women have been instrumental to the cultivation of *liberatory pedagogies* purposefully designed to transmit oppositional knowledge to counter white supremacist and patriarchal

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hegemony, and to create positive, deep structural shifts in the ways of being, worldviews, and actions of those under their tutelage (Henry, 1998; Johnson, Pitre, & Johnson, 2014).

Teaching, in all of its forms, has historically been an integral part of Black women's struggle for social justice. The connection between early Black women educators' justice work and their pedagogies can best be described as "a collective, strategic, multidimensional pedagogical approach committed to liberation, equality, representation, participation and actualization in education and society though critiques and transformation of institutions, curriculum and epistemologies" (Gist, 2015, p. 51). Indeed, Black women have made tremendous pedagogical contributions toward Black liberation particularly where educational opportunities have been denied and/or there have been vast disparities (Clemons, 2014; Delpit, 1995; Fairclough, 2007; Foster, 1997; Phillips & McCaskill, 1995; Siddle-Walker, 2005). Black women educators of today join a river of Black foremothers[2] whose pedagogies not only served as resistance to white supremacist and patriarchal domination, but as healing and empowerment particularly for Black community members (Baker, 2011; Beauboeuf-LaFontant, 1999; Dixson, 2003; Giddings, 1984). However, because much of the pedagogical literature tends to center whiteness and/or maleness,[3] the subjugated knowledge of Black women educators who have done and are currently doing important work remains largely invisible. As such, this volume fills an important gap in the literature as it aims to illuminate, contextualize, and complicate Black women's liberatory pedagogical approaches, both within and beyond higher education.

As Joy James (1993) maintains, "We [Black women] tell our stories to illuminate the paths we travel and to share humor, courage and wisdom in this liberation struggle" (p. 31). In keeping with James' insight, this anthology takes an assets-based approach where authors present counter-stories that serve to challenge deficit thinking surrounding Black women's intellectual production (Bay, Griffin, Jones, & Savage, 2015), to push back against those who seek to define and exclude Black women's voices, and to heal, inspire, and transform others. Specifically, the authors share their wisdom through a wide range of sentiments as they document their challenges, triumphs, and the ways in which their Black womanhood (as well as their culture/ethnicity, class background, sexuality, etc.) has informed their unique pedagogies and praxes. In so doing, many of the authors also present model(s) for pedagogies, curriculum development, and frameworks based in Black/African indigenous knowledge systems. Thus this volume celebrates Black women's ancestral ties to Africa and the

power that this yields, while simultaneously offering culturally-specific tools to build a body of emancipatory wisdom, which reaches across disciplines, institutions, and populations.

In an effort to expand the literature on Black women's pedagogies, this volume incorporates a plethora of voices, theoretical and pedagogical frameworks, as well as a variety of disciplinary locations and teaching/learning environments. Through a multidimensional lens, the authors present pedagogy as a political endeavor aimed at decolonizing and redefining the ways we think about teaching, learning, and praxis. Notwithstanding differences in ideological and political underpinnings, the contributors to this volume are all committed to a praxis of liberation in which the transformative and healing power and potential of Black women's pedagogies is highlighted. As such, the authors move beyond victimhood to embrace the notion of Black women educators, scholars, and activists as active agents in the creation and maintenance of "cultures of dissent" (Mohanty, 1994, p. 162), in essence transforming the academy and/or society itself.

Ultimately, this book serves to reclaim educational spaces for Black women's knowledges, identities, and realities to emerge, providing important subtext for decolonizing pedagogy. Employing ancestral ways of knowing and the potency of narrative, the themes of this collection draw on community, collaboration, and consciousness-raising in order to create stories of resistance, transformation, and healing. In so doing, we have positioned Black women at the center in an effort to challenge our objectification and invisibility, (re)claiming a radical Black female subjectivity (hooks, 1989, 1992). We therefore anticipate that this volume will do far more than provide an academic scope. Rather, we hope to invoke perspectives that unbind pedagogy from the academy and white supremacist education, while simultaneously celebrating the rich rebellious resistance of each narrative voice within this work.

Stretching the Notion of Pedagogy

The term "pedagogy" has traditionally referred to the art or science of teaching, and, particularly in the professional field of education, tends to encompass instructional analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation of student learning. However, as Ellsworth (2005) notes, "our very frameworks for understanding what pedagogy is extends from our own cultural constructs of what counts as teaching and learning in institutional settings—constructs that reify traditional forms of intellectual

activity as the only possible mode of critical intervention" (p. 5). Thus, our conceptualization of pedagogy interrogates the above definition which excludes and negates pedagogies that do not fit neatly into this rigid, limited, and very technical view of what pedagogy is and should be. Instead, this volume rests on the assumption that education is a process rather than a product, expanding the concept of pedagogy beyond one's teaching practices to more holistically encompass the "meaningful interaction between teaching and learning" (Wink, 2011, p. 47), and the entire process of knowledge production and consumption. As such, liberatory pedagogy denotes a less formalized process illustrating a "collectively produced set of experiences organized around issues and concerns that allow for a critical understanding of everyday oppression as well as the dynamics involved in constructing alternative political cultures" (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1993, p. 27). Accordingly, in this volume we explore the multiplicity of meanings, forms, and outcomes of pedagogy, including unearthing the hidden or unacknowledged pedagogies of liberation that Black women engage, within and beyond a higher education setting.

While we acknowledge hooks' (1994) contention that the classroom can be a site for the transmission of liberatory pedagogies (as many authors in this volume demonstrate), we also argue that meaningful teaching/learning exchanges should not be limited to the classroom, or to formal education/educators (Roman & Eyre, 1997). Indeed, for Black people, pedagogy cannot be synonymous with the classroom or with schooling, because we have systematically been denied access to both, especially to higher education. Furthermore, the notion that our teachings should be bound to the classroom is not only elitist, but also oppressive (Freire, 1970).

Conversely, in opposition to Western epistemology that dichotomizes theory and practice, the concept of praxis—the process by which education leads to action—is central to liberatory education (Freire, 1970). We therefore argue that we must reframe our pedagogies as liberatory, regardless of the site in which teaching/learning occurs. For example, foremother and public pedagogue Septima Clark saw pedagogy as an active, communal, democratic, and dialectical process involving all different types of learners and society as the classroom, asserting:

> The school in which the Negro must be educated is the shopping center he is boycotting, the city council chamber where he is demanding justice, the ballot box at which he chooses his political leaders, the hiring offices where he demands that he be hired on merit, the meeting hall of the board of education where he insists on equal education. (Evans, 2009, p. xvi)

Many Black women bring multilayered and complex notions of pedagogy to their work, both inside and out of the classroom, informed by a history of resistance and a commitment to the liberation of Black peoples and humanity as a whole, which is particularly reflective of our relational community-oriented ontology (James, 1993, 2013; John, 1997; King & Swartz, 2014, 2016). Thus the majority of the authors in this volume (academics and practitioners alike) engage various educational contexts, practices, and sites beyond the classroom, with the understanding that we, as Black women, are inextricably linked to our communities.

Decolonizing and (Re)Claiming Pedagogy

At the heart of white supremacy and colonization is the sustained practice of cultural theft (Ani, 2000; Diop, 1974; DuBois, 1920; Emeagwali, 2006; Fanon, 1967). Thus many of the "innovative" pedagogies that white educators in the Western academy have claimed as their own such as cooperative/communal, experiential, active, student-centered, social-emotional, and service learning, as well as scholar-activism and social justice education, have been appropriated from precolonial Africa, Asia, and the Americas (Orelus & Brock, 2014; Hilliard, 1998; King & Swartz, 2014, 2016; Reagan, 2004). For example, mainstream pedagogical literature continues to deny, omit, and erase the foundational contributions of indigenous African educational philosophies and pedagogies, which can be traced as far back as the Ancient Kemetic (Egyptian) *Instruction of Ptahhotep*, "the oldest textbook on pedagogy" (Carruthers, 1999, p. 258). In this regard, King and Swartz (2016) posit:

> We have all been so disconnected from a positive identification with Africa and its cultural legacy—which includes thousands of years of educational excellence—that it has become the norm for African-derived content, concepts, and practices to be appropriated and presented as culturally denuded (corporate-driven) "best" knowledge and "best" pedagogical practices. (p. 12)

It is disheartening, to say the least, that white folks are viewed as the educational "experts" when their methods have been gravely inadequate for and damaging to Black people and other people of color (Asante, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Shujaa, 1994; Watkins, 2001). As Nobles (1998) asserts, formal education for Black people "has been, for the most part, training designed to reinforce our dehumanization and ultimately to disconnect us from the power of the African spirit (mind)" (p. xiv). We would do well to remember that while Black people have been on the

receiving end of white supremacist "mis-education" for hundreds of years (Woodson, 1990), *we* have been successfully educating *ourselves* for thousands of years (Hilliard III, 1995, 1998; Murrell, 2002; Watkins, 2015). In our attempt at "browning" the pedagogical literature (Gaztambide-Fernàndez, 2015), we are putting forth anti-colonial pedagogy as resistance to the erasure and co-optation of indigenous knowledges and experience (Dei, 2010). Thus in excavating indigenous African pedagogies, we are enacting what Jacob Carruthers terms *intellectual warfare,* "an ongoing battle to rescue, reclaim, and restore African history, culture, language, spirituality, and ethos to its rightful place within the scope of African humanity from the clutches of European interlopers who have seized our glorious heritage and claimed it as their own" (Levi, 2012, p. 180).

Precisely, Ancient Africa is the source of contemporary social justice/liberatory education where the *sesh* (teacher) of Kemet and the *oluko* (sage and teacher) of Yorubaland's pedagogies were based in the principles of MAAT (truth, justice, order, reciprocity, balance, harmony) (Hilliard, 1998; Karnga, 2010). Specifically, these pedagogical practices reject individualism and, instead, model human compassion and collective responsibility in service of the betterment of an interconnected humanity. For centuries Black women have retained the "heritage knowledge" (King & Swartz, 2016, p. 4) of African ontology and epistemology such as the above principles of MAAT and Ubuntu (interconnectedness). Cynthia Dillard (2012) asserts that the "holistic view of the African woman, in relation to her community, echoes pre-colonial African practices and values regarding the physical as well as the spiritual well-being of the community" (p. 72). Passing on this knowledge intergenerationally as griots (storytellers), djelis (historians), and Mwalimus (teachers), Black women have carried on these African traditions through both formal and informal pedagogical processes as beacons of service, social responsibility, and activist intellectualism, laying the foundation for Black women's contemporary liberatory pedagogies to emerge.

Black Women in the Academy

While higher education has been characterized as "one of the greatest hopes for intellectual and civic progress" (Boyer, 1997, p. 85), for many Black women, the academy has actually been *part* of our struggle, especially

in Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). Despite the rhetoric of the academy's commitment to social justice, there continues to be prescription to dominant Eurocentric/androcentric ideological, epistemological, methodological, and pedagogical traditions that are meant to maintain the hegemonic order (Baszile, 2006; Harris & González, 2012). Consequently, the literature concerning Black women in academia is replete with examples[4] of marginalization, isolation, and compartmentalization[5]. It delineates a clear pattern of institutional and interpersonal oppression where Black women are ever cognizant that "their presence represents a disruptive incursion into spaces never intended for them" (McKay, 1997).

Notwithstanding the challenges faced by Black women in the academy that are well-documented in the literature, there is also a rich legacy of universities as sites where Black women students and educators have served as important agents of qualitative change (Biondi, 2014; Kendi, 2012; Kynard, 2013; Ransby, 2003). Black women within the academy have histsorically been at the forefront of profound social movements such as the women's rights, civil rights, anti-apartheid, and other anti-colonial movements. Undoubtedly, Black women have only been able to enter the academy as a direct result of some of these same movements, and thus many feel a sense of responsibility to continue that legacy of fighting for "academic, cultural, social, and political change in scholarship and pedagogy" (Butler, 2000, p. 27). Research confirms that for academics of color, and particularly for Black women, success is often measured by how effective they have been as change agents, within the academy and beyond (Antonio, 2002; Shockley, 2013; Thomas, 2001; Thompson & Louque, 2005). For example, Tyson (2001) describes the connection between her role as an academic freedom fighter and her role as a liberatory pedagogue:

> As a sister in the academy, the sum of who I am as a teacher, researcher, and activist makes it possible for me to continue to breathe a breath of life into my work: A breath of life that sustains pedagogy grounded in critical consciousness, a research agenda grounded in an epistemology of cultural specificity and an activism grounded in emancipatory action. (p. 148)

The chapters in this volume suggest that the spirit of Sankofa prevails, as contemporary Black women academics honor our Ancestors and Elders

for modeling scholarly activism and liberatory pedagogies. Furthermore, in keeping with the legacy of our ancestors and foremothers' community-oriented ontology and social justice mission, Black women academics tend not to confine our pedagogies to the classroom, or to the halls of the Ivory Tower (such as our involvement within the Movement for Black Lives), which challenges the notion of what "an academic should do or be" (Evans, 2007, p. 2). Because Black women are doing critical work that does not fit neatly with, and often challenges, white male hegemony, our "success" not only often goes unrecognized, but these efforts are sometimes even punished.

Specifically, many of the authors in this volume cultivate liberatory pedagogies that demystify and interrogate canonical knowledge, exposing the role of oppressive ideologies in shaping power relations both in academe and in society at large. As hooks (1994) notes, for Black women in the academy, "the choice to teach against the grain of conformity, to challenge the status quo, has often had negative consequences. And that is part of what makes that choice one that is not politically neutral" (p. 203). However, the magnitude of social injustice and unnecessary human suffering makes this "choice" unequivocal. Thus many of the Black women in this volume claim spaces of radical possibility within the academy, holding onto a deep and inviolable conviction in our ability to effect change through our pedagogies and praxis of liberation.

Organization of the Book

The chapters showcased in this book represent a wide range of Black women's liberatory pedagogies, from political education in a community organizing capacity to higher education in classrooms and beyond. This volume is divided into three sections—Part I: *Challenges to Black Women in the Academy/Pedagogies of Resistance*; Part II: *Transformative Pedagogies: Theory, Praxis, Strategies, and Applications*; and Part III: *Pedagogies of Healing*—all demonstrating the complexity and heterogeneity of Black women's experiences, ontologies, epistemologies, methodologies, and educational philosophies.

Part I: *Challenges to Black Women in the Academy/Pedagogies of Resistance* focuses on the power and agency that Black women faculty exercise within an oppressive academy. Specifically, this section explores varying strategies Black women professors employ in an effort to overcome microaggressions, institutional racism, and colonizing and oppres-

sive curriculum and practices. This section begins with Chap. 2, "The curriculum that has no name: A choreo-pedagogy for colored girls seeking to fly over the rainbow," in which professor Toni King uses a poetic narrative format to re-contextualize, and further theorize womanist pedagogies of relational social change that Black women educators commonly cultivate as tools of critical education, leadership development, and recovery from race, class, and gender oppressions in order to more adequately address the needs of their Black women students. In Chap. 3, "*Black Skin, White Masks*: Negotiating Institutional Resistance to Revolutionary Pedagogy and Praxis in the HBCU," professor Zoe Spencer celebrates the passion of engaging students in critical and liberatory pedagogy at a Historically Black College and University where she has experienced institutional resistance and the vilification of her work as a revolutionary pedagogue and human rights activist. In Chap. 4, "Black Women Academics and Senior Managers Resisting Gendered Racism in British Higher Education Institutions," Cecile Wright, Uvanney Maylor, and Valarie Watson voice the experiences of isolation, racism, sexism, and a lack of opportunities for career advancement for Black women academics in the UK, but more importantly, they highlight Black women's empowerment, agency, tactical flair, effective maneuverings, and articulations and demonstrations of personal power as resistance to white supremacy in the UK academy.

In Chap. 5, "Stories of Migration: Passing Through, Crossing Over, and Decolonial Transgressing in Academyland," professor Kirsten Edwards draws on Black women's storytelling tradition to explore issues of home and not-belonging, and the multiple locations that shape her pedagogical resistance to the practices and expectations of a colonizing academy. Similarly, in Chap. 6, "Gettin' Free: Anger as Resistance to White Supremacy Within and Beyond the Academy," professor Olivia Perlow explores the evolution and uses of anger as an ongoing personal, intellectual, political, and pedagogical resistance project as a Black woman professor seeking to destabilize a white supremacist patriarchal academy and society. In the final chapter in this section, Chap. 7, "Black Women's Co-Mentoring Relationships as Resistance to Marginalization at a PWI," professor Andrea Baldwin and her undergraduate student Raven Johnson share their experiences with the development of a non-hierarchical and mutually beneficial co-mentoring relationship as a successful strategy that Black women at PWIs can utilize to resist marginalization.

Part II: *Transformative Pedagogies: Theory, Praxis, Strategies, and Applications* highlights the transformative potential of Black women's pedagogies through an examination of the multitude of theoretical and philosophical underpinnings, as well as the various capacities and disciplines in which Black women strategically apply their pedagogies. In Chap. 8, "Teaching and Learning Philosophical 'Special' Topics: Black Feminism and Intersectionality," professor Kathryn Gines co-authors with her graduate students A. Marie Ranjbar, Edward O'Byrn, Eyo Ewara, and William Paris to archive the transformative nature of their graduate seminar, which they attribute to Gines' pedagogy and the lessons and insights gleaned from the course readings on Black feminism and intersectionality, as well as the particular demographics of the class, all of which led to the intentional cultivation of an affirming community. In Chap. 9, "Teaching Reproductive Justice: An Activist's Approach," human rights activist and co-founder of the Reproductive Justice (RJ) Framework Loretta Ross explores a radical and transformative pedagogical approach to teaching RJ that challenges the pro-choice/pro-life binary through an intersectional human rights framework. In Chap. 10,"*Close/Bye*: Staging [State] Intimacy and Betrayal in 'Performance of Literature'," professor Stephanie Leigh Batiste documents the transformative process of co-creating the play "CLOSE/BYE" with her students, in which themes such as closeness and distance, love and betrayal were explored as means to layer self-knowledge, intimate relationships, social injustice, and state violence.

In Chap. 11, "The Quality of the Light: Evidence, Truths, and the Odd Practice of the Poet-Sociologist," Eve Ewing explores her dual identity as a poet and sociology professor/scholar through three lenses: the liberatory and transformative potential of poetry in the classroom, the use of poetry as evidence for sociological phenomena, and the active craft of living and being in the world as a poet. In the final chapter in this section, Chap. 12, "Black Queer Feminism as Praxis: Building an Organization and a Movement," Black Youth Project 100 (BYP100) activist and graduate student Janae Bonsu offers an organizational case analysis of the theory and practice of transformative organizing and movement building focusing on group-centered leadership, transformative justice and community accountability, policy development and advocacy, political education, and campaigns and direct action organizing that are reflective of Black Queer Feminist values.

The final section of the book, Part III: *Pedagogies of Healing*, focuses on the liberatory pedagogies that Black women utilize to rejuvenate and

restore hope, joy, power, and the healing energies needed to fight the good fight. This section in particular positions Black women as critical knowledge producers who reject the notion of victimhood and rather embrace their agency as revolutionary change-makers, facilitating the empowerment of those under their tutelage. In the first chapter of this section, Chap. 13, "Calling on the Divine and Sacred Energy of Queens: Bringing Afrikan Indigenous Wisdom and Spirituality to the Academy," professor Derise Tolliver discusses how her praxis as an African-centered educator and facilitator of learning has been influenced by her mother, grandmothers, and great grandmother, whom she refers to as "Mommas to the 4th power," to illustrate how their examples of complementarity, creativity, character, celebration, and cultural groundedness have manifested in both her personal life and professional efforts to facilitate healing in the lives of her students. Similarly, in Chap. 14, "Healing through (Re)Membering and (Re)Claiming Ancestral Knowledge about Black Witch Magic," Black witch Lakeesha Harris recalls the influence of various Black women in her life as she examines her own journey to healing. Furthermore, Harris discusses how through the creation of pedagogical spaces such as Sojourner's Healing Room, Black Witch Chronicles, and Black Witch University she has taught others to reclaim their innate wisdom, spiritual connection, and magical and ritual application in order to facilitate healing for Black women, queer and trans* people, and their communities.

In Chap. 15, "Another Lesson Before Dying: Toward a Pedagogy of Black Self-Love," professor Denise Taliaferro Baszile discusses her pedagogy which allows and encourages Black women faculty to teach who they are, translating her practice of loving blackness into a healing pedagogy of Black self-love designed to address the complexity of Black student alienation on campus. In Chap. 16, "Healing Circles as Black Feminist Pedagogical Interventions," professor Jennifer Richardson offers a theoretical paradigm shift in thinking about Black feminist pedagogy and praxis by exploring the ways in which the incorporation of self-care and the erotic through the radical Black feminist tradition can lead to healing students and others, particularly those that are Black women. Closing out this section and the book itself, in Chap. 17, "Kuja Nyumbani (*Coming Home*): Using African-Centered Pedagogy to Educate Black Students in the Academy," professor Sharon Bethea brings readers home to our African roots of teaching, learning, and healing through African-centered curriculum and teaching practices with Black students in the academy.

Notes

1. Self-definition and naming are socio-political acts that are critical to this volume. As Steven Biko asserts, "Merely by describing yourself as black you have started on a road towards emancipation, you have committed yourself to fight against all forces that seek to use your blackness as a stamp that marks you out as a subservient being." Each author answered our very specific call for papers, which required self-identification as a "Black woman." The term "Black" is a political term that not only speaks to identity, culture, location, and agency, but is also fluid, dynamic, and context-dependent. Given its complexity, to present one definition for "Black" would limit its scope and would contribute to the univocal and sometimes fixed analytic discourse often utilized in the academy. Thus, within their narratives, each author develops and exhibits her own definition of "Black womanness" and specifies the terms she uses to self-identify (i.e. Black, African American, Africana, Afrikan, African Caribbean).
2. There are innumerable examples of these foremothers, such as Maria Stewart, Anna Julia Cooper, Ida B. Wells, Mary McCleod Bethune, Fannie Lou Hamer, Fannie Jackson Coppin, Lucy Moten, Frances Watkins Harper, Margaret Washington, Mary Church Terrell, Septima Poinsette Clark, Ella Baker, Gloria Richardson, Dorothy Height, Geneva Smitherman, JoAnn Robinson, Shirley Chisolm, Barbara Jordan, and many others who are less known.
3. Some of the critiques of this pedagogical literature (i.e. critical pedagogy) are that these pedagogues are perpetuating hegemony and epistemic violence by validating a white male worldview that largely excludes the voices and experiences of people of color and organic intellectuals as knowledge producers. Furthermore, these pedagogues mostly theorize in the abstract and are thus disconnected from the lived experiences of people of color (see, e.g., Orelus & Brock, 2014; Darder, 2011; Grande, 2004; hooks, 1998; Lynn & Jennings, 2009).
4. Stanley (2006) identifies a host of phrases and terms that have been used in the literature to describe the experiences of faculty of color: multiple marginality, multiple oppressions, otherness, living in two worlds, the academy's new cast, silenced voices, ivy halls and glass walls, individual survivors or institutional transformers, from border to center, visible and invisible barriers, the color of teaching, and navigating between two worlds.
5. See, for example, Benjamin, 1997; Bonner et al., 2015; Ford, 2011; Gregory, 1999; Gutiérrez y Muhs, Niemann, González & Harris, 2012; Harley, 2008; Harlow, 2003; Harris, 2007; Henderson, Hunter & Hildreth, 2010; Hendrix, 2007; Jackson & Johnson, 2011; Johnson & Johnson, 2014; Myers, 2002; Patton, 2004; Pittman, 2010; Stanley, 2006; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001; Thompson & Louque, 2005; Turner & Myers, 2000; Tusmith & Reddy, 2002; Vargas, 2002.

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PART I

Challenges to Black Women in the Academy: Pedagogies of Resistance

CHAPTER 2

The Curriculum That Has No Name: A Choreo-pedagogy for Colored Girls Seeking to Fly over the Rainbow

Toni C. King

The following poetic narrative/performance ritual tells the counter-story of the "hidden curriculum" (Henry, 1998; Maparyan, 2012) that Black women commonly integrate into their lives and work as educators. Written in "the" collective voice of Black women educators, this narrative illustrates and legitimizes the hidden curriculum as a tool of critical education, leadership development, and recovery from the tripartite oppressions of race, class, and gender/s. The hidden curriculum refers to Black women who engage in motherwork (Collins, 2000) and mothering the mind (Brown, 1991), while fulfilling the responsibilities of their teaching posts from a range of structural categories—contingency faculty, pre-tenured faculty, senior faculty, and so on. The pedagogical elements of the hidden curriculum span a

The title of this work and the prelude's use of "woman in red" and so on signifies Ntozake Shange's groundbreaking performance piece *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf: a choreopoem* (1989, University of Michigan).

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host of educational and leadership development spheres such as bi- or polyculturalism (DuBois, 1903), racial identity development, intra- and intercultural politics, socialization to and navigation of race-gender identity within the dominant culture (Dunbar, 1998), presentation of self, and preparation for change agentry and social justice leadership. Most significantly, this whole-person curricular approach transcends the bounds of the traditional classroom. Although this work exists in addition to formal teaching responsibilities, this performance ritual recasts this cultural woman-to-woman pedagogical process beyond the notion of the "extra burden" of mentoring and service disproportionately occurring among Black women faculty. Rather it is re-contextualized to portray and further theorize womanist pedagogies of relational social change and resistance that Black women integrate as a stream of their teaching praxis in academe. By employing a womanist tale of Motherline leadership development, cross-generational bonding for political resistance, and woman-to-woman healing, this piece relays the costs, risks, and rewards of living out the core pedagogical values of the hidden curriculum. Ultimately, the spoken word tradition conveys a multiplicity of embodied experience, emotionality, ways of knowing, and cultural resonance that creates possibilities for readers to gain cultural insider insight. In this way, this piece itself is pedagogy—as it delineates and validates for readers subjugated knowledge occurring "beneath" the ivory tower.

Prelude

> **Woman in Red.**[1] "If we are to contend in theory and practice, with the educational difficulties of students from working class and racialized communities …"
>
> **Woman in Black.** "…we must seek answers as Freire argued, within the long histories of economic, social, and political oppression … as they currently exist within our own lives and that of our students."
>
> **Woman in Green.** "This concept of culture links decolonizing education to communal and ancestral knowledge …"
>
> —Antonia Darder, educator (Darder, 2013, p. i)[2]

[Woman in Red enters stage left and speaks this poem into mythopoetic being. She symbolizes one of many Black women in the academy. And so, where indicated, should one dare to perform this choreopedagogy …enter another woman in Red, and then in Black, and then in Green … in performance spaces of your own creation.]

They seek the thing that has no name.

as if we carry it in our pockets.

they are the girls inter/rupted
the ones we set out to find
there is within each one a mother-less child

when they see us, recognition lights their eyes
they are willing to lay their heads upon our knees
to eat from our hands
they lay their purple gratitude over our shoulders
find us tender
even in the tough-teaching-trenches
they have requested

this is their registration.

some days, our hands are empty, but our minds work
to find something in the wind
the rustle of the trees
their memory of ancestral love
to manifest the needed morsel.

seeing us bloom above ground
is proof
that sunlight waits for them
and they push
through rock.

they
who mostly had a someone somewhere in the desert hegemony produced
who maybe had a big mama, a nana, a teacher, a counselor, a pah-pah
whose houses had no mirrors[3], who spoke into the winds of time
"you is kind, you is smart, you is important.[4]"

Those who made their lives mana, we salute. You are modern day Underground
Railroad. They came over on you.

but still far too many suckled on mother-loss
on the wire mesh monkey
matrix of racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism

misogyny/ism, white supremacy/ism
that their mothers suckled on and their mothers

many loved hard,
those mothers, fathers, uncles, aunts, grandmothers
siblings, saviors, saints, sinners,
loved those ravaged by the gynocide of imperialism
the dross of enslavement, the tazing of colonization, the brutality of the new jim crow

know they, you, us, we, were never intended to feel the warmth of the sun

they who saw their communities eviscerated by matricide, patricide
knew its offspring
rejection, abandon, addiction, abuse, betrayal,
failed presence, spirit-absence, and desecration
intended to subjugate.

BUT their refusal to be obliterated
rocked the world
when it learned they had *matriculated*.

and they came!

Finding us
there
always there
b/cause we had blasted through brick and mortar,
and the thousand fiery hoops of advanced degrees
to be t/heir
they came
bearing unanswerable questions
hearing uncapturable answers
wrapping up in us to stay warm in institutions designed for
their invalid/ation

> *[**Woman in Red** leaves stage left as Woman in Green simultaneously enters stage right. The Woman in Green begins]*

Some will ask
but what need have they of healing?
in these ivory'd towers of

care,
civic engagement, global understanding, diversity and inclusion, multi-cultural dialogues,
cross cultural celebrations, and sharing across differences.
others will ask in their ivy covered innocence,
what manner of crimes occur within our hallowed havens?
some will seek to
pathologize the injured
as not having the resilience to receive their opportunity
read, lift themselves with their own boot straps
dance backwards in their own stilettoes
write failure to thrive,
editorialize as a "special need,"
theorize as an over reliance on
the mother nurture of "the STRONG Black woman."

How could the "the world see otherwise,[5]"?
When the lashings of colonization we hear in the background
come from teachers, to tutors, from advisors to conductors, from counselors to coaches, from teammates to roommates, from referees to res-life, work-study to workouts,
from the arts to activism, from feminists to lovers, and sometimes woundings
in "the house of a friend."[6]
myriad M I C R O aggressions and structural oppressions
that carry the toxic tinctures of annihilation, spirit disconfirmation,

via hypervisibility, invisibility, multiplicative demands for
performances of belonging,
is it her Blackness, her womanness, her gayness, her trans, do her class
markers place her here? There? Is she too much? not enough
of the constructions others need?
and what cumulative pressures to acculturate/assimilate/failure to infiltrate/encapsulate
learn the monocultural stand/ards
make the perfect calculations that find all
papers, tasks, meetings, appointments, projects, capstones, classroom vocalizations,
EXTRA curricular machinations
offered in a timely fashion, performed at the speed of white
despite

parental support and advice, familial backing, issues back home, playing academic catch up in multiple arenas, depression, post-traumatic stress called living while Black & female, work-life balance of students as whole persons,
are all the same
after all, one size *does* fit all doesn't it?

And so, we close ranks with any who will assist in the soul surgery necessary for removal of the cumulative incursions of multiple "isms" embedded in the day-to-day
and now in the "souls of Black folks"[7]

If you have joined us. You will know that
this is our third shift![8]

But only in the un/nameable
do we gather the injured unto ourselves.
applying balm to lacerated hearts
that for all their wisdom, expected more
on crossing into Canada.

> *[**Woman in Green** leaves stage left as a Woman in Purple simultaneously enters stage right. The Woman in Purple begins]*

Finding them
we begin
filling holes in the ritual hut with mud
preparing the bath
creating the circle.
all ages, sizes, skin colors, religions, socio-economic classes, sexual(i)ties
We come
permed, natural, wigged, braided, loc/ed, hair-pieced, mohawked, bald, even weaved
All womanist-all the time
no two alike

carrying first and foremost, the intellectual feast
in the community college, city college, state college, ivy league, liberal arts, HBCU, PWI, seminary, professional school, religious private, "for profit" and maybe even online degree
we teach real

we have no care for whether "they" deem us
visiting, pre-tenured, contingency, continuing contract, partner-hire-we-had-to-find-something-for-her-to-keep-him/her, abd, ed.d., full-professor, administrator-with-some-teaching-responsibilities.
Ha!
the college's mission statement is fulfilled. most of us can re/cite it. Intersectionality of purpose is drill.
What they call win-win,
we know as both/and. Read. "Yes. We can!"

We teach hard, nurture harder, train-up
we prevent ejection, and expatriation, attrition and revolving door
politics of tuition-in/student-out/loans-begin
we know the real deal
of our habitats
mind our p's and q's, just enough
to re-main
and bring our curriculum of correction, reformation, protection, liberation
and sometimes just personal presentation
cause it's really about the acculturative capital of taste,
and coming to a style of one's own, border crossing included.

As we teach, we are also meeting, greeting, commuting, standing in the gap, paying dues and cultural taxation, fighting for our place,
uplifting, promoting anti-racism, facing the triple jeopardies, negotiating cultural capital, sometimes finding the gates barred, the ivory tower too high, the air behind its walls too toxic,
sometimes succumbing
some have to keep it moving, avoid annihilation, begin anew, seek the long term space, or declare ourselves scholars-at-large, land in multiple institutions with our hidden curriculum in our bags.

throughout, we hold oppositional space within institutional space[9]
for men, women, white, black, red, yellow, abled-differently, valued differently, differing values
for peers, colleagues, support staff, administrators
we align, co-labor, co/nspire to correct in/justice
we stay awake.

set out to right the wrongs of educational injustice
de-ice the likelihood of failure
brought on by young jim who leaves no child left (behind)
called
teaching to the test, underfunded districts, closed schools, busing, revised "tracking," unchecked violence, sexual assault, bullying, drugs, school embedded gang violence, over policed student behavior that places youth in the penal system to soon, where "no tolerance" translates into no way out.

fending against the "extra burden" that chases and chains the Black female academic and those who wear the colors of the universe on our bodies,
we somehow manage
to reach for each/other
the way someone reached for us, and because of who didn't

we read the need, assess the damages,
put out tentacles to the tentative
coax in from the wilderness
build contexts out of kindling
light the hearth
the true-real as major
101 through the capstone
racial identity development required!

> *[**Woman in Purple** leaves stage left as a Woman in Yellow simultaneously enters stage right. The Woman in Yellow begins]*

when they arrive
they are specific
they want lens to see
eagle or ant, bird's eye or mouse
their hearts beat for voice
self-efficacy, change agentry,
they run to world-shape, despite the label of intimidate
hone their courage to create
pull town, gown, community, margins, worlds
into view

They work overtime, overload, and over
Joy. Hurting, working, resisting, working, healing, working. Sometimes recognized.
always baptized by their longing for
a just world order.

no two curricula are alike despite
the common thread weaving world views into canopy
covering ella's[10] daughters' daughters
with tools of resistance sealed in the canon of critical theory, "words of fire[11]," womanist/Black
feminist thought, critical race theory, anti-racism praxis, strategies to counter hegemony, to straddle borderlands, to queer theory, to trans-nationalism and global-ize feminisms
to heal the crack in the cosmic egg.

methodologies
stitched, knitted, crocheted, quilted, baked,
canned, plowed, milled, cotton-picked, sugar-caned harvested, rice paddy worked, boogied, rapped, rocked, tapped, rhymed, stroked, stoked, turned, preached
and
teached.

timeless tenets passed down by our sojourners and harrietts, our anna julias and our amy jacques, our ida-bs, our pauli/s and our aileen/s, our rosa/s, coretta/s, and betty/s, our fannie lou/s, daisy/s, and diane/s, our ericka's, angela/s and assata/s, our unbossed[12] shirley/s, our nikki/s, sonia/s, audre/s, alice/s, maya/s, delores/s, bell/s, patricia/s, june/s, sylvia/s and gloria/s and all the allomothers[13]
and all the unseen,
unnamed,
stalwart ones
Workers of subju/gated knowledge under
ground
like how to turn in
toward the gaping wound
how with hands bound, to pull the introject out of one's back
and what does compassion plus outrage squared look like in daily life?

*[**Woman in Purple** leaves stage left as three women in white enter simultaneously stage right. The first Woman in White steps forward from the others and speaks]*

With all, we raise the hymn of the salt eaters

"Sistah do you wanna be healed?"[14] [All three women say this line in unison]

the choice is theirs [Woman in White # 1 resumes]

we rejoice
Sistah, do you own who you are [All three women]
the choice is yours [Woman in White # 1 resumes]

we anoint
They awaken in our arms
armed
anew with the tradition that cannot be named[15]

or taken.

on the next assault they rise more quickly [Woman in White # 2 steps forward]

easily carrying both food and arsenal
shielding their backs while facing forward
uncompromising warriors for peace
And now [Woman in White # 3 steps forward]

they come to us in the days before battle
laying their plans across the kitchen table
seeking council
fire lights the shadows as we talk
help them to anticipate and side-step javelins of oppression
geared for those who feel the fire next time[16] before it begins
who feed the bonfires of self-love
necessary for nationhood to survive
and give birth
and now they come on the dawn of victory/s [Woman in White # 1, steps forward]

regaling, hailing, querying modes of leadership

we listen, help to mend the fabric where the clarity of our resistance wears thin
knowing still
"even their errors are correct[17]" [All three women say this line in unison]

When they come with a wounded sister [Woman in White # 2 steps forward]

slung across their back
staying only long enough for us to begin
the ritual, the bond, the long journey
we respond
begin
again

soon
these daughters
turn to humus
in our fertile soil
push up the young shoots
of a new day
carry us
into their time,
place, age
return to comm/unity [All three women say these lines in unison]

return to nationstates
turn in to universes.

And we continue whispering the something that has no name. [Woman in White # 1]
And we begin anew. [Woman in White # 2]
And we begin an/old [Woman in White # 3]
And we begin [Woman in White # 1]

And we whisper the something [Women in White #s 1 and 2]
that has no name [Woman in White # 3]

And we whisper the something [Woman in White #s 2 and 3]

this no name [Woman in White # 1]
this non/a/me
this nana(me). that can only be breathed between us
and we hear the call of silence
in the rustling of the trees
and we hear the call of justice in the
falling of the leaves
and we transform the "silence into language and action[18]"
and we whisper [All three women]
and we whisper
Shhhhhhhhhhh. [Woman in White # 1]
Shhhhhhhhhhhh,
Shhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh,

whisper… [All three women]

its name. [Woman in White # 1]
Its name ...
is holy.

Dedication:

Woman in Purple. This work is dedicated to ella's daughters in the academy

Woman in Yellow. And to the women who mother their minds and their leadership.

Woman in Purple: AND THEIR ***F(L)IGHT***!!!

dedicated to: ella's daughters in the academy, and especially to j m. m[19]

Epilogue

Written in a lyrical poetic style, this narrative invokes the historical memory of a people. It universalizes the archetypal story of how Black women respond to other Black women injured by the matrices of oppression. It is an ancient motif for peoples of African descent to participate in each other's healing and resistance to all forms of oppression (hooks, 1989; Bambara, 1980). And so this narrative renders a gender-specific tale of this specialized support adapted for use in institutions of higher learning. The support offered in these settings—to those students who choose it—includes a tutelage for liberation of both self and others. In this way it assists in preparing young women students to enter the cycle of giving

back to women of color peers who may need the same kind of race-gender-attuned healing and leadership development. Ultimately, these women students are more able to support others across identities and contribute to the entirety of educational institutions via whatever pockets of influence the students have access to as they learn to work their own change agentry.

The current academy faces a crisis of access, retention (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2013, 2014), and the provision of an environment that can accept, sustain, and support all students regardless of how they learn, their socio-economic needs, their generational status, the variations of prior educational preparation, and their socio-cultural (nationality, ethnicity, race, religion, gender/s and sexualities, or age) backgrounds (Butler, 2013). The spate of recent student protests across the nation relative to the climate of these institutions, the disproportionately few faculty of color, and the everyday racism and incidents of racial bias call for new levels of cultural responsiveness (Gay, 2010; Jabbar & Hardaker, 2013) in higher education. Such student activism also calls for holding environments where students across all identities can grow and thrive throughout their educational experience.

While institutions are making some progress toward institutionalization of concrete resources and support across social identities (e.g. inclusive bathrooms, clothes pantries for interview attire, food pantries for food-challenged students), the need for culturally relevant educational (Ladson-Billings, 1992) and leadership development among students across identities remains. Within communities of color and/or marginalized communities there may be invisible or underutilized models of teaching that address these students' particular needs for academic and leadership development. For example, in Black communities, there is a rich history of educators from pre-K through post-secondary education drawing upon culturally relevant historical models of education and adapting them for use in higher education (Ladson-Billings, 1992; Walker, 1996). The ways in which Black women educators in higher education work with their Black women students is one such adaptive model.

This performance ritual portrays how such a model of Black-woman-to-Black-woman, educator-to-student culturally relevant pedagogy works beyond the classroom (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1992; Maparyan, 2012). In general, the workings of this "hidden curriculum" (Henry, 1998) remain largely invisible to the mainstream academic community. One reason for this is that it includes but also transcends the traditional classroom. Rather it takes place within the context of a relation-

ship, and the mutuality of discovery among the educator Motherline that some Black women actively seek a form of academic and leadership development. To conduct this underground-yet-in-plain-view work, Black women educators draw upon and apply what Barbara Omolade (1994) calls "the tradition that has no name." Overall, this tradition springs from Motherline tutelage well-documented in sociological and anthropological literature as an existential experience among women across cultures (King & Ferguson, 2011; Lowinsky, 1992). Motherline tutelage refers to the gendered cultural transmission of knowledge that women pass on to (usually) younger generations of women so that they might survive oppression, thrive, and bring their talents, gifts, and leadership into the world. This is the tradition that derived from such iconic Civil Rights leaders as Ella Baker—known as the Fundi (Grant, 1986)—an esteemed teacher who passes on knowledge to help an entire people survive, progress, and transform the structures of hegemony.

Among Black communities this tradition has been variously referred to as mothering the mind (Brown, 1991), political motherwork (Collins, 2000), kitchen table deep talk (King & Ferguson, 2011), motherwit (Maparyan, 2012), and other signifiers of culturally honed knowledge and adult development transmission systems whose purpose is personal and political, individual and collective. Between Black women it takes on the added urgency of restoring their self-hood, especially those who are "committed to survival and wholeness of entire people" (Walker, 1983, p. xii). For it is their very exertion of agency in the service of a vision for collective uplift in a world often hostile to their presence that puts such women students at even greater risk. In the academy, this tradition becomes a "curriculum" that Black women engage for their Black women students. Here is where many Black women educators take up the mantle of leadership development. They engage in this work by choice, even though it stretches their own capacities to be retained in the academy. And they engage in this work intentionally—with a pedagogical agenda that is twofold. First, it attends to the restoration of selfhood infusing students with belief in their capacity for agency, and understanding of one's self as a scholar despite various forms of epistemic violence that denote otherwise. Second, it supports students' choice to apply their academic knowledge in ways that reflect womanist or Black Feminist goals such as collective uplift, social change, and social justice.

Gaining a mere "edimication" or becoming "an educated fool" is the way Black communities signify an education that does not express wisdom. Culturally, wisdom seeks to uplift the collective or promote justice—not at the expense of the individual, but as intertwined and inseparable (Hill Collins, 2000; Maparyan, 2012). The strategies of the curriculum that has no name require the Black woman educator to collaborate with others across the university to support the holistic development of students from the margins. In the present creative piece, the focus is Black women's work with same race women students. However, the Black feminist/womanist agenda extends itself to many groups banished from authentic recognition, and validation. While the focus of this Motherline tutelage is Black women, this dialogical teaching and learning must be read diasporically and transculturally. Black includes the multiplicative heritages of the Diaspora (e.g. Afro-German, Afro-Caribbean, Afro-Latin). And transcultural means that some white women students and women of color who are not Black move into this dialogical learning motif in ways very similar to Black women. Some of the students come from majority Black or very diverse communities (e.g. attended predominately Black high schools, found homeplace in their lives with Black educators, coaches, mentors, teachers, or caretakers). Others find that their anti-racist core values and alignment with womanist philosophical tenets as the form of feminism they live out in their lives makes them seek connections with Black women faculty and find a place at the kitchen table. And so this dialogical curriculum is at once culturally focused and flexible. In terms of breadth its practices apply to the many ways systems of academic hegemony penalize or expel those without proper educational preparation and/or social capital to navigate the culture of the ivory tower. It also extends to those who may not be Black or women, but who pay the price of marginality in other ways and who seek the curriculum that has no name. Nevertheless, Black women have something special to offer to each other. They bring the potential for a deep and validating knowledge of each other's experience. As Audre Lorde puts it: "I was not meant to be alone without you who understand" (Lorde, 1978, p. 34).

The curriculum that has no name reframes and redefines classroom teaching practices, just as it defines and makes visible alternative cultural spaces of education and learning. These are the kitchen tables or other

"third spaces" that exist beyond the binaries of mainstream society. And so, a marker of Black women's pedagogies is its mobility, as well as it transgressive and transformative capacity. That is, as the student recovers from cumulative injuries of continual disconfirmation about how they perform their identities, their academic work, the academy's exclusion of their bodies, minds, and ways of knowing (e.g. how they think, speak, learn, produce knowledge), they begin to come to voice and find their own centering as a scholar. Their difficult experiences in finding their intellectual grounding often occur in combination with other systemic barriers such as financial issues at college or with their families back home, discriminatory treatment, lack of access to the college's resources, and needs for employment that compete with academics, extra-curriculars, or taking full advantage of college life.

It may seem as if such culturally and individually customized teaching might only serve to drain Black women faculty members who already encounter the "extra burden" of service documented as occurring for educators of color (Williams June, 2015; King et al., 2002). However, the process of teaching the curriculum that has no name can be mutually rejuvenating. The mutuality that is possible occurs incrementally throughout the course of the relationship. And given their different positions as faculty and student, it may not be realized in what we consider a reciprocal relationship until well after the student graduates. Yet some level of mutuality begins when the Motherline faculty sees the transformation that is occurring within the student. This bearing witness to the student's academic and leadership development may occur in myriad places such as the classroom, serving on a committee together, within a public forum or discussion, or even within the context of student activism on or off campus.

Finally, there is the gratification of spending time in the company of Black women students coming into their own. Students-in-tutelage may connect with another student in ways that help shed light on how to navigate some aspect of college life with that peer. Seeing the support and teachings shared is also gratifying. At the cultural level, mutuality exists in the long-term view of collective uplift itself. As Ella Baker best put it: "The struggle is eternal. The tribe increase[s]. Somebody else carries on."[20] Working with those who will carry on is deeply gratifying to Black women whose cultural identities derive from the organizing principle "I am because we are, and because we are therefore I am" (Mbiti, 1970).

Within the context of the Black women's curriculum that has no name, these women students begin to flourish, believe in their abilities despite external disconfirmation, and come into a critical consciousness that can critique the very institutions of higher learning themselves. Such Black women students also begin to turn their attention to making their campuses a better place. They begin to work with the Motherline to think through their own oppositional capacities, change agent strategic maneuvers, and apply humanizing action to counter institutionalized oppression within higher education and beyond. The kind of work Black women are doing with their students clearly falls within the spectrum of high-impact practices that institutions of higher learning now seek. High-impact practices are commonly known to offer students such things as purposeful learning, meaningful interaction with peers, and developmental relations with professors to engage in meaning-making, deep reflection and deconstruction of their experiences in the context of solving problems, and engaging in collective works of leadership and social change (Harper, 2009). Institutions sometimes recognize the inequitable distribution of such high-impact practices across the diversities of their student bodies (e.g. differences in who goes abroad, who obtains off campus internships, who obtains paid internships, who is selected for competitive funding for research or experiential opportunities). And so this narrative spells out how Black women help to apply high-impact practices in the margins of same race–gender relations.

This "story" is written as a performance, because in as much as it is situated within the deep cultural space of Black collective memory throughout the Diaspora, it is also a communal story. It expresses how Black women use their positionality within the academy to work with their colleagues across multiple identities. Together, we each work to bring the mission of our academic institutions to life. Most of our institutions espouse a purpose to reach all of the students we matriculate, yet the capacity for doing this varies greatly. Moreover, the institutionalization of the matrices of race, class, gender/s oppression can actively work against this stated mission. Ritualizing this deeply connected teaching allows readers of many other backgrounds to have a more enlivened encounter with the story being told. It enlarges the potential for shared experience and activation of our intersubjectivities. The choreo-poem is our invitation into the dance of culture. Cultural novice and insider share what Maparyan (2012) calls the "logic of womanism," which she describes as

"experiential, narrative, ecological, moral, emotional, communal, and mystical" (p. 40).

And what of action? We must eventually come to that. How is this choreo-pedagogy a call to action? And if it is such, what actions? First, ritualizing this narrative creates a site for connected knowing, for feelings, intuition, emotional intelligence, and the multiple ways in which art gives us an encounter that strikes a human chord. For it is the very absence of "getting it" emotionally, when cultural outsiders are seeking to understand, that keeps us from being able to reimagine and redefine the problems and solutions of the work we do across our social identities in the academy. This narrative portends future action by bringing alive the experiential. For it is first within the embodied knowledge of our intersectionality that we come to get a glimmer of what we are not. Embodied experience is the first signifier that something of cultural depth is occurring that is "not like us." And in that borderland between our differences (Anzaldua, 1990) we may learn just enough to collaborate on solutions, and possibilities.

By implication, the knowledge of what Black women educators are doing is a call for action on the part of institutions. It asks how institutions can become intentional in providing an environment that does not engage in cultural taxation. The metaphor of cultural taxation points to the kinds of sanctions (intentional and unintentional) that Black women educators pay for their presence as "culturally different others" in higher education. *One form* of cultural difference is their insistence on "giving back" to students from their own cultural or social identity groups. The story of Black women engaged in helping the institution fulfill its mission of serving all students across identities poses an opportunity for institutions to engage in an equally ethical response. That is, how can institutions of higher learning recognize, respect, support, incentivize, and reward their Black women faculty and safeguard them from unnecessary overload? Can institutional understanding of Black women faculty members' cultural pedagogy inform institutions in ways that reduce negative outcomes in tenure and/or promotion, or during the contract renewal process for visiting or part-time faculty/instructors? Often retention of faculty from marginalized groups fails for lack of institutional sight. That is, the capacity to see what and how faculty, such as Black women, contribute to the work of the institution. And *all* of these faculty who contribute in the spheres of the curriculum that has no name benefit the university at a deep level.

Crafting such solutions requires community across identities, and across positions within higher education (e.g. across administrations, faculty, staff, students). And so the style in which this piece is written is meant to create or at least invite community. The invitation calls us to participate in a temporary liminal space where we come together within and across cultures for acclamation of one culture's approach. We come together in this imagined performative community to first shift the dialogue so that the voices of Black women faculty are at the center. And then we ritualize the voices so as to magnify them for communal engagement. Hence this narrative elevates the human experience of how one marginalized group builds bridges for their students to the center of things—all the while expanding, pluralizing, and democratizing what the center can now mean for these scholar-leaders in development. Seeing one group's approach helps us reimagine cultural insider work for many groups in these contemporary times. Such a tale formed to create a collective liberatory experience for *all* participants regardless of identity is written in a "tongue of its own." As bell hooks (1989) states:

> The most important of our work—the work of liberation—demands of us that we make a new language, that we create the oppositional discourse, the liberatory voice. Fundamentally, the oppressed person who has moved from object to subject speaks to us in a new way. This speech, this liberatory voice, emerges only when the oppressed experience self-recovery. (p. 29)

Toward this end, the evocative language of performance ritual makes the unseen pedagogy of recovery from oppression seen. At the same time this voice destabilizes the dichotomies of cultural insider and cultural outsider. For in opening this space to create a ritual that mirrors the liminality of Black woman educators engaged in motherwork, a space is similarly opened to the reader. In this space (whether imagined or literally performed), we all participate in a collective holding environment where mutual understanding can surface. Here we have a portal to see our way more fully into each other's lives. Here we have a communal foundation. Here we have an experiential assemblage, a third space of our own to celebrate Black women students' educational journey from the margins to the center of their own empowered selves. A journey that takes place on the wings of Black women educators' pedagogical methods honed for just such flight!

Notes

1. In Ntozake Shange's pioneering work, *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf: a choreo-poem* (1989, University of Michigan), the seven African American women are designated by a color that they wear rather than a name: the woman in red, woman in orange, woman in yellow, woman in green, woman in blue, woman in brown, and woman in purple. The choreo-pedagogy offered in the present piece intends to give tribute to Shange's canonical womanist and Black feminist literary contribution. This canonical work ritualized the stories of women of color within their historical, material, personal, and political contexts. For this reason, the artistic strategy originating in Shange's work is re-employed here to signify its precedence and resonance with this work.
2. From *Darder, Antonia (*2013*) Critical Leadership for Social Justice and Community Empowerment*. Social Policy, Education and Curriculum Research Unit. North Dartmouth: Centre for Policy Analyses/U Mass Dartmouth, http://www.umassd.edu/universitysearch/?q=antonia%20darder
3. This phrase refers to the title and lyrics of a song entitled "There Were No Mirrors in My Nana's House" by the legendary acapella group Sweet Honey in the Rock. This song is included on their album *Still on the Journey*, 1993, composed by Dr. Ysaye M. Barnwell, published by Barnwell's Notes, under the label Earthbeat.
4. This line is a quote from the 2011 film *The Help*, directed and written by Tate Taylor, and adapted from the novel *The Help*, written by Kathyrn Stockett (2009).
5. Phrase used in the poem by Paul Laurence Dunbar, 1872–1906, entitled "We Wear the Mask." This poem lives in the canon of Black literature, a precursor to the explosion of art during the Harlem Renaissance.
6. "Wounded in the House of a Friend" (1995) is the title of the title poem for a book of the same name by Sonia Sanchez, poet, essayist, activist, born in 1934, and associated with the Black Arts Movement.
7. *The Souls of Black Folks* is the title of a book first published in 1903. The author is W.E.B. DuBois, internationally renowned scholar and activist, prolific writer, and iconically named as the father of sociology.
8. See also: "Andrea's Third Shift: The Invisible Work of African-American Women in Higher Education," in *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation by* Gloria Anzaldua and AnaLouise Keating, Eds, 2002.
9. Postcolonial and transnational feminist theorist Chandra Talpade Mohanty coined this term in "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" (1984). This concept applies to the work of internal change agents or internal activists who fulfill their organizational responsibilities while working toward institutional change.

10. The reference to Ella refers to Civil Rights leader Ella Baker and by implication other Black women Civil Rights leaders who trained others to engage in community activism during the Civil Rights era. Such women leaders engaged in strategic leadership development work with women of the community, and the generation of leaders they trained are referred to as their daughters—commonly denoted by the phrase "Ella's daughters."
11. *Words of Fire*: *An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought* edited by Beverly Guy-Sheftall (1995) is one of the texts within the canon of Black feminist and Black womanist thought. This text anthologizes the works of Black women activist-intellectuals from the 1830s to contemporary times and their contributions as the foremothers of Black feminist thought and praxis.
12. Signifier of Shirley Chisholm's autobiography entitled *Unbought and Unbossed* (1970). Chisholm was the first major-party Black candidate for President of the United States and the first woman to run for the Democratic presidential nomination.
13. This list of women represents some of the iconic Black and Latina women activists and intellectuals from the canon of Black womanist and Black feminist thought. The list includes Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Anna Julia Cooper, Amy Jacques Garvey, Ida B. Wells, Pauli Murray, Aileen Clark Hernandez, Rosa Parks, Coretta Scott King, Betty Shabazz, Fannie Lou Hamer, Ella Baker, Daisy Bates, Diane Nash, Ericka Huggins, Angela Davis, Assata Shakur, Shirley Chisolm, Nikki Giovanni, Sonia Sanchez, Audre Lorde, Alice Walker, Maya Angelou, Delores Huerta, bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins, June Jordan, Sylvia Rivera, and Gloria Anzaldua.
14. This paraphrased quote is from the novel *The Salt Eaters* by Toni Cade Bambara.
15. "The Tradition that Has No Name" is referred to by Barbara Omolade, in her book *The Rising Song of African American Women* (1994) as the methods of activist tutelage occurring between Black women within their communities to engage in political action and social change. It is a tradition in which women taught others by actively doing the work of organizing communities, and through oral tradition and praxis. Since it was not "written down," it remained nameless—known through relational transmission and outcomes rather than written words. Ella Baker's work is a prime example of this tutelage, and women who learned from her are often referred to as "Ella's daughters." See footnote xii.
16. "The Fire Next Time" signifies the title of a book by African American writer James Baldwin (1963).
17. This quote is from a poem by Nikki Giovanni entitled "Ego Tripping (there may be a reason why)" published in 1972 in a collection of poetry titled *My House: Poems,* NY: Morrow.

18. "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action" is an essay. In this essay she speaks to the power of being with our silence, and the deeply reflective process of coming to voice what that silence is as a precursor to clear, centered, and effective action in the world.
19. Thank you to those who gave me feedback or helped to edit earlier drafts of this work: Twisha Asher, Brooke Hayes, Vianna Alcantara, and Jasmine M. McGhee of my spiritual daughterline; beloved womanist intern Rene Guo; and JoAnne Henry, Ph.D., Fareeda Griffith, Ph.D., and S. Alease Ferguson, Ph.D., my sisters in the academic Motherline. Thank you to all the men who work in complementarity with the Motherline, and whose efforts are as tireless, as committed, and as profound. To those who give support, nurture, and Fatherline contributions to students across gender/s, and to those of us who are your colleagues—we appreciate you.

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CHAPTER 3

Black Skin, White Masks: Negotiating Institutional Resistance to Revolutionary Pedagogy and Praxis in the HBCU

Zoe Spencer

Melanin-coated brown skin
High pitched voice
Black Urban vernacular
Standing outside
Screaming #blacklivesmatter!
Even though I know that
Black life doesn't always seem
To matter.
I am
Black life.
Born from the security of my mother's womb
into an oppressive world
that doesn't greet my birth kindly
because my skin is black
and I

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was born…
a girl.
Racism, Sexism and
Classism—
All colliding to define me
and
How I must abide by these
Power dynamics
That want to make me feel powerless.
But I am
Powerful-dammit.
I am
A rose in a concrete jungle
A diamond in a dark mine
I am
Determined
to shine
The light that I've been given
Until it is time
For me to transition into another realm
Until then
I am provided divine guidance
By a light that I sometimes fail
To see in me
Because I am too busy
Wondering why the world

Refuses to
Respect the life in me…
I am
Fighting to escape the box
That society has created for me
Trying to find peace in a chaotic world
That I don't fight by choice
Scrambling, trying to find ways
To create and project my voice
I am
A spirit
a universal microcosm

In a body
That is Black
And it matters
That I am Black
And being Black
Matters
Dark matter
Is Black
And it is life
And that matters
I am life….
Black Life
And my life
Matters!

I am from Barry Farms Projects in S.E Washington, D.C. I grew up seeing my mother struggle to ensure that we had. I watched her make sacrifices to move us to a "good" neighborhood, meaning a white, suburban neighborhood. There, I experienced the cultural shift and shock of going from all Black faces and the comforting familial environment of closely conjoined dwellings with tightly coiled screen doors that snapped, thin walls, tarnished grass and dirt paths, ice cream trucks that sold dill pickles, "Now-n-Laters," and onion rings, and alley-ways that we played in, to the social isolation and cold whiteness of the newly integrating suburbs in which there was violent resistance to both my family's presence in the neighborhood and the bussed Black students' presence in the neighborhood school. So, each weekend and summer that I could, I would retreat back to S.E with my older cousins who took care of me more often than not. When I was old enough to drive, I returned to my old neighborhood to socially engage every chance I could.

Consequently, I was present in one of the nation's leading drug capitols during the "crack era" and lived my adolescent and young adult years through the "War on Drugs" (see Webb, 1999). I grew up witnessing the terror of police officers' boots on Black men's necks and Black bodies lined up against walls being searched. I lost friends and associates to drugs, incarceration, and brutal deaths. I heard the screeching sounds of Black mothers crying at the sight of their dead sons' bullet-riddled bodies lying in the street, covered by sterile white sheets with exposed feet, and that one ever-elusive tennis shoe that always ended up "over there." Yet, I was able to return to my predominantly white neighborhood where I was not

confronted with urban violence, but rather called "nigger-bitch" and told to "go back to Africa" by unfamiliar angry white faces that chased me in pick-up trucks, forcing me to run faster than I ever had (playing tag in the projects) and hide in woods that I would have otherwise avoided, all because I knew *this* was not a game. So no, the "good" neighborhood never felt good or better to me.

Thus, it was my desire to escape overt racism more so than a desire to escape the "ills" of the hood that made me focus on my studies in high school when other lures had captivated the attention of my friends. I yearned for an opportunity to attend a Historically Black College/University (HBCU) that would nourish my understanding of my people's struggle, my roots, and my history. I was accepted to Howard University (my first and only choice) in 1984, against a backdrop of devastating "economic restructuring" and Black immiseration (Anderson, 1994; Greer, 2013). There, I received the critical academic and intellectual guidance that allowed me to put all that I had experienced and observed throughout my life into context. I also sincerely believe that my education at Howard prepared me for motherhood, enabling me to consciously raise my Black son in the critical crossfire of institutional racism and urban violence.

I had my son in 1987, the summer of my junior year, in the midst of the mass production and dissemination of hegemonic images of the "promiscuous" Black mother, accused of causing the demise of their communities (Collins, 2000). As Perlow (2013) states, "consistent with the images of the bad Black/welfare mother and the dominant ideology that emphasizes individual responsibility, Black student-mothers are often demonized as irresponsibly producing children that we can't afford" (p. 116). Needless to say, as a college student, I had to conjure up a great deal of strength in order to resist the shame that is projected onto young, single, Black mothers. Harris-Perry (2011) articulates my experience when she states:

> African American women are structurally positioned to experience shame more frequently than others. As a group they tend to possess a number of stigmatized identities and life circumstances: they are more likely to be poor, to be unmarried, to parent children alone, to be overweight, to be physically ill, and to be undereducated and underemployed. Black women who escape many of these circumstances must still contend with damaging racial and gendered stereotypes. (p. 107)

However, the birth of my son gave me a vitality and conviction that I did not previously possess. He became my reason for seeking intellectual

growth and forced me to focus on the practical application of my education in order to understand and negotiate the complexities of life. My steadfast commitment to this powerful evolutionary process led me to reject advice from those who thought it best to "diversify" my education by attending a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) for graduate school—and I proudly earned all three of my degrees (B.A in Administration of Justice, M.S.W., and Ph.D. in Sociology) from Howard. As Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015) reflects on his own awakening at Howard University, he states:

> This power, this black power, originates in a view of the American galaxy taken from a dark and essential planet. Black power is the dungeon-side view of Monticello—which is to say, the view taken in struggle. And black power births a kind of understanding that illuminates all the galaxies in their truest colors (p. 149).

It is solely through my own journey that I was awakened to the legacy of spiritual, intellectual, and existential excellence that I was bequeathed, and to the understanding of the manner in which systematic/systemic forms of socio-political oppression operate simultaneously to control resources and bodies globally.

My educational achievements have by no means protected me from the racism, elitism, sexism, and paternalism that I experience in various ways on a daily basis. With each new encounter, I am reminded of my points of oppression that fight to rip at my heart, neutralize my spirit, and murder the very core of my being. I recognize that on a stage and in front of a podium and a microphone, I become Dr. Zoe Spencer. In front of a classroom, I become Dr. Z. But when I leave the parameters that create the only shift in my socially constructed reality, society and I both agree that I am Black and I am a woman in a white supremacist and patriarchal world. Accordingly, like Kynard (2013), I reject an "integrationist-celebratory-bourgeois model" (p. 244) where my story is used as some bootstrap arrival narrative that prompts the acceptance and/or accolades of people who don't look like me, or that allows me to stand on a pedestal so that my narrative might resound more loudly than others from similar backgrounds who didn't "make it." I do not wish for anyone to be able to utilize my adherence to social measures of success to remove me from my history in order to make my existence or my lesson more palatable—to make me the comfortable exception to the Black inferiority, equal opportunity, or colorblindness myths by removing me from my urban Blackness. Consequently, I recognize that who I have become is a culmination of all

that I am—a working class single mom from the hood—and a revolutionary one at that. I celebrate *that* truth as the reality that grounds my pedagogy and praxis. My journey guides my connection to my students, dictates how I define my mission and purpose at the HBCU, and thus provides context to my commitment to a revolutionary pedagogical approach.

The Complex Issue of Revolutionary Pedagogy in the HBCU

I must acknowledge first and foremost that since the inception of the HBCU, it has been and continues to be critical to the educational attainment and societal advancement of Black people in America. The HBCU has provided access for scores of Black students who otherwise (deemed uneducable by white standards) may not have had the opportunity to even attend college. Currently, although HBCUs only represent 3 percent of higher education institutions, they graduate 25 percent of Black B.A.s, 50 percent of Black public school teachers, and 70 percent of Black dentists (Kynard, 2013). In the same vein, the HBCU has unequivocally been at the center of socio-political movements and anti-racist activism, nurturing civil rights leaders and other movement builders (Douglass, 2012; Greene & Oesterreich, 2012; Kendi, 2012). Thus as faculty at an HBCU, I follow in the ancestral footsteps of a long line of courageous students, faculty, alumni, and even administrators (e.g. Anna Julia Cooper, W.E.B. DuBois, Thurgood Marshall, Ella Baker, Martin Luther King Jr., E. Franklin Frazier, Zora Neale Hurston, Kwame Ture) who have been at the forefront of challenging white supremacist education, producing revolutionary scholarship during the most critical periods of racial, socio-political, and economic transformations in America (see Arnette, 2015; Biondi, 2012; Douglass, 2012; Evans, 2007; Kynard, 2013;Williamson, 2008).

Thus, my intent here is not to minimize the contributions of the HBCU, but rather to call attention to the ways in which the HBCU administration and some faculty have internalized the white supremacist, patriarchal, and class-based elitist values of the larger society, thwarting the liberatory potential of revolutionary pedagogy and praxis, both inside and beyond the HBCU. So, the question becomes: How does this play out in the HBCU, especially when the agenda of the government that supports it conflicts with the struggle and/or even promotes the systematic oppression of the people that the HBCU serves and is supposed to represent?

Since slavery, "proper" education for Black people was designed to teach them inferiority and acceptance of their place in the social hierarchy in order to maintain the status quo (Anderson, 1988; Watkins, 2001; Woodson, 1933). In 1933, Carter G. Woodson in *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (2006) states:

> When you control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his actions. You do not have to tell him not to stand here or go yonder. He will find his "proper place" and will stay in it. You do not need to send him to the back door. He will go without being told. In fact, if there is no back door, he will cut one for his special benefit. His education makes it necessary. (p. 192)

Specifically, the HBCU was established to serve three principal goals: to train labor to engage in industrial, advanced agricultural, and manufacturing production; to train Black educators to teach Black students in the way of conformity to racial dominance and oppression; and to train Black professionals to provide services in segregated communities (hooks, 2010). Thus, the HBCU was founded in order to maintain the social and political interests of the white industrialists, philanthropists, and politicians who funded and supported them. Despite significant challenges to white supremacy in the HBCU, it still retains some elements of its original mission, which is counterproductive to the liberatory education of its student population.

As numerous theorists such as Marx (1848) and Fanon (1967) have contended, under capitalism the interests of the State and the interests of the oppressed are mutually exclusive and cannot coexist. Thus, I argue that the HBCU's continued financial dependence on government funding fosters an imperial relationship with the State wherein the institution is unable to actualize as a sovereign body that can be wholly committed to confronting socio-political oppression. According to Lovett (2015):

> [T]he Jim Crow legacy helped prevent HBCUs and their constituents—mostly located in the former slave South—from entering fair and equal competition in American higher education in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Even within a century gone by, these barriers, visible and invisible, slowed the evolution of the HBCUs into fully developed institutions.... (p. xii)

Thus, the precarious existence of the HBCU demands that the leadership/administration must acquiesce to operating within the boundaries,

mission, and agenda of the State (including ideological boundaries that center white supremacy), or risk the loss of funding—especially during times of racial tension, economic contraction, and/or political censorship (Greene & Oesterreich, 2012). Consequently, whether voluntarily or as a matter of course, the HBCU administration and even faculty within the academy who subscribe to petty bourgeoisie values embrace the ideological and cultural hegemony of white society and attempt to replicate and promote this (conformist education in blackface) within the HBCU community in order to preserve "respectability," gain recognition, and maintain the favor of the dominant culture (Frazier, 1957). In this sense, I argue that Black leadership/administration at the HBCU parallels the "overseer," entrusted to enforce the will of the "master," who is then rewarded with a higher status than the "masses" in exchange. Accordingly, the HBCU has become a de facto segregated community wherein the "Black bourgeoisie" has established intra-racial status, power, and dominance that they are not able to achieve in either predominantly white institutions or society as a whole (Frazier, 1957). As such, Freire (2012) contends:

> …the oppressed who have adapted to the structure of domination in which they are immersed, and become resigned to it, are inhibited from waging the struggle for freedom so long as they feel incapable of running the risks it requires…They are at one and the same time themselves and the oppressor whose consciousness they have internalized. (p. 29)

Specifically, I argue that at my institution the administration have internalized hegemonic ideologies about race, class, gender, religion, and sexuality, and have thus become the conscious or unconscious purveyors and practitioners of individualism, class-based elitism, colorism, sexism, paternalism, homophobia, and "Christian-centeredness" in their management of the HBCU and its constituents (Douglass, 2012; Perlow, 2013). As a result, the practice of respectability politics that emerges from these oppressive ideologies takes the form of censorship and the implementation of both conspicuous and inconspicuous policies, practices, and responses that infringe upon the academic freedom, mobility, and support of faculty who engage in pedagogy/praxis that emphasizes liberatory education, consciousness, and activism itself. I understand that Black administrators who do not believe that they are capable of and/or are not willing to do

the work required to eliminate or at least reduce dependence on white constituent groups in the funding and operation of the HBCU are placed in a quandary when there is non-conformity. Therefore, most are not willing to risk supporting internal agendas, curricula, or even faculty like myself, that threaten to upset the balance of hegemonic dominance. This has posed a plethora of challenges for me as a Black woman professor who engages in revolutionary pedagogy and praxis.

Like bell hooks (1994), "I celebrate teaching that enables transgressions—a movement beyond boundaries. It is that movement which makes education the practice of freedom" (p. 7). My commitment to my students, to the legacy of the HBCU, and to the liberation of oppressed peoples makes me problematic to my administration and some faculty for several reasons. For one, I am vocal and active in addressing, organizing, and supporting efforts against the many forms of discrimination and oppression that occur within my institution. Noam Chomsky (2004) would classify me as a *dissident intellectual*, where "individuals have an alternate view of the world…do not perform as they are expected by giving tolerably accurate description of reality that conforms to those with wealth…and are marginalized, tortured, and sent into exile" (p. 17) As Darder (2011) states, "…dissidents are not to be trusted. This is not because we are untrustworthy but rather because we *can* [emphasis mine] be trusted to disrupt bourgeoisie etiquettes of civility, if need be, to push back attitudes or actions that are fundamentally destructive to democratic life—no matter where or who is in leadership" (p. 10). Whereas the HBCU has traditionally been lauded for championing racial equality outside of the academy, faculty are not expected to rock the boat within the university. Thus, because I challenge authority and disrupt the patriarchal dominance of the administration, I am labeled a "trouble-maker." Yet as Perlow (2013) argues, this persecutory tactic "is counterproductive to social change and a demonstration of the historical silencing of Black women" (p. 120). Consequently, the administration and some faculty have retaliated against me for my outspoken dissension by attempting to discredit my accomplishments and my work, challenging my credentials, impeding my academic freedom (e.g. through surveillance of my classroom and utilizing the contents of my social media pages and my public thoughts to formally reprimand me), attempting to derail my tenure, maligning my character and intentions, and attempting to ostracize me from my colleagues.

Relatedly, in line with the notion that administrators have internalized the dominant culture's value system where activism is generally disparaged, the administration has taken an anti-activist stance, as it has done historically (Kynard, 2013). It can be said that contemporary activism, as Rabaka (2009) states, is "relegated to the status of a ruse put forward by the unruly (dare I say, 'buckwild!') blacks of bygone eras—that is, those 'Pan-African insurgents,' 'Negritude nuisances,' 'Civil Rights radicals,' and, of course, 'Black Power pests' of the past" (p. xi). My activism, both on and off-campus, worries the administration, as they have confessed (in closed circles) that they view my resistance to socio-political and racial oppression as a "representation" of the university community that may make the power structure (i.e. government, police, etc.) uncomfortable. Thus, I pose a threat to the manner in which my administration engages in respectability politics and thus publicly characterizes our HBCU, which Greene and Oesterreich (2012) argue is not as a place where faculty and students activism is accepted.

Equally, if not more significant, the administration and many faculty view my liberatory/revolutionary pedagogy that centers social justice/social transformation as disarming and even disdainful. However, in spite of these sentiments and the unyielding attacks on my character and livelihood, my spiritual, social, and political commitment to social justice, the legacy of the HBCU, and my students is unwavering. Adams, Bell, and Griffin (2007) put forth that:

> the goal of social justice education is to enable people to develop the critical analytical tools necessary to understand oppression and their own socialization within oppressive systems, and to develop agency and capacity to interpret and change oppressive patterns and behaviors in themselves and the institutions and communities of which they are a part. (p. 2)

I contend that the power and process of teaching and learning can and must be liberatory if members of marginalized groups are going to engage in the work of changing oppressive conditions, both individually and collectively. As Ella Baker advises, "in order for us as poor and oppressed people to become a part of a society that is meaningful, the system under which we now exist has to be radically changed. This means that we are going to have to learn to think in radical terms" (cited in James, 1999, p. 73). As a professor at an HBCU who has had the privilege of critically

engaging with members of an oppressed group, as McLaren (1999) posits, "part of the task is ethical: to make liberation and the abolition of human suffering the goal of the educative enterprise itself" (p. 185). As such, McLaren (1999) further states:

> Pedagogy is distinct from teaching in that it situates the teacher/learner encounter in a wider context of historical and sociopolitical forces in which the active knowing recognizes and takes into account the differentiated politics of reception surrounding the object of knowledge by the students. Critical pedagogy constitutes a dialectical and dialogical process that instantiates a reciprocal exchange between teachers and students-an exchange that engages in the tasks of reframing, re-functioning, and reposing the question of understanding itself, bringing into dialectical relief the structural and rational dimensions of knowledge and its hydra-headed power/knowledge dimensions. Revolutionary pedagogy creates a narrative space set against the naturalized flow of the everyday, against the daily poetics of agency, encounter, and conflict. (p. 185)

This argument grounds my pedagogical approach because I want my students to leave my classes knowing who they are, understanding the history and legacy of Black struggle, and being able to effectively negotiate the oppressions that they will surely encounter when they leave the comfort of "home." Admittedly, because I teach a majority Black student population, I do not experience the resistance that Black women faculty are faced with when addressing racism, sexism, and classism in the classrooms of PWIs that bring my sisters so much pain (Myers, 2002; Perlow, Bethea, & Wheeler, 2014; Pittman, 2010). My students are generally anxious and open to learning outside of the boxes of white supremacy, to rewriting their narratives, and to nourishing their voices. By making the subject relevant to their collective (although not homogeneous) experiences through the use of practical examples and analyses of the structures that sustain and justify power and oppression, the pathway to critical consciousness is opened (hooks, 2010). As a result, when my students see oppression, many of them become compelled to question, analyze, and even challenge it, be it in the classroom or in the larger society. Freire (2012) reminds us that social justice education must lead to action—praxis. Thus, given its historical legacy, I put forth that the HBCU should especially be a place in which students are not only encouraged to think critically, but also to act radically, including challenging conformity, socio-

political oppression, and engaging in direct action. Shockley (2013) expands on the connection between liberatory pedagogy and praxis in the following passage:

> In this paradigm both teacher/learner and learner/teacher are social change agents, digesting and interrogating existing bodies of knowledge while making new meaning, challenging hegemonic knowledge production (Giroux & McLaren, 1994), and contributing to a more just world by translating thought into progressive action. This requires an engaged and transformative pedagogy that is rooted in relationship, authenticity, risk-taking, curiosity, courage, dialogue, disciplinary border-crossing, intellectual rigor, intentionality, emotional connectivity, and critical reflection. (p. 23)

However, the administration and colleagues view the manner in which I engage my students in liberatory/revolutionary pedagogy as a threat to their own order, control, and power over our "shared students," their own classroom dynamics, and the way in which the university practices respectability politics. Unfortunately, I have found that the vast majority of the faculty and administrators at my institution subscribe to what Freire (2012) characterizes as "traditional" education, designed to promote conformity to dominant ideological and cultural values that support and sustain power and oppression. Thus, the general expectation is relative to the paternalistic way in which many Black families view the relationships between parents and children—that students will do as they are told without "talking back" (hooks, 1989). Accordingly, I consider my institution a place where the hierarchy implies the non-negotiable conformity to power and authority, and education implies, as Freire (2012) puts forth, a banking model—a neat process wherein students remain passive receptacles who receive academic deposits from the professor without question, critique, or engagement. Thus, the students' passion and desire to truly acquire knowledge and understanding is often misconstrued as disrespect/insubordination to those who view conformity and order as integral components of classroom "management," and may not be prepared for this "distraction." This way of thinking also reflects the university's embrace of a bureaucratic structure as opposed to a place that challenges and nourishes critical thinking in the classroom, or even respects shared governance.

Consequently, my students, especially the sociology majors, are not acknowledged and respected as the organic intellectuals or critical thinkers

that they are, but are instead pejoratively labeled "Dr. Z's minions" by some faculty and administrators. The assumption is that my students' "blind" love, admiration, and trust in me, not the evolution of their own consciousness, allows me to "indoctrinate" them into an imagined revolutionary army in which I am the General, and they follow my command without understanding or agency. Accordingly, I have both observed and been told about attempts by faculty and administrators to censor students' voices and activities, and to neutralize their rights to question and protest both on campus and in the classroom. I have witnessed administrators chastise or ignore calls for feedback or questions from the students identified as "radical" or "trouble-makers" in the classroom and in public forums, and administrators giving maternal/paternal lectures about being cautious of my approach, their interaction with me as a mentor and professor, and the need to "develop their own minds." I opine that such an absurd assumption speaks to the manner in which deficit perceptions about the intellectual abilities and the capacity for the conscious actualization of our Black student population are internalized and subsequently affect the rationality and pedagogies of those who are charged with educating them. Thus, this is one form of domination that must be disrupted if the roots of systematic oppression are to be dismantled.

I posit that relinquishing power is essential to a liberatory pedagogical model (hooks, 2010). As Darder (2011) states,

> Students must therefore be acknowledged, respected, and treated as worthy and respected co-creators of knowledge within the classroom. The degree to which this is possible is linked to both the political consciousness and skill of teachers to be fully present, to negotiate power in the process of learning *with* their students, and to establish meaningful interactions in the classroom community. (p. 349)

What administrators and colleagues fail to realize is that the love and admiration that my students have for me comes directly from their respect for the love, admiration, expectations, and hope that I have for them. As such, our process is reciprocal—we learn from each other. hooks (2010) posits, "When we teach with love, combining care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect, and trust, we are often able to enter the classroom and go straight to the heart of the matter" (p. 161). Getting to the "heart of the matter" is the substance of nourishing critical consciousness. Thus, when students develop critical consciousness, it doesn't turn off

when they leave my classroom. For them, all spaces become "pedagogical" spaces where inquiry becomes an innate part of their sensory process, and learning becomes metaphysical. In this sense, I am in agreement with Ella Baker (1972) who states, "I have always thought what is needed is the development of people who are interested not in being leaders as much as in developing leadership in others" (p. 345). So, in spite of institutional resistance, and even hate, *this* is the principal, unrelenting, and unapologetic goal of my pedagogical approach within the HBCU—to nourish critical thinkers who become consciously engaged in their own praxis.

Pedagogy Without Praxis Is Like…

> If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom and yet depreciate agitation… want crops without plowing up the ground, they want rain without thunder and lightning. They want to ocean without the awful roar of its many waters…Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will. — Frederick Douglass, 1857

While my pedagogical approach is firmly rooted in the works of pedagogues such as bell hooks and Paulo Freire, my consciousness developed (long before I started teaching) from a theoretical foundation that allows me to understand the roots of socio-political oppression, and that is what grounds my praxis. Although most would classify me as a Marxist and while I resist being categorized or ideologically imprisoned by labels, I concede that my analytic foundation is rooted in a Black radical tradition, where I employ a historical materialist perspective to explain the socio-historical conditions of the masses, especially the masses of Black people throughout the African Diaspora. As Rabaka (2009) contends:

> Where white Marxists/critical class theorists have a longstanding history of neglecting, not only the political economy of race and racism but the distinct radical thought traditions, life-worlds and lived-experiences of continental and diasporan Africans in capitalist and colonial contexts, primarily utilizing the black radical tradition… endeavors to accent the overlapping, interlocking, and intersecting character of capitalism, colonialism, racism, and sexism, among other forms of domination, oppression, and exploitation.… Along with other black radical figures, like Marcus Garvey, Claudia Jones, Ella Baker, Malcolm X, Fannie Lou Hamer, Bayard Rustin, and Audre Lorde, the examples of W.E. B. Du Bois, C. L. R. James, Aime Cesaire, Leopold Senghor, Frantz Fanon, and Amilcar Cabral can serve as

> models of, and provide the means through which we begin critically rethinking the possibilities of resistance to, and the transgressive transformation of the new global imperialism(s) of our age. (pp. 15; xiv)

It is my theoretical foundation that enables me to critique the manner in which ruling class dominance under capitalism requires the oppression of the masses and, as such, allows me to challenge the State and its apparatus as the condition for liberation. James (1999) suggests that those who "explicitly challenge state and corporate dominance and critique the privileged status of bourgeois elites among the left; those that do so by connecting political theory for radical transformation with political acts to abolish corporate-state and elite dominance are revolutionary" (p. 79). I strive to be revolutionary. The fluid evolution of my own consciousness, which embodies the ability to think, process, and analyze phenomena outside of socially constructed boxes, *requires* praxis.

Accordingly, from an activist perspective, the relationship between pedagogy and praxis is congruent and one cannot exist without the other, in me. Thus, while it may seem easy to find ego satisfaction by analyzing social issues in the classroom and presenting at conferences that dominate Black narratives and Black issues from the same white supremacist and patriarchal perspectives that exist in the society that we critique, it is not enough *for me*. It is not enough for me to write a book, a "peer-reviewed" article, or this book chapter, as the sole means of addressing the struggle, and then go home to my suburban home and exist in isolation from the people "left behind" in Barry Farms. It is not enough for me to nourish conscious thinkers and then depend on them to do the work. It is *necessary* for me to actively contribute to changing the conditions that I teach about. As James (2013) contends, "We can be organic intellectuals of formations other than the academy—that is, relevant radical subjects—if and only if, we reject the sites of entry and performance as final destination points for activist politics for social justice" (p. 217). Thus, to understand the roots of oppression requires a response—the creation of pathways for liberation. While this may begin or be furthered within spaces of privilege, the most significant work occurs outside the academy, among the most marginalized people. That means that I engage with people who may not have an opportunity to sit in my classroom, or attend a conference, but are integral to the struggle.

Revolutionary praxis means "getting dirty," challenging the discomfort and filth of white supremacist and patriarchal oppression, engaging in

forms of activism where there is the risk that comfort, respect, freedom, stability, and even life might be disrupted. Consequently, I have traveled to Ferguson, D.C., Baltimore, and other cities in order to understand the unique yet collective plight of the people who started a movement where I faced the possibility of surveillance, rubber bullets, tear gas, and/or arrest. I have both organized and participated in protests, "die-ins," and shut-downs in front of the U.S. Capitol, the Department of Justice, and local roadways and businesses in order to call for an end to state violence and oppression. In the spirit of Ida B. Wells, I have challenged the neo-lynching laws such as Castle Doctrine and Stand Your Ground. As such, I have advocated for the families of Bobby Gadsden, Mark Howard, and Charal Thomas (the little-known neo-lynching victims), writing countless complaints on their behalf to the Department of Justice, FBI, South Carolina Law Enforcement Division, and the South Carolina Attorney General. I have written to the United Nations to request that the United States be held accountable for its blatant violations of the United Declaration of Human Rights, to no avail.

I also return to Barry Farms and other neighborhoods to engage the communities that I come from, speaking to the youth, going to the schools, learning from the elders, and attending community functions. I regularly go to Level III correctional facilities, local jails, and juvenile facilities to speak to my brothers and sisters through confrontational "calls to consciousness" and critical dialogue. However, as hooks (2003) warns, "Just as white supremacy or male domination serves as a location of privilege that provides pseudo self-esteem, academic hierarchies deem smart people chosen and therefore more worthy of regard than the unintelligent masses" (p. 99). Thus, I consciously try to avoid the elitist tendencies of "scholar-activists" who use their degrees or status as a license to become the "authority" over a struggle and a people which many of them have lost connection with. I must acknowledge that although I am from Barry Farms, I do not live there anymore and admit that my book knowledge or my ability to research doesn't supersede those who embody the struggle from the frontlines. I must actively listen in order to truly receive the wisdom and analyses from the voices of the people. The struggle is not for academics to dominate movement, but rather to fluidly engage.

There are no limits to transformative praxis. Paulo Freire argues that "without a vision for tomorrow, hope is impossible. The past does not generate hope except for the time when one is reminded of rebellious, daring moments of a fight" (cited in McLaren, 2000, p. 161). By putting

revolutionary pedagogy into practice, I serve as a model of giving back and "walking the walk" that my students can be proud of while simultaneously fighting for the liberation of all oppressed people. Ultimately I wish to leave a legacy and have my soul write a story that will be undeniable to my Ancestors upon my transition from this earth. In struggle, there can be no limit to hope. For *this* I am envied, vilified, labeled, ostracized, targeted, and even hated by my administration and some of my colleagues. But, most importantly, for *this* I am loved and respected by my students who do not celebrate me (Dr. Z), but celebrate the cultural, ideological, spiritual, and personal development and self-actualization that they, themselves, achieve in the spaces that we create together. I am proud to be the water that my Creator has allowed me to pour on them, the example that the Creator has prepared me to be for them. My reward is not my meager pay but rather the gift of watching them grow before my eyes, their smiles when they challenge me, the mutual exchange of ideas and information that we experience together, the ability to develop the whole student, the willingness to humble myself and be vulnerable, and students' willingness to keep me a part of their lives long after class is over. These things are priceless. Selfishly, beyond any divine purpose, engaging both the pedagogy and praxis of revolution and liberation is my only hope, and "hope is something shared between teachers and students. The hope that we can learn together, teach together, be curiously impatient together, produce something great together, and resist together the obstacles that prevent the flowering of our joy" (Freire in McLaren, 2000, p. 161). So, I understand the discomfort that my pedagogy/praxis elicits—it is threatening to the structure, subjectivity, and fragility of power, dominance, and oppression. Yet, it is different, it is powerful, it is transformative, and most of all, it is beautiful in the possibility of change that it creates within the academy and society at large.

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CHAPTER 4

Black Women Academics and Senior Managers Resisting Gendered Racism in British Higher Education Institutions

Cecile Wright, Uvanney Maylor, and Valerie Watson

This chapter explores how Black[1] women academics and senior managers resist the white supremacist brutalisation that exists in UK higher education institutions (HEIs) and survive with dignity. Black women in the UK academy deploy transformative strategies of resistance (King, 1991) in challenging white hegemonic discourses against a backdrop of white resistance to Black women's presence and the simultaneous denial of racism. Unlike previous literature in this area, we shift the narrative to focus on instances of empowerment, Black women's sense of agency, tactical flair, effective maneuverings, articulations, and demonstrations of personal power. Although issues of representation and the racist and sexist experiences of Black women in HEIs in the UK are not new, the narratives that we report in this chapter are especially important today given that recent

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research, including a recent film from the University and College Union that records the experiences of Black staff, shines a new light on the insidious racism that plagues higher education in the UK (Hunt, 2016). In addition, increasingly, Black academics in the UK are publicly voicing their views about the lack of a representative number of Black faculty and administrators on UK campuses, as well as their personal experiences of isolation, insidious forms of racism and sexism, and a lack of opportunities for career advancement. Not only are Black women underrepresented in British universities, when they are qualified and have the educational and administrative qualifications, they are further diminished, underemployed and marginalized in a racially and gendered segmented labor market within UK HEIs (Mirza, 2006a). In like manner, Black students are increasingly vocal about the invisibility of Black professors in their classrooms.

This chapter arose out of our need to articulate and share some of our own experiences as well as those of other Black women academics working within HEIs in the UK. These articulations provide the context for this chapter. By articulating and reflecting on our own experiences we engage in a "reflective and reflexive" (Burke, Cropper, & Harrison, 2000, p. 298) process of challenging the power of the institutions that we are located in. Reflecting upon and critically analyzing our experiences in the academy allowed us to actively engage in a process that challenges our marginality. Thus, we make an important contribution to the current discourses by articulating and making explicit our experiences within the academic community. The very act of naming oppressive processes makes them explicit and is an important strategy for those who experience and witness situations of inequality.

Drawing on theories of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) and critical race theory (Delgado, 1995), we examine how race, class and gender can create a matrix of oppression, and elicit resistance. This process has enabled us to identify strategies which we feel will be useful for other marginalized individuals and groups engaged in struggles of resistance and for those interested in challenging the oppressive power relations that characterize the academic environment. Wright, Thompson and Chaner (2007) posit that

> while the writing of Black females in the UK point to the tendency for the lives and voices of Black women to be missing from discourses of race and gender… the problems that Black women face do not necessarily relegate them to a 'victim' status. (p. 146).

The narratives reported in this chapter defy the victim status and, instead, demonstrate our collective responses to living and working in

hostile higher education environments are epitomized in the title and content of Maya Angelou's well-known poem *And Still I Rise*. Put simply, "WE"—Black women in the UK higher education system—"rise"; "WE" rise as we traverse and transcend hostile working environments and thereby provide inspiration and affirmation to other women.

This chapter is divided into three parts. First, we provide a brief discussion of the historical context and background of the racist/colonialist/imperialist paradigms and viewpoints posited about Black people generally and Black women specifically in the UK that came to be deeply embedded in the institutional structures of UK higher education institutions. Next, we discuss the impact of the legacy of such white supremacist paradigms on the present-day experiences of Black women academics and senior managers, their underrepresentation, marginalization and invisibility, as well as the contemporary challenges they face in HEIs today. Lastly, we present a discussion of the phenomenological experiences of a small group of women working within the university environment and the authors, focusing on the ways in which Black women faculty and administrators negotiate challenges, marginalization, white privilege, and white supremacy, resist oppressive conditions, and create strategies of resistance within the institutional power structures of UK HEIs.

The Past Behind the Present: Historical and Contemporary Racism/Sexism in UK Higher Education

The institutions of higher learning in the UK are historically tied to the wealth generated by the enslavement/commodification of Black bodies and the colonial/imperial exploitation, land theft, and resource extraction of/from peoples of color around the globe (Warmington, 2013). The ideological justifications for these practices were promulgated by British social institutions, (i.e. the media, religion, education) and reflected in racist discourses regarding the alleged deficiencies of non-white peoples, in direct support of white supremacy. As Sherwood (2003) points out, during the development of the British empire:

> The notion of "British" [was] constructed in superior terms in relation to "the other" in order to have the right to expropriate lands from the "inferior" and "uncivilised" and to press imperialist expansion under the umbrella of the "civilising mission." Colonial peoples were either mediated

> into savages, unable to rule themselves, without religion or law, perhaps even without language, and thus to be "civilised" or seen as a dissolute, fainéant civilisation unfit to rule themselves. (p. 1)

In universities designed by and for elite white males, racism and sexism were institutionalized—where propaganda and racist discourse was generated and disseminated, a Eurocentrism that cast white Western Europeans as superior compared to the uncivilized "rest" (Hall, 1992). It was in these institutions that theories of racial inferiority/white supremacy were developed, "tested," and practiced in the labs, classrooms, and publications coming out of British higher education institutions that constructed Blackness/Otherness as sub-human, deficient, savage, and whiteness as superior (Shilliam, 2015). It is within this context that both Black students and academics were incorporated into the white and racist landscape of British higher education.

Black women are peculiarly situated in this historical discourse based upon their dual marginalized positions of being Black and female. For example, the history of Black women in Britain reveals sexualized racist notions of Black female humanity, steeped in the legacy of slavery, colonialism, and imperialism (Nzegwu, 2003), in which they have been seen as exotic—a physical/sexual novelty (and as a threat) (Collins, 2009). Thus, the position of Black women in the UK academy, whether in the classroom or in the decision-making boardroom, symbolizes these attitudes (Nzegwu, 2003). As Ackah (2014) astutely points out, such attitudes and ideas about Blacks "echoes down the corridors of time" (p. 1) linking past practices related to Blacks in HEIs in the UK to the present.

The Past Is Strapped to Our Black Backs: Connecting UK Higher Education's Past and Present

As Mignon McLaughlin (1963) states, "The past is strapped to our backs. We do not have to see it; we can always feel it." How appropriate and insightful McLaughlin's statement about the past and its connections to the present (and future) is for our discussion of UK higher education today. In regard to the continuing underrepresentation of Black women in

UK HEIs and both their experiences with overt racism and sexism and the microaggressions they regularly encounter, the past is definitely "strapped to our backs." For some time, the idea of fostering equality of opportunity and diversity has been viewed as essential for creating the conditions for an excellent UK higher education system. In fact, a number of initiatives and action plans have been instituted such as the network for Black British academics, efforts to institute British Black Studies, the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, and the Equality Act, 2010, which promoted racial equality and contributed to universities producing diversity action plans (Bhavnani, Mirza, & Meeto, 2005).

In 2015, when there was a significant lack of Blacks in senior positions in HEIs, a Race Quality Charter was piloted (and launched 2016) as a guide to ensure that a diverse workforce is represented at all levels of institutions (Bhopal, 2015). A 2016 report on equality and diversity, the Higher Education Funding Council of England (HEFCE), claimed:

> Much progress has been made towards greater equality and diversity in the higher education sector in recent years, especially since the advent of the public sector equality duty in the Equality Act, 2010… For instance, there is a trend towards greater diversity in the professoriate, with more female and black and minority ethnic (BME) professors than ever before. (p. 3)

However, HEFCE does introduce the caveat that:

> …certain positive trends should not obscure the fact that the pace of change is slow and large disparities and inequalities remain in many areas. For example, if the proportion of female professors continues to increase at the same rate as it has over the past 10 years, it will take another 40 years for women to reach parity with men. (p. 4)

As a result of such deliberate and strategic diversity plans and actions, various observers and concerned parties have claimed varying degrees of success of such actions aimed at diversifying higher education faculty, staff, and students.

Thus, claims of success notwithstanding, recent statistics and reports belie these claims and, rather, show that there continues to be a significant underrepresentation and/or complete invisibility of Black academics in the professoriate and in senior staff positions. As argued by Ahmed, "despite these action plans, endemic racialised class and gender divisions

show little sign of abating and ‘diversity work’ remains ‘undone’ in higher education because though the term ‘diversity’ may ‘circulate’ in the institution, diversity documents and statements get ‘stuck,’ that is ‘cut off from histories of struggle which expose inequalities” (as cited by Mirza, 2006a, p. 103). Even with efforts it seems that not much has changed; the past continues to haunt the present.

Data and documentary evidence of gender and racial segmentation illustrated by a succession of recent reports by Runnymede (2015) and the Equality Challenge Unit (2015) demonstrate that the British academy still embodies white supremacy and hegemony where white men are overwhelmingly represented in both academic and administrative leadership positions, thus providing support to Ahmed (2005) and other critics of the lack of success or the failure of various diversity plans to produce significant results. For instance, as of 2015, 92 percent of professors were white, while less than one percent were Black. Specifically, 60 (0.4 percent) professors were recorded as being Black (ECU, 2015; Runnymede, 2015) with 17 of these Black professors identified as women (Garner, 2015). Only the University of Birmingham had more than 2 Black British professors (Shepherd, 2015). According to Garner (2015), universities are more likely to hire Black staff as cleaners, receptionists, or porters rather than as academic staff.

Equally disturbing is the data revealing the shocking underrepresentation of Black academics in leadership positions “who make the key strategic decisions concerning ethos, priorities and direction of their institutions” (Ackah, 2014, p. 2). In 2017, the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) released figures that indicated that there were no Black academics in the category of managers, directors, or senior officials at UK universities—and that there hadn’t been for the past three years—2015, 2016, 2017 (Gray, 2017). However, according to Adams, because of HESA’s policy of rounding their data down, the zero figure did not capture the one and only Black woman in the entire UK higher education system, Valerie Amos, director of the School of Oriental and African Studies, leading a UK university. This caveat notwithstanding, as the overall data clearly shows, the workforce/institutions of higher education in the UK are dominated by intersectional inequalities or, as Pilkington (2014) asserts, the “sheer weight of whiteness” (p. 9) and maleness.

Researchers have identified “invisibility” as a major issue impacting Black women academics in the UK (see, e.g., Mirza, 2006a, 2006b;

Wright, Thompson, & Channer, 2007). Wijeyesinghe and Jones (2013) contend that on predominantly white campuses, Black women academics "may experience invisibility as result of the intersections of race and gender, as well as heightened visibility in contexts in which they are clearly the minority compositionally" (p. 138). In Britain, Black female academics are often rendered invisible and their entry into the academy conditional because they are considered inauthentic, or not having rights to what Bourdieu (2001) refers to as "legitimate membership" (p. 11) in the university. The near absence of Black women in senior positions (ECU, 2015; HESA, 2017) encourages assumptions of limited competence and a lack of entitlement to membership (Singh & Kwhali, 2015) perpetuating this notion. Furthermore, as Wright et al. (2007) argue:

> Within the context of (the history) British universities it is important to connect [Black women's] location to the institution's current and past narratives, such as the types of bodies considered to be 'natural' occupants of specific spaces or location. Thus, we need to be aware of historical, cultural, political and institutional practices inherent within education as exemplified through the theorizing of the body politic. (p. 149)

For instance, as the narrative illustrated below by one of the authors of this chapter reveals, in contemporary times Black women, long viewed as "space invaders" (Puwar, 2004) in academia, are rarely considered to be professors:

> It is Thursday afternoon; I was rushing to deliver a package of notes addressed to the other two before our meeting later in the day. I bumped into and greeted a white female colleague who noted the names on the package. She stated: "Oh is that package for … I didn't know she was a professor. She doesn't look like one."

Despite various diversification efforts we must resist any illusion that there has been rapid change or transformation (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2011; Shilliam, 2015) in the status and experiences of Black women, a belief encouraged by white hegemonic diversity discourse, which alleges the "inclusion" of Black people into the academy.

Ironically, in contrast, Black and other culturally diverse students are much better represented in UK HEIs, making up nearly 50 percent of the student population in some institutions (Ackah, 2014; ECU, 2015). Yet

even in these universities, Black academics are rare, particularly those in senior positions (Ackah, 2014). According to Ackah (2014):

> It is hard to think of an arena of UK public life where the people are so poorly represented and served on the basis of their race. Within the White landscape of British higher education Black students and academics are subjected to mechanisms and processes in the environment which disadvantage Black groups owing to historical constructions of Black people "as a problem, and as suffering from a range of deficit characteristics" (e.g. lack of aspiration, lack of motivation, lack of confidence and so on). (Burke, 2015, p. 21)

As a result, both Black academics and Black students are united by feelings of alienation from their environment, discrimination and/or exclusion, and significant underrepresentation in the higher arenas of attainment and progression (Shilliam, 2015).

The discrimination prevalent in British universities has led Black academics and Black students to demand legislation requiring universities to remedy discrimination and to redress the systematic exclusion of Black students and staff and the absence of a curriculum inclusive of Black students[2] (Runnymede, 2015; Shepherd, 2015; Shilliam, 2015). Despite Black academics' demands for legislation that would require these universities to remedy discrimination (Shepherd, 2015), "this scandalous state of affairs [has] generate(d) minimal investigation, censure or legal scrutiny under the 2010 Equality Act" (p. 1). As the UK academy attempts to shift toward models of and action plans for "diversity," it is with the spirit of continual vigilance and reflection that an urgent need to examine the experiential knowledges produced by academics on the margins is in order. Moreover, hooks (1995) and Ahmed (2012) remind us of the precariousness of Black people working in contexts where they continue to be dominated by white men and women and of the need to remain vigilant in resisting the potential of collusion.

The Invisibility/Visibility Contradiction: Resisting Marginalization

In many ways, Black women's ability to successfully navigate their way through academia is tied both to their visibility and their invisibility. All of the women represented in this chapter discussed the ways in which

they were rendered invisible. Learning about how best to handle this situation led Bev to actively remind colleagues in meetings of her contribution each time. This self-promotion, as she saw it, was an unfamiliar way of working but necessary to learn. Despite the pervasive challenges faced by Black women working in academic environments, Black women employed multiple strategies of resistance. For instance, Yasmin highlights how she responded and deployed strategies in her working in environment, where she was the only Black woman senior manager, by embracing the notion of her "exceptionality," and arms herself to navigate a hostile environment by remaining alert to covert racism. She states:

> The more you climb the ladder, the less colour you see… this also can mean the less overt racism you see. I have to keep my eyes and ears open… stay alert. It's easy to get sucked in … to forget who I am and how I am really seen.

Additionally, these narratives identified some of the ways in which Black women in the academy consciously make their presence known as an act of resistance. A common saying among them is "If you are not at the table you are likely to be on the menu." By their very presence in academia these women refuse to be ignored. Therefore, regular if not daily maintenance of visibility is key to challenging their instrumental oppression. Indeed, as Mirza (2006a) notes, "…Black women slip into invisibility in the site that matters the most—how they are valued and embraced in everyday practice, and the transforming difference that they bring to higher education institutions" (p. 103). Pat, a Black academic, observes, "such identification [i.e. becoming visible] can be advantageous as it can be used to express [one's] ideas and thoughts and reinforce resistance." In white academia moving from the master–slave relationship requires Black academics to be acknowledged, recognized, and their work respected (Nzegwu, 2003; Perlow, Bethea, & Wheeler, 2014). To accomplish this, these Black women considered it essential to move from the margins to center, or in other words, from being invisible to visible. Being prepared to speak out and ensure that in your absence someone is prepared to speak on your behalf reminds those around the table of your existence; an alternative perspective is an important part of reducing invisibility.

Negotiating the Power Structure as a Form of Resistance

Burke et al. (2000) state that "the ability to analyse the concept of power is central to understanding empowerment, anti-oppressive practice and survival strategie" (p. 301). Specifically, Wright et al. (2007) demonstrate that:

> marginalization, tenuous position, lack of a sense of belonging, …[and] feelings of being excessively scrutinized and marginalized, are common amongst the women. Issues of lack of progression, workload management, lack of opportunities, lack of support and access to resources are identified by the women…Black women [must therefore] negotiate their experiences of work in academia and …they [often] feel damaged by their experiences. (p. 158)

Black women deployed strategies to negotiate their working lives arising out of institutional power relations. For example,

> "W" was aggressively confronted in her office and wrongly accused by a white female professor of not informing her about the development of a research training programme despite previous discussion at a staff meeting (where the White staff member was present). Dissatisfied with the response that she was present, the white female professor later re-sent an email (originally sent by "W") which she felt vindicated her claim that there had been no communication about the training programme. Strong in her leadership, "W" reasserted her power and position and reclaimed her rights as research lead with the White female professor by going to her office, standing bold and emphasizing that she was present at the meeting, and stating clearly the time and date of the meeting, and backing this up by sending the correct email and paperwork that had been circulated at the time.

In discussing the strategy deployed to negotiate institutional power, Jenny (a lecturer) in her narrative reflected her experience of being conditionally accepted into the higher regions of the academy as long as she took on the conditions of mobility in higher education, which to some extent included "passing." Jenny understood passing to mean relinquishing aspects of her identity as a Black woman, while Bev (a lecturer) understood it as having to hide her ambitions, having encountered responses of incredulity and dismissal from three male and two female prominent white researchers in

her department. Ahmed (1999) discusses the process of "passing," reiterating Tyler who describes it as a politically viable response to oppression. Singh and Kwhali (2015) and Jackson and O'Callaghan (2011) examined practices designed to exclude Black women, and their data suggests that when women resisted instead of hiding their ambitions and identity, their identities became more pronounced in their quest for as many qualifications as possible. Indeed three of the women we talked to were overqualified for their jobs and had pursued additional qualifications to ensure their potential employment status and to underline their abilities. For instance, one respondent explains:

> I am the first Black employee of the counselling service. I became Head of this service two years ago. It is fair to state that my initial appointment as counsellor in 2014 and recent appointment as Head of the service was greeted with incredulity. On paper alone, I am the best qualified to fulfil this role.

Another way in which these Black women negotiated the power structure and the oppression they feel was to become involved in formal institutional arrangements for protection and their survival in HEIs. The institutional arrangements include joining trade unions, gaining membership of senior leadership committees, and so forth. These strategies, as Burke et al. (2000) note, "enabled Black women and others engaged in the process of change to continually challenge and resist the oppressive power relations that characterize academic environments" (p. 297).

The combination of white male privilege and Eurocentric pedagogy lays claim to supremacy, normality, power, and objectivity, and, therefore the most "esteemed" disciplines and areas of knowledge (Shilliam, 2015). As noted by Perlow et al. (2014), Black women in the academy, on the other hand, are usually seen as inherently connected to racial issues and therefore subjective and biased. They are rarely associated with intellectualism and often cast as unintelligent, lazy, and angry. Black women report being unsupported and marginalized, thus needing to resist such discourses (Mama, 1995; Maylor, 2009; Mirza, 2006a, 2006b; Wright et al., 2007). As Jenny observes:

> For the sake of my sanity I learned to be proud of what I have achieved and to not get drawn into any claims that I am representative of all Black women… It's been tricky and sometimes a daily challenge.

Black women academics have to continually resist discourses which seek to present them as unintelligent or capable of only teaching in multicultural areas. This is exemplified by a Black female professor who states:

> I find that I am continually viewed as not quite intellectual or knowledgeable enough not because of my class, but because of taken for granted perceptions about the abilities of Black people and the lack of recognition of the cultural capital/community cultural wealth resources (Yosso, 2005) we bring to the education process.

This Black professor revealed how her assessment and review of a doctoral student's work was doubly criticized, first in writing (framed as confidential peer critique) and then in an open forum by a white colleague. Through this action, her white colleague undermined and devalued her knowledge, intellectual capacity, and expertise, attempting to subvert her resistance by requesting secrecy, this language implying friendship, and abusing her power when she writes in her note "please do not pass on," and "I'm not criticising you, I hope you know that." The subsequent meeting confirmed the attack when the Black professor was asked to account for the requested revisions and a resubmission of the student's work. This was underlined by the white professor insisting that "she was the professor of education," deeming the Black professor's views as irrelevant, and as not having the authority to critique the student's work. Furthermore, she graded and defined the Black professor's place by asking her for recommended texts for a multicultural module on a master's degree course, emphasizing that this was an area of specialization for the Black woman professor. Mirza (2006a) refers to this encounter as"'infantalisation' [whereby Black academics] are not only pigeonholed as 'just a race expert,' but Black lecturers are also seen as less capable of being in authority" (p. 106). This attitude extends challenges of Black women, whereby white colleagues utilize covert yet hostile strategies to exclude Black women academics. Another example cited by the Black woman professor of a white male doctoral student claiming that her review of his work made him "physically sick" points to the way in which Black women in the academy have to stand firm, resist, and publicly challenge dysconscious racism (King, 1991).

Resistance to these acts of micro and macroaggressions by Black women in academia has taken the form of naming them where possible (Burke et al., 2000), using their understanding of scholarship to challenge them

immediately and accessing support from networks in the Black academic community and other relevant arenas where possible (see section on empowerment and community networks). Resisting criticism from white academics and students also requires, as Angela (a senior administrator) states, "Refus[ing] to be drawn into old and familiar ways of working and relating to White people. We need to learn from history and the past and work out something new." This working out "something new" can be associated with Black women teaching to transgress white supremacist boundaries (hooks, 1994, 2003) in predominantly white classrooms and beyond:

> Decolonising our taken-for-granted knowledges and entrenched ways of being inherent within our institutional walls requires not only deep self reflection, but an intellectual and institutional safe space to develop critical consciousness for ourselves and our students. (Mirza, 2015, p. 28)

Such resistance extends to Black women's teaching and encouraging doctoral students to utilize critical theories (e.g. postcolonial, critical race theory, and Black feminism) in their research, and not being afraid to challenge white academics who dismiss the inclusion of Black texts (e.g. Fanon's 2008 *Black Skin, White Masks*) as non-academic political radicalism, or who question the absence of "key" white European theorists such as Bourdieu (2001) and Foucault (1989) in Black students' theorizing of their research findings (Maylor, 2015). These actions undervalue the work of Black students on the premise that they cannot "critically engage with leading theorists," that is, dead white European men who themselves did not engage with race or ethnicity in their work.

Empowerment Through Support from Networks and Community

Bringing community networks from the margins into the center of higher education challenges the invisibility of Black workers. Black women's intentional visibility extends beyond their mere presence in UK universities. It also includes advocating on behalf of their Black sisters, brothers, children, and the next generation of Black students, through their work and affiliations to professional and community networks (Ladson-Billings, 2005; Wright et al., 2007). For example, one of the participants is the chair of her university's Black and Minority Ethnic Staff network. This is one of the ways in which she volunteers her time and energies in the act of

maintaining the visibility of Black workers in all areas of decision making within the university and the local community. It is also a way of encouraging Black workers to engage and raise issues of specific concern as a group. This has meant that the academy has been challenged to give attention to its behavior and policies as an institution. The network's projects meet nationally held basic frameworks of accountability. The process has meant that discomfort and "difficult conversations" must be had and deficiencies in that university must be acknowledged and addressed. Colleagues within the staff network have been able to publicize and advocate on behalf of the local community within the university structure. This has led to university funding of and sponsoring community activities, as well as providing well-earned recognition of the additional voluntary work done by Black university workers in their local area.

Our research demonstrates that resistance strategies employed by African Caribbean women academics and senior managers to withstand isolation and challenges from white workers designed to undermine their authority in academia were rooted in their "*being comfortable in [their] own skin*" and having a strong sense of their African Caribbean identity as well their connection and attachment to the Black community. The respondents discussed being bolstered by an African Caribbean identity arising from being born in the Caribbean or familial connections with African Caribbean peoples who have experience of triumphing over adversity. In particular they had an understanding of Caribbean history informed by slavery and colonialism, which encourages resistance and promotes self-belief in making changes for oneself and the wider Black community. Jenny, Bev, and Yasmin saw not being born in the UK as an advantage. Although they are UK citizens, their strong sense of the roots of their cultural heritage was supportive. In Bev's view, her ethnicity and hence visibility had played a positive part in her success. She received family advice and support related to work rate and the effort required to succeed. She was determined to draw on the learning from her cultural history and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) resources that affirmed her sense of self, and provided her with a sense of resilience in the face of adversity, vision, determination, and a mandate to make a difference. Yasmin described how she had reached her senior position over a number of years and had succeeded, coping with isolation by retaining a strong sense of herself and community and heritage through her familial connections and links with other Black networks, national and local. Cora and Bev cited similar strategies of supportive higher education Black networks external to their university for navigating

their way through higher education. In addition, these strategies proved very useful for reflecting on critical incidents and reality checking. Drawing strength from Black women academics who were/are available via telephone or social media was/is also crucial to resist challenges they encountered from white academics. As one participant observed:

> Today true freedom for Black academics remains a constant challenge and continually has to be fought for. My ability to resist the constant battles in navigating institutional power norms of knowledge and managing staff and student perceptions of Black academic ability comes through support day or night from other Black female academics.

Four of the Black women we talked to had access to internal and or external mentors. This enabled them to track their progress, and scan and review their work in a safe space. For one respondent, the impact of mentoring was instrumental in the initial stages of becoming/being the Head of an all-white department. As Marsha observed:

> Working with a Black mentor who had undergone similar challenges was invaluable and inspirational. Also, she fully understood the dimensions of my task and alerted me to the pitfalls of my actions, which were complicated by how I would be seen as a Black manager. She also introduced me to other Black workers in HE at my level who were not visible day to day.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to examine Black women academics' and senior managers' experiences in UK higher education, and the strategies they employ to subvert the visibility/invisibility phenomenon, and how they negotiate institutional power daily. In addition, we described the empowerment Black women derive from engaging with Black networks and support structures in maintaining their existence in higher education, while also rebuffing white supremacist discourses. The narratives of these Black women demonstrated their awareness of the myriad of expectations of them and their position. For some as leaders, they were subject to what Dumas (1985) refers to as "The Black Mammy Syndrome," often called upon to be superhuman. Navigating their way through higher education requires Black women to resist definition and being totally depended on to solve everything. Rather than being used as solely a "bridge" by others, these women highlighted the importance of using themselves to journey

through higher education in order to make a meaningful difference in knowledge construction, student attainment, and their own progression in the academy. Being successful also required them to resist inappropriate demands from white colleagues and, as some said, to "tone it [their ideas] down"; "assimilate at all costs" to the point of denying their ethnicity, culture and heritage; "deny the impact of racism" on their employment experiences; to "not make waves" or challenge white authority; and/or "to be an expert on Black people and diversity issues only."

These Black women also recounted deriving courage from supportive colleagues, family, and friends internal and external to the academy. Such support was and remains a crucial strategy for Black women in navigating their way through UK HEIs and attaining senior positions while at the same time asserting their knowledge and power. Drawing on mentors and community networks as well as being political with a small and big "P" are vital parts of Black women's strategies used to negotiate their way through higher education institutions. Ultimately, Black women's resistance is underpinned by the following participant's observation:

> A sense of wanting to give back what I have been given (by my forbears) and learnt using knowledge and experience to change thinking and perceptions about the place of Black women as leaders. To support the younger Black generation—our children. … I have a strong belief in our power to change and that our history of resilience and being resilient shows this to be true. It also makes us a force to be reckoned with.

Notes

1. In the UK, and in this chapter, "Black" is used to refer to people of African and African Caribbean heritage.
2. Runnymede (2015) drew attention to "high profile initiatives such as the 'We Too Are Oxford' student campaign, the 'Why Isn't my Professor Black?' events and Black British Academics network (info@blackbritishacademics.co.uk), the push for 'Black Studies' and concern in Parliament, suggest a strong appetite for change from without and within the university system, from staff and students, organisations, institutions (including leading and Russell Group Universities), policy-makers and (some) politicians" (p. 4).

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CHAPTER 5

Stories of Migration: Passing Through, Crossing Over, and Decolonial Transgressing in Academyland

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I am a South Louisiana woman. My physical orientation to place and space shapes the way I understand the production of knowledge and the purposes of pedagogy. Owing to a distinctive Black Southern feminized orientation to the world, much of my genealogical and cultural ways of knowing, and being, and dreaming have been shaped in the crucible of the Black Enslavement and its continually relevant aftermath. This metaphysical preoccupation is not limited to the fact of bondage. My Black Southern femininity is also deeply connected to the attempted theft and erasure of African identity (Ani, 1994; Dillard, 2012). Excavating the bonds between Black Southern women's culture and an African foundation has been fundamental to my development as a teacher. It has also complicated my migration to the academy. One uncovered link, or *kink* depending on your perspective, that has proven particularly significant is the power of story.

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Like our African foremothers, since the Enslavement Southern Black women have used stories to instruct, direct, protect, and survive. For generations we have crafted stories, prose, song, and testimony narrating the liberation of our people (Ards, 2015; Baszile, 2008; Brooks & Houck, 2011; Collins, 1990; Dillard, 2012; Edwards & Baszile, 2016; hooks, 1992). Every day, it becomes clearer to me that I am my ancestors' daughter, as story is integral to my life. I write in story. I theorize in story. I research in story and study stories. I use analogy and life-experience to communicate big ideas to my students and colleagues. My connection to storytelling as cultural and pedagogical disruption is not only a manifestation of regional origination; nor is story simply my *preferred* method of delivery. It is my first language. It is the language of African ascendance (Dillard, 2012). As Barbara Christian (1987) puts forth:

> For people of color have always theorized—but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic. And I am inclined to say that our theorizing (and I intentionally use the verb and not the noun) is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in the riddles and proverbs, in the play with language because dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking. How else have we managed to survive with such spiritedness the assault on our bodies, social institutions, countries and our humanity? (p. 52)

It is in the schoolhouse of everyday scholars, under my Black storytelling mothers' tutelage, that I grew strong and astute. Like a seamless tapestry of wisdom from my third-grade educated grandmother, Mama Savannah, to my graduate school educated Aunt Liz, my mothers' stories prepared me to listen for the call of my academic mothers. From Mothers Audre Lorde and bell hooks to Aunts Cynthia Dillard and Patricia Hill Collins, the lessons on living, being, resisting, and loving continued. Their words are and have always been more than entertaining fables, or something to pass the time. The stories crafted by these kin-women—familial and academic—while imaginative, like those of Mothers Octavia Butler and Alice Walker, are fiercely real and unapologetically concerned with the messiness, complexity, and promise of Black life. The thread that connects these Black mothers' stories for me is testimony. Testimony or testifying (testifyin', i.e. "let the church say 'Amen'"; Callin' and Respondin') is that rhetorical strategy originating in the Black faith oral tradition, and connected to African traditional religions and culture (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Wilmore, 2004; Smitherman, 1977).

Whether in home communities or the spaces of solace Black women create in Academyland[1], stories strengthen one's capacity to think deeply with dexterity, but their purpose does not stop there. Most importantly, Black women's words call; they call in, they call forth, and they call out. Their storytelling and testimonies respond to the ever-present need for Black liberation. It is within Black women's words that I learned the art of storytelling. It is often adapted for academic pages, thinly veiled in scholarly vernacular, steadfastly committed to telling Black women's stories not only for personal and communal deliverance, but also for the fortitude of the next generation (Edwards & Baszile, 2016). This is the soul of Black women's storytelling: deliverance. Stories, words, prose, all working together for the liberation of a people.

Unfortunately, I learned quickly that Academyland did not recognize my storytelling credentials. As Geneva Smitherman (1977) puts forth:

> The story element is so strong in black communicative dynamics that it pervades general everyday conversation. An ordinary inquiry is likely to elicit an extended narrative response where the abstract point or general message will be couched in concrete story form. The reporting of events is never simply objectively reported, but dramatically acted out and narrated. The Black English speaker thus simultaneously conveys the facts and his or her personal sociopsychological perspective on the facts…Unaware of the black cultural matrix in which narrative sequencing is grounded, whites… often become genuinely irritated at what they regard as "belabored verbosity" and narration in an "inappropriate" context. (p. 161)

For various reasons, the experience of academic border crossing took me by surprise. Prior to becoming an academic, a resident of Academyland, the circumstances of my life had not required that I live at the borders (Anzaldúa, 1981). I had not adequately developed a *mestiza* identity, nor had I learned to speak in the various translated tongues (Anzaldúa, 1981) necessary to be heard in Academyland. While I did endure requisite visits to and from Academyland and similar locales such as the United Grade School Nations, the Isle of White Professionalism, and North of Melanin Christianity, my life before residency in Academyland was well-nestled in the embrace of Black women's community. There were challenges of course. It was not a perfect home. But it was loving and intellectually nourishing.

I began my more permanent relationship with Academyland while on a regular trip to the Isle of White Professionalism. I was working at a university at the time, and my well-meaning, supportive white employer informed

me that the university would pay for me to pursue a PhD. She didn't know enough to prepare me. It seemed like a great opportunity to not only visit Academyland intermittently, but to gain dual-citizenship. I had always enjoyed my visits to Academyland as a tourist. Why not make it a second home? In the beginning my migration seemed smooth enough, but the further along in the process I moved, the more difficult it became.

For a very long time I struggled with my new identity as a Storytelling-Academic, mainly because I never grew accustomed to Academyland's Master Tongue (Minh-ha, 1989). During my earliest years as a doctoral student, before I found the voices of my academic kin-women, I attempted to dress up my stories in appropriate citations and imitated speech. I was "passé universitaire"; I was an African ascendant storyteller passing for an academic (Edwards, 2013, p. 149). Academics are those individuals who collectively constitute the intelligentsia:

> I am thus deliberately considering the intelligentsia not as individuals, nor as class factions, but rather as a systematically constituted group bound by a common habitus…that is by common perceptions, dispositions, practices and institutions that account for the systematized nature of their intellectual production. (Franco 1994, p. 360)

I quickly realized that the aims of deep thinking were quite different in Academyland. Here, intellect was less about liberation, and more about adherence to elusive notions of reason, logic, and objectivity that seemed to only apply to the thoughts and actions of those people who considered themselves white and often male (Baszile 2008; Coates, 2015). As I migrated through hostile territory and compromised in ways that I am now ashamed of, for the opportunity to reside in a land that would never love me, several of my foremothers who had already attempted the journey warned me, saying:

> Our credibility in the white-male run intellectual establishment is constantly in question and rises and falls in direct proportion to the degree to which we continue to act and think like our…selves, rejecting the modes of bankrupt white-male Western thought. Intellectual passing is a dangerous and limiting solution…a nonsolution that makes us invisible. (Hull & Smith, 1982, p. xviii)

Their exhortation was clear, but I still tried in vain. I was seduced into forgetting their wisdom, seduced into conforming instead of resisting

and transforming (Dillard, 2012). In this wonderland of nonsense, I structured and rephrased, sanitized and cited, for entre into particular journals, for invitations to specific conferences, trying my hardest to align my identity with that of Academyland. All the while I felt like an angry, broken fraud.

As I struggled with my seemingly failed hybridity, I heard the reverberations of storytelling and testimony echoed in the textual pedagogy and scholarly rearing (Edwards & Baszile, 2016) I received from the writings of Black women scholars. In their words, the lessons of home came into sharper focus. These memories and reminders of story contained clues and hidden messages that continue to guide me. Now my native tongue and cultural practices show up in the strangest ways. In those moments, when I allow my kin-women's stories to speak to and through me, I am able to catch a glimpse of the divide, the border, the place where I cross over. I feel more confident in my not belonging-ness, and this confidence has been the key to my ability to move like a Storyteller in Academyland. A clearer understanding of the border, or the distinctions between Academyland and home, helps me to more thoughtfully and usefully embrace a hybrid identity. It helps me to clarify my purpose in Academyland and recognize my power.

For example, one day quite recently, I had an epiphany, a revelation if you will. I decided that enough was enough, that I was enough! And while I'm constantly working through my enoughness, there is one thing of which I am certain. On that revelatory day, I decided that I will no longer theorize in disguise. I will no longer teach from a fraudulent position. I am abandoning pedagogical performance that denies my embodiment, the very realness of my body and the way *this* body is "read as text" (Baszile, 2008, p. 252). My (re)new(ed) approach to academic occupation strengthens my sense of clarity and insight, and has helped me to not only better understand Academyland, but also my relationship to it. This relationship is transient and migratory, with particular allegiances and responsibilities. As I peel through more and more layers of perception, I've recognized the ways in which different stories along my academic life's journey have led me closer to my most authentic self. From revelations of academic plantations, to un(der)paid service work, to contentious citizenship, and presently ambassadorship, the deeper I've dug into my Black feminized core, the more I am able to decolonize not only my mind and writing, but also my spirit.

As I've matured in my spiritual-intellectual-centeredness, the connection between my own attempts at passing and the larger system that causes Black women to be *unvisible* (McKittrick, 2006) becomes clearer. The interlocking system (Collins, 1990) reduces Black women scholars' labor to domestic servitude (Harley, 2008). It removes us from and repackages our theoretical offerings for dominant group consumption (Crenshaw, 1989). It also weighs us down with untenable professional expectations (Gregory, 1999), such as excessive service and committee work, while also presuming our incompetence (Gutierrez y Muhs et al., 2012) when participating in more intellectually rigorous tasks. The experience of erasure is a collective burden. The more I have come to understand the intricate web that has made both passing and erasure possible, the more I have been able to connect my practice of storytelling with my culturally Black feminized identity. Embracing my original language, storytelling, as an act of deliberate resistance to passing was my first act of repatriation. Through storytelling in Academyland, I am able to model practices of teaching and learning that are culturally-specific to my Black feminized home.

In this chapter I invite the reader to listen to my stories of being a migratory Black woman who struggles to practice the art of pedagogical translation in Academyland. Through disruptive and disorienting curricula that decenter the preeminence of (il)logic and (ir)rationality and infuse African ascendance, an embodied pedagogy that attends to the wholeness—the spirit, mind, and body—I write my theoretical mothers and myself in. These stories serve as narratives of borders and border crossings. I use story to teach and make legible Black women's academic lives. Like my foremothers, the fulfillment of my testimony (Edwards & Baszile, 2016) is most expressed when that teaching and increased legibility leads to the healing and liberation of other Black women as well as marginalized peoples writ large—those travelers who most often find their lives written out of Academyland's Master Narrative.

Academic Borders: The Place of Pedagogical and Curricular Resistance

The first story I will offer here has stayed with me clear and bright throughout the years. It's one of my first real glimpses of the academic border. After the experience retold in this story, I began to see how one's identity of origin could completely transform after crossing the border. I realized

the way in which one could go from being a living, breathing human being to a trespasser with one step into Academyland's classrooms.

> *A few years ago, during my first semester as a tenure track faculty member, a white male senior colleague stepped into my office to chat, and, I suppose, to check and see how I was getting along. He had recently attended one of my research presentations where I discussed the challenges Black women faculty experience in predominantly white classrooms and the strategies they employ to be successful. The conversation flowed naturally and eventually we began to discuss the cultural and experiential backgrounds that white, specifically poor/working class and male, students bring with them to college.*
>
> *He stated*:
>
>> *As a white man, I get it. I was one of those guys. I came from a working class background. We had it tough, but we also had racist beliefs. But because it was so difficult for us economically, it was hard to recognize the relative privilege we had because of race. I like to think about these [white] guys as either "Knuckleheads" or "Assholes." The Knuckleheads are those guys that just don't know any better. But once you give them a chance and help them see the larger inequalities, they come around. The Assholes are those guys who could care less about anyone else. They enjoy their privilege and want to keep it no matter what, even if it's unfair.*
>
> *I listened to my colleague's analysis, and understood the truth in his perspective. However, as a Black woman professor, I also recognized that his truth only worked if particular actors were in place, specifically if the educator delivering the alternative, systemic perspective to the white male student was also white (and possibly male). After a few moments of reflection on my colleague's comments, I responded. "Yes, that may be true. But often those same guys who are Knuckleheads in your classroom transform into Assholes in mine."*

My moment of reflection on the Knuckleheads and Assholes with my colleague brought into stark relief many of the complications inherent in my role as an educator in Academyland. There are various tools and best practices that "social justice" educators learn to employ in college classrooms. They include methods such as small and large group dialogue facilitation; accessible readings that plainly illustrate bias, discrimination and microaggressions in society and on college campuses; and activities

that expose students to their relative privileges and oppressions. Aside from instructional strategies, conferences hold workshops on the subject and there are a plethora of books to assist the novice educator in helping students come to a greater awareness about the world around them and its perennial challenges with inequality. Unfortunately, what I've found as I've become more observant of Academyland and its cultural practices is that what's not always made explicit are the specific educators and audiences being targeted. I think this is a particular tool of obfuscation, a linguistic practice of subtext communication. It has been my experience that most discussions pertaining to the delivery and receipt of social justice education implicitly assume white educators and students. The tools that emerge within this context, while effective, are also culturally and situationally specific. They often focus on issues such as "exposure," "tolerance," and "acceptance" through the creation of "safe spaces" where (privileged) individuals can speak freely without judgment. Unfortunately, safe spaces rarely take seriously the trauma of systemic marginalization and border crossing by prioritizing the pedagogical and cultural needs of the oppressed. They also do not substantively consider the ways bodies are read (e.g. recognized as foreign to Academyland), and how those readings complicate pedagogical interactions. Safe spaces assume the instructor will possess institutional privilege in relation to the students, without acknowledging privileged students' ability to exert contra-power against marginalized faculty (Juliano, 2007). When the agents change, the model social justice classroom also shifts in important ways.

Teaching and Learning in Womanish Ways

Aside from instructional strategies that can be laced with cultural assumptions, I have found two overarching values consistently present in conversations about social justice education. They are (1) Fearlessness and (2) Love (or as some describe it, an ethic of care). To me, these two values are fundamental to any liberatory project. The work is challenging and in many ways disruptive of every socio-political, institutional frame Academyland citizens are afforded in regard to navigating life as an agent within imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy (hooks, 1992). Doing such *treasonous* work requires courage and boldness to continually cross academic borders.

Relatedly, because educators committed to justice are disrupting the very foundation on which our students (and colleagues) have built their lives, we must pursue these ideals empathetically. The work cannot reassert

dominant, authoritarian paradigms that force students to respond in particular ways. As Audre Lorde (2008) warned, "The Master's tools will never dismantle the Master's house." We have to leave enough loving space for agential growth and development. I also find love to be a personally liberatory tool. It is a resistant rebellion to oppressive frames that would seek to disavow me of the ability to love and care; to be whole enough to infuse positive energy into my work and relationships. Love and fearlessness have also been essential to my ongoing labor in spirit decolonization. It is important to note that tools such as fearlessness, love, and storytelling are necessary, but if not deployed in service to the decolonization of my spirit, they are mundane. Spirit decolonization is the constant—*religious*—practice of cleansing my spirit from the terror of Academyland and its ally nations. It's my daily reminder to resist illegibility and the consumption of stereotypes that work to erase my humanity and agency. Spirit decolonization is a sacred act of survival and renewal. Thoughtfully engaging the decolonization of my spirit allows me to productively negotiate the contradictions and complexities of being a Black woman in Academyland.

Without spirit decolonization, even tools as powerful as love and fearlessness can morph in grotesque ways. Unfortunately, while working in Academyland I have found that when expressed through a Black woman's body, fearlessness and love are often reinterpreted and repurposed as irrational anger and mammy/wet-nurse service (Harley, 2008; Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000). *My* fearlessness in the classroom is seen as an attitude that needs to be managed and/or disciplined. *My* care and love is attributed to an instinctual need to take care of white people, an obligatory responsibility that denies me subjectivity and agency in the student–teacher relationship.

In order to practice fearless and loving justice work, I must also prepare myself for the reactions of the citizens of Academyland. For me this once was a volatile ebb and flow between doing the work while also resisting the stereotypes and oppressive constructions of Black womanhood. Flux in practice often looked like questioning the value of sitting patiently with students when balancing life and class became too much, while also struggling not to grant leniency to the entitled. I worried about how my encouragement of unheard voices in the classroom would be perceived, while simultaneously deliberating how I could most diplomatically challenge bigoted rhetoric. These are the pedagogical strategies that I, as a border crossing Black woman, had to create to maintain residence in Academyland.

Uncompensated Labor: When and Where I Pass Through

For Black women faculty, standing at the front of the predominantly white classroom is fraught with multiple levels of contradiction (Taylor-Brandon, 2006). A quick Google search illustrates the common perception of the scholar in the public imagination: white, male, middle-aged, and middle class. Even the way its occupants describe Academyland implies particular inhabitants. "All roads lead to Aristotle." "Tweed jackets and loafers." If all scholarly roads lead to Aristotle, which roads lead to Fannie Lou Hamer? Unfortunately, none of the stereotypical academic frames afforded Black women are erudite. Instead we are angry Sapphires, lazy Welfare Queens, strong beasts of burden, overly-sexed whores, caregiving Mammies (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000). Within these perceptual borders, real human beings are constantly negotiating multiple identities within various contexts. The complications that emerge for Black women faculty at the site of academic borders are often illegible to their more enfranchised counterparts (Anzaldúa, 1981; Crenshaw, 1991). I'm reminded of my illegibility every time I encounter an Asshole in my classroom. I'm tempted to ask my senior colleague where exactly the Knuckleheads meet. I'd like the opportunity to introduce myself.

The interesting aspect of these intersectionally restrictive tropes is that they are dynamic in their application. Funnily enough, one of the more challenging scenarios to contend with is when students and colleagues assume by constructing me as the kind, gentle maid they are intimately acquainted with that it is somehow beneficial to me. In some ways they fallaciously expect that I should also be grateful for the opportunity to exist in any capacity within the borders of Academyland. However, mistaking their positive feelings toward the comforting/comfortable Black woman as supportive and appreciative is particularly disturbing. The expectation of gratitude makes it even more difficult to hear my justifiable indignation and resistance. More importantly, it makes it even more difficult for me to access my goal of infusing love into the classroom. Contending with the trope of the wet nurse can trap me in a vicious cycle: attempts at loving pedagogical practice → students'/colleagues' unjust assumptions → personal resistance → vicious pushback → reevaluation of appropriate loving pedagogical response…

Quite frankly working within the borders is exhausting! If I maintain a secular outlook, the work can become taxing beyond ability. I have learned

as I struggle through the vicious cycle that part of my praxis of resistance must be to deny the banality of my efforts, and instead affirm the decolonizing spirit practice of sowing and reaping. I choose as a daily practice to reconceptualize the vicious cycle as seasons. Instead of being trapped in a never-ending losing battle, I labor waiting for the inevitable fruit of love and justice to break through the surface. By reframing the difficult work of justice enacted through my Black woman body as spiritual decolonizing labor with intermittent but inevitable natural results, I give myself the space to breathe, and most importantly, to love. This is the space where I uncompromisingly embody a knowing and being of my fullest, most authentic self. When I embrace this spiritual love labor, I am better able to depart in my spirit from Academyland's plantation and wet-nurse service. I begin to recognize my path to wholeness.

Crossing Over: Black Women's Illegibility, Translation, and Dual-Citizenship

My primary field of study is Post-secondary Education. Recently, I gave an invited address on the current state of the field at our national organization's annual conference. It was a great opportunity, and put me on a larger platform in Academyland than I'd ever been before. I was anxious for several weeks leading up to the talk. Not just because of the audience—prominent citizens in this province of Academyland—but mainly because I knew I had to tell the truth, to testify to my experiences being a Black woman in a field that fiercely guards its disciplinary borders. Transdisciplinary perspectives are regularly sanctioned in my corner of Academyland. Principal journals and conferences regulate access according to who appears in one's reference list. Theoretical pursuits that do not align with the *identity* of the field are regularly detained at the border. Border-guarding fields are most challenging for Black women dual-citizens. These academic provinces most often treat us like trespassers.

At this time, I was also in the thick of spirit decolonization, no longer simply rejecting notions of wet-nursing, but also actively attempting to theorize from a position of full intellectual dual-citizenship. Spirit decolonization required that I simultaneously pursue theoretical and pedagogical strategies that attended to my cultural identity, while regularly disrupting curricular frames that maintained systems of academic domination. I began to prioritize my spiritual health and the needs of my community

over the priorities of Academyland. This spiritual shift manifested naturally in several ways. I began to more intentionally reorganize my syllabus by including more marginalized and critical voices and giving less intellectual space to canonical authors and traditional perspectives. I began to ask my students unsafe questions that challenged them to think critically and deeply about the world around them and their role in Academyland. I invited non-academic guest speakers who were laborers in communities that are less resourced and often unheard in Academyland. Most importantly I refused to be passé universitaire any longer. I began to insist on self-definition. In some ways this process was like coming out of hiding. I taught from a place of authenticity and duality and I invited my students to participate in my journey to wholeness (hooks, 1994).

The praxis of resistance to passing also came in the form of translation. I had to translate my newly adopted position in Academyland to my more enfranchised fellow citizens. The talk addressed to my field at our national conference was one of my first honestly translated texts. I began the talk by acknowledging my dual-citizenship, describing for the audience the struggles associated with occupying Academyland from this positionality. I anchored my remarks in the words of contemporary storytelling mothers and sisters, adding my voice to the silenced chorus of the unheard. Our stories attested to the ways Academyland implicitly demands the assimilation of dual-citizens. A prerequisite to our inhabitance is the tacit rejection of our origins, favoring instead the values and practices of Academyland. Dual-citizens must temper their natural inclinations toward hybridity, while letting go of any hope for mutual learning and respect. Laying bare its violence and hypocrisy, I challenged my province of Academyland to *do better*! I asked the field to live up to its values and ideals, to become the inclusive, transdisciplinary, innovative place they imagine themselves to be. Most importantly, I demanded to be heard and seen as I am.

Spiritual-Intellectual Transgressing: The New Ambassador

> *I find myself…now…I believe I have crossed over into somewhere else. I know too much and that too much does not allow me to write comfortably or unproblematically in the "proper" academic prose. (Denise Taliaferro Baszile,* 2010*, p. 493)*

As I re-read my remarks to my province of Academyland and re-member the scene in which it occurred, I recognize the power of this transitional/transient moment in my life. While boldly acknowledging my home and

the challenges I have encountered with border crossing, I also testified to the many ways I've learned to blend and scaffold. While a beautiful and potent practice, I noted that the art of pedagogical and theoretical blending is actually a mark of my not-belonging as well as my home. The women of color scholars that I cited in the talk are not only translators, but also ambassadors beckoning me home. Their words are for me invocations and protective warnings mentoring me into the work of translation and world-traveling (Anzaldúa, 1981; Lugones, 1987). All of my efforts to intellectually blend and amalgamate as a naturalized, not natural-born, citizen, while useful and beneficial for Academyland, were also distracting me from my intellectual place of belonging (Baszile, 2006). What I also had to come to terms with was the reality that my cultural adaptations (revising my writing to sound more "objective," attempting to prove the existence of systemic oppression through an overabundance of references in my pedagogy, or my own internalized practice of erasure by way of detachment in my writing and teaching) did not, could not camouflage my markings—theoretical accent, values, practices—of not belonging. In many ways Academyland's insistence on my not belonging was the impetus for my spirit decolonization. It left me with only two alternatives: resist or be consumed. I chose resistance.

Dillard (2012) notes that embracing an African ascendant feminized identity releases Black women scholars from allegiance to the academy and its commitment to Euro-masculinist modes of thinking and being. From this separated subject-position, we are better able to see and walk in our spiritual purpose in Academyland as Black women. This understanding assists us in rejecting an ever-contentious citizenship as the ultimate goal, and instead embrace a dual-citizenship or ambassadorship that roots our identities and potential in an epistemic space that centers African ascendant womanhood.

From this African ascendant feminized position, I'm less concerned about assimilation or adaptation, and more intent on understanding and diplomacy. My pedagogical goal is no longer the transfer of information that silently reasserts narratives of domination (Freire, 2007). Instead the goal of my teaching—in the classroom and in my writings—is uncompromised loving liberation. As I craft syllabi and prose, I am constantly aware of the paths that lead to unknowing and the tools my students and readers need to dismantle the structures that require their bondage. This means calling on other storytellers in my work who express divergent ideas, developing classroom activities and projects that require the application of critical perspectives, and embracing as well as verbally acknowledging with

my students the tension-filled pedagogical relationships that emerge in the process of challenging taken-for-granted assumptions (Miller, 2006).

Some may argue that it is a dangerous activity to practice diplomacy with a hostile land. However, I have decided that I will no longer alter my disposition to align with the practices of an oppressive force. Furthermore, Academyland's punishments do not threaten me. Its rewards possess no value. Its currency does not purchase the resources I need for sustenance. I am renegotiating the terms of my relationship with Academyland, with or without its officials' approval. I am decolonizing my mind and my spirit and I am re-membering home.

Notes

1. Academyland, often referred to as the *academy*, *academe*, *academia*, or the *Ivory Tower*, is a perplexing place. It is in this land where intellectuals, or the "intelligentsia" (Franco, 1994, p. 360), gather to write the rules of knowledge production and epistemology. While Academyland invests greatly in appearing cosmopolitan, it shares a strong genealogical and cultural relationship to Europe. Migrants and visitors to Academyland that do not possess an inherited or at minimum adopted European affiliation often encounter great difficulty traversing its terrain.

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CHAPTER 6

Gettin' Free: Anger as Resistance to White Supremacy Within and Beyond the Academy

Olivia N. Perlow

ANGER [n]. An intense emotional state of displeasure induced by a grievance. I have been trying to write this chapter for years, yet so often when I've made the attempt I've experienced "spells of impotent, self-consuming rage" (Wallace, 1995, p. 225). How can I write a coherent chapter when, like so many other Black women, I am so often in this state? Black women's anger runs deep, and spans across centuries. Audre Lorde (2007) articulates this conundrum when she states that Black women:

> … have grown up within a symphony of anger, at being silenced, at being unchosen, at knowing that when we survive, it is in spite of a world that takes for granted our lack of humanness, and which hates our very existence outside of its service. And I say symphony rather than cacophony because we have had to learn to orchestrate those furies so that they do not tear us apart. We have had to learn to move through them and use them for strength and force and insight within our daily lives. Those of us who did not learn this difficult lesson did not survive. And part of my anger is always libation for my fallen sisters. (p. 129)

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When I consider Lorde's words, I understand the power of anger, and that I must strategically employ it in service of my vision. But my vision is blurred by the smog of racism. Eric Garner's tragic "I can't breathe" ironically gave voice to the collective and historical suffocating and silencing of Black America from this racial smog. As Beverly Daniel Tatum (2003) describes it, "sometimes it is so thick it is visible, other times it is less apparent, but always, day in and day out, we are breathing it in" (p. 6). It was only recently that I realized that I too cannot breathe, or at least frequently don't breathe—I am constantly holding my breath in anticipation of attack. I wear my anger as armor, and this too is suffocating. So this writing paralysis stems from numerous sources such as the anger and exhaustion I experience as a result of constantly fighting against racism, injustice, and the overall "panic of this deadly world" (Williams, 1992, p. 5), not to mention as a result of trying to maintain a sense of self-worth amidst the denial of Black women's humanity and intellect (Myers, 2002). For these reasons (among others), Gloria Hull suggests that Black women writers often struggle "against unfavorable odds to create their personalities and artistic selves" (Johnson & Loeb, 1995, p. 22).

When I started writing this chapter, America's first Black president, Barack Obama, had just been elected; now, it's the "Predator in Chief," Donald Trump! I write best when I am angry—mostly to push back against white supremacy and patriarchy—so I guess I wasn't angry *enuf*, till now. Now I feel like I must express my anger through writing in order to prevent it from consuming me. In *Notes from a Welfare Queen in the Ivory Tower* (2002), Laura Harris writes:

> i write to get even. in fact, i only really became a writer…when I felt powerless enough and angry enough. i write to get even with every *muthafuckah* who ever told me what i was or was not and what i should or should not be doing (p. 1).

Here, I can directly relate to Harris' desire to "get even" through writing, which represents a powerful political act of resistance to those that seek to control and/or silence Black women. I once emailed Professor Harris (who I did not know personally) at her university email address and received her out of office autoreply message that included a link to the following Wikipedia entry/definition: "Drapetomania was a conjectural mental illness that, in 1851, American physician Samuel A. Cartwright hypothesized to cause Black slaves to flee captivity." Laughing out loud, I said to myself, "I thought I was 'baaaad' but this sista has me beat—a

woman after my own heart!" Harris not only mocks the rampant anti-intellectualism of an academy steeped in a history of racist pseudoscience that has functioned to rationalize white supremacy, but she also calls attention to the historical resistance of Black women seeking to escape "the plantation," in this case the academy, where hierarchical relations play out in racialized and gendered ways.

In a similar vein, in tracing the evolution of her resistance work, author/blogger Mia McKenzie (a.k.a. Black Girl Dangerous) calls attention to the silencing of Black women in the following statement:

> I thought about all the white women who had labeled me angry or aggressive just because I refused to be silent or invisible…I decided that instead of being silent…I would be louder. That instead of becoming invisible, I would become manifest. That instead of being defeated, I would triumph…over everyone who ever looked at a black woman and saw someone who *could* be silenced, someone whose story didn't matter, whose voice didn't count…I decided that, instead of dying, I would live. And that I would be dangerous. Really dangerous. The kind of dangerous that would make a difference in the world. (2014, pp. 3–4)

Black women's anger and even rage can produce moments of profound clarity. Furthermore, in calling out the utter hypocrisy of white supremacist (il)logic, both Harris' and McKenzie's refusal to self-censor and kowtow to white supremacist social control is tactically transformative and liberatory. bell hooks (1989) states that for Black women:

> …true speaking is not solely an expression of creative power; it is an act of resistance, a political gesture that challenges politics of domination that would render us nameless and voiceless. As such, it is a courageous act—as such, it represents a threat. To those who wield oppressive power, that which is threatening must necessarily be wiped out, annihilated, silenced. (p. 8)

Because Black women are one of the most vulnerable populations in the academy (Nzinga-Johnson, 2013), true speaking is an act that few of us are in a position to and/or are brave enough to engage in nowadays. Thus when Black women academics do choose to *Blackspeak* angry (neck-rolling) truth to power, to push back against the politics of respectability and against white middle-class civility and fragility, it is more than an act of political will, it is an act of apostasy! That is what those that seek to control Black women fear the most—when we are *angry*, *woke*, and *unafraid*. This is the way it has been historically and it is thus the rebellious voices of

Black foremothers that motivate my forward movement. Writer Lorene Cary captures my sentiments about the influence of Black women's voices on her own writing: "They burst into my silence, and in my head, they shouted and chattered and whispered and sang together. I am writing…to become part of that unruly conversation, and to bring my experience back to the community of minds that made it possible" (Johnson & Loeb, 1995, p. 17). The remainder of this chapter is my attempt to join "that unruly conversation" as I explore my anger as an ongoing personal, intellectual, political, and pedagogical project as a Black woman professor traversing hostile terrain while seeking to destabilize a white supremacist patriarchal academy and society.

The Evolution of My Anger

I was born at home in the late 1970s, in the San Francisco Bay Area, a "revolutionary petunia" (Walker, 1982). My mom told me I made labor easy for her because I did most of the work; I was freedom lovin' and I couldn't wait to get into the world n' start raising hell—that is, in the sense of speaking out against injustice any and everywhere that I witnessed it (whether it directly affected me or not). I remember experiencing, from a young age, a connection to and a compassion for the human condition that has seemingly been a vital part of my character development, and simultaneously, a real source of my anger. I learned early on that the profit motive has no heart. The following poem that I wrote when I was seven years old captures the frustration I felt with the greed, exploitation, and alienation produced by capitalism (although I could not yet articulate this):

> Why oh why do I have to be responsible?
> Time goes by fast, so fast
> Others be kind to others
> Money is a little piece of junk

My mother in particular made sure that I learned "real" history, whether I liked it or not. While my friends were playing outside, I was at anti-apartheid marches. When my mom forced me to go up on stage to meet South African freedom fighter Archbishop Desmond Tutu, I went metaphorically kicking and screaming. As many Black mothers say to their children, she opined, "You'll appreciate it when you're older." When I was in

the fourth grade, my class went on a field trip to one of the San Francisco Missions (where white missionaries tried to assimilate/Christianize Indigenous peoples, many of whom, in their resistance and depression, died). When one of my peers asked the white woman curator if the Native Americans liked it there, she replied that they did. I fidgeted in my seat until I felt like my mouth was about to burst and then interjected, "Excuse me but that is *not* true!" as I began dropping the few pieces of information on the subject that I had learned over the years. I was scared that I was going to be in trouble, but Miss Carter, with her thick thigh havin', blue jeans, black heels, and red lipstick wearin' 1980s beautiful Black woman self, who I loved (and was my only Black teacher in elementary school), whispered in my ear that she was very proud of me. Thus at a young age, I came to understand the power master narratives wield in silencing marginalized groups, as well as the power of voice in resisting that practice.

I have always disliked anyone exerting control over my voice and have pushed back against the expectation of unquestioned conformity for as long as I can remember (i.e. I refused to say the pledge). *Talking back* (hooks, 1989) was a perpetual problem for me growing up. I couldn't wait to leave home for college and get free. While most of my peers loved "The Bay," I saw it as a death trap. My burgeoning *oppositional gaze* (hooks, 1992) enabled me to see straight through the white "liberal" façade. I knew that the beautiful hills and bridges were not the full story—not *our* story—that school and residential segregation, displacement, and under-resourcing of communities of color was not a natural state of affairs, but a real consequence of white racism—and *our* reality (i.e. our Fillmore is now their Western Addition/NOPA—gentrification at its finest). Many of my friends and associates who did not, or could not leave are not faring well. Unfortunately, my first attempt at gettin' free was met with disappointment. I spent my freshman year of college at a Predominantly White Institution in Los Angeles where swastikas and "nigger go home" signs were plastered around campus. For my sophomore year, I transferred to a Historically Black College/University on the East Coast where I finally found my niche fighting for social justice—for fair/affordable housing, against police violence, and so forth.

I wanted to be a Civil Rights lawyer so I deferred my admission (and full ride, yikes!) to law school to do paralegal work at a law firm in Washington, D.C. The irony is that there was only one lawyer of color employed at a firm that practiced civil rights/employment law, and in

"Chocolate City" at that! Even more unacceptable was that they recruited law clerks (law students) from all of the local law schools except Howard University, which is known for civil rights law! Furthermore, the more I learned about the legal loopholes that sustained discriminatory practices, the more I understood that laws are designed by elite and powerful (mostly) white men in order to maintain white supremacy and hegemony under the false pretense of "color-blindness" (see, Bell, 2008; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1996; López, 2014). While working at the firm, I told myself that unless my name was "Thurgood-isha" Marshall and I could make fundamental legal changes, I was not about to burn myself out working *within* the (in)justice system. At the suggestion of one of my mentors, I decided instead to attend graduate school where I could more freely critique these institutions.

The more injustice I've experienced and/or witnessed over the years, the angrier and more outspoken I've become. Learning my history has afforded me the knowledge that I come from a long line of Black women whose anger has served to break down the walls of white supremacy. The following is one of my favorite stories detailed by Angela Davis that keeps me going in times when I feel too beat down to continue the fight:

> One evening in July of 1927, robed and hooded Ku Klux Klansmen attempted to disrupt [Bessie Smith's] tent performance…When Smith was informed of the trouble, she immediately left the tent and, according to her biographer: "…ran toward the intruders, stopped within ten feet of them, placed one hand on her hip, and shook a clenched fist at the Klansmen. 'What the fuck you think you're doin',' she shouted above the sound of the band. 'I'll get the whole damn tent out here if I have to. You just pick up them sheets and run!' The Klansmen, apparently too surprised to move, just stood there and gawked. Bessie hurled obscenities at them until they finally turned and disappeared quietly into the darkness…". (James, 1998, p. 259)

If our foremothers could take on colonizers, slaveholders, white supremacist groups and mobs, and others that sought to terrorize and control us, contemporary Black women most certainly can resist the less overt (yet quite insidious) forms of domination that exist today. Black women must re(claim) our *wild*, that is, our "inner will to rebel, to move against the grain, to be out of one's place" (hooks, 1992, p. 49). So as bell hooks has done, I too have "claimed this legacy of defiance, of will, of

courage, affirming my link to female ancestors who were bold and daring in their speech" (1989, p. 9).

The "Angry Black Woman" Stereotype

From its inception, whiteness has been about social control—about how to keep people in line in order to create/maintain white supremacy. As Richard Dyer asserts, for whites: "'The fear of one's own body, of how one controls it and relates to it' and the fear of not being able to control other bodies, those bodies whose exploitation is so fundamental to capitalist economy, are both at the heart of whiteness" (cited in Rodriguez, 2000, p. 39). Since chattel slavery, stereotypes of Black women, or what Patricia Hill Collins (2008) has appropriately termed *controlling images*, were designed to serve this very purpose—social control. Accordingly, mass disseminated hegemonic images of Black women (i.e. Jezebel, Mammy, Sapphire, etc.) as grotesque, bad, aggressive, masculine, loudmouthed, crazy, lascivious, unintelligent, and beasts of burden have served to dehumanize Black women, morally (and legally) excluding them from the protections afforded to white "ladies," while simultaneously justifying Black women's commodification, exploitation, and the genocidal practices committed against them, their families, and their communities (Collins, 2008; Jewell, 1993; Jordan-Zachary, 2008; Spencer, 2011). Accordingly, Hazel Carby (1987) notes:

> …portrayals of black women as defiant, which is simply to not accept their submissive positions, affirming her humanity, refusing to be brutalized, degraded, and dehumanized, have historically set her as an outcast to womanhood, which was reserved for submissive white Southern antebellum "ladies" in which they were to "repress a harsh answer, to confess a fault, and to stop (right or wrong) in the midst of self-defense, in gentle submission." (p. 38)

The rejection of the legal and socio-cultural racial and gender hierarchical power relations that mandated Black women's passivity and subservience has historically been attributed to cultural deficits and pathology (Frederickson & Walters, 2013; James, 1998; Washington, 2008). Furthermore, Black women's resistance to white supremacist and patriarchal dominance has been met with extreme forms of brutality which have in turn been justified by these same negative images of Black women. For

example, to justify the ruthless practice of lynching Black women, Delongoria (2006) explains:

> …Many of the same eighteenth and nineteenth century stereotypes continued to thrive in the post emancipation South. In fact, a more intense, wild, unsupervised image of Jezebel emerged as the example of what happened to black women without the paternalism of slavery. Jezebel was becoming the bad, uncontrollable, black woman. This crazier version of her intensified fears that black "moral deficiencies…threatened white civilization." (p. 66)

Dehumanizing and pathologizing Black women through hegemonic images in order to control us carries over into the present day (see, e.g., Davis, 2006; Richie, 2012; Roberts, 2003). The "angry black woman" is one of the most prevalent contemporary stereotypes about Black women that functions to stifle our voices and impede dissent by portraying us as aggressive, irrational, ill-tempered, and hostile, regardless of the circumstances or provocation (Morgan & Bennett, 2006). This stereotype is so common that even Black women in extremely prestigious positions such as Michelle Obama have been undermined by accusations of embodying this stereotype (Harris-Perry, 2011; Johnson, 2012; Madison, 2009). According to Madison (2009), stereotyping Michelle Obama as an "angry black woman" during the 2008 presidential campaign "was both easier and more compatible with normalized notions of gender and blackness than to engage the more complicated genealogy of black rage in the USA" (p. 323).

The "angry Black woman" stereotype dehumanizes Black women by reducing all of our individuality and complexity to a single emotion: anger. It is an erasure of the multiplicity of our identities, our histories, our cultures, our experiences, and it ultimately "shrinks us to shells of ourselves" (Mock, 2014, p. 249). Furthermore, this stereotype pathologizes Black women whose behaviors do not conform to white middle-class standards and this is exacerbated by racist, ethnocentric, and xenophobic (mis)interpretations of Black women's cultural expressions (Ashely, 2014; Baraka, 1997; Lanehart, 2002). This emotional reductionism coupled with the widespread expectation that Black women be strong/superwomen—or like Nanny in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* says, "de mule uh de world" (Hurston, 1990)—masks and therefore neglects our very real human pain and vulnerabilities (Beaubeouf-Lafontant, 2009; Harris, 2015; Wallace, 1980).

Furthermore, as Ashely (2014) notes, there is a plethora of research demonstrating Black women's cognizance of the "angry Black woman" stereotype and of the negative consequences for being seen as such (see, e.g., Durr and Wingfield, 2011; González-Prendes & Thomas, 2011; Lewis & Neville, 2015; Walley-Jean, 2009). Consequently, this produces a *politics of silence* (Higginbotham, 1994) in which many Black women feel that they must suppress their anger for fear of confirming this stereotype (Wingfield, 2007, 2010). Thus the ability of Black women to freely express anger is constrained and those who do so are often subjected to a great deal of scrutiny (Fritsch, 2015; Harris, 2015; Wingfield, 2010). However, anger is a universal emotion, a survival mechanism alerting us to harm (Lerner, 1997), so Black women suppressing their anger can lead to negative health outcomes (Ashely, 2014; West, 1995).

For Black women who *are* angry (and reasonably so), the notion that Black women's anger is irrational or unjustified serves as a silencing mechanism that masks both individual harm and structural oppression. Smith (2000) argues that Black women's fear of being labeled a Sapphire, or "angry black woman," hinders our ability to effectively resist and speak out against injustice, making us complicit in the discrimination we face and/or witness, and causing us to "remain docile, unthreatening, and invested in self-commodification rather than queer or in your face" (Hu-DeHart, 2000). Black women are entitled to our anger—it is part of our humanity and to deny us righteous anger (just like denying us pain) is to further dehumanize us (Fritsch, 2015). As bell hooks (1996) states, "Racial hatred is real. And it is humanizing to be able to resist it with militant rage" (p. 10). It is important that Black women give voice to our anger. As Audre Lorde (2007) has warned, we need to be acutely aware that our silence has not and will not protect us so "what is most important…must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood" (p. 40). Voice is not a gift, it is a human right! We have the right to express our anger and expect that our voices be heard.

It is voicing anger that makes demands for justice. Anger has historically been the emotional impetus behind many Black social movements globally, galvanizing us to fight against injustice and oppression (Banks, 2014; Rickford, 2016; White, 2016). As Michael Denzel Smith (2015) puts forth:

> Black rage announces itself at the Women's Convention in Akron, Ohio, and says, "Ain't I a woman?" Black rage stands before hundreds of thousands at the Lincoln Memorial and says, "America has given the Negro

> people a bad check, a check which has come back marked 'insufficient funds.'" Black rage says to the Democratic National Convention, "I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired." Black rage says "Fuck tha Police" and "Fight the Power."

Black women such as Harriet Tubman, Ida B. Wells, and Rosa Parks have historically channeled their anger into a radical critique of white supremacy and patriarchy, fueling resistance and activism, and we must continue in that tradition (Malveaux, 1989). As Malcolm X famously stated: "Usually when people are sad, they don't do anything. They just cry over their condition. But when they get angry, they bring about a change." When Black women orchestrate our anger in service of our vision of a more just and humane world, there are no limits to what we can achieve.

The Tyranny of "Niceness" and Race Backtalk of an Angry Black Woman Professor

While most of my anger is directed at the manifestations of white supremacy that occur outside of the academy, I still harbor intense anger toward academe, which is a microcosm of the larger oppressive society. The academy participates vigorously in the production and reproduction of white supremacy through racist ideologies, curriculum, research, and processes that harm people of color in a multitude of ways (Ahmed, 2012; Chesler, Lewis, & Crowfoot, 2005; Guinier, 2015; Law, Phillips, & Turney, 2004; Pittman, 2012). However, one of the greatest sources of my anger in the academy stems from the psychological terror that I (and many of my colleagues and students of color) experience as a result of the discourse on race, especially from my self-proclaimed "liberal" colleagues who consider themselves to be "good" white people. I have found that for most white academics who claim to base their knowledge on "logic" and "reason," critical thinking is completely eclipsed when it comes to racial discourse and their attending legitimation of hierarchy and privilege. Thus white supremacy in the academy tends to operate in an anti-intellectual, commonsensical fashion where racism apparently exists without racists (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). That is, colorblindness, race-neutrality, post-racialism, and/or racial transcendence is the newer (il)logic of white supremacy that is used to justify deepening institutionalized race-based social inequalities (see, e.g., Neville, Gallardo, & Sue, 2016). Through

"race-neutral" language, white academics employ *legitimizing myths* (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) to "rationalize minorities' contemporary status as the product of market dynamics, naturally occurring phenomena, and blacks' imputed cultural limitations" (Bonilla-Silva, 2014, p. 2). Because of this *color-blind racism* (Bonilla-Silva, 2001), many white academics only recognize overt racism (which they attribute to the "deplorables," not themselves), allowing them to "maintain their innocence and naïveté while absolving them from taking personal responsibility to rectify injustices" (Sue, 2015, p. 24).

However, many Black people and other people of color are tuned in to the dog whistle of racially coded language and this, what we recognize as thinly veiled hate speech, creates a great deal of anger among us (Cose, 1993; Feagin & McKinney, 2003; Feagin & Sikes, 1994; Myers, 2005). Consequently, the academy remains a site ripe for angry anti-racist pedagogy and praxis. I therefore *talk back*, *backtalk*, or *speak truth to power* every chance I get (and was doing so even before tenure). This takes on a special form of public pedagogy which Ming Fang He (2010) calls *exile pedagogy*. As Edward Said (1994) states, "Exile for the intellectuals…is restlessness, movement, constantly being unsettled, and unsettling others" (p. 53). Similarly, in Antonia Darder's (2011) discussion of *dissident intellectuals,* those who use their voice in search of justice, she states:

> [D]issidents are anchored to revolutionary possibilities that demand both intellectual discipline and irresponsible courage to speak the unspeakable, to stand alone if necessary, and to accept the material and emotional consequences of tramping over hegemony's "holy ground."…Thus, a life of dissent requires us to expel the "success myths" of capital that pollute the ivy-covered halls of academia and to reject the warped and distorted privileges of power, persevered and doled out to the obedient servants of the empire. (pp. 3, 5)

Consequently, I told myself before I started working in the academy that I was not willing to sell my soul/self-censor for a job, so I have very purposefully set up my life so that I am able exercise my dissident voice freely without fear of reprisal. This is not to say that I can't lose my job, it's just that if I do, I will be o.k. As such, I consider myself an *intellectual maroon*, or someone who has "declared their freedom through their publicly stated thoughts" (Carruthers, 1999, p. 52). Therefore, I am known at my university for my bold and fearless speech, to the point where it is not uncommon for me to find notes under my door expressing concerns

from those who feel too vulnerable to speak out, and hoping that I would raise the issue publicly. As a result of my backtalk, especially as it relates to issues of racism (which has been described by my white colleagues as "ranting"), the "angry Black woman" stereotype has played out for me in insidious ways. As such, like other insurgents in the academy, I too have been "marked as lunatic, renegade, or an enemy of the state" (Darder, 2011, p. 2) by those seeking to maintain white supremacy.

In one example, I was recently accused by a white male top administrator and his white female assistant of being "mean" when I expressed anger at *his* racist actions. I couldn't help but laugh at the irony of this accusation, as the voice of my foremother Zora Neale Hurston echoed in my head: "I love myself when I am laughing. And then again when I am looking mean and impressive" (Walker, 1979). As Andrea Smith (2013) has noted, one pillar of white supremacy is the logic that Black people are inherently slaveable. I argue that this "plantation mentality" operates in the academy and it serves to justify race- and gender-based hierarchies (Harley, 2008). Likening Black academics to house slaves, Ladson-Billings (2005) points out that just because we are *in* the house doesn't mean we are *of* the house. That is, we are still expected to stay in our place, serving the will of *Massa*. Thus the accusation of me being "mean" is demonstrative of the age-old silencing mechanism that punishes Black women for challenging the racial and gender social order and associated caste etiquette, which is to practice deference toward white people "by being passive, insecure and inappropriately dependent" (Smith, 2000, p. 33). Anger (especially from a Black woman) also insults middle-class civility and isn't considered "nice." I was out of *my place*, that is, outside of the realm of the "good" non-threatening mammified respectability politics. As Fritsch (2015) states, for Black women:

> [t]he idea that our success is a threat to the way things have always been done means the interest of the establishment to protect the status quo is as strong as our desire to break it down…Forgive us if sometimes in doing so we become more like you than you'd like, determined, pushy, bossy and yes, a little entitled too. (p. 23)

Furthermore, by me not protecting these administrators' feelings, I challenged their sense of entitlement to racial comfort (Sue et al., 2007). My engaging in what Derald Wing Sue (2015) refers to as *race talk* threatened "to unmask the hidden secret that the superior positions of many

Whites were obtained through the oppression of people of color and through current inequitable arrangements" (p. 32). Robin DiAngelo (2011) uses the term "white fragility" to describe the inability of white people to respond constructively when their racial positions are challenged. Despite a plethora of research supporting that the most valid assessment of racism comes from those on the receiving end, due to their racial arrogance it is rare that white people actually hear and consider the legitimacy of race backtalk from people of color (Sue, 2015). However, truly "receiving" feedback and effectively engaging in conversations on race that recognize, respect, and integrate racially diverse perspectives is not only essential to developing critical consciousness, but is also key to white folks ending their racist collusion (DiAngelo, 2015a, 2015b; Sue, 2015). Yet instead of acknowledging my complaints regarding racism, through *whitesplaining* (Johnson, 2016) that *I* was mean, these administrators in effect negated my claims and feelings, a phenomenon Sue et al. (2007) refer to as a *microinvalidation* (p. 274).

Furthermore, despite the *epistemic violence* (Spivak, 1998) being enacted upon me, these administrators portrayed *me* as the aggressor, which is an invocation of the "angry Black woman" stereotype. Audre Lorde (2007) states, "To turn aside from the anger of Black women with excuses or the pretexts of intimidation is to award no one power -- it is merely another way of preserving racial blindness, the power of unaddressed privilege, unbleached, intact" (p. 132). Even more damaging, by redirecting the emphasis on *my* mean behavior, they repositioned themselves as innocent victims, a tactic that masks whiteness as "a power that wounds, hurts, tortures…a reality that disrupts the fantasy of whiteness as representing goodness" (hooks, 1992, p. 341). Accordingly, in interactions with people of color, white people often say things like "I feel attacked" or "I'm so hurt," which serves to obscure the actual power relations at work. Furthermore, this tactic mystifies the historical and contemporary reality of what Spencer and Perlow (forthcoming) refer to as *Savage White American Terror* (*SWAT*). As DiAngelo (2011) explains:

> By employing terms that connote physical abuse, whites tap into the classic discourse of people of color (particularly African Americans) as dangerous and violent. This discourse perverts the actual direction of danger that exists between whites and others. The history of brutal, extensive, institutionalized and ongoing violence perpetrated by whites against people of color—slavery, genocide, lynching, whipping, forced sterilization and medical

> experimentation to mention a few—becomes profoundly trivialized when whites claim they don't feel safe or are under attack when in the rare situation of merely talking about race with people of color. (p. 65)

Here I must beg the question, what is "mean" and who gets to decide? Despite the fact that white people have mostly moved from biological explanations to cultural explanations of our alleged deficiencies, the collective character assassination of Black women that coincides with the white savior mentality is employed in the academy to pathologize us—that is, academics/administrators treat angry Black women as if we are a problem that needs correcting. Let's be clear here, this is not the "Negro Problem" (Myrdal, 1944) and never has been—but rather the primordial white problem! What is mean is not my "brutally" honest manner of expression that is void of pretentious niceties. My anger is a logical response to racialized and gendered maltreatment. The following are some examples of what I explained to these administrators that *are* mean:

- Despite the fact that our university is strategically and proudly touted as "the most diverse public university in the Midwest," we have an almost exclusively white upper administration that continues to nurture an environment that is hostile to and inadequate for the success of students, staff, and faculty of color—PUNCH!
- The administration is underfunding and/or dismantling programs that impact our most vulnerable students and faculty of color—KICK!
- Our university police continue to target our students of color for harassment. For example, a Black male student was put in handcuffs because he "fit the description" of someone who stole a white woman's purse—it turned out that she had simply misplaced it—SMACK!
- White faculty members continue to center whiteness in their curriculum and practice microaggressions against students of color. For example, a white faculty member was teaching about welfare and asked my Black woman mentee to explain it, assuming she had been a recipient—SLAP!
- Someone crossed out and replaced the "Black" with "All" on a "Black Lives Matter" sign that was hanging up in the hall—JAB!
- The administration employed "eminent domain" in order to acquire neighboring properties, effectively displacing many people of color, including well-established business owners—SMASH!

What is so disheartening is that these examples are not extremes or outliers; rather they are the norm in the academy across the nation in the age of neoliberal capitalism where even many self-proclaimed "liberal" whites have abandoned goals of expanding opportunity for racial minorities and fighting for social justice, in favor of elitism and maintaining a system of white supremacy (see Frank, 2016; McLaren and Farahmandpur, 2004; Sleeper, 1998). But what never ceases to amaze me is how readily accepted racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, and other oppressive ideologies and actions are, as long as they are administered "nicely." When it comes specifically to racism, this is a phenomenon Yawo Brown (2015) refers to as "polite white supremacy." Accordingly, white minister Elle Dowd (2016) argues that niceness is a "false idol with a body count," stating that white people "continue to make human sacrifices to the altar of our bloodthirsty God of Niceness, caring more about [their] own comfort and security than about [Black] children dying in the streets."

The expectations of "niceness" and "civility" (or in the case of the academy, professionalism and collegiality) are not benign, but rather tools used to mask white supremacist power relations and to silence people of color, ultimately maintaining the status quo (Alemán, 2009). I argue that niceness should not and must not take precedence over justice. Nor should niceness be a prerequisite for confronting truth. Kwame Ture and Charles Hamilton (1992) eloquently articulate this notion in their seminal work *Black Power* (which is worth quoting at length):

> Black people in American have no time to play nice, polite parlor games—especially when the lives of *their* children are at stake. Some white Americans can afford to speak softly, tread lightly, employ the soft-sell and put-off (or is it out-down?)…For black people to adopt their methods of relieving our oppression is ludicrous… It is crystal clear that society is capable of and willing to reward those individuals who do not forcefully condemn it—to reward them with prestige, status, and material benefits. But these crumbs of co-optation should be rejected…Anything less than clarity, honesty, and forcefulness perpetuates the centuries of sliding over, dressing up, and soothing down the true feelings, hopes and demands of an oppressed black people. Mild demands and hypocritical smiles mislead white America into thinking that all is fine and peaceful. They mislead white America into thinking that the path and pace chosen to deal with racial problems are acceptable to masses of black Americans. It is far better to speak forcefully and truthfully. (pp. xvi–xviii).

The expectation of niceness and civility in the face of racism and injustice is what Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. disparages in his 1963 infamous "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" as a "negative peace," a way for white folks to keep order and maintain the status quo. However, as Baptiste (2008) states, "Niceness is not a humanizing imperative. Rather, it is a deluding phantom—a salacious seduction…the unwitting handmaiden of oppressive hegemony" (p. 26). The idea that social justice must be obtained nicely within a system that is far from nice is ludicrous.

For Black women, niceness is not only racialized, it is also gendered, mired in the expectation of submission to white supremacist and patriarchal dominance. For example, there has been recent resistance to the expectation that girls and women smile (i.e. Serena Williams and Simone Biles), which is another patriarchal attempt to exert control over women's bodies, forcing us into rigid gender roles (i.e. caretaking and appeasing men), and further denying us emotional agency (LaFrance, 2011). This has even greater implications for Black women because we have historically not had control over our bodies, and have been expected to practice deferential behavior, even in the face of grave injustices. Black women recognize the tyranny of niceness as a manipulation and exercise of white power that serves to further silence us. This is equally apparent when it comes to race talk between white and Black women in which white women often enact white fragility, playing the victim, getting defensive, and even crying (Accapadi, 2007; DiAngelo, 2015; Lorde, 2007; McRae, 2003). One of my mentors and co-editors on this book, BarBara Scott, talks about white women as appendages of the white male power structure, stating, "Everywhere I turn, there is a white girl/woman crying her way into securing whatever she wants at the time…it is an important arsenal in these women's tool-chests of power." Again, white women use their carefully crafted and historically enacted tears as a weapon, re-centering the focus on *their* emotional "wounds," deflecting from the real issue(s) of their own racism, and failing to empathize with the person who is truly injured (Accapadi, 2007; DiAngelo, 2015; Edgington, 1998). We must be mindful that white women's crocodile tears have historically and continue to result in severe consequences for Black people, including imprisonment and murder. Yet, in the above-mentioned interactions, once again, Black women are vilified as the aggressors for speaking out against white supremacy.

Never-Ending Conclusion

White supremacy is not passive, nice, good, neutral, or benign. It does not provide comfort nor consider the feelings or humanity of people of color. It is aggressive, cruel, and violent. It degrades, dehumanizes, and destroys. It shackles yet takes no prisoners. It has a body count yet doesn't count certain bodies. It starves mind-body-spirit. It is an angry system and those who use it and/or gain privilege from it cannot and must not be exempt from the anger manifested from a system that would rather see Black women annihilated than liberated. Consequently, white supremacy must be addressed just as aggressively. However, I will not allow my anger to be used as a convenient scapegoat that exonerates, mitigates, or negates the white supremacy it was born from. No, Black women must not be bamboozled by white supremacist projecting, making us think *we* are the problem. After all, it is not Black women's anger that "is dripping down over this globe like a diseased liquid" (Lorde, 2007, p. 133). Thus in the spirit of resistance of my foremothers, I will continue to speak out (angrily) against white supremacy; I will not respond with restraint to a system that does not respect me or my people, just to assuage white fears and guilt. Rachel Alicia Griffin (2012), another unapologetically angry Black woman in the academy, embodies this spirit of resistance in the following statement:

> To embody the prideful tenacity that Black womanhood brings forth, I will do the very things that Black women are discursively disciplined not to do. I will rant without a hint of regret, and I will do so with my head held high believing that I am worth standing up for in a world that crudely tells me otherwise! Planting my feet in defiance, I will finish just as I have begun—weary, depleted, "shaken, though not shattered" (Yancy, 2008, p. 2), and convinced that I am a brilliant woman of color who is worthy of sheer honesty, deep contemplation, and everlasting celebration. (p. 139)

The academy is not only non-exempt, but has been the epicenter of white supremacist ideologies and innovations for over a century. It is my anger that propels me to speak, to act, to dissent, and also to teach "passionately" against this system. In my classes, I invite my students to join me in getting angry. By articulating my anger, I not only demystify the "angry Black woman" stereotype, but also naturalize anger because so many of us have been taught that this is not an acceptable emotion in the academy (hooks, 1994, 2003). But as Baptiste (2008) reminds us: "Until educators

rid themselves of their yearning to be nice, until they embrace wholeheartedly their obligation to impose, their educational impact—especially in addressing social inequalities—will be severely curtailed" (p. 26). The further we move past the "politeness protocol" (Sue, 2015, p. 24), away from the concept of safe spaces to embrace brave spaces, the more apparent it will become that the discomfort of anger can stimulate learning. We must reaffirm the humanity of Black women in particular by acknowledging and making space for us to freely express anger, within the academy and beyond, ever mindful that this is only one small step toward liberation.

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CHAPTER 7

Black Women's Co-Mentoring Relationships as Resistance to Marginalization at a PWI

Andrea N. Baldwin and Raven Johnson

Black women in the academy experience deep inequities that stem from underrepresentation and pervasive structural biases in higher education (Trinidad, 2014). These inequalities are based in racist colonialist images of Black women who, not being male or white, are thought to "have no visible basis for certain kinds of knowledge" (Simmonds, 1992, p. 52) or rationality. The Eurocentric foundations of academia force Black women into margins and lead to microaggressions that demonstrate opposition to their pedagogies, bodies, and very existence in these spaces (Perlow, Bethea, & Wheeler, 2014). In order to survive and to succeed in this climate, Black women have had to develop strategies of resistance such as through their writing and scholarship (Collins, 1986), through the creation of communities (The Combahee River Collective, 1982), and through the cultivation of mentoring relationships (Britt & Kelly, 2005). Written from the perspectives of two Black women, one who was adjunct

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faculty in Women's Studies (Andrea) and the other who was an undergraduate student majoring in Journalism (Raven) at a Predominately White Institution (PWI), this chapter addresses how we resisted marginalization, specifically by developing a pedagogy/praxis in which a co-mentoring relationship was key. In this chapter, we detail this process, which is rooted in critical race theory (CRT), Black feminism, and transnational feminism.

Critical race theorists, Black feminists, and transnational feminists all argue that in higher education, the curricula and pedagogies of white people are normalized, rendering the experiences of women and people of color as Other (Alexander & Mohanty, 2010; Collins, 2000; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Transnational feminists in particular contend that this is the result of the colonist heritage of U.S. institutions of higher education and the attendant dissemination of Eurocentric/androcentric epistemologies, pedagogies, and methodologies that do not address concerns of oppressed groups, further propagating their marginalization. Thus, despite recent attempts at diversifying the curriculum, institutions continue to utilize cartographic rules that center Euro-Americans, even when referring to the lives of people of color (Alexander & Mohanty, 2010). These practices have negatively impacted Black women faculty and students such as ourselves, which has significantly affected our success in the academy.

In addition, like many other Black women at various institutions across the U.S., we too have experienced daily racial microaggressions (Sue et al., 2007). They communicate that as Black women, our "bodies are imagined politically, historically, and conceptually circumscribed as being out of place" (Harley, 2008, p. 23). Andrea's experience included challenges from students who rate Black faculty as less knowledgeable (Pittman, 2010); the withholding of important university or departmental information; the consistent questioning of her intellectual and pedagogical capability and the undervaluing of her qualifications and contributions (Cooke, 2014); and the ghettoizing of her intellectual value (Harley, 2008).

Raven's experience with microaggressions as a student was in the form of a lack of hospitability toward her cultural values as an African American; faculty's lower expectations of her academic performance; pressure for her to assimilate into the white majority culture (Watkins, LaBarrie, & Appio, 2010) and to absorb Eurocentric/androcentric epistemological and methodological traditions; and being forced to compromise her gender and/or

racial identities. This daily barrage of challenges to Black women faculty and students not only affects our confidence, but also results in *racial battle fatigue* (Cooke, 2014). For us, these microaggressions have led to perpetual self-monitoring and the undermining of our own competence to overcompensate for our presumed deficiencies, and a sense of powerlessness to effect change.

Theoretical Underpinnings of Our Pedagogy/Praxis of Resistance

As previously stated, our pedagogy/praxis is based on CRT, Black feminism, and transnational feminism. Each of these frameworks is important because it espouses a "process of mediation through which theory and practice become deeply interwoven with one another" (Lock Swarr & Nagar, 2010, p. 6). Specifically, CRT connects the experience of people of color and existent racial inequities to broader social, economic, and historical systems that perpetuate injustice. In order to effect societal and institutional change, it seeks to complicate Euro-American narratives by including the voices of people of color. With regard to the oppression Black women face in the academy, Black feminist Patricia Hill Collins (2000) argues that the intellectual colonization of Black women's bodies produces images of us as "outsiders within" (p. 70). To push back against this marginality and to redress the egregious racial harms which systematically disadvantage Black women, Collins (1986) advocates for Black female self-valuation, self-definition, and knowledge validation. The strategy of knowledge validation she proposes should be shaped by the unique intersectional experiences of Black women, produced by Black women, and for Black women (Collins, 1986). In addition, Collins argues that Black women must clarify our own standpoint. This standpoint replaces negative images of Black women created by mainstream white supremacist and patriarchal social institutions with our own self-definitions (Collins, 1986). Furthermore, our standpoint allows us to develop a pedagogy and praxis of resistance based on self-care and in caring for those in our respective communities (The Combahee River Collective, 1982).

To clarify this standpoint, a focus on spatial awareness, as espoused by transnational feminists, is also significant. The term "transnational" refers to the practice of operating across national boundaries, traversing, transcending, and transforming these barriers. Transnational feminist scholars

have used the term to describe women's cross-border organizing (Mindry, 2001). They have written extensively on pedagogy/praxis that utilizes intersectional methods with the following threefold purpose: to work systematically and overtly against imperial corporatist projects of globalization and capitalist patriarchies which are at the foundation of State creation and global economic inequality within and among states; to wrestle with the way in which individual and collective agency is bound up in these processes; and to be critical, active, and self-reflexive (Lock Swarr & Nagar, 2010). As such, we engage in national border crossings every day despite physical locationality. We do so by utilizing the materiality, that is, the combined experience/expertise and access, gained from all of our past and present locations—physical, virtual, cultural, racial/ethnic, economic, and other—conscious not to privilege or be bound to any of them, and engaging in a process of self-critique and collective reflection.

Transnational collaboration is therefore "a dynamic construct through which praxis can acquire its meaning and form is given place, time and struggle" (Lock Swarr & Nagar, 2010, p. 9). Viewing the academy as a place that works to colonize cultural and knowledge practices, we understood that while our bodies as women and racial minorities are circumscribed to the margins, we could refuse to be bound by these locations (Alexander & Mohanty, 2010). Thus our pedagogy/praxis evolved from a need to create counterspaces for Black women within and outside of traditional classroom spaces that utilize racist colonist pedagogies and label Black women and women not born in the U.S. as foreigners in that space. We argue herein that a transnational feminist praxis is a strategy of resistance.

As a pedagogical tool, transnational feminism allows Black women in academia to transform the way we teach and learn through the dismantling of hierarchal barriers. It makes audible the voices of students as knowledge producers, and forges new types of mentoring partnerships between Black women. It is through an honest and open sharing of our intersectional experiences, free of socially constructed and imposed hierarchies, that we were able to resist marginality on campus. As we learned more about each other's experiences—the similarities and the differences—we engaged in border crossing through co-mentoring and care, and developed pedagogical tools and a praxis which we continued as Andrea moved to another higher education institution, and Raven into a profession as a public high school teacher.

Andrea's Narrative

I am a Black woman from the global South living in the U.S. and teaching at a PWI. My identity shapes my pedagogy, one that draws from my experiences of shared struggle and cooperation growing up in a poor, matriarchal, extended family environment in the rural parts of the Caribbean island state of Barbados. Caribbean countries have a large number of female-headed households, a disproportionate number of which are poor (Kabeer, 2003). The effects of globalization and Western neoliberal policies have ravaged the governments and people of the Caribbean, exacerbating unemployment and drastically reducing the purchasing power of its citizens (Melville, 2002). As such, women of the region who normally bear the greatest responsibility for the care of children, the sick, and the elderly (Deere & Antrobus, 1990) have been increasingly forced to work multiple jobs, especially in the informal sector. They therefore have had to engage in reciprocal kin and community relationships of care to survive. I remember my own mother working two jobs and leaving me as the oldest (but still very young), in charge of my siblings. For a few years, my mother entered a seasonal immigrant worker program where she left us with her sisters for nine months out of the year to work cleaning hotels in the U.S.

Many women, my mother included, socialized their girls to view education as the only way to succeed and girls like me were taught strategies intended to ensure our economic survival independently of men (Ellis, 2003). It was my mother's insistence and her tireless support that inculcated in me the importance of education and, the value of a mentor. She herself was never able to finish high school and, despite having to work long hours, would stay up to help me study for high school, undergraduate, and law school exams. She was my first mentor. She influenced my pedagogy and taught me the value of care in learning.

Inside undergraduate classrooms during my time at the University of the West Indies (UWI) where the scholarship of Western jurists and legal scholars were taught, critical knowledge was hard to find. It was outside of the classroom among the communities of Black women faculty and students I encountered, the partnerships I built in both my undergraduate and graduate career, and our collaborations that I was exposed to theories of race, gender, and postcolonialism. I gained an appreciation for engaging with the knowledge produced by people of color in the region and throughout the African Diaspora, that is critical of Western, Eurocentric,

neoliberal policies and institutions. It was there at UWI, collaborating with other Black women from the working and middle classes, that I came into my feminist consciousness. I remember very clearly working with a cohort of Black women faculty and students, to organize and host the first feminist conference for graduate students, from which we launched one of our feminist activist groups. The support I received from Black women, especially faculty, was what got me through my years as a student. Before I could put a name to the type of praxis we engaged in at UWI, I knew that I wanted to make it an integral part of my own pedagogy once I became faculty.

Immediately after I graduated with my Ph.D. in Gender and Development Studies, I migrated to the U.S. I felt like I had lost my community with this change in location, and had a challenging time entering and navigating the U.S. academy. With a non-U.S. degree, it was extremely difficult for me to obtain an academic appointment. When I was finally able to network myself into a position, it was at a PWI, and I felt so alone. I had to learn the customs of the U.S. academy on my own where things that may seem simple like academic ranking and semester systems for me took time. This was a very different experience than at UWI and I longed to build a relationship with a Black woman faculty mentor, but for the entire time I was at this PWI, I met none. I eventually became close to the program's administrative assistant, a Black woman who was able to help me traverse administrative and cultural hurdles.

At the PWI where I met Raven, I was attached as an adjunct to Women's Studies, a small, underfunded program, which offers a minor. I and a growing reserve of part-time faculty make up a majority of the higher education instructors nationwide who are unprotected by tenure, have low to no job security, low pay and few benefits, heavy workloads, and are excluded from decision making (Kingkade, 2014). While I had been educated to recognize how the intersections of my nationality, race, gender, and status at the university circumscribed my body as out of place, I had never before so overtly experienced this type of marginalization. Within this matrix of oppression, I constantly had my intelligence assaulted and foreign education credentials openly challenged by students, faculty, and administration. Even within my program I was told by white students and faculty who claim feminism that I talk about race too much. These comments carry meaning in a small program, which depends on the partnership and support of other faculty and departments throughout the semesters. Thus I often felt as though I had to self-censor. In addition to

coping with my own daily microaggressions, I also witnessed incidents of microaggressions being expressed in my classrooms or to students of color, but due to my precarious status at the University, I often felt powerless to assist. My affiliation with the program, however, was conveniently advantageous to the administration, as I could attract more students of color to the minor, and especially in instances where there was a University-wide event on "diversity." Yet, when it came to mainstream Women's Studies planning I was excluded, even when I volunteered. The irony here is that while diversity is desirable on paper, it is often resisted in practice (Cooke, 2014).

Raven's Narrative

As a Black woman raised in a predominately Black environment, I often asked myself how I ended up at a PWI. I grew up in Birmingham, Alabama, the pinnacle of the Civil Rights Movement. I can remember vividly the times as a child when my parents would pack my sister and me in the car and drive us to the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, to Kelly Ingram Park, and even to 16th Street Baptist Church. A great deal of my childhood was spent listening to stories from my grandparents of how they participated in the Children's Crusade in Birmingham, which advocated for the desegregation of their city and their schools. Hearing these stories and being exposed to civil rights monuments, museums, and historical sites shaped my identity as a Black woman from the South. Very early on it was instilled in me that Black people had to be strong and "twice as good" to survive in a system that was not built for us to succeed.

I attended a predominantly Black high school and by the time I graduated wanted to explore the world outside of my community. When it was time to go to college, I applied to several historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and PWIs, but was convinced by family and friends that attending a PWI would be more "advantageous." I felt that I knew what to expect when I elected to attend a PWI but as I look back, I see now that my expectations were extremely ambitious. Very early on in my college career I found myself questioning my decision to attend a PWI where Black students made up seven percent of the student body. It did not take long to realize that the culture I grew up learning about as a child was not valued in this space, the most obvious signifier being that there were very few people who looked like me. Yet, those with authority reminded students at every opportunity that we were "family." I recall

questioning why certain "family members" had more privilege than others and why there were so few people of color in a family of over 24,000 students.

It was not until my junior year when I walked into Andrea's *Introduction to Women's Studies* class that I began to really interrogate why I felt like an outsider within the institution. I became more intentional in trying to understand why, although I was presented with so much opportunity, I was experiencing such complex emotions, which at the time I could not fully articulate. It was in Andrea's class that I was exposed to theories of gender equity, and being a Journalism major, I was captivated by overtly sexist images of women portrayed by the media. What I did not expect, however, was that this class would so completely address my racial identity as it did my gender identity, and I learned that I did not have to divorce my race from my gender. This class was also a celebration of Black womanhood, and of the Black woman's body; strength and tenacity leaped off the pages during the semester. The classroom space that Andrea provided for me/us that semester was one that, upon reflection, I needed to validate my experiences as a Black woman in a higher education setting.

Learning about microaggressions was particularly useful in navigating a PWI. There were many times I received explicit and implicit messages that reinforced that I was not welcome as a part of the college community. White peers insulted me, and it was not uncommon to be told that I "spoke well" during class presentations. I was even stopped once by someone indicating that there was a spill in the Student Center that needed to be cleaned up. My professors have also been guilty of microagressions. One example of this occurred while talking about television programming in one of my classes that was taught by a white male. A student mentioned a successful Black television writer and her magnificent run on a broadcast network with three hit shows. In recalling which television writer the student was referring to, the professor blurted out, "Oh, the angry Black woman!" He then looked in my direction, as the only Black student in the class. I am certain he caught my non-verbal facial cues of disgust because he proceeded to ask me if I was offended.

My first reaction to these slights was always one of self-doubt, thinking that I was reading too much into something that was probably well intentioned. I would usually debrief with Andrea, who allotted me the time and the space to articulate my feelings. She explained that there was meaning in my apprehension in confronting white peers and faculty who probably believe that they aren't engaging in discriminatory behavior,

and see themselves as just and democratically minded (Sue, 2004). These validating conversations not only made me draw closer to Andrea but also enabled me to gain the confidence to respond to subsequent microaggressions.

After time spent in Andrea's class and time spent feeling resentment toward the dominant community at my school for its seemingly "unconscious" rejection, I asked myself, "How can I be authentically me in this environment?" It was then that I made the decision to resist marginalization by seeking out a community, engaging in social justice work, and by making my work and myself visible on campus. Within a year's time, I had been selected to attend the university's top leadership summit, became a facilitator for an annual leadership program on campus, and won a position on the Executive Board of the Black Student Union, the second largest student organization on campus. I also gained an anchor position at the school's news station. While these new responsibilities provided me with the opportunities I needed to try to make a difference on campus, I quickly realized how becoming so visible resulted in racial tokenism. As I was asked to speak more about "the Black experience" and to serve on numerous panels addressing issues of diversity and inclusion, I realized that there was an expectation that I stick to a particular script. It was clear that I was not supposed to raise issues Black women and men faced on campus, or to agitate for any real change on behalf of the minority students while serving in these capacities.

Holding positions of authority on campus brought on complex feelings of helplessness and occasional guilt, knowing that my minority peers looked to me and others in similar positions for direction. But I also understood that the rhetoric of change we were fed from the institution and the reality we faced daily were at odds. While I treasured the time spent, the experiences gained, and value of the network I was able to build, the awareness of my outsider status was never more acute.

Andrea's Pedagogy/Praxis of Resistance

Despite the oppressive circumstances described above, like most Black female faculty, my love for teaching and mentoring Black women is the primary reason for my persistence (Turner, Gonzalez, & Wood, 2008), and I decided that I needed to do more to create counterspaces for myself and my students. I began by analyzing my curriculum and connected with Black women students on campus to find out what issues were important

and appropriate for them to discuss and to share in the classroom. This process positioned the students as knowledge co-producers instead of simply consumers, and led to collaborations like Raven's and mine where students were able to articulate their standpoint. Students who participated were engaged, open to others' ideas, excited to conduct research, and invested in the production and acquisition of knowledge. I also started utilizing student suggestions for course content, and bringing student organizations such as the LGBTQIA alliance and the BSU into the classroom to discuss issues of identity-based discrimination on campus.

The above are the spatial links that a transnational feminist praxis can make visible through the dismantling of barriers. To not be bound by the circumstances of our strict professor–student location, it was essential for me to be conscious of spatiality and place, and when, where, what, and who I could draw from to engender change and work systematically, collaboratively, and overtly against oppression. At that time I was engaging in a pedagogy which, while grounded in my transnational feminist identity, was very specific to ensuring my own daily survival in the academy. I was crossing and destabilizing borders in the classroom by incorporating more of my cultural identity into my syllabus. I introduced my students to women from the global South not as sympathetic victims or global sisters, but as women who, while constrained by the legacy of colonialism and imperialism, were agents for their own cause, utilizing both culturally traditional and innovative strategies to fight oppression. I was doing so by relying heavily on my UWI community of feminists for academic but mostly emotional support. As I shared more about myself in the classroom, I noticed that Black women students spoke, shared, and met with me more to talk about their own experiences, including those of marginalization on campus.

These meetings led to an evolution of my pedagogy to include counter-hegemonic strategies that took into account Black women's need for care in a space where we were so few in number. I realized that Black women students needed more than a Black woman professor in the classroom lecturing to them, but one who also engaged with them as intellectuals. To work toward this, I made myself vulnerable, drawing on the knowledge and experience gained from multiple spatialities and temporalities, integrating my cross-border experiences deeper into my pedagogy.

In communicating to my students that their issues were relevant and worth talking, writing, and speaking about, by my second year at that institution, I became known for also working closely with students outside

of the classroom. I helped students to organize protests, co-organized several faculty/student panel discussions on intersectional discrimination, supported and attended speak-ins and die-ins to raise awareness on national and campus wide racism, and read poetry at the student-driven "Black Poets Speak Out." I also made sure that students knew that after planning and engaging in difficult and emotional social justice work, they had a space to debrief and engage in self-care.

I further worked to destabilize barriers by joining my activism of advocating and creating spaces for Black women to flourish with my pedagogy, by developing the Women's Studies Research Initiative. The purpose of the initiative was to encourage and recognize undergraduate involvement in research scholarship focusing on issues of gender. As a part of this initiative students developed their research interests in Women's Studies through faculty partnerships, and were provided with financial support. This initiative served several students who successfully developed and presented their research at conferences across the U.S. Of these, I mentored two Black women students, one of whom was Raven.

In working with students like Raven, my teaching, research, and activism were completely transformed. I moved away from the academic/activist, student/teacher divides that are central to much of academia and considered the contextual benefits of destabilizing binaries which constrain knowledge production, relationships, and growth. It was only by traversing national, institutional, organizational, hierarchical, class, and other barriers to work closely with students to create counterspaces that I was able to develop a pedagogy/praxis in which my academic work is a crucial component of my activism. This pedagogy/praxis emphasizes the mentoring of Black women students, teaching them to love their Black bodies, and arming them with a framework and tools to circumvent racial microaggressions, while simultaneously mandating their right to manifest their own epistemology, methodology, and praxis.

Andrea and Raven's Co-Mentoring Relationship as Resistance

The literature demonstrates that there is a correlation between participation in mentoring relationships for Black women faculty particularly at PWIs and their success in higher education, regardless of the level of mentoring (e.g. formal or informal) in which they participate (Holmes, Land, & Hinton-Hudson, 2007). Mentoring in the traditional sense is

defined as "a process by which a person of superior rank … guides, and facilitates, the personal, intellectual, and/or career development of a less experienced person. The relationship is generally hierarchical" (Holmes et al., 2007, p. 108). In this definition the mentee is thought to be in a position to benefit from the mentor but the process of reciprocity is not considered.

Our approach to mentoring is a less traditional one and embraces the concept of "co-mentoring," or a more egalitarian form of mentoring where those involved in the mentorship relationship contribute to the care and development of one another regardless of who is thought to possess more knowledge and/or experience (Holmes et al., 2007). Those who advocate for co-mentoring relationships emphasize the opportunity for mutual empowerment and learning where those involved can "occupy the role of teacher and learner, with the assumption being that both individuals have something to offer and gain in the relationship" (McGuire & Reger, 2003, p. 54). Our co-mentoring relationship, which stems from a transnational feminist pedagogical practice, acknowledges just that, and is conscious of socially constructed hierarchies. This type of mentorship not only provided a space to resist the racism at our institution but also helped us to co-create counterstories such as this that legitimate our experiences, and that give life to our strategies.

For me (Raven) the relationship we developed was the validation I needed to get me through my time at the PWI. I had spent two years in academia before I found someone I could really confide in about my experiences. My relationship with Andrea helped me to see what I had been feeling as relevant. More importantly, our relationship helped me to understand that no matter our location in the university hierarchy, Black women are marginalized. Often Black women within positions of authority maintain a tough exterior, and while there are some benefits to masking vulnerability, these women often suffer in silence for fear of reprisal. By Andrea's honest and open approach with me, I could feel her sincerity and sense of care for my well-being, and was compelled to be as open as well. Our relationship required being honest about our feelings and fears, and breaking down barriers so that we as partners could both teach and learn from each other. As partners I felt free to offer Andrea advice about how to approach students, about what Black women on campus needed, and I felt heard. I also felt that I could be an equal participant in mapping the directions of our projects, sometimes even taking the lead. While Andrea made herself available to guide me, she was also willing to give me space

when I needed to figure it out on my own. I didn't always need her to be a mentor; sometimes I needed her to be professor, friend, or resource. It was the flexibility of our relationship, what I have come to know as border crossing, that was the most important component of our co-mentoring praxis. To bend rules of academic structure and procedures which marginalized us, to relate to each other based on the uniqueness of whatever situation we were presented with, was crucial to my growth, understanding, and self-validation.

In addition, approaching co-mentoring as a pedagogical partnership is an important component of destabilizing barriers. As we listened and cried with each other, I (Andrea) have also incorporated our realities and needs for learning into my syllabi and teaching. And as I (Raven) have moved on to teach in the public school system, I have also taken my co-mentoring experience into my classroom, teaching Black girls how to love their beautiful Black selves and working with them in a process of self- and knowledge validation. My pedagogy has been influenced by the type of pedagogy Andrea used in class, and I now openly share my personal experience to "put cracks in students' preconceived notions of our own bodies" (Perlow et al., 2014). In working together we have made and continue to make Black women's issues visible, opening up an avenue for us/them to see more of our/themselves in what we/they are learning so we/they might become invested in evolving Black partnerships.

As we attempted to unravel the complexity engendered by multiple identities in multiple contexts through deliberate and critical interrogation, the process of writing became crucial to building our relationship and navigating the academy. Writing became important to me (Raven) because as a Journalism major I saw the value in documenting these experiences, as I began to see my writing as a part of the production of Black women's scholarship. For me (Andrea), I was aware that while analyses confirm that Black professors are more often engaged in student interaction and mentoring than their colleagues, this approach and expectation comes into direct conflict with "a system of academic advancement that places value primarily on scholarship" (Griffin & Reddick, 2011, p. 1033). My use of mentorship as a resistance strategy meant that it was important for me to write about its value to Black women. Mentoring Black women has also been the most academically rewarding experience for me, as it has stripped me down to my most vulnerable and allowed me to be at my most honest (academically), and writing about this is important. This process has resulted in a shifting of my (Andrea's) research interests, which now

allows me to advocate for Black women, and my (Raven's) incorporation of these strategies of resistance allows me to better prepare Black girls for higher education.

Conclusion

Our need to connect as Black women is important, in part because of the historical ways that we have been devalued, denied access, and silenced in a larger social system (Fries-Britt & Kelly, 2005). Utilizing CRT, Black feminist, and transnational feminist traditions helps us to discover that we are not alone in our marginalization, and provides us with the oppositional knowledges needed to dismantle binaries, and create egalitarian Black counterspaces. For us, our relationship, coming together to strategize, to address the microaggressions we faced daily, and partnering under the Women's Studies Initiative has not only helped us navigate the realities of our daily materiality, but also to dismantle socially constructed hierarchal spaces, ultimately resulting in the co-authoring of this chapter. We became empowered participants, hearing our own stories, listening to each other frame arguments, and together framing our own. Just like Fries-Britt and Kelly's (2005) experience, it was our "willingness to remove the walls early in our relationship and to genuinely work together without pretense of 'play acting' our role as student and teacher [that was] important because it removed the limitations that often accompany these formal roles" (p. 238).

For Andrea, identifying how aspects of her experience intersect with those of her students and working at, according to hooks (1989), taking the "abstraction and articulat[ing] it in a language that renders it accessible" (p. 39) to students, as we talk and think through our struggles together, was a source of empowerment garnered from this space. For Raven, this counterspace allowed her the opportunity to embrace her differences, while not seeing them as unique to her alone. It also helped her to put her feelings into words and continue to develop her own Black feminist consciousness.

The toll of being Black women and the difficulties this presents in achieving political consciousness and performing pedagogical work should not be underestimated. While there are many suggestions we could make, we believe that the most important is that Black women at PWIs have authentic conversations with each other across socially constructed hierarchal boundaries in order to create sites for developing a community of resistance. It is also important to let our voices be heard, whether in our

activism or our scholarship, because according to Audre Lorde (1984), "[i]t is not difference which immobilizes us, but silence. And there are so many silences to be broken" (p. 44). Writing together as an outcome of our mentoring partnership validated our experiences, and cemented our pedagogy/praxis, which we hope others will utilize to break silences.

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PART II

Transformative Pedagogies: Theory, Praxis, Strategies, and Applications

CHAPTER 8

Teaching and Learning Philosophical "Special" Topics: Black Feminism and Intersectionality

Kathryn T. Gines, A. Marie Ranjbar, Edward O'Byrn, Eyo Ewara, and William Paris

In the seminal work *But Some of Us Are Brave* (Russell, 1982), Michele Russell notes that political education becomes radical when we connect daily life with making history, and the classroom is a space where these connections can happen. She explains, "…the classroom serves as a temporary space where we can evoke and evaluate our collective memory of what is done to us, and what we do in turn" (Russell, 1982, p. 196). She further asserts that we start where we are, making the learning process conscious and the content specific, building students' confidence in their ability to make it through the morass of their lives, and piecing

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together identity and community. For Russell, the first and most fundamental pedagogical step is to recognize ourselves in history (and I would add in philosophy). She is writing about her experience teaching a Black studies course at Wayne County Community College in a Detroit YMCA classroom with 22 Black women ranging in age from 19 to 55. I teach in a very different context—in a philosophy department at a predominantly white institution (PWI)—and yet Russell's insights remain relevant.

In May 2015, I taught an intensive four-week "Special Topics" graduate seminar in philosophy on "Black Feminism and Intersectionality." The students in the seminar included: one Iranian American woman in geography and women's studies, two Black American women in philosophy, and three Black men in philosophy (one identifies as Black American, one as Black/bi-racial American, and one as Black/bi-racial Canadian). It is rare to have a graduate seminar in philosophy taught by a Black woman philosopher *and* comprising all graduate students of color at a PWI (i.e. a rare opportunity to engage one another in a seminar without a white gaze). Teaching the seminar was such a transformative event that I invited the students to co-author this chapter so that we could reflect on the collective experience from our individual perspectives. Four of the six graduate students eagerly accepted the invitation.

Our aim in the chapter is to consider the transformative impact of Black women's pedagogies, specifically my own approach to teaching the above-mentioned course as well as the lessons and insights the students gleaned from the readings. As we share and archive our experience, we argue that this course was distinctly transformative because we could, in Russell's (1982) words, "evoke and evaluate our collective memory of what is done to us, and what we do in turn." Furthermore, we were able to recognize ourselves in philosophy. This transformative experience was shaped by the unique class dynamics created by demographics (yes, our races, genders, sexual orientations, nationalities, etc. mattered for us) coupled with my pedagogical practices—including the structure (student-led discussion) and content (readings) of the course, as well as the intentional cultivation of an affirming community. Each co-author writes from her/his unique standpoint while remaining attentive to these guiding threads and themes interwoven throughout the chapter.

A Black Woman Philosopher's Pedagogical Practices: Teaching "Black Feminism and Intersectionality" (Kathryn T. Gines)

Philosophy, as a profession and academic discipline, has constructed a Western philosophical canon that is overwhelmingly white and male and that routinely excludes the scholarly contributions of women and people of color (Bernal, 1987; Dotson, 2011, 2012; Gines, 2011, 2014; Harris, 1995; Henry, 2005; James, 1992; Obenga, 1996; Patel, 2016). I have taught undergraduate and graduate courses in philosophy (and Africana Studies) for over a decade with varying challenges (e.g. inquiries about why we have to read so many women, Black women, non-white people, etc.) and successes (e.g. confessions from white students and men of color that they would never read these types of texts, but because of this class, they explored unfamiliar concepts and possibilities). I am often the first or the only Black and/or woman and/or Black woman professor that many students have had at the PWIs where I have taught (The University of Memphis, Emory University, Vanderbilt University, and Penn State University). Even in my current philosophy department, which has actively recruited and retained women and people of color into its doctoral program (successfully graduating six Black women with doctorates between July 2015 and June 2016), graduate seminars on Africana and/or Black feminist philosophy have been relegated to "Special Topics" listings taught by me.

With these dynamics in mind, I am very intentional about shifting the geography of reason, challenging the traditional white male philosophy canon as the only source of knowledge production, and including diverse voices and perspectives in the courses that I teach (Collins, 1986a, 1990; Gordon, 2011; Omolade, 1993; Tillman, 2002; Tisdell, 1998). I expand the boundaries of the canon by underscoring underrepresented areas of philosophy, especially the contributions of women and persons of color. Pedagogically, rather than rely on the traditional lecture as a primary teaching method, I encourage engaged, student-led participation (Collins, 1986a). In these ways, my syllabi and pedagogy are expressions of political activism (hooks, 1994).

My most fulfilling teaching experience to date has been the May 2015 "Special Topics" graduate seminar "Black Feminism and Intersectionality." We examined classic texts that exemplify Black feminist and transnational feminist theory, but are typically underexplored or altogether ignored

within the discipline of philosophy.[1] These texts, coupled with reflections on our individual and collective lived experiences, were taken as valid and valuable sources of knowledge. The readings and class discussions are representative of my pedagogical commitment to affirming writings and voices that have been largely ignored in philosophy. What is most radical and transformative about my pedagogical practices in general and this course in particular is not the challenging of oppressive hegemony, white supremacy, racism, sexism, patriarchy, homophobia, and so on (though my teaching and this course did all of the above). I do not center whiteness as the primary or privileged topics of inquiry. Rather what made this seminar experience radical was the centering of Black feminism and intersectionality as philosophical subjects while empowering the participants to be and feel seen and heard. In this uniquely diverse classroom space we disclosed experiences, personal and political reflections, and everyday practices for surviving and thriving that we typically do not disclose in predominantly white spaces.

Each co-author highlights the importance of thoughtful student-led discussions and having a space in which they could speak and be heard on their own terms. For Ranjbar, my empathic listening to their grievances and my willingness to reflect upon and share my experiences within various academic positions demonstrated a commitment to integrating theory with the everyday. It provided concrete examples of how the students might navigate their own issues with the Academy's predominantly white insider community and encouraged them to see themselves as also belonging in the Academy. Our seminar became a venerated space to openly and honestly share intellectual and emotional frustrations and affirmations. We did not have to offer a justification for the content of the syllabus or explain why these readings provided important contributions to advancing critical thought and everyday commitments to social justice.

O'Byrn also emphasized the significance of the powerful, fluid, unforced class discussions that discarded the traditional philosophy lecture and instead interweaved the concerns and everyday experiences of students with the philosophical concepts central to the course. He appreciated the opportunity to ask identity-based questions (frowned upon in other courses) and the chance to talk about the professional and personal dilemmas faced by underrepresented students in philosophy—a discipline often defined exclusively through the history of white male philosophers. The focus on philosophers of color altered our relationship to philosophy by reinserting our historical presence into philosophical debates. In challenging narrow

accounts of philosophy we saw that transformative work in philosophy is possible. Ewara also emphasized the interconnections between the texts and our lived experiences (delineated by race, gender, and sexuality)—all considered integral to our class discussions. The texts became interlocutors in ongoing conversations with ramifications for everyone involved. Finally, Paris asserted that the seminar readings and class discussions allowed him to shift his approach to reading philosophy and especially Black feminism. The success of this course resulted not only from my pedagogy, but also from the unique and powerful space jointly created by the professor and the students. Traditional classroom boundaries, protocols, and hierarchies were challenged and the students were excited to co-author this chapter with me (and I with them). In the remaining sections of the chapter, each student offers her/his unique perspective on the insights they gained from the course.

The Intellectual and Emotional Labor of Women of Color Scholar-Activists (A. Marie Ranjbar)

Our seminar began with tracing the genealogy of intersectional thought to Black women scholar-activists since the nineteenth century, which remains largely unacknowledged in mainstream feminist thought (Gines, 2014). The seminar syllabus was, in many ways, its own foundational text and testament to legitimizing, upholding, and expanding a canon that we could claim as our own (even in a philosophy course). While intersectionality is now a cornerstone of U.S. women's studies, encapsulated as a defining theoretical practice by the (U.S.) National Women's Studies Association, our seminar discussions about this 'success' were overshadowed by a frustration with the belated naming and uptake of this critical analytic. The realization that intersectionality has only recently come to define American feminist scholarship following over a century of writings by Black women regarding their experiences of layered, multiple oppressions was, to say the least, disheartening. In response to assigned readings, we collectively grappled with invisibilities in our own respective research projects, which informed many discussions about how these erasures within intellectual traditions mirrored our everyday experiences of silencing in academic life.

The sentiment of a forced patience, and operating within a temporal and geographic location that is not our choosing, was an underlying yet prominent theme in our seminar readings and discussions. Our seminar

led me to consider different ways that time, in particular, is experienced by women of color scholars in our everyday lives within the academy. For many women of color (myself included), the price of making critical interventions is to be in a constant state of waiting (Spivak, 1988). This is not only waiting for the intellectual uptake of various interventions within a discipline, but awaiting radical transformations of epistemologies and methodologies within institutions that continue to uphold an intellectual tradition profoundly shaped by colonialist histories and erasures of thought outside of a predominately male Western canon. The act of waiting for recognition of the analytical and theoretical contributions from women of color is an important component of what feminist scholars have identified as epistemic violence or injustice (Dotson, 2011; Fricker & Fricker, 2007; Medina, 2013).

Not only are women of color scholars aware of the multiple oppressions that we continue to face, but simultaneously (and necessarily) become responsible for the defense and promulgation of these ideas. The repetition of scholarly interventions and a continued commitment to feminist projects of equality results in another injustice, namely feeling unable to choose to devote one's time and resources to other intellectual endeavors. The intellectual and emotional labor of repetition—of having to explain, yet again, the continued importance of theories of difference and intersectional analyses—consumes time as a resource. Those who are dedicated to interlinking theory with praxis face another hurdle, waiting to be acknowledged as both an academic and an activist. Intellectuals writing about race, class, and gender, such as Angela Davis and Ruthie Gilmore, are often described first and foremost as activists, effectively rendering their intellectual contributions invisible. There remains a significant disconnect between who is advocating for intersectional interventions, who is recognized for employing these analytical methods, and who ultimately benefits from subscribing to such analytics.

Circular arguments for various recognitions of intellectual contributions do not necessarily lead to different forms of scholarship, but nonetheless produce a palpable anxiety among feminist scholars. Despite calls within women's studies and philosophy to address privilege through analyses of layered oppressions (Ortega, 2006), a focus on the anxiety stemming from a fear of reproducing epistemic injustices results in the re-centering of those with privilege. This ultimately deflects attention away from the provocations intersectionality offers, as a theoretical construct, and hinders us, as feminists collectively, from imagining more inclusive possibilities for our shared work in achieving more equitable futures.

While intersectionality has become a critical component of women's studies scholarship in the U.S., based on the shared experiences of seminar participants, it is clear that the mainstreaming of an intersectional analytic has not necessarily led to greater self-reflexivity in research and writing processes. Perhaps the institutionalization of this analytic has instead deflected attention away from practices of everyday engagement with difference, making intersectionality so familiar that it is now difficult to employ this term productively.

Challenging Boundaries and Expanding Philosophical Conversations (Edward O'Byrn)

"Black Feminism and Intersectionality" is one of the best philosophy courses I have taken in my entire philosophical education. I did not have a strong background in Black feminism before entering the course, but after reading much of the material I have come to see that many works by women of color have been intentionally ignored or obscured in philosophy. For instance, in a typical American Philosophy class, students can expect to read Charles Pierce, William James, John Dewey, among other white men. Even an African American Philosophy class may cover Fredrick Douglass, W.E.B. Dubois, Martin Delaney, and other Black male figures. But neither of these philosophy classes is likely to offer a sustained engagement with figures like Sojourner Truth, Anna Julia Cooper, and Harriet Jacobs—despite the fact that these authors (and numerous others) and their writings are intelligent, challenging, and philosophically pertinent.

Most of the seminar texts were written in the 1800s through the early/mid-1900s, but they all retain contemporary relevance. Salient themes in these texts included challenges of being vulnerable due to lack of legal protections, precarity experienced by sexual minorities, the hatred faced by many who choose to challenge racial exclusions and stereotypes, and the strength of those who have endured these challenges throughout their lifetimes. The themes of the texts addressed the precarious positioning of certain identities, and we could see how the texts were speaking both to us and about us. There was a deep connection between our lived experiences, as graduate students of color, and the course materials that we covered.

I was inspired by this course because it motivated me to see the philosophical value of thinkers who have been devalued in the discipline of philosophy. The anthologies *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African*

American Feminist Thought and *This Bridge Called My Back*, which chronicle the historical legacies and philosophical work of women of color Feminists, left the greatest impressions on me. Overall, the seminar readings challenged boundaries concerning race, gender, sexual orientation, and nationality—expanding philosophical conversations about ethics and equality into areas I had not previously explored. After reading these figures, it became clear that the field of philosophy must expand its canon to include arguments and knowledge that have been articulated by Black women for over a century. It is necessary for the field of philosophy not only to take Black feminism seriously as an area of study, but also to reevaluate central claims by canonical figures in light of Black feminist and intersectional contributions. This class by Dr. Gines offers a model for undertaking this challenge. The combination of fellow graduate students, the professor, and the course material together fostered an environment of open and rigorous dialogue. Through our readings, discussions, and embodied presence, we challenged the traditional image of who participates in and generates philosophy.

Engaging Black Women's Writings on Their Own Terms (Eyo Ewara)

When feminist philosophy and critical philosophy of race approach writings by Black women, it seems that they do so only to mine these writings for correctives to their own projects. In white women's feminism and Black men's philosophies of race, Black women's lives are posed as derivative of those others, male or white. The use of Black feminist writings as critical addendum ultimately serves to re-focus attention back onto white feminists and Black men, leaving existing race and gender structures intact. Rather than engaging Black women's writings on their own terms, this way of superficially acknowledging while not actually engaging Black women's writings devalues the Black feminist tradition (Ortega, 2006).

A feminist course may include Black feminist thought as a branch of the tradition that merely provides helpful insights, but one that is not representative of feminism overall. Indeed, Black feminist writings are often misrepresented as an addendum and/or a late development stemming from criticisms of the already established white feminist tradition. When white feminism engages women of color feminisms only as outwardly focused critical projects, this is a diminished engagement with the writings of women of color. It suggests that women of color feminist projects

(assumed to be a bit too "particularized") are expected to work for or with white women's writings (assumed to be easily "universalized" and relevant to the experiences of *all* women, not only *white* women). Similarly, within critical philosophy of race, Black women's contributions (if they appear at all) emerge in citations meant to show the failings of the male-centric canon. This limited engagement through citations utilizes a vocabulary that allows the author to mention—though not necessarily take seriously—the work and experiences of Black women as an integral part of a critical philosophy of race project. Thus, this canon continues to operate with the same presuppositions based on the needs and experiences of Black men.

This "Black Feminism and Intersectionality" graduate seminar made me aware of how the implicit presence of racial and gendered relations among students and instructors frames the philosophical significance and political tone of that content, delimiting the ways that students are able to interpret given content. Dr. Gines' pedagogical openness to our active interrogation of these structures stood in stark contrast to previous experiences in many philosophy courses, where I and/or my concerns have been passed over in silence. The actual structure of most classrooms—no matter how well meaning—facilitates the continued erasure of Black women's experiences as the subject and proper situation of their thought. This erasure is enabled through predominantly white classroom demographics and the preferred foci of students and instructors in that context. This accommodation of whiteness in the classroom occurs in several ways. Sometimes problematic claims are made about the supposedly limited relevance of features particular to Black women's lives and the intellectual products of those lives. Or on pragmatic grounds, one might consider the limited time available to catch white students up on the fact that there are different kinds of subjects with different kinds of problems to which different forms of thought respond.

It is against such accommodations of whiteness along with the aforementioned problematic framing of Black women's experiences and intellectual work as resource and addendum that this seminar worked so powerfully. Having an intellectual space facilitated by a Black woman professor that included only students of color and as many women students as there were men, coupled with a curriculum where the writings and lives of Black women were given a primary and positive focus, profoundly changed the reading and interpretation of Black feminist works, as well as the content of the philosophy canon. The seminar provided the space for this basic presupposition: Black women do not only exist as an addendum or

as a problem which appears whenever larger or less marginalized groups are criticized. Additionally, we need not begin or carry out our thinking exclusively within the context and concerns of those groups whose identities are privileged and presented as though they are not themselves intersectional (most often white students).

In our seminar, there were no white students with whom we were forced to restart from the exposition of experiences of racism to establish for them the relevance of the particular intellectual work of Black women. Nor was there a need to justify or argue for the reality of the experiences of Black women. Dr. Gines' openness to our own sharing (and connecting what we shared and read) created a space where we could and did take each other's claims about racism seriously. The receptiveness she modeled also encouraged many of us (who might have thought primarily about racism as it relates to our male experience) to be open to hearing and attempting to understand the co-constitution of sexism and racism for Black women. We acknowledged together that we all have experiences that are difficult for many white students to believe exist as we recount them. Consequently, despite the obviousness of those experiences to us, we often feel forced to defend our lives, selves, and experiences in predominantly white academic spaces. But in this uniquely diverse seminar space, the writings and our own testimonies were seen and heard in their historic and contemporary contexts without having to be condensed, truncated, or omitted to accommodate white men or women. Instead, our space allowed for disclosure of everyday experiences—in all their power, horror, or sheer ridiculousness—without having them dismissed as anomalies. These life experiences were recognized as systematic phenomena.

Future Directions for Reading Black Feminism (William Paris)

Within the graduate seminar "Black Feminism and Intersectionality," we found ourselves repeatedly asking how it is that a discourse traced as far back as Maria W. Stewart, Sojourner Truth, and Anna Julia Cooper can retain its explicitly philosophical *and* political origins.[2] That is, how can we read these figures and texts in a way that honors the authors' standpoints and testimonies, appreciates the political contexts out of which they are writing, and also recognizes their philosophical insights without imposing the constrictions of the historically white and male Western philosophical canon? With these questions in mind, I will offer reflections

on how philosophers might read Black feminism and intersectionality differently. By presenting reading as a form of bodily constitution, I urge readers to move away from metabolic reading of *in*corporation (absorbing what one wants while discarding the rest) and toward *ex*corporation (slowing down and learning to learn how to read differently). This shift in emphasis arose from my discussions with Dr. Gines and my colleagues in the seminar.

White audiences often view Black women’s standpoints and testimonies as inherently unreliable and in need of a supplement (usually a white supplement) in order to make their standpoints and testimonies *palatable*. This problem of (un)reliability and palatability reinforces a problematic paradigm of reading the works of marginalized communities. Within this problematic paradigm, which I refer to as *metabolic reading*, the accounts of the marginalized are reduced to mere facts rather than being read as *experiences of witnessing oppression*. My use of the phrase “metabolic reading” is meant to call attention to how Western philosophical readings (both ways of reading and the texts themselves) constitute the white and male body as the figure of good health. I relate this type of reading to how marginalized bodies (of work) are *in*corporated to maintain the good health of the Western canon. The affective experience of reading has been cultivated so that what is palatable in intersectional texts confirms or enhances the white Western body (of work) and what is not palatable is discarded. I would like to critique the dominant paradigms of reading in the discipline of philosophy (and other Eurocentric disciplines) and call for a greater exploration of texts “outside” the Western philosophical canon.

What does it mean to figure reading as a form of bodily constitution? First, it is not enough to read the intersectional works of Black women if one only finds value in how well they may be *in*corporated within the body of a dominant Western philosophical canon. For instance, if I read the work of bell hooks and I think she is more legitimate because of her theoretical engagements with figures like Foucault and this response induces me to *return to* Foucault with renewed vigor, then I have engaged in metabolic reading. I have drawn out the “nutrients” of hooks’ writing so that the discourse I already find palatable (the Western philosophical canon) may expand and increase in power while leaving to “waste” what in hooks may not be easily digestible.

Second, framing reading as a form of bodily constitution allows us to understand reading as a socio-historical process wherein certain sedi-

mented tendencies may need to be unlearned. Our philosophical bodies are engaging with disciplining images of good health that are anything but neutral. Why is it difficult to find the texts of women of color in many philosophy syllabi? What accounts for the aggression toward these thinkers in the classroom and other arenas of philosophy (e.g. conferences)? Might we say this is a result of bodies (of work) tending toward preserving the status quo of white and male health? Traditional reading, presented here as metabolic reading, has been figured around an ethos of increased health with white male bodies (of work) representing good health. But within such an ethos, critiques and questions concerning what has conditioned the image of good health are often left unheard and unanswered.

Finally, it is my position that the frame of *metabolic reading* unsettles accounts that drift toward figuring reading as an abstract process of the mind. This "drift" serves to obscure the power dynamics that inhere within particular bodies as they approach texts and disrupts the notion that "reading more" is a sufficient condition for the transformation of paradigms of oppression. Indeed, in our present day, it may appear that a certain amount of "capital" may be accrued by showing how diverse one can be. bell hooks (1992) argues, "Within commodity culture, *ethnicity becomes spice* [emphasis added], seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture" (p. 21). We may argue that even a "politics of citation" does not save us from hooks' analysis of "eating the other" since simply having the names of diverse writers may really be an attempt to make the dominant paradigm of thinking seem livelier. hooks goes on to claim that what is really aimed at in these excursions is a transformation of one's own body that leaves the "familiar world" intact (1992, pp. 24–25). Since bodies are implicated in worlds, we may ask: If a world does not change, then how much has the body changed?

As philosophers we should take the works of intersectionality as an *injunction* to slow down. We ought not to assume that thought outside dominant paradigms of palatability is valuable only insofar as it confirms and enhances the metabolism of our thinking. Indeed, it may be *experienced* as a decrease in health, or as displeasure (as a body feels when learning it cannot do something). I would argue that what is necessitated is a shift away from reading strictly as *in*corporation and the elaboration of a concept of *ex*corporation. *Ex*corporation would require a process of

material imagination that engages the difficult shift away from increasing what the present body can do in order to constitute another, thus far, imaginary body. Such an "ethics" would be in accord with Spivak's "… process of learning to learn from below" (as cited in Morton, 2007, p. 170) wherein the "to" slows down one's immediate habits. I would modify this in favor of "learning *to* learn how *to* read in order *to* read." While so many injunctions may not find favor with our current constitution(s), this process of imagination would hopefully loosen one's dogmatic faith in one's own metabolic processes of reading that have been inherited and instead be open to possibilities of different metabolisms for different bodies (of work).

Conclusion

Patricia Hill Collins (1986b) asserts that while identity markers like race and gender mark us as "penultimate strangers" within the Academy, outsiders retain special standpoint knowledge that can be used to challenge erasures and misrepresentations of communities of color in academic work (p. 15). Each co-author has expressed a version of this assertion from his or her perspective and voice. We insist that the fact that the professor and students were all persons of color reading radical texts by trailblazing women activists and scholars of color was a *very* salient aspect of the course and its transformative impact—empowering us to challenge erasures and misrepresentations. We unapologetically embrace Black feminism and identity politics as insightfully described in the "Combahee River Collective"—namely, the idea that "the most profound and potentially the most radical politics come directly out of our own identity" (Hull, Scott, & Smith, 1986, p. 16). We acknowledge that there may be concerns about politics of representation, but identity mattered for us, especially at a PWI saturated with misrepresentations and erasures. This course stood in stark contrast to so many others in which we had shared experiences of being unheard and unacknowledged, experiences of being told implicitly or explicitly that we are not good enough, our work is not sufficiently philosophical, or our projects are too narrowly focused. In this space we could assert that we are good enough, we are philosophical, and far from being narrowly focused, our research and teaching projects offer expansive paradigms for being philosophers and doing philosophy.

Notes

1. Course readings in order of appearance:

- Gines, "Black Feminism and Intersectional Analyses: A Defense of Intersectionality" in *Philosophy Today* (2011).
- Gines, "Race Women, Race Men and Early Expressions of Proto-Intersectionality, 1830s–1930s" in *Why Race and Gender Still Matter: An Intersectional Approach* (2014) edited by Namita Goswami, Maeve M. O'Donovan and Lisa Yount.
- Lena Gunnarsson, "A Defense of the Category 'Women'" in *Feminist Theory* (2011).
- Kimberlé Crenshaw's "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics" (1989).
- Kimberlé Crenshaw's "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color" (1991).
- Guy-Sheftall's *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African American Feminist Thought* (1995). (Focus on Maria Stewart, Anna Julia Cooper, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Elise Johnson McDougals, Sadie Mossel Alexander, Francis Beale, Combahee River Collective).
- Deborah King's "Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of Black Feminist Ideology" (1988).
- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry on Anna Julia Cooper (by Kathryn T. Gines).
- *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981) edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa.
- *All of the Women Are White, All of the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies* (1982) edited by Gloria Hull, Patricia Bell-Scott, and Barbara Smith
- Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988).
- Angela Davis, *Women, Race, and Class* (1981).
- Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* (1991).
- Patricia Hill Collins, "Its All in the Family: Intersections of Race, Gender, and Nation."
- *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (1991) edited by Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres. (Especially: Mohanty, Russo, and Johnson-Odim).
- Mohanty "Transnational Feminist Crossings: On Neoliberalism and Radical Critique" (SIGNS 2013).

These may be considered "typical" texts in some disciplines, but they are not on most philosophy syllabi. Students frequently asked, "How have we not read this before?"

2. In the U.S. context, this problematic may find its "roots" in the necessity of white women "vouching" for the narratives of Black female slaves. Consider Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Oliver, 2001, 100–104).

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CHAPTER 9

Teaching Reproductive Justice: An Activist's Approach

Loretta J. Ross

While I've written extensively for the past two decades on activist theories and practices for achieving Reproductive Justice (RJ), I've only recently been asked to explore pedagogical approaches to teaching about it as part of this innovative anthology on Black women's liberatory pedagogies. As one of the co-creators of the framework in 1994, I've mostly used popular education formats to teach RJ theory and activist practices to community-based organizations and social justice movements. This was part of a collective movement-building process, mostly when I was professionally affiliated with the SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective from 1997 to 2012, first as a co-founder and then as the National Coordinator. Our goal was to become critically conscious agents of social change to demand our places in the center of reproductive politics, not at the margins of abortion debates. We sought to organize collectively to transform the institutions and policies that affect the lives of women of color. Our pedagogical praxis was embedded in analyzing and eliminating historical silences and contemporary social inequalities that prevent people from living fully realized, self-determining reproductive

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lives. For the RJ movement, a radical pedagogical approach is required for bodily empowerment and community self-determination beyond the pro-choice/pro-life binary.

My Story

My story demonstrates how knowledge is produced through embodied experiences, and illustrates my epistemological journey. I believe that how we know what we know determines how we teach. My teaching about RJ reflects my belief that stories matter and lived experiences lodge a particular type of knowledge within our intellectual, emotional, and spiritual DNA. While experience is not the only (or best) way of learning, it provides an enhancing referent that amplifies future ways of acquiring knowledge. My knowledge of the world of reproductive politics is inseparable from the experiential context in which that knowledge was produced. The connection between knowledge, consciousness, and empowerment aided me in understanding intersectionality and interlocking oppressions, and in re-conceptualizing the social relations of domination and resistance to produce RJ theory and pedagogy. Specifically, it helped me to understand my own truths and to define my own reality as a Black woman resisting white supremacy and gender injustice while embedded in an African American community. My story is not unique, but rather emblematic of the innumerable landmines girls must navigate through on the journey to self-knowledge, self-recovery, and self-determination. As a feminist public intellectual, I've often shared my story publicly to break the conspiracy of silence about childhood sexual abuse, incest, and reproductive oppression.

I was born in Temple, Texas in 1953, the sixth of eight children in a blended family. My strongest family roots were Christian, working class, and Southern rural, producing a conservatism that reinforced our durable family loyalties and close relationships. Predictably, sex and sexuality were not subjects of discussion. We also didn't talk about racial politics because my parents sought to insulate us from that harsh reality. In addition, my father, an Army weapons specialist and drill sergeant, out-ranked the fathers of my white playmates. Because of the Armed Forces' official commitment to desegregation, the military inhibited overt expressions of racism. Children were carefully trained by their parents not to exhibit racial animosity. I was 8 years old before I first heard the word "nigger" and had to ask my parents what it meant.

I attended integrated schools—Army schools then public schools. When I was 11 years old on a Girl Scouts outing, a stranger kidnapped, beat, and raped me. I didn't know I was being raped until he struck me repeatedly in my face because I didn't know what sexual assault or even sex was. I was too afraid to tell my parents what had happened for fear I would be blamed. Withering in silence, I remained vulnerable. At age 14 I was the victim of incest by a predatory distant cousin who was supposed to be babysitting me. Many of the multigenerational family secrets about rape, incest, and child abuse cascaded out during that turmoil. In the 1960s, abortion was illegal and adoption was the only ethical option. I gave birth to my son, Howard, in 1969, spending the next four decades co-parenting with my rapist. At 16, I was offered two full scholarships: one to Radcliffe College and one to Howard University. Because I chose to keep my child and was a morally "suspect" Black girl, Radcliffe rescinded their scholarship offer, so I attended Howard.

Soon after enrolling at Howard University in 1970, I became involved in Black nationalist politics, anti-apartheid activities, and tenant organizing in Washington, DC. For birth control, I was offered a Dalkon Shield IUD, a defective birth control device. At age 23 I became one of 700,000 women worldwide who were sterilized. I became an anti-sterilization activist fighting all forms of population control and was one of the first women to win a suit against the manufacturer of the device. As a rape and sterilization abuse survivor, I interpreted my personal experiences through the lens of Black feminism and global solidarity movements, such as the struggle against apartheid and for self-determination in East Timor in the 1970s and 1980s. As James Baldwin states, "I wanted to find out in what way the *specialness* of my experience could be made to connect me with other people instead of dividing me from them" (Baldwin, 1998, p. 137). I felt privileged to have learned about feminism through the richly textured and globalized Black women's activist community of Washington, DC, unlike many other Black women who are introduced to feminism by white women. The vibrant Black feminist community in DC created magical epistemological, methodological, and activist spaces for a young woman coming of age in the 1970s.

The depth and breadth of my activism spans from these early beginnings to the present, informed by what was going on around me and in other parts of the world. In the process of moving among different social justice movements, my community organizing transitioned seamlessly between women's rights, civil rights, and human rights. For example, in

1979 I became director of the DC. Rape Crisis Center, the only center at the time run primarily by and for women of color where I co-organized the first National Conference on Third World Women and Violence in 1980. The political assassination of my friend and comrade Yulanda Ward that same year was a turning point in my life, after which I recommitted to a lifetime of political activism. Within and outside of my various positions over the years (i.e. Director, Program Director, and/or Coordinator positions in organizations such as the National Organization of Women (NOW) and the National Black Women's Health Project), I have organized women of color delegations for pro-choice marches, organized the first national conference on Women of Color and Reproductive Rights in 1987, and the first national conference of African American Women for Reproductive Rights in 1990. In response to the Supreme Court's *Webster* decision in 1989, under the leadership of Donna Brazile, I helped produce the path-breaking statement "We Remember: African American Women are for Reproductive Freedom." We organized African American women to protest because the Supreme Court in *Webster* allowed states to individualize abortion restrictions that had previously been thought forbidden under *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 decision that legalized abortion. We knew this court decision would disproportionately affect Black women.

Employing a global intersectional lens, my activism has not been confined to the U.S., or to U.S.-based feminist issues. For example, from 1991 to 1995 I was the National Program Research Director for the Center for Democratic Renewal (formerly the National Anti-Klan Network), where I directed projects on right-wing organizations in South Africa, and documented Klan and neo-Nazi involvement in anti-abortion violence, becoming an expert on white supremacy and fascism. International solidarity work contoured my consciousness about the intersection of domestic and global issues through work in the Philippines, Nicaragua, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, El Salvador, Uganda, Tanzania, and Israel/Palestine. I co-founded the International Council of African Women and the Network of East-West Women, and have been a regular participant in the International Women and Health meetings in South Africa, Brazil, India, and Canada, among others. I helped to organize a delegation of 1100 African American women to attend the 1985 United Nations World Conference for Women in Nairobi, and also participated in the UN women's conferences in Copenhagen in 1980 and Beijing in 1995, as well as the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994.

In 1996 I created the National Center for Human Rights Education, a training and resource center for grassroots activists aimed at applying a human rights analysis to injustices in the U.S. SisterSong was founded in 1997 as a national collective of women of color working on reproductive health, rights, and justice issues, and I was one of 16 co-founders. Along with 11 other Black women, I co-created the RJ framework in 1994 that intersected a human rights, civil rights, and women's rights analysis, and has transformed reproductive politics and the pro-choice movement.

The Reproductive Justice Framework

The RJ framework was conceptualized in activist communities of women of color rather than in the academy, bringing together those who survive reproductive oppression with those who think and write about it. In 1994, 12 Black feminists gathered in Chicago to attend a pro-choice conference on health care reform. Recognizing that reproductive health care is the main reason many women first visit a doctor, we insisted that any strategy offered by the Clinton Administration to reform health care must center reproductive health. We problematized how reproductive rights issues, such as abortion, were frequently isolated from other social justice concerns affecting the African American community, particularly racism, incarceration, economics, and education. We caucused at the conference, placing ourselves at the center of our analysis. While abortion was a crucial human right, we also needed other human rights protections such as health care, safety from violence, jobs, daycare, and the right to motherhood to resist the dangerous politics of population control devastating our communities.

Myths of overpopulation by people of color and the politics of scarcity directly affect the reproductive decision-making of women of color worldwide. Changing our consciousness as individuals leads to social transformation of political and economic institutions affecting our reproductive lives. Centering our experiences offers revelatory insights that reject our objectification by a white supremacist society and provides a critique of the Eurocentric, phallocentric, and masculinist worldview that shapes the reproductive options for people around the world. Our fresh perspectives—so different from the endless and debilitating debates that focused exclusively on abortion—radically shifted our thinking, and launched the concept of RJ by splicing together **reproductive rights + social jus-**

tice = reproductive justice. We claimed the power to name and define our own realities by crystalizing new possibilities for activism and theory to control our reproductive destinies.

Our first action was to place a full-page signature advertisement in the *Washington Post* on August 16, 1994 which demanded that reproductive health care not be neglected or sacrificed in the political process. We successfully mobilized Black women nationally and, in about three weeks, 836 African American women joined our signature campaign. Thus, RJ was developed through policy work informed by our lived experiences which affirmed and made best use of our subjectivity, storytelling practices, and political acumen as experts in reproductive politics.

Black feminist theorizing about and organizing using the RJ framework in the subsequent decades expanded to demonstrate the power of Black women as agents of knowledge confronting race, gender, and class oppression. The position we took in this campaign is a powerful example of centering, of placing oneself in the center of the lens to discover new ways of describing reality from particular standpoints using intersectionality to describe our oppression, not just our identities, a process I call "Lens Theory." Reproductive policies worldwide often center on women's bodies, which affects our health, reproduction, and sexuality. Often, individual bodily integrity and autonomy are constrained and manipulated to achieve social, economic, and environmental outcomes favorable to elites but negatively affecting our communities.

RJ, by definition, is creative, critical, insurgent, and reflexive. Specifically, the RJ framework builds on a legacy of Black feminism, human rights, critical race/gender theories, ethics, and religion and ethics. RJ expands the reproductive health and rights movements to offer an intersectional approach to reproductive politics with the goal of protecting women's human rights. It makes the voices of people who live on the margins audible while employing the concept of shifting lenses to embrace multiplicative identities to dialogue across differing markers of reproductive oppression. Although the RJ framework was created by Black women, it does not only apply to Black women because it has an inherent universality like the broad applicability of the theory of intersectionality. Everyone has the human right to have their bodily autonomy and reproductive choices protected, and the right to define their own identities with integrity, and expect society to respect them.

RJ has three primary values: (1) the right *not* to have a child; (2) the right to *have* a child; and (3) the right to *parent* children in safe and healthy environments free from state, corporate, and individual violence. In addition, this framework demands sexual autonomy and gender freedom for every human being, recognizing that not everyone who gets pregnant or needs an abortion is a woman. Thus, the RJ framework includes transmen, transwomen, and gender non-conforming individuals. As stated at the Fourth World Conference for Women in Beijing, China in 1995, "The human rights of women include their right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination, and violence" (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2014, p. 18). All people who become parents require a safe and dignified social context in which to make decisions about themselves, their families, and their communities. This context depends on access to specific, community-based resources including high-quality health care, housing, education, a living wage, a healthy environment, and a social safety net for times when these resources fail. Safe fertility control, childbirth, and parenting are impossible without human rights protections.

This approach does not uphold the artificially truncated understanding of human rights based on the linear enshrinement of atomized individualism inherited from the Enlightenment tradition. This individualistic reduction of human rights emphasizes civil and political rights while neglecting the rest, particularly economic and social rights. The pro-choice movement emphasizes individual choice, for example, while understating the effects of group harms and restrictions based on race and class. Individual autonomy, by itself, cannot achieve full human rights protections. A glaring example is how poor people cannot exercise their individual right to an abortion using their health care provided by the government because the Hyde Amendment restricts the use of public funds for abortions. A reproductive rights analysis focused simply on keeping abortion safe and legal fails to account for accessibility and cost barriers, and ignores the social context in which people make their reproductive decisions.

Rather, RJ offers a fuller, more expansive vision based on non-European philosophical traditions, such as Ubuntu from Africa and Confucianism from China. In expressing a more collectivist belief system, "I am because we are," radical human rights interpretations based on Black feminist theories like intersectionality re-center expressions of the dialectic between

the individual and the community by incorporating a love for humanity, respect for ancestors, and harmony in thought and conduct. Another expression comes from Judaism, “My neighbor’s material needs are my spiritual needs,” demonstrating that human interdependence is based on an ethical value system that contrasts with the alienated individualism of European thought. This reclaiming of the pre-colonial meanings of human rights through the RJ framework provides a more holistic analysis that situates individual rights within the social constructions of groups that emphasize human relationships. In practical terms this means that individuals do not make autonomous decisions about their reproductive options without considering the political, social, and economic conditions of the community in which they are embedded. Thus, economic, social, cultural, environmental, developmental, and sexual human rights are as important and interconnected as civil and political rights.

Using the human rights framework, we must urgently respond to a resurgence of justifications for population control that disproportionately have an impact on communities made vulnerable by race, gender, sexuality, immigration status, ability, religion, age, and so forth. The fertility of poor people is further limited because of targeted population reduction strategies made ubiquitous by embodied social policies such as hyper-sterilization or welfare-based family caps. The notion that certain kinds of people should not have children is more subtly enacted today than in the open era of Eugenics in the 1930s.

For example, in fertility medicine where one needs a referral to see a reproductive endocrinologist to address infertility, many Black women cannot get past their gynecologist. Although the reasons for higher infertility rates among African American women are not clear, fibroid tumors play a role. Doctors agree that benign fibroid tumors can overtake a uterus. While there are non-surgical methods for reducing fibroids and maintaining fertility, removal of the uterus is the most frequently used method doctors employ for African American women. Thus, one-third of African American women no longer have a uterus, further limiting their parenting options. Similarly, a recent investigation by the Center for Investigative Reporting revealed that dozens of female inmates in California had been illegally sterilized by the state. This story reminds us that the government’s past practices of population control continue into the present.

The goal of RJ theory, pedagogy, and consonant activist practices is to understand these conditions and work to construct alternative pathways

that affirm the human rights of individuals and communities, so that they may control their own reproductive destinies. As activists, we use RJ to create a vision for our movement, to organize our communities, and to press for cultural, policy, and legal changes. It is an organizing approach that is complex, multifaceted, and intersectional to affirm visionary values that can be achieved through the patient, long-term work of building relationships, shifting culture, and creating community. Because we are up against well-resourced inimical forces of neoliberal capitalism, white supremacy, and reproductive oppression, we do not naively imagine that we will achieve RJ overnight, or even in a few decades. Our collective embodiment requires an RJ strategy that is, by definition, long term to create moral, legal, and political shifts so that the lives of vulnerable people matter.

Human Rights: The Foundation of Reproductive Justice

Reproductive justice is an intentional framework to shape the competing ideals of equality and the social reality of inequality by pointing out the disparity in opportunities in determining our reproductive destinies. Human rights standards examine not only processes but outcomes, which is beyond American jurisprudence. Thus, the RJ movement has shifted to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) for its more comprehensive moral, political, social, and legal foundations that address both processes and outcomes. The UDHR is far more useful for achieving RJ than the limited U.S. Constitution, which most frequently gets interpreted to benefit the reproductively privileged. Teaching about RJ requires human rights education as a practice.

History has shown that the U.S. Constitution cannot adequately address sex discrimination against women (Steinem, 2015). In fact, the attorney who argued for abortion rights in *Roe v. Wade* at the Supreme Court, Sarah Weddington, wanted the Court to rule that denying women the right to an abortion was a form of sex discrimination and violated the 14th Amendment of the Constitution. The Court demurred, choosing not to go that far in dismantling traditional sex discrimination in the U.S. (notably a path that Canada actually embraced when it ruled that abortion denial is a form of sex discrimination a few years later). The Supreme Court instead articulated a tenuous "right to privacy" that is not in the U.S. Constitution that allowed trimester-based government interventions

in women's decision-making, with increasing state power and diminishing women's autonomy the further along the pregnancy progresses. That deeply flawed Court decision permitted a patchwork of anti-abortion laws across the country, with more than 2000 bills introduced in state legislatures to restrict women's human right to abortion.

In order to better understand the way that the RJ analysis may be used in conjunction with the human rights framework, it is important to review the current eight categories of human rights to get a sense of their relevance to everyone's lives. These categories have developed and expanded since the original writing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 which articulated the first five. New categories may emerge, such as "digital rights" because of rapidly increasing and invasive digital technology. The following are the present categories of human rights:

- **Civil Rights**: Non-discrimination, Equality
- **Political Rights**: Voting, Speech, Assembly
- **Economic Rights**: Living Wage, Workers' Rights, Fair Management of the Economy
- **Social Rights**: Health Care, Food, Shelter, Education
- **Cultural Rights**: Freedom of and from Religion, Language, Dress
- **Environmental Rights**: Clean Air, Water, and Land. No Toxic Neighborhoods
- **Developmental Rights**: Control Own Natural Resources
- **Sexual Rights**: Right to Have or Not Have Children, Right to Marry and When, Same-Sex Rights, Transgender Rights, Right to Birth Control and Abortion, Right to Sexual Pleasure and Define Families

It is important to understand that the spurious claims of "human rights for the unborn" (in actual violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) are used by those who manipulate the framework rather than uphold it. This strategy seeks to deny all of our human rights to privacy, bodily self-determination, and justice, but especially the rights of women. In fact, the first article of the UDHR states that "All human beings *are born* free and equal in dignity and rights [emphasis added]." The UDHR does not confer human rights to those who are not here yet, but does demand that the rights of people already born be respected and protected. Moreover, freedom *of* religion is a human right but, concomi-

tantly, freedom *from* religion is also a human right. In other words, women have the right to not have others' religious views imposed upon our bodies. Human rights are not negotiable—they are inalienable. Human rights are our birthright as human beings. To achieve our human rights, we seek reproductive justice for ourselves, our families, and our communities.

In addition to offering wider protection for abortion rights, human rights also offer more comprehensive protection against the denial of birthing rights. The Convention Against Genocide describes the prevention of births among a population as a form of genocide. I call reproductive oppression through genocide "reprocide," which fundamentally contradicts reproductive justice values. Other examples include forcibly transferring children from a community, such as Native American children forcibly removed from their families to boarding schools run by white Christians. The disproportionate placement of poor children and children of color in foster care throughout the U.S. is also a human rights violation. Thus, strategies of population control and reduction violate several important human rights treaties to which the United States is obligated, having ratified the Genocide Convention in 1992.

We join the many feminists around the world who prefer to use international human rights standards to make claims for full reproductive freedom. Recognizing that women have full human rights that cannot be diminished because of a natural health condition like pregnancy, activists particularly from the Global South have urged the United Nations and NGOs to affirm that women's rights are human rights, and that human rights protect abortion rights as well as public health. For example, international AIDS activist Dázon Dixon Diallo works in South Africa and the United States providing services, advocacy, and income generating projects for women with HIV/AIDS. She points out the relationship between working to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS and community conditions: "We're not only fighting a virus; we're fighting the conditions that allow it to proliferate…We need to look at public health issues from within a human rights framework…the need for prevention justice" (Dixon Diallo, n.d., 3). This type of reframing is taught through an RJ pedagogy.

In terms of movement building, human rights appeal because they are a radically different way for social justice activists to examine power and

inequality, and the role of the State and non-state actors like corporations and individuals in perpetuating violations. Human rights offer strong moral arguments for setting standards for how people should be treated, and what everyone deserves as a member of human society, regardless of their identity, citizenship, abilities, and so on. Human rights also present strong political possibilities for bringing together various social justice movements under a unifying ideological platform not based on identity politics but our shared humanity. Although the United States has not ratified the majority of the available human rights treaties, it is possible to exert pressure on U.S. local, state, and federal governments to comply with internationally recognized human rights norms and standards, while building the political power to achieve treaty ratification by the U.S. Senate. Legal enforcement possibilities increase when backed by an educated human rights movement.

In using the human rights framework, RJ pedagogy links both individual and group rights in that we all have the same human rights, but may need different things to achieve them based on our intersectional location in life—that is our race, class, gender, sexual orientation, abilities, carceral condition, and immigration status. Reproductive justice emphasizes each person's individuality indicated by intersectional markers, but without ignoring collective or group identity. The reproductive justice movement is a part of the intersectional effort toward building a human rights culture in the United States. Human rights must be infused into the complex and multiple beliefs, motivations, and policies of the United States. Incorporated into a reproductive justice pedagogical approach, they offer a compelling counter to the "culture of life" rhetoric of fundamentalists, conservatives, libertarians, the alt-right, and Christian nationalists. The human rights framework challenges those who believe our society should be stuck in the days when people had to be religiously-qualified white males in order to have power, a particularly paternalistic and authoritarian perversion of democracy baked into American history and modern politics.

Toward a Reproductive Justice Pedagogy

The first curricula on RJ were co-designed by me, Eveline Shen (of Forward Together), and Susan Yanow (formerly of the Abortion Access Project) in 2005 because SisterSong needed a way to capture and convey this exciting framework for transforming activism on reproductive health

and rights issues in a popular education process that centered the lens on the lived experiences of women of color. Because we started teaching RJ with a fresh, original theoretical framework, books had yet to be written that comprehensively described our vision for the future activism, or adequately analyzed the past we had endured through an intersectional RJ lens. The first book on Reproductive Justice was written ten years after the concept was envisioned, *Undivided Rights: Women of Color Organize for Reproductive Justice*, co-authored by Jael Silliman, Marlene Gerber Fried, Elena Gutiérrez, and me, and published in 2004. Even then, our research revealed that the framework was not widely known or embraced by women of color. Yet within a short decade after its publication, RJ became the dominant framework for reproductive politics among women of color, and has moved from the margins to the mainstream, affecting the decisions of large pro-choice organizations (Pérez, 2015).

Let me first and foremost acknowledge that successfully teaching RJ is no easy feat due to the complexity and depth of the framework. The most frequent attempt I've witnessed has been a traditional pro-choice approach that centers abortion in the middle of the frame, and then populates the boundaries with other issues such as poverty, race, childcare, sex education, and so on. In some instances, teachers or trainers graft race and gender onto existing analyses of abortion politics with no in-depth analysis of the power differentials among women, or without references to the economic, environmental, or military meta-systems that also affect reproductive decision-making. Although this approach is admittedly more expansive than simply teaching about abortion debates, it falls short of the radical intersectional pedagogy offered by RJ because it is unable to offer an articulate understanding of the complexities of intersectionality and power differentials in public policy and daily life. Intersectionality should not be reduced to simplistic markers of difference (which everyone has) but instead focus on the ideologies and mechanics of oppression (which everyone doesn't experience).

This may be because some folks are confused about the relationship between "pro-choice" politics and RJ. Therefore, some questions that should be addressed when teaching about RJ are "Is RJ in tension with 'choice' politics or does its theory and activism rest on an entirely different basis?" and "Is RJ an attempt to make peace between the pro-choice and pro-life frameworks?" (Ross & Solinger, 2017, p. 113). It is important to underscore here that RJ is neither an oppositional nor a peace-making

framework. Rather it is an emergent radical theory that reframes the problem and simultaneously provides a location for healing from the trauma of reproductive oppression. RJ helps people make sense out of what is happening to their bodies, their people, and their communities caught up in the ravages of what some call "casino capitalism" that exploits labor, reproduction, sexuality, and the environment for the benefit of the few. To paraphrase an iconic white feminist intellectual, Andrea Dworkin, RJ creates new ways of thinking, not just thinking new things.

Instead of simply considering pregnancy outcomes, I prefer to imagine that RJ is inflected in nearly every field of human activity because governments and the elites who control them always seek to manage the reproductive capacity of people in either overt or covert ways. Empires need bodies. They need bodies for wealth creation, colonization, labor, and armies. To achieve these goals, certain bodies are valued, while others are devalued. This requires an economic hierarchy expressed in binaries that are enforced through artificial racial and gender social constructs that privilege the reproduction of one part of the population at the expense of another, such as male/female, white/Black, citizen/migrant, cis/trans. The limited logics of fixity and classification means that specific bodies are raced, gendered, classed, and conferred citizenship based on the work they are expected to perform and their value to social, economic, and political elites. Decisions about economic choices, land use, municipal services, the environment, education, urbanization, health care, and so forth always have an impact on and are affected by reproductive decision-making by individuals and communities.

Moreover, some mainstream groups have wrongly claimed the mantle of RJ without substantively changing their mission, practices, or philosophies. For example, some groups that primarily or singularly work on abortion rights have rebranded themselves as RJ organizations without appreciating the radical, transformative content of the framework, as well as the origins, histories, and contributions of women of color. This practice has risked de-radicalizing RJ, making it more vulnerable to neoliberal, liberal, and conservative interpretations that compromise its transformative potential. This misappropriation of the original RJ framework is captured in the following diminutions:

- Class and race privileges pose "choice" as a framework that ignores the social contexts in which "choices" are actually limited

- Heterosexual essentialism assumes that only hetero women can/should have children, ignoring lesbians, transmen, gender-queer folk, and so on, accused of representing a "failed femininity"
- "Mothering" as national imperative/duty of women—thus childless white women have reneged on their responsibilities and are seen as incapable of nurturing, dangerous, and resisting their manifest destiny (as in settler colonialism), while women of color are discouraged from procreating, again expressed as responsibility to the nation because children of color are perceived as threats to the security of the body politic either as criminals, terrorists, or simply welfare drains
- Shaming and blaming (poor mothers can't afford children) while middle- and upper-class women face barriers to voluntary sterilization (compelled to have children)
- False moralities/anti-sex postures—sex for procreation only; slut-shaming used to discipline non-conforming women.

These possible misinterpretations and misuses of the RJ framework are inevitable because there are no official "RJ police" monitoring the boundaries. RJ theories, strategies, and practices emerge out of the distinct historical realities of diverse communities. The inherent universality of the framework means that people will use different lenses with which to interpret their own experiences (i.e. my specific Black feminist lens is not appropriate for everyone, not even other Black women). To assist, I'd like to offer some criteria RJ activists frequently use to determine if a practice (or organization) is embracing the RJ framework in a way that honors its origins and vision. These are standards used by SisterSong and developed by leading women of color RJ organizations in 2006 because the framework was visibly migrating from the margins to the center of reproductive politics. I share the following criteria as suggested guidelines for self-reflection and accountability, and I hope that those who choose to teach from an RJ pedagogical perspective do so respecting the lives and experiences of those who created and generously shared it:

- Intersectionality—issues must be interconnected
- Connect the local to the global
- Based on the Human Rights framework
- Makes the link between the individual and community
- Invokes government and corporate responsibility
- Fights all forms of population control (Eugenics)

- Committed to individual/community leadership development that results in a shift of power
- Puts marginalized communities at the center of the lens
- Participation of those most affected, and policy changes are necessary to achieve political power
- Has its own intersectionality involving theory, strategy, and practice
- Has an inherent universality that applies to everyone because everyone has the same human rights.

In teaching RJ, we seek to maintain its radical core. RJ pedagogy collectively and critically examines the everyday experiences of the most marginalized people and raises consciousness by organizing and movement building against injustices. Specifically, we work toward the reproductive liberation of people who are socially, culturally, and economically subjugated and whose lives are peripheralized in the arenas of class, gender, and racial struggles. By emphasizing how the ideology of white supremacy differentiates between which bodies are protected and encouraged to reproduce, and which ones are devalued and discouraged from reproducing, RJ pedagogy pays close attention to many types of barriers preventing autonomy and self-determination, and thereby affecting the symbiotic relationships within communities in which individuals seek to manifest their reproductive options. Furthermore, while traditional educational approaches rarely provide opportunities for action and reflection in dialogical relationship for political engagement and social transformation, the goal of RJ pedagogy is to directly affect social relationships as a radical pedagogy that achieves social, political, and economic self-determination. It is an education about social conflict, confronting reproductive oppression in its numerous manifestations, rather than one only seeking peaceful transformation. It is a risk-taking process in which praxis means transformative action.

Accordingly, resistance is an important theme in RJ pedagogy. Despite the pressures of the government, the church, civil society, or individuals, people have always resisted, doing what was necessary to control their own fertility. They used whatever knowledge and technology was available to them, often risking their health and lives, and sometimes as acts of resistance to dehumanizing conditions. For example, enslaved Black women sometimes used potions and herbs as both contraceptives and abortifacients based on midwifery knowledge from Africa. They were oftentimes so successful that entire plantations of women chose not to bear children into slavery, and

prompted investigations by medical authorities as slave owners inquired why they failed to receive a return on their investments (Ross, 1998).

Yet individuals and communities are more than products of oppression. As Paulo Freire (1970) states, "They cannot enter the struggle as objects in order *later* to become men" (p. 55). An RJ pedagogical approach demands that participants theorize their own subjectivity, and define their own multiple, intersecting realities. A goal of RJ pedagogy is to eliminate the perceived false binary between theory and practice so that the "lived experience of theorizing is fundamentally linked to processes of self-recovery, of collective liberation" and integrated into everyday life (hooks, 1994, p. 61). Individuals may develop their own praxis by reciprocally combining reflection, theory, and action to have a liberatory impact on their society, and to end all forms of reproductive oppression.

Relatedly, teaching about RJ requires shifting away from traditional educational paradigms of competition, hierarchies, and domination toward a framework based on human rights that centers interdependence, inclusion, and intersectionality. Our pedagogical approach draws on the work of Paulo Freire (1970) that questions how power operates within a white supremacist system in the development of knowledge and agency, particularly as these are affected by socially constructed categories of race/ethnicity, gender, class, citizenship, age, sexual preference, and so forth. As Southern organizer Frank Adams said in 1973:

> I believe that education should foster individual growth and social change and nourish the fundamental value of complete personal liberty while encouraging thoughtful citizenship in community. I believe that education must be born of the creative tension between how life is lived and how life might be lived in a free society. Such education is suited for the young and for the older. (Pamela McMichael, Facebook Post 3/20/17)

In working toward Adams' vision, RJ pedagogy is an engaged, embodied pedagogy that challenges the belief that serious theory is disembodied, neutral, and universal in Cartesian and modernist frameworks. Rather RJ pedagogy is based on a popular education model which assumes that we are all experts in a community of learners with a profound body of insights, knowledges, stories, and experiences from which we can achieve progress toward the realization of human rights. It dissolves traditional disciplinary boundaries and creates new language based on the visionary pragmatism

by Black women, an overdue recognition of the authority of experience, and a fresh examination of the relationship between agency, power, and struggle, as Black feminist theorist Patricia Hill Collins has frequently described (Collins, 1998, p. 189–190). RJ resists linear periodization and builds on accumulated actions and knowledge passed from generation to generation. It affirms that ways of knowing emerge from embodied experiences that incorporate differences to lift them from the invisibilizing forces that only acknowledge privileged sites of power and knowledge. RJ pedagogy seeks to provide learners with ways of knowing that enable them to be more present in the world with a transformed consciousness.

The objectives of RJ pedagogy may include: (1) Establishing trust; (2) Understanding past experiences; (3) Demonstrating the relationship between RJ theory and activism (prazis) and; (4) Envisioning a future in which human rights are protected through an intersectional approach to RJ. In some instances, teaching RJ may conclude with an activist action or campaign. A successful popular education process develops engaged activists who can participate in learning that leads to progressive actions locally and/or globally. As peace and human rights educator Betty Reardon (1985) writes, “Education is that process by which we learn new ways of thinking and behaving, a very significant component of the transition-transformation processes. Education is that process by which we glimpse what might be and what we ourselves can become” (p. 84).

People often come to RJ trainings with a strong notion of their value systems and what they want to achieve in the world. Successful RJ pedagogy will help them see the possibilities and the many paths available they can take to achieve their goals. Some will already know their paths; others will develop them as the information marinates in their souls and their brains, but they appreciate that learning is a life-long process. Most often, teaching about RJ has been a shared learning experience. In most instances, I have worked with adult learners, those for whom debates on social justice politics were not novel. In fact, most social justice audiences welcome the holistic approach offered by the RJ framework, because it connects the dots in their experiences with an analysis that brings together apparently disparate issues in their lives and communities. While reproductive oppression differentiates individuals and communities from one another, at the same time, multiple oppressions may intersect but are not interchangeable or create the same reproductive vulnerabilities. Not every marginalized social location provides a sturdy or comprehensive analysis with which to challenge white supremacy, misogyny, imperialism, and heteronormativity.

Connections are established through the experience of being oppressed, marginalized, and colonized.

Adults of color have their own unique ways of constructing knowledge—epistemologies—using distinct and group-specific modes of communications in their interactions with each other. They hold cultural understandings that stray from the white norm, with rich histories and powerful connections among peoples who have dealt with being silenced. An RJ pedagogy therefore advocates for a consideration of the culture of the learners beyond the traditional ways of education because it must account for the silencing of their voices and the erasure of their history. Thus, a transformative RJ pedagogy must examine the ways that individuals and institutions replicate oppressive educational processes that are counterpoised against culturally relevant pedagogy that is transgressive and holistic. RJ pedagogy requires valuing each person's perspective, history, and presence, and using flexible agendas that fluidly shift directions to reciprocate the pre-existing knowledges among co-learners. In fact, RJ is most suitably experienced as a partnership process in which the teachers serve more as facilitators than professors, helping the group achieve desired outcomes that enrich and enhance their lives, rather than fixating on a rigid syllabus that perfunctorily marches through selected topics.

One learning exercise I frequently use is called "Human Rights in the Headlines." The participants bring a copy of their local newspaper to class. Using a copy of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), they are asked to read selected articles and identify which human rights are violated or upheld by the way they are covered in the news stories, particularly stories that appear disconnected from reproductive politics. An example might be a story on water quality that has implications for children's health, or another story on land zoning that reduces the availability of affordable housing. After this exercise, the learners are more adept at identifying instances of reproductive oppression, recognizing the links between apparently disparate issues. They also become more conversant with the UDHR and can synthesize a human rights-centered perspective pertinent to their reproductive lives. Perhaps most importantly, they never read a news article the same way again without a lens of critical reproductive consciousness.

The goal of RJ pedagogy is to help people become passionate about reproductive politics and discern them in nearly every aspect of human endeavor. Whether a finite set of topics is systematically covered is of less

import than whether we share a thirst for new meanings and fresh interpretations of the worlds in which we are embodied, and with which we are in dialogue. The RJ approach rethinks old ways of knowing about human reproduction by seeking to catalyze a new epistemology, an innovative way of knowing the power of economic, political, and social relations through the lens of reproductive politics and decision making. If successful, each participant will leave forever seeing the world and its relations in a different light.

Conclusion

In closing, I hope that emerging pedagogical approaches using the RJ framework arouse the same kind of excitement and passion SisterSong has been able to produce in building our radical activist movement for RJ. An RJ pedagogy can be rambunctious, unpredictable, and energetic. It disrupts the misogynistic conceptions of human beings, challenges existing power imbalances, and upsets hierarchies of thought and knowledge. It is a commitment to a politicized, revolutionary feminist movement to transform society. It ruptures the artificial binary of theory versus practice, while also challenging the pervasive denial of accountability in reproductive politics for white supremacy, patriarchy, nativism, xenophobia, religious nationalism, transphobia, homophobia, ableism, militarism, and classism.

bell hooks (1994) states, "Confronting one another across differences means that we must change ideas about how we learn; rather than fearing conflict we have to find ways to use it as a catalyst for new thinking, for growth" (p. 113). Women of color have developed "a plural consciousness" that uproots dualistic thinking that "requires understanding multiple, often opposing, ideas and knowledges, and negotiating these knowledges" (Anzaldúa, 2005, p. 60). This is related to the development of feminist pluralism that brings attention to the construction of identities, norms, and interests to bring underrepresented theoretical perspectives and underrepresented groups into the economic, political, philosophical, and social mainstream, or rather, to re-center the mainstream into the borderlands of ambiguity in which people of color reside. This re-envisioning encourages teachers and learners to not only treasure diversity within and across communities and even societies, but imagine the possibility for building coalitions across the presumed chasms of difference. Luce Irigaray declares that, "Depth does not mean a chasm" (Irigaray,

1980, p. 75). Gloria Anzaldúa suggests that a "mestiza consciousness" arising from inhabiting contradictory locations simultaneously is a valuable source of knowledge production because it "challenges dualism and is flexible and tolerant of ambiguity" (Anzaldúa, 2005, p. 60).

When women of color proclaim we have a new paradigm called Reproductive Justice for powering our movement, we recognize that we oppose what some perceive as dualistic logic with our complexity, reflexivity, and resistance. The ambiguities embedded in the RJ paradigm threaten order, threaten certainty, threaten control, and threaten power in very fundamental ways by disrupting the normative gender and racial categories of hegemonic reproductive structures. Through our diligent activist and intellectual work challenging reproductive oppression, we invite destabilization and ambiguity. We are not simply trying to find a space in which our voices, knowledges, and activism can be articulated, but to transform the context, the universe in which our voices are mediated. We question the concept of mediation itself, not simply who is in charge of such mediation. We do not need to eradicate difference to feel solidarity. We do not need to share a common oppression to fight equally to end all oppressions (Lorde, 2005). Audre Lorde affirms, "It is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences and to examine the distortions that result from our misnaming them and their effects upon human behavior and expectation" (Lorde, 2005, p. 50). Reproductive Justice pedagogy anticipates differences with joy because the tremendous potential of the unified human spirit may be liberated in the service of dignity and justice.

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CHAPTER 10

Close/Bye: Staging [State] Intimacy and Betrayal in 'Performance of Literature'

Stephanie Leigh Batiste

My Performance of Literature course puts Black feminist concepts into play in teaching toward transformation. In this course students analyze literature and adapt it to the stage in an original play. The course animates many of the interlocking priorities of Black feminist pedagogies: an ethics of care, collectivity and collaboration, community-building, individual contribution, protest against state incursion, attention to gender, womanist concern with gender equality, and insistence on Black, queer, women, men, and children's freedom. Hip hop concerns for urban experience and youth freedom also came into play in my Spring 2015 class *Performance of Literature:Black California*.

Describing myself as a Black feminist is like describing what it feels like to the insides of my capillaries to have blood coursing through them. Impossible. Forgone. So thorough as to be imperceptible. Black feminism is "when and where I enter" as well as how. It has become my way of knowing, thinking, and doing, an epistemology for performing self and approaching community. Since mainstream U.S. feminisms have historically tended to exclude Black women and Women-of-Color, Patricia Hill

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Collins (2000) and many others understand Black feminism as a diasporic reparative framework that already takes into account women's ability, value, and equality. With this assumption in place Black feminism seeks to shape families, society, and policy to reflect this equality. To honor the women, from my own Black mothers to artists and scholars, leaders and ancestors, who have stood unmoved, have written, have fought, bled, and fallen to protect my personhood and forge my legal equality, I never capitulate to apology for being a Black woman, and very rarely to explanation. We know and insist that Black people exist and deserve to live freely with dignity and in health without committing or suffering violence. Per Black feminist emphasis on collectivity, we fight to achieve equal access and equal protection for communities in which Black women take part locally and globally against the retrograde structures that govern and exclude and destroy. Black feminism helps shape my stubborn insistence on making the world more just and more kind, especially to those who have been ignored and cast out. I choose to stand up for what is right and fair and to teach others with beauty, care, and the force of creativity. Teaching is one way I share the possibility of creative engagement for social transformation and encourage students to do the same. Perhaps I have inherited June Jordan's "Attitude," a feminist concern for humanitarian justice explored in Scene 6 of our original play.

The topic for each class is drawn from my research interests in Black performance history and theory as they change over time. For any iteration of the course, I shape the performance and give students freedom in filling in the outlines. Course readings develop a common critical project. Structured assignments guide students in adapting and devising an original play from the literary materials. Students rewrite and edit, choose images and sounds, and stage the work to devise a complete theatrical production. In cooperation with students, I direct and block the piece. Each choice becomes a critical assessment. Each decision demands that students figure out how to animate themes and meanings with their bodies, props, and the limited space of the theatrical stage. Students more keenly grasp race, history, and expression by theorizing them through embodied and aesthetic choices. In teaching this course I've led students through staging canonical Black texts including Jean Toomer's *Cane*. In collaboration with professor and artist Osun Joni L. Jones, we used Chamber Theater and the Theatrical Jazz Aesthetic to adapt Gwendolyn Brooks' mid-century novel *Maud Martha*. Drawing from my contemporaneous research on Black performances and histories of violence in

California, I turned the Spring 2015 course toward a broad study of literature by and about Black Californians. This chapter details the process and the activist product of developing the show *Close/Bye* (2015).

Close/Bye explored themes of intimacy and betrayal as they inflect interpersonal, spatial, and state relationships for Blacks. In addressing these themes, the group felt moved to confront the racism inherent in the very public annihilating state violence recently captured by the media. In protest to these atrocities and in the spirit of activist critique and resistance enacted by Americans across the nation, our show honored Black creative engagement with issues of loving and belonging to a state that betrays and punishes. *Close/Bye* contemplates intimacy and release, presence and transition, in a manner inspired by ritual practices of Black theater and shifting performances of race, protest, and power. The concept of "closeness" dramatizes a desire for recognition, love, and justice between people and between the nation and its citizens; "bye," its violation. Our readings addressed Black migration, group and individual experience, and urban life. These helped students to contextualize and critique state-sanctioned murders of Black citizens that contemporaneously plagued our society in 2014 and 2015. The show combined original poetry and adaptations of diverse literary material. The texture of the students' production enacted care for the issues at hand, for the victims of state violence, and for the health and dysfunction of justice.

Pedagogy and Performance of Literature

I would like my students to be more knowledgeable, more aware, more sensitive, more capable, and more humane in anything that they do. My goal is to help students perceive the sensual and critical joy in the elation and tragedy that suffuse Black creative expressions—expressions that often self-critically engage possibilities of social justice and the very nature of humanity. Studying Black cultural production proves difficult to many students in its capacity inevitably and consistently to lay bare vicious racism and failures of U.S. ideology in ways this generation of young people has barely conceived. Yet, the texts not only reveal histories of racism, but also model how students might confront it creatively.

My performance pedagogy combines "rigor" with "play" to challenge students and emphasize the pleasure of learning. "Performance and/as Pedagogy" puts learning goals in "play" on the stage for an audience

rather than in a closed interaction with an exam or term paper. E. Patrick Johnson (2003) excavates the relationships between literature, Blackness as textual trace and identity, and performance epistemology/pedagogy in critical classes that ask students to perform live. "Performance as epistemology" combines the "sensual and somatic nature" of culture with text in learning about history and race (pp. 219, 229). The "interanimation of texts—literature, culture, lived experience, bodies" (p. 229) allows students to implicate themselves in the material and their environment. This critical approach to feeling through the intertextualities and intersectionalities of the material and of identity demands that students acknowledge their relationship to the texts and to history. This process inculcates an intimate relationship to diversity through a sensitivity and responsibility to knowledge and to others through movement, sense, and experience. They begin to tread carefully through expressions and experiences that are different from their own, however familiar or strange.

To provide a foundation for apprehending social change, class activities strive toward a feminist gathering of the students into a community with the power to make choices. Paul Carter Harrison (2002) identifies performance in an Africanist aesthetic with the ritual capacity to bless and transform the social sphere. Developing performance offers a critical sociality to intellectual production and to the classroom. This new way of being social and of thinking together toward a goal becomes a conduit for students to choose how to make an impact. Students have to debate and agree, make concessions to their own vision, and respect others' contributions. *Liveness* becomes a collaborative territory through which students as creators, presenters, and audience members engage each other across interpretation and response. The process connects critical analysis to social vision and creative contribution toward broader social change.

Brenda Dixon Gottschild (1996) describes Africanist performance as demonstrating "mood, attitude, or movement breaks that omit the transitions and connective links valued in the European academic aesthetic" (p. 14). Likewise, my performance scholarship and practice channel the rhythms of poetry and perform critical association on the page and stage. Africanist aesthetics display associative assemblage, resistance to linearity, and a multivoiced nature. I encourage such Africanist poetics and associative links poetry, performance, and scholarship in student performance as well. Africanist creativity becomes an approach to knowledge-making. As

such, student performance is Africanist *and*, in bearing these same characteristics, also post-modern. This kind of abstraction and fragmentation in our praxis helps students understand the complicated nature of identity. Layering music, art, and photography excites students with the sights, sounds, and rhythms of Black performance that come together anew in their association with literature.

Performance of Literature focuses on notions of *racial* performance through performance of textual content and meaning. Thus, students both analyze Blackness and produce Blackness as performance. And because we must perform Blackness, activist anti-racism becomes a necessary process and result of our work. Our anti-racism requires us to understand the constructed nature of race and its performative characteristics. We think through the ways the public has been trained to identify and view Blackness as shaped by history. We study the ways that Black performance inveighs both identity and craft. We necessarily confront the notion that race is performative, that is, race is both made and makes things happen. This idea constitutes a theoretical intervention in notions of race and being. Elam and Krasner (2001) elaborate Adrienne Kennedy's notion that "race, racism, is a device," a truism declared by an African intellectual in her play *Les Blancs* (p. 5). Understanding that like theater where devices transform illusion into reality, race and racism, too, are "devices" that have very real consequences for experience. As such, in order to *play*, all students are called upon to confront their conceptions of race and Blackness, of the very ways that race operates and makes meaning, toward an achievement and display of anti-racism in performance. We consider the ways in which Blackness performs itself and acts as a provocation outside of the intention of individuals and sometimes without our presence or knowledge. We then consider how Black performers manipulate and take advantage of these conditions. Students toy with the concept of achieving racial justice in part through shifting the terms of knowledge about the very character of race and how it works.

Most students in my classes have been non-performers. They never believe it possible to make a new show in ten weeks. Yet, they do it every time. To help, I give students very clear permission to fail as performers. Permission to make mistakes and play the fool gives them the safety and confidence to take risks. By ensuring that it will be ok if the end-product is bad, even very bad, students become non-judgmental, focus on process, and forgive themselves and each other as we learn.

Class Work and Preparing the Show

My interdisciplinary syllabus asked students to read short stories, poetry, broadsides, autobiographical essays, and excerpts from novels. These were complemented by (1) theory in Black performance and identity and (2) historical and sociological essays on Black experience in California and the development and decline of Black neighborhoods. Students conducted further research by identifying themes and provocations in one literary item and pursuing those ideas to additional secondary sources. Doing research encouraged informed, intelligent questions about meaning and its consequences. Students also completed a close reading of a literary source that spoke to them, then began to imagine the piece on its feet as scene and dialogue. Each student brought in an assignment called "My Vision, My Gifts" in which s/he envisioned how the show might shape and what special abilities and talents they would offer to group work. Together, we brainstormed themes and concepts that stood out across the materials we studied. I grouped these ideas and discovered that in considerations of love and justice, sincerity and satire, the students had cathected to concepts of intimacy and betrayal. Group discussion of themes and action determined the script.

The students adapted pieces that insightfully reflected Black interiority and social conflict. Six of seven pieces were by women: *LA Love Cry* by Wanda Coleman, *New black math* by Suzan Lori Parks, *Speech Sounds* by Octavia Butler, *If He Hollers Let Him Go* by Chester Himes, *Brown Glass Windows* by devorah major, *I Am Seeking an Attitude* by June Jordan, and *California Lessons* by Lucille Clifton. We were unable to include some authors key in driving us toward our themes, particularly Jervey Tervalon's "A Pootbutts' Scary Life in Outer Space L.A." (Nanda, 2011, pp. 311–313) and Dana Johnson's collection of short stories *Break Any Woman Down* (2001). Students did not directly adapt any of the secondary material. Using *only* words from published materials, the students crafted scenes of between two and seven minutes to allow for a 50-minute show. Students' staging channeled myriad points of interest from lectures including the precariousness of performances of Blackness, Black experiences of racialized violence as psychological weight and madness, the freedom of creativity, and the insistence of Black cultural forms on their own specificity and integrity. The pieces were arranged to highlight the development of the themes and also to vary the tone, energy, and sound of the scenes.

I led the students in drama exercises that focused on play, intention, and conflict. Diverse professional guests elaborated these exercises in three brilliant master classes, workshops in which the artist, or "master" of an art, guides participants through exercises foundational to their practice. Such classes train artists in new modes. Experienced actors, all also writers and directors, taught ours.

Master classes by Roger Guenveur Smith, Michael Morgan, and Adelina Anthony were open to the public.[1] Thus, even as the students were developing trust within the class, these events allowed the group to be porous and inclusive. The students began to perform for themselves, but also to anticipate an audience. The distinguished guests taught students the power of staging Black history, of theater as a mode of social action and vehicle for human empathy, and of performance as a dynamic means of dramatizing story through the body. We incorporated key lessons from each into the show.

Roger Guenveur Smith taught students that theater and performance help distant histories feel immediate. Watching Smith transform before their eyes in his lecture "Performing Black California Icons" impressed upon students the transporting power of theater. Smith dramatized history. Having watched Smith's *A Huey Newton P. Newton Story* (2002), students knew his work through this intense, chain-smoking characterization of a Black power icon. Smith performed bits of his show *Rodney King*, about the survivor of police violence whose trial spurred the 1992 LA Rebellion, and his new work in progress in which he resurrects a diasporic Black worker and Theodore Roosevelt during the nineteenth-century building of the Panama Canal. They witnessed sharp, subtle shifts in emotion, voice, and physical tension. Smith's shape-shifting virtuosity that played them like so many chords of a violin made the students very emotional, with responses ranging from defensiveness to despair. They began to grasp how to use historical information as theater rather than evidence. Students achieved a sensibility of performances of Blackness and the performativity of race in complex, deeply personal ways through theater. This helped them figure out that they too could strive for both critical and emotional power.

Professor Michael Morgan, a voice specialist and director in the University of South California Beaufort Department of Theater and Dance, helped students develop protest poetry that became the spine of the show. They also learned that using one's body and voice in the theater requires internal self-trust rather than external effort. Morgan's master class was called "The Monster Writes." He adapted a process from his

prison outreach program called *The Odyssey Project* where each summer he brings youth from a local juvenile detention facility to campus to adapt and perform Homer's epic poem from 800 B.C. In the workshop, the students participated in relaxation, stretching, and breathing exercises that accessed the autonomic nervous system in freeing breath and sounds. Morgan directed this energy into a writing assignment in which students imagined the position of Homer's monster, Cyclops. Morgan revealed that though typically hated and demonized as evil, the monster sustains injustice in his victimization to Odysseus and his soldiers' violent invasion of his home. The Cyclops was not the aggressor. He is rendered a monster by virtue of the aggressors' purported "fear." Placed against our readings and current events, our Cyclops was clearly Black. Students were asked to identify with the Cyclops and write, in elevated language, a poem, song, or speech about a time they or someone they know felt excluded and misunderstood. They bravely volunteered to take turns reciting their new work using breathing techniques we had practiced. I took part as well, allowing our engagements with performance to weaken hierarchy between professor and student. Through this experience, important sensibilities of empathy and equality took shape as content and form. Students began to take risks and to think both through and outside of themselves. These priorities are the same ones I was asking them to bring to their performance.

Queer Chicana feminist Adelina Anthony's master class, "Beats, Body, & Breath," emphasized intention and action as creating meaning and relationships in drama. Her exercises demonstrated the relationship between intention, the body, and enactment. Anthony asked students to practice interrelation and intention by choosing and playing verbs without speaking. Students brainstormed action words and played oppositional intentions in silent mini-dramas on stage. In a practice of discovering embodied emotion and action, Anthony paired participants in an exercise in which one was a sculptor and another the clay. Students asked permission to mold the other's body. They invented poses from the emotional texture of our readings. The group inspected the museum of live stills. The sculptures were then invited to come alive with a gesture and a sound inspired by the pose. We used such poses in the show to represent characters as graffiti. The interaction was hands-on, interactive, responsive, and creative. There was something about the lack of pressure in being seen in a pose crafted by another that helped these non-performers to shed self-consciousness. This particular exercise helped them to become performers whose work was to express something specific. They could let go of themselves to commit to the work. My hope is that performance such as this

models for them an embodied commitment to activism as work that uses but is not necessarily about them.

In class we reprised "The Monster Writes" experience. I assigned students the name of one Black citizen who had been subjected to the race-based, state violence we had recently seen so readily repeated on the news. They took ten minutes to complete research using their internet-ready devices. Some of the people we researched were particularly iconic helping signal those to whom we were unable to pay tribute. The students honored the shadow of the Cyclops in poetic offerings that linked their own sense of personhood and care to victims' experiences. In the way that Black womanism calls the individual to stand up for others, students wrote new pieces that more fully shifted our focus from the self to another. In their invariable tenderness, each tribute underscored the sensibilities *Close/Bye* sought to explore.

The Play *Close/Bye*

I created an aesthetic through-line, representative activities, and a prologue. We began with a two-minute "Die-In" that projected a 4:30 minute timer ticking down the hours Michael Brown lay in the streets of Ferguson, Missouri. Time accelerates. The scene gave the appearance of slaughter as bodies lay still in a cluster fanning out from center stage. A trickster outlined resting bodies in chalk. I crafted the show to manipulate markers of death in the streets and change their meanings. I used different kinds of physical outlines calling up the chalk outlines drawn around corpses, police tape, shrouds, still bodies, photographic images, and sounds of breathing extended, and cut short. Students stood in front of and laid upon outlines, reviving from still poses as graffiti or the dead. The movements drew upon the students' workshop in which they dramatized a scene with a single gesture from a still pose. The interplay between motion and stillness called up notions of time—time running out or down, time standing still, clocks turning. Protest images lingered through the poetic tributes. In this way, we put our own presence in continuing conversation with the past in protest of the persistence of violence in the present. Audible breaths by the group puncutated shifts in time and feeling in this short scene.

Other images for the show included views of California cities, abstract and iconic land, ocean, and cityscapes, photographs from Black neighborhoods and experiences. Many of these represented geographies of the stories' and poems' settings—such as an alternately blighted, everyday, and romanticized Los Angeles. The images supported the transformation and abandonment of Black urban areas and showed the contrast between idyllic possibility and systemic violence against the people.

The scenes of the play communicated different theoretical and activist claims. Wanda Coleman's spoken word poem *L.A. Love Cry* casts the relationship between herself and the city as a bad sexual relationship. The title *Close/Bye* received its most immediate interpretation in this early scene with lovers being scorned by the city and the system. The conflicts between the seductive city and her enraged masochistic lovers brought both submission and trouble analogizing a relationship to the political structure.

An old woman who stares at the waves and sprinting graffiti artist from devorah major's *Brown Glass Windows* inspired the outlines that our players colored-in upstage center (Nanda, 2011). The graffiti set-up on stage doubled as an alter manifesting an Africanist call for theater to act as the limen, the protected transitional conduit, between the divine and social virtue (Harrison, 2002). Water for the paintbrushes acted as libations. The figures represented youth and energy, madness, history, and haunting. The old woman steps in front of a police officer to rescue the painting boy from arrest in a disruption of state control. The tension between images of life, death, and spirit; the power of the water and of running; and the play of visibility in major's representations of white, brown, light, and dark captured our imagination of possibility and its abortion. The students' adaptation strove to represent the feelings of escape and freedom breathing through this story.

The dreaming scene from Chester Himes' 1945 novel *If He Hollers Let Him Go* focused on its protagonist's brief near wakings and clock-like turnings of his body. "Then I turned over and dreamed on my other side … Then I turned over and dreamed on my back" (Nanda, 2011, pp. 62, 63). We discussed these small, seemingly inconsequential movements as tremendous shifts in the protagonist's burdened psyche. The excerpt emphasizes the psychological impact of the exclusion and circumscription faced by Black men. The protagonist confesses, "for a moment I felt torn all lose inside, shriveled, paralyzed as if after a while I'd have to get up and die" (Nanda, 2011, p. 63). The students adapted these turns as a clock, the body as keeping time. It ticked ominously and expectantly in the scene's soundscape during the projection of images that constituted the stage sleepers' collective nightmare. Himes' character's tragic observation that "I got so the only place I felt safe was in bed asleep" is undermined by the complex images of these dreams (Nanda, 2011, p. 65). The Dream sequences projected the public nightmares of victims of state violence, Rodney King, Tyisha Miller, and Michael Brown. The image essay of Rodney King included a slide of Roger Guenveur Smith playing him on stage. Thus, the students placed their show in a genealogy of performative

re-interpretations of the past. They understood the historical event and creative responses to it as influencing discourses of violence and justice. The ticking and turning gave us a pathological haunting of history as, in different eras, the violence returned. The character's psychological disintegration and mounting paranoia becomes rooted in the fact of historical terror. In the scene, this struggle ultimately served to instigate a new history, to free the subject from the psychological burdens of the past, and revise the future of our memories.

Scenes staging Suzan Lori Park's *New black math* (2005) and Octavia Butler's *Speech Sounds* (1995) used hip hop and jazz to interpret Black thought and Black urban experience as declarations and critiques of freedom. *New black math* was a staged as a free-style rap show in the style of an all female hip hop group on campus. The rhythmic bridge insisted "A black play does not exist./Every play is a black play," contemplating the constructedness of identity and the power of Black creativity (Parks, 2005, p. 577). Inspired by Parks, they produced a beautiful Black play that was also irreverent in its social analysis. For Octavia Butler in *Speech Sounds* alliances and the realization of freedom are more easily achieved with communication than violence. Otherwise people become forced to craft battle strategies as a life-saving measure, rather than mutual engagement toward understanding. *Speech Sounds* was adapted as a dance piece with traffic noise that bled into African-style drumming, a beating heart, and music by John Coltrane. The soundscape was punctuated with the violent blaring of a bus horn. The blaring arrived as a disruption of the beauty of Black life rising in the other sounds.

As the penultimate scene, I choreographed a protest that communicated the resilience and fortitude of organized resistance. I transformed images of death into celebrations of life and vigorous resistance. Two young women's "Monster Writes" poems denounced gendered invisibility and heteronormativity. We curated these in a call and response chorus with Black poet activist June Jordan's 1993 essay "I'm Seeking an Attitude," about her developing feminist politics (Nanda, 2011). Jordan asks why she has considered herself primarily an advocate for race in the face of egregious exclusion, regulation, and destruction of women, girls, and the poor that seemed barely visible and not actionable by the state. Jordan placed the logic and moral righteousness supporting anti-racist protest in service of women articulating a Black feminist activism that imagines the freedom of all people.

To grow the crowd the students formed a pyramid that grew to a point downstage embodying blocking from the tribute poems as an aggregate,

rather than as individual experience. Together, the group disrupted the isolation of the recitations and the solitude of each victim's death. Image work projected marches, group protests, and Black Lives Matter[2] events from 2014 to 2015. The last of these was a photo of a massive group of protesters with their hands raised in the "hands up, don't shoot" protest pose from Ferguson, Missouri in 2015 that the performers assumed in solidarity with the movement.

The final scene gestured toward the future with quiet provocative resolution in Black feminist poet Lucille Clifton's contemplative "California Lessons" (1987). Clifton's understated enigmatic lines decry Native American genocide, the lynching of Black citizens, and U.S. imperial expansion as manifestations of violent racism (Nanda, 2011). Clifton offers "a wheel … and it is turning" that threatens the world with U.S. frontierism and, in contrast, also portends a U.S. reckoning with its destructive imperial policies (p. 211). This "wheel" picked up the leitmotif of time that we played throughout the show. Students offered short lines and single words of the poem as a student played "America the Beautiful" on his trumpet. This live music called forth the morning and the evening of change unseen, sounding the ironies of national inclusion and betrayal. Somehow neither heavy handed nor maudlin, it was calming, resolute. Interspersed with Clifton, a fragmented chorus declared the names of the slain honored in students' tributes:

I am Rekia Boyd./I am Eric Garner./I am Tamir Rice.
I am Freddie Gray./I am Amadou Dialo./I am Oscar Grant.
I am LaTasha Harlins./I am Miriam Carey./I am Trayvon Martin.
I am Renisha McBride./I am Michael Brown.

Until…

ALL: I am … (*Silence. Audible Breath In.*)…

Clifton gave us:

Student: 5 metaphysics
Student: question: what is karma?
Student: answer:
ALL: there is a wheel
and it is turning … (Nanda, 2011, p. 210)

Students then lifted the white sheet our trickster had decorated with chalk outlines in Scene 1. Rather than displaying outlines of the dead, the sheet showed energetic graffiti silhouettes of youth with arms raised in the clenched fist of Black power. The ensemble closed the show in an

"*audible exhale.*" *Curtain*

The student interpretation, show finale, and my own teaching goals expired together in the play's final breath with readiness to achieve a transformed future. The audience was invited to breathe with us. Our closing offered meditative breathing as a preparation for action and insistence on Black beauty, life, and activism. We breathe together to place our creative selves on the brink of further action. We breathe together the possibility of human efficacy toward individual and social transformation as Lucille Clifton's wheel turns us toward social and epistemological change.

Notes

1. These guests constituted a lecture series called "Social Justice and Performance." The student performance was the final offering in the series.
2. Black Lives Matter is a political, social, and media activist organization developed in response to police killings of Black citizens. See blacklivesmatter.com

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CHAPTER 11

The Quality of the Light: Evidence, Truths, and the Odd Practice of the Poet-Sociologist

Eve L. Ewing

horror movie pitch

okay you guys are gonna love it. get this

all the black women turn invisible,
all of them

just overnight. America goes to sleep and they're there
and they wake up and they're not

the scary part?   stick with me
they're not gone. YOU JUST CAN'T SEE EM
        think about it
        they can see each other
        but you can't see them
        and they could be anywhere

the girl you passed up for the promotion
she could be in your car
ready to yank your head back by your hair
right when you're at a busy intersection

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the woman you grabbed on the subway escalator
she could be in your living room
looking through your tax returns

the group of friends you whistled at
might take turns whistling back at you from hidden places
shrill, and off-key, until you go mad

the one you prodded and whispered about
she might be lurking in the men's room
with a sharp letter opener and a roll of duct tape

the girl you lied on again and again
might be on the back porch where you smoke
and she's dousing your cigarettes in lighter fluid

all the ones whose hair you touched
all the ones whose names you mocked
all the ones whose pay you cut
the ones whose houses
the ones whose jobs
the ones whose babies
the ones who
the ones who
the ones

they could be anywhere with knives
or guns or poison or machetes or
things they have to say to you about you
and you have to listen

i mean let's be real maybe they would just leave
go somewhere warm and secret, string up Christmas lights,
raise goats and chickens, grow zucchini and fire up the grill,
make every night for cards and barbecue, let their hair grow
or cut it all off, let themselves get fat
or skinny, talk about things
that are not you

but then again
maybe they would do everything you did to them
do it more
and faster
and harder
with all the <u>mean</u> they learned from you.

the witless cruelty
the smirking dismissals
the rope across your wrist
all the twisted words and lucky punches

and you wouldn't even see them coming

(Ewing, E.L., 2017)

As a poet, I often explore themes that echo those I focus on in my research—race, identity, and power. A poem like this one, "horror movie pitch," allows me to venture into a discussion about intersectionality and [in]visibility through a somewhat more irreverent, open-ended, and accessible lens than, say, an essay might. To me, this moving between forms to best serve the ideas one wishes to convey makes sense, much in the same way we as researchers move across theoretical frameworks and methodological tools in order to best address a line of inquiry. But the question that repeatedly arises in interviews, in personal conversations, in emails from writers and graduate students looking for advice generally goes something like this: "You're a poet, and a sociologist. How do you do both at the same time?" I invariably struggle with a response as my mind is ringing—not with answers, but with several countervailing questions. I never fully understand what is meant. Are they asking how, logistically, I manage the time demands of my work? Or is it an epistemological question—are they asking how I negotiate competing systems of knowledge in my head, the poet's knowledge and the sociologist's knowledge? Is it an ontological question? That is, are they asking how one can be simultaneously a poet and a social scientist? And if so, is this a variant of a question they pose of all people who occupy two positions at once ("So, you're a dental hygienist and the president of the parent-teacher association at your child's school … how do you do that?") or is there something in particular about the coupling of poetry and social science that is so counterintuitive or distasteful that it begs for special comment? It seems impolite to ask any of this out loud, so I just do my best to answer the question. I often think, though, about a boyfriend of many years ago who reacted to my interest in my graduate statistics courses by saying, with dramatic disdain, "I fell in love with a poet, not a *researcher*" (needless to say, he is no longer present to witness my progress in either of these career paths). And on the other end of the spectrum are those sociologists who, as James D. Miley put it, "regard [an] interest in poetry as an illness from which they hope I will soon recover" (1988).

As a qualitative sociologist, one of the methods I use in my work is critical discourse analysis—the process of carefully examining language practices to understand what people are doing in social spaces when they use certain words, phrases, or verbal cues. So I wonder what these folks really mean when they say *poet*, anyway. What is a poet, and what is poetry that it should be presumed so antithetical to the work of the social scientist? I am reminded of a passage from the seminal Audre Lorde essay "Poetry is Not a Luxury":

> When we view living in the european mode only as a problem to be solved, we rely solely upon our ideas to make us free, for these were what the white fathers told us were precious. But as we come more into touch with our own ancient, non-european consciousness of living as a situation to be experienced and interacted with, we learn more and more to cherish our feelings, and to respect those hidden sources of our power from where true knowledge and, therefore, lasting action comes. At this point in time, I believe that women carry within ourselves the possibility for fusion of these two approaches so necessary for survival, and we come closest to this combination in our poetry. I speak here of poetry as a revelatory distillation of experience, not the sterile word play that, too often, the white fathers distorted the word *poetry* to mean—in order to cover a desperate wish for imagination without insight. For women, then, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action. Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought. (2012, p. 37)

If we understand "poetry," as Lorde puts forth here, as (1) a tacit recognition of the fact that worthwhile knowledge can be derived from one's own experiences, including affective experiences, as opposed to only from "objective" problem-based analysis, (2) a manifestation of women's (especially Black women's) pragmatic strategies for navigating a patriarchal world while simultaneously valuing our own inner lives, and (3) not a luxury reserved for a privileged few, but rather "a vital necessity of our existence," through which we imagine ulterior lives of liberation, then perhaps the juxtaposition of poetry and social science—in a course, in a piece of writing, or embodied in an individual—might seem much more natural. After all, the task of the social scientist is to ask critical questions about the reality that surrounds us—our strange behaviors, our attach-

ments, the institutions we construct, and the inequalities and injustices that lie therein, the trappings of what we call "culture," and all the idiosyncrasies that make up human life in society.

Lorde's formulation enables us to think about the task of the poet as thinking through, alongside, and ultimately above and beyond the happenstance of life as we know it; poetry unites, as she describes it, the tripartite entities of language, idea, and action. As the social scientist asks *what is*, the poet asks *what may be*; as the social scientist tells what people *do*, the poet tells what people *are*. Indeed, Lorde's characterization of poetry as a tool to "give name to the nameless so it can be thought" suggests a useful third party to the dialectical paradigm of empirics and theory: imagination. Where the social scientist uses empirics to gather a descriptive understanding of the social world, and uses theory to render these observations into more broadly applicable, abstract connecting threads among social phenomena, the poet uses imagination to extend the social world from the realm of the observable into the realm of the possible. Consider, for instance, this excerpt from the poem "Field Trip to the Museum of Human History," by Franny Choi (Segal, 2015):

> Dry-mouthed, we came upon a contraption
> of chain and bolt, an ancient torture instrument
>
> the guide called "handcuffs." We stared
> at the diagrams and almost felt the cold metal
>
> licking our wrists, almost tasted dirt,
> almost heard the siren and slammed door,
>
> the cold-blooded click of the cocked-back pistol,
> and our palms were slick with some old recognition,
>
> as if in some forgotten dream we did live this way,
> in submission, in fear, assuming positions
>
> of power were earned, or at least carved in steel,
> that they couldn't be torn down like musty curtains,
>
> an old house cleared of its dust and obsolete artifacts.

In the world of Choi's poem, police abolition is not a thorny theoretical issue or an impossible dream; it is historical fact. Choi's poem allows us the space to sit alongside a speaker for whom a world of violent policing is as

difficult to envision as a world without it is for our contemporaries. Within the universe of the poem, what once felt merely possible is rendered concrete, to be touched and tasted.

I have spent the majority of my life in performance poetry spaces and have dedicated the last several years to curating spaces where young people can share poetry in community, and through these experiences I have come to understand poetry as one of the most powerful tools human beings have for cultivating empathy and a sense of the subjectivity of others. I believe that such empathy can build the foundation for a full and loving care, and such care is, in turn, the difference between teachers who are nurturing and teachers who are harmful, between researchers who are community partners and researchers who are well-meaning but exploitative and parasitic, between policy-makers who center the lives of those they presume to serve and policy-makers who conveniently forget the humanity of those who dwell on the other side of a spreadsheet. Further, inherent in a poem is a comfort with paradox and subtlety, with nuance and even the moments of apparent self-contradiction or uncertainty that characterize all human life. Reading history, statistics, and theories could help my students accumulate *knowledge*; reading poetry helps them bolster this knowledge with *understanding*.

As Lorde suggests, our foremothers have established a long tradition of intuiting the role of poetry in the relational work of our everyday lives. When I was a child, my mother used call-and-response verse of her own invention to move my brother and me through the daily rhythms of childhood. Calling us out of bed, she would chant: *Good morning! Good morning? How are you this morning?* (To which one was to reply, “I’m fine, I’m fine, I’m very fine this morning!” whether or not one was actually fine.) African American culture is full of aphorisms, in effect short orally transmitted verses that share critical truisms for survival and success using poetic features such as alliteration (“hit dogs holler”), parallel structure (“don’t start none, won’t be none”), and rhyme (“all my skinfolk ain’t my kinfolk”). Akiwowo (1986) has suggested that the Yoruba oral poetry *Ayajo Asuwada* illustrates the principles of a foundational sociological worldview (e.g. the necessity of community and the dangers of social alienation, the nature of a good society) through several verses. Akiwowo describes these principles and this poetic practice as comprising “a vision of the future” (p. 345).

Proceeding from this idea of poetry as the realm of the possible, in the remainder of this chapter I will illustrate the reciprocal links between my

dual roles as poet and social scientist and how this duality works reciprocally and cohesively in my scholarship, my classroom teaching, and my own practice as a poet. Specifically, in the following pages I briefly discuss three ways in which poetry is nestled within my scholarly work: using poetry in the classroom, using poetry as a form of argumentative evidence, and my own practice as a working poet.

Poetry in the Classroom

At the Harvard Graduate School of Education, I designed and taught a course called "Racism and Educational Inequality in the Lives of African-American Youth" (I am not one for brevity). As laid out in the catalog description, the course was designed to "draw on sociological lenses to provide a theoretical, historical, and empirical overview of issues affecting the education of Black youth in America." Students explored sociological frameworks for understanding race, racism, and anti-blackness, discussed contemporary educational policy and instructional practices, and read a great deal about the manifestations of educational inequality. Much of the reading was fairly standard for a course on this topic: Frederick Douglass, Gloria Ladson-Billings, the Moynihan Report, and lots of empirical reading on implicit bias, discrimination, and the disproportionate suspension and expulsion of Black youth. Like many other professors of my generation, I also reached into other media forms to convey key content. We watched documentaries, listened to a podcast, had a remote guest speaker through video-conferencing and a panel of visitors, and I made all the students watch the music video for the song "Never Catch Me" by Flying Lotus featuring Kendrick Lamar in tandem with a bell hooks reading as part of a conversation about Black death and resilience.

And, we read poems. We read poems because in a course focusing on the lives of young people who have been silenced, marginalized, erased, and discriminated against, people who have been the targets of some of the most heinous violence the American educational system can concoct, I did not want students to walk away framing Black children only as two-dimensional objects of suffering and despair. We read two poems: "when the officer caught me" by Nate Marshall, and "This, Here" by Kush Thompson. Thompson's poem came as part of a conversation on intersectionality and the ways in which the lives and experiences of Black girls are so handily made invisible in much of the national discourse around education crises. Thompson (2015), who herself identifies as a womanist, offers

a delicate, evocative telling of her own narrative of Black girlhood on Chicago's West Side:

> This, where your heart is not yet
> a restless telephone wire shackled to the ankle
> of every one you have ever loved after sunset.
> This, where the news stations tell you everything you know about
> what lives across your street, outside of your living room window,
> at the end of your driveway.
> This, deliberate. This, abrupt.
> This, sloppy stitching.

In that week's reading response assignment, a white male student—a former computer science teacher, working toward his master's degree—wrote of the connections he saw between the poem and another assigned reading, *Despite the Best Intentions* by Amanda Lewis and John Diamond. The student begins by quoting Lewis and Diamond's argument that the "social order works to reproduce racist schema and racial inequality through the mundane activities of everyday life" (2015, p. 5). He goes on to discuss the poem:

> When connecting those two lines from her poem to [the reading from *Despite the Best Intentions*] there is a picture being painted about the clear boundaries that are in place between blacks and whites in essentially all aspects of society, and that did not just happen by chance .... The "sloppy stitching" that makes it so easy to see, the clear disparities at the "integrated" Riverview High School where inside the classrooms it was segregated, and when comparing the income levels of black and white students the black students came from families that made half as much money.

While the student arguably took away an important conceptual point from his reading of the Lewis and Diamond text—the fact that racism is structural in nature and reproduces itself through the *habitus* of ordinary people—the juxtaposition of the sociology text and the poem enabled him to employ a powerful metaphor for better understanding and discussing structural racism. As he points out, "sloppy stitching" is an apt way to describe the machinations of segregation in housing and schools: there are threads that bind the whole system together, but once you see them, they are hard to unsee. Metaphors like this have tremendous utility not only in

helping students understand social science concepts, but also in communicating them; perhaps the student will find "sloppy stitching" to be a useful tool in sharing his learning about segregation with others when he returns to his work as an educator.

Poetry as Evidence

In *When the Bell Stops Ringing* (Ewing, 2018), my book about structural racism and public school closures in Chicago, I bolster my sociological arguments with evidence from a variety of disciplines, including history, psychology, and philosophy. I also include poems in every chapter. I find that the poems serve multiple evidentiary purposes: they offer a different sort of first-person account of the social forces discussed in the book, and they provide useful metaphors for reader understanding much in the same way as Thompson's poem provided a metaphor for student understanding.

For instance, in a chapter on institutional mourning, the social and emotional processes undergone by individuals and communities facing the loss of a shared institution, I include an excerpt from a poem performed by four Black youth during the Louder Than A Bomb youth poetry slam festival. In the poem, they talk about their frustration and anger toward Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel for overseeing the destruction of public schools and public housing.

> Mister Wreck-It Rahm/look at what Chicago's becoming
> Bending the rules to fit a lie of building a new Chicago
> Building new streets when your own plan got some potholes
> Tearing down dreams/it's getting real windy in these streets
> Where Xs mark the spot where his wrecking ball is next to drop
> We are not included in the blueprint of the new Chicago

While the other sources of evidence in the book—interviews, observations, discourse analysis, historical analysis, tables, and figures—all work in cohesion to support the rhetorical thrust behind the idea of institutional mourning, the poem provides something singular even within this milieu. It represents the conceptual framing of the authors themselves, their own way of uniting the threads of experience and evidence to make a point, and do so in a form that is succinct and memorable. In a chapter outlining the history of residential segregation in Chicago's Bronzeville community, the

argument is preceded by a quotation from the Gwendolyn Brooks poem "kitchenette building": *We are things of dry hours and the involuntary plan, Grayed in, and gray* (Brooks, 1992).

The chapter is replete with historical and quantitative evidence detailing the way public institutions doubled down on segregation over the course of the twentieth century. But foregrounding the chapter with the poem offers a guiding metaphor—the kitchenette building—that reinforces the evidence that follows. Perhaps more importantly, it signals to the reader that this too is a means of understanding; this Black woman poet's imagistic rendering of her life narrative is a worthy and necessary intervention to anyone hoping to understand the social meaning of segregation. This implicit assertion is in concert with the tenets of critical race theory (CRT), one of which is the centrality of experiential knowledge. As Yosso, Smith, Ceja, and Solórzano (2009) describe, CRT "explicitly listens to the lived experiences of People of Color through counter-storytelling methods such as family histories, parables, testimonios, *dichos* (proverbs), and chronicles." In the context of the field of education, which has seen a distressing push toward positivistic and neoliberal logics of evidence (see, for instance, Lipman, 2013), there is a continued imperative for scholars and theorists from historically marginalized groups to maintain an insistence that our ways of knowing are as legitimate, if not more so, as forms of knowledge emerging from the historically Cartesian logic of the academy, with its fidelity to a supposed objectivity which has never actually been objective so much as bound to a myopically constrained view of the universe. We must continue to embody the centrality of witnessing, of storytelling. We must uphold griot truths, always.

Poetry as Praxis

I decided to be a poet, inasmuch as one can "decide" such a thing, many years before I decided to be any kind of scholar. At the time I completed graduate school, I had already published several poems and received a contract to publish my first book of poetry, garnered a place in the social world of poetry and established connections with countless peers in the field, performed publicly in many venues, taught poetry in a variety of settings, participated in workshops and residencies, and spent a great deal of time co-organizing the Louder Than A Bomb Massachusetts Youth Poetry Slam and the Chicago Poetry Block Party. This might all be well and good for someone in a literature department, but as a social scientist, I wondered as I entered the job market what my potential new colleagues

might think if they happened upon this information. I also wondered what students would think if they encountered my poet voice (both literal and literary), which is in many ways different from my professor voice. Beginning my career as a junior scholar with an existing robust persona as a poet left me with a few possibilities. If I felt that being a poet meant people would somehow take my sociological work less seriously, I could stop writing poems, or at least stop sending them out into the world for others to see. Not only did this seem impossible, it seemed selfish. My own life was irreversibly transformed by the poets who came before me, and I regularly receive correspondence from young people who write to tell me of the impact my work has had on them.

When considering matters like this—matters of representation, perception, and what is seen as respectable—I tend to begin from a simple first principle: *this space wasn't made for you anyway*. The institution of the American university emerged with the presumption of white maleness at the core of what it considers valuable, acceptable, and worthy. In our era, as people of color, queer people, people with disabilities, and others whose very existence was unaccounted for at the dawn of the American professoriate, we continue to be seen as interlopers, to be generally ignored, tolerated, tokenized, or "the lucky ones" held up as exceptional and remarkable figures while the institutions who make us newsletter features and keynote speakers continue to systemically marginalize and exclude those who look like us and come from the communities that raised us. This persistent situation strains the boundaries of what "inclusion" actually means. I am reminded of the life of Georgiana Simpson, who in 1920 enrolled at the University of Chicago in pursuit of a bachelor's degree and moved into a women's dormitory (University of Chicago Library, 2009). Several of her white classmates protested her presence, and five of them moved out after the head of the residence hall stated definitively that Simpson ought to be able to stay. When the president of the university returned from his summer vacation and learned of the decision, he unilaterally reversed it, forcing Simpson to find housing off campus. She went on to earn master's and doctoral degrees in German philology. Simpson, like many Black woman scholars who would follow her, was—to borrow a phrasing from Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot—*at* the university, but not *of* the university (personal communication). So it is, and so, I assume until shown otherwise, shall it ever be. This first principle, dispiriting as it can be, is also perversely liberatory. If you already view yourself to be something of an oddity in the eyes of the institution, there is not much to lose by adding a proclivity for creative writing to the list of your "abnormalities."

Still, I was startled the first time I stepped up to the microphone for a reading at an art gallery in Boston and saw several students from my Education and Social Policy course looking back at me. And I was relieved that this apparent disruption of predictable social boundaries did not result in any major disaster. The students laughed at the funny parts, looked distressed at the sad parts, clapped, and left at the end, and in class had nothing to say about my love poems or my stated interest in time travel, and at that point I don't think it would have bothered me if they had. It's just as well. As much as I understand the functioning of such boundaries in the world, the fact remains that in my head all of these ideas and forms and functions tend to blur together, seeking whatever expressive space seems most useful and available in any given moment.

So it is that before I ever wrote an essay or a book about racism and urban public school closures, I wrote a poem about it. It is called "Requiem for Fifth Period and the Things That Went On Then" and it ends like this (Ewing, 2014):

> Sing, Muse, of Mrs. Marshall, who cannot answer now.
> The desk is unattended and she leans
> against the other side of the oaken door,
> the principal's side, where a sign reads "Children Are My Business"
> and a doll-like painted woman smiles broadly, surrounded by the faces of earnest people.
> She is resting against the wood as her forearms strain
> with the weight of all the papers,
> colored like oatmeal or dust, each with a label at the top.
> The first says STEVENS, JAVONTE, and below that, KAIZER
> and below that, eight numbers.
> Tell of how she collates them by classroom, then alphabetically,
> though each letter is the same, though each bears the same news.
>
> Tell, Muse, of the siren that called their joy sparse and their love vacant.
> Tell of the wind that scattered them.

In relating the reality of school closure through this narrative path, one that focuses on individual characters and draws out a single moment to be examined, to be lived and re-lived from many angles, something different is revealed about the impact of school closure—about the stakeholders whose lives are at play, about their worldview and their troubles that both precede and will exceed this policy decision, about the exogenous shock of this news. In this sense, the poem teaches.

The poet, too, teaches—in the decisions she makes, is teaching; her pedagogy is enacted in the practice of being in the world in addition to the classroom context. Frequently I receive emails from teenagers, most often Black girls, who have been assigned to read my poetry and have questions about it. These messages, adding to the already-overwhelming deluge of digital correspondence we all face daily, are tempting to ignore. But then I think of the letters of famed poet Gwendolyn Brooks. I have visited two Brooks archives, and both times have been awestruck by her commitment to correspondence—especially with children. If Brooks—Pulitzer Prize winner, Library of Congress poet, poet laureate of Illinois, beloved by countless readers—was not too busy to write back, how can I be? I think of Miss Brooks when I receive an email from a girl named Tiffany: "I chose your poem because I wanted to recite something that I could relate to; something that incorporates my culture and femininity. When I read your poem, I knew that it was the right fit for me. I am one of two African American students in the senior class, so your biography inspired me as well to embrace my culture, which is easy to forget because of where I live." And in the manner of Miss Brooks, I have come to see this kind of correspondence, as well as the teaching done and through the poem itself, as a form of praxis as well as pedagogy. Tiffany learns something about her own identity through her encounter with the poem; through her remote encounter with me she learns something about the nature of poetry and poets but also the nature of Black women—something which I, in turn, learned from Miss Brooks. Through the encounter I am also reminded of the poet and the person I want to be. Each time I receive a letter like Tiffany's, I learn and re-learn anew the lesson Miss Brooks offered in her poem "Paul Robeson" (1992): "we are each other's business: we are each other's magnitude and bond."

We hear often that boundaries—of personhood, of citizenship—are intended to protect us. But I continue to believe that it is possible to be many things at once, because I don't know any other way to be. As a poet, I love a good metaphor, and while I am grateful that Crenshaw's vital framework of intersectionality (1991) has been broadly embraced in scholarly literature and in public consciousness, too rarely do we give it its full due as a striking visual metaphor. Here we sit, Black women, in the place where two roads meet. We did not choose to be here, but this is where we are. A friend, another Black woman professor, told me recently that she had read a book in which Black women academics are advised to keep their offices as void of any personal effects and sparse as possible. No inspirational

quotations on the bulletin board. No bowls of your favorite candy. No pictures of family. Nothing of comfort. The risk, she explained, was that students visiting for office hours might mistakenly overestimate our capacity to nurture and think it our primary function. "Nothing that will make them think that we're mammy," she said. For our own survival, the logic goes, it is best for Black women to obscure as much of our own personhood as possible. But, as we know empirically, no amount of subdued expression, no level of adherence to what is considered "appropriate"[1] comportment for a scholar can ever overcome that first principle. Better, I figure, to do the absolute best scholarship I possibly can, keep myself motivated with the pictures of my loved ones and images of Gwendolyn Brooks and Margaret Burroughs in my office, eat candy, and write poems.

Notes

1. For more on why pursuing the idea of "appropriateness" is a futile exercise for people of color, see Flores & Rosa, 2015.

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CHAPTER 12

Black Queer Feminism as Praxis: Building an Organization and a Movement

Janaé E. Bonsu

Social movements rarely have just one definitive starting point, and I'm sure there are many stories of inciting moments in our current Black liberation movement; I will offer one. In 2012, a small group of young Black people working with Cathy J. Cohen at the Black Youth Project[1]—a research initiative that examined Black millennials' social and political attitudes and behaviors—developed a plan to convene young Black people from across the country and political spectrum to strategize about movement building beyond electoral politics. After a year of planning, 100 young Black activists, writers, organizers, artists, policy wonks, and tech workers came together right outside of Chicago for the "Beyond November Movement" in July of 2013. Just before the meeting was about to end for the day, one of the participants learned that the verdict in the George Zimmerman case for killing then 17-year-old Trayvon Martin was going to be announced. The group decided to listen to the verdict

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together, and described that crucial moment in a subsequent open letter to the Black community:

> As we waited to hear the verdict, in the spirit of unity, we formed a circle and locked hands. When we heard "not guilty," our hearts broke collectively. In that moment, it was clear that Black life had no value … This moment reminds us that we can't look to others to see our value but we have to recognize our own value. In spite of what was said in court, what verdict has been reached, or how hopeless we feel, Trayvon did NOT die in vain … However, his death will serve as the catalyst of a new movement where the struggle for justice will prevail. (Berkley, 2013)

It was from that collective trauma, pain, and anger that the Black Youth Project 100 (BYP100) as an organization was agitated into existence. In the weeks that followed, a small sub-group of people that had attended Beyond November Movement traveled to Washington, DC for the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington where they drafted a mission, vision, and core values statement, which laid the foundation for what BYP100 would become.

While BYP100 was being founded, I was embarking on a journey to figure out my role in building the type of world I want to live in. I grew up in Columbia, South Carolina where compounded experiences of anti-Blackness planted seeds of resistance within me. Whether it was the cyclical effects of the criminal legal system's reach into my family, or my first protest at the South Carolina statehouse to demand the takedown of the confederate flag, I felt a sense of urgency to attack the roots of these issues, but I wasn't entirely clear about how. My developing consciousness led me to Chicago to begin a master's program in social work in the fall of 2013. I was a Black woman at a prestigious predominately white university in a city where I didn't have any family or friends; I yearned for both community and a political home. At the end of my first cold (in more ways than one) winter quarter, my cousin invited me to a strategy session in New York City where I met three members of the budding organization BYP100 that was, as they described it, trying to build a movement wherein *all* Black people had social, political, educational, and economic freedom in our lifetime. I didn't know exactly what that looked like, but I fell in love with the idea of working toward it. I followed up with the Chicago-based member when we returned to the city and have been an active BYP100 member ever since. Not only had I

found a community amid my social isolation in graduate school, but I found a political home and answer to my long unanswered question of "how?"

Today, BYP100 has grown into a national member-based organization with eight chapters (and counting) of young Black people between the ages of 18 and 35 who are dedicated to seeing Black liberation in our lifetime. BYP100 is but one organization within the larger Movement for Black Lives that envisions a fundamentally different society free of oppression and domination, seeks to build a social movement that confronts systemic violence and healing from the trauma endured, and to build sustainable infrastructure for the world in which we want to live—all through a Black Queer Feminist lens. This chapter examines how BYP100 engages Black Queer Feminism as praxis for transformative organizing and movement building.

From Theory…

During a talk delivered at Harvard University, Audre Lorde (1982) stated, "There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives." Because we are all under attack from multiple systems of oppression, we cannot afford to overlook any part of ourselves. Utilizing a Black Queer Feminist lens, a theory of radical inclusivity, we are intentional about bringing the people who are most marginalized in our communities to the center of our work. Theoretically, a Black Queer Feminist lens encompasses Black feminist and queer theories.

Feminism, as an ideology of women's collective action, has been most effective when the goal included not only equality with men, but more importantly, socio-cultural transformation (Steady, 1993). As Assata Shakur has stated, "Theory without practice is just as incomplete as practice without theory. The two have to go together" (Shakur, 2001). Accordingly, Black feminism particularly centers the power of self-definition and group empowerment through dialogical processes in which action and thought inform one another (Collins, 2000). Importantly, Black feminism posits that Black women—trans and non-trans women—face compounded and interrelated oppressions as a direct result of their race, gender, social class, sexuality, citizenship status, and other identities (Collins, 2000; Guy-Sheftall, 1995). These oppressions uniquely shape our needs and concerns, and make it imperative that movements for social justice fight for freedom from these compounded oppressions simultaneously. In other

words, Black feminists and allies cannot fight against racism without that addressing sexism, classism, ableism, or any -ism that is rooted in the lived experiences of Black women without fighting them all.

Queerness and queer theory is fundamentally important to center in any anti-oppressive space. Queer theory opposes the notion of heteronormativity, the notion that heterosexuality is normal or natural, and that deviations from it are not (Cohen, 1997). Queer theory also informs our rejection of the notion that singular, cisgendered, heterosexual, charismatic male leadership is a viable pathway to our collective and sustained freedom. In the words of Black Youth Project's founder, Cathy Cohen, "At the intersection of oppression and resistance lies the radical potential of queerness to challenge and bring together all those deemed marginal and all those committed to liberatory politics" (1997, p. 440). In turn, centering Queer theory in social movement building serves as an essential reminder that gender and sexuality are fluid and do not determine who we are or how we should treat people. In the spirit and politic of the Combahee River Collective—who at their time was more of a radical edge of the Black Freedom Movement—the current Movement for Black Lives has centered Black Queer Feminism in our liberatory politics to the point where queerness in this time is not really queer at all. Queerness, in the words of poet Brandon Wint Page, is "Not queer like gay. Queer like, escaping definition. Queer like some sort of fluidity at once. Queer like a freedom too strange to be conquered. Queer like the fearlessness to imagine what love can look like and pursue it."

A Black Queer Feminist lens is where these theoretical tenants meet at the most radical juncture. It allows us to see that liberation for all Black people can only be realized by centering the voices and experiences of historically silenced and vulnerable groups within Black communities, including those that are queer, trans*, femme, poor, disabled, and undocumented. BYP100 uses a Black Queer Feminist lens to envision the future, structure our work, and to guide the ways in which we function. To organize for the liberation of our people, we must work to alter relations of power by confronting oppressive systems in our broader communities *and* our organizations. That means we must make decisions democratically, intentionally center the most marginalized voices, lovingly hold one another accountable, and care for one another holistically because we believe that our values must be reflected in the way we run our organization internally in order to manifest these values in the broader society.

As experts of our experiences, we are the only ones capable of leading the way to our own liberation. As Black people who live at the nexus of many different identities, the oppressions that we face are not always outside of our communities, but also within them and our organizational spaces. Thus, as Makani Themba eloquently stated to a group of us during a leadership retreat, "We're all beautifully flawed, so we have to create organizations and structures to help us do the right thing."

…To Practice

One of the first things I learned about organizing is the importance of relationships. There is no way to meaningfully organize power in a revolutionary way without developing relationships with one another that are reflective of the world we want to see. This means that we aim to organize and cultivate a community within and outside of our membership that consistently demonstrates our values. It is only through consistently and intentionally struggling through what it means to truly be in community with one another as our whole selves that we can actively build practical intersectional models for group-centered leadership, transformative justice and community accountability, policy development and advocacy, political education and campaigns, and direct action organizing.

Group-Centered Leadership and Leadership Development

Group-centered leadership is a concept BYP100 adopted from Ella Baker's style of organizing, and can be summed up by her words that "strong people don't need strong leaders" (Ransby, 2003, p. 188). A commitment to a group-centered philosophy of leadership encourages us to structure our organization and our work in a way that relies on us all to be leaders, as opposed to relying too heavily on individuals. In turn, we do not believe in top-down leadership, figureheads, respectability politics, or leadership structures that reinforce any racist, classist, patriarchal, assimilationist or otherwise oppressive frameworks for determining who is fit to be a leader. That is not to devalue formal leadership roles; indeed, BYP100 is an organization that has a formal leadership structure both nationally and locally. But these formal leaders are not the end-all be-all decision-makers, nor do they hold power over other members. Rather, decisions are made through rigorous conversation with members and democratic consensus-driven processes.

Because most of the members of BYP100 have never truly practiced democracy before, ensuring that we reflect democratic values in the way that we govern ourselves as an organization is extremely important. For example, when we take a vote and someone expresses a dissenting opinion or abstains, we need to hear from that person before a final decision is made. The idea that majority is supposed to rule by default can serve to silence people, so while democratic consensus processes can be time-consuming, we feel that it's better to have a long process where everyone is heard than to perpetuate the cycle of silencing Black people, and Black women in particular, in movement spaces and in critical decision-making.

Group-centered leadership also means actively finding opportunities and creating formal structures to train, cultivate, and nurture the skills and talents of every member who wishes to do so. I came to this work with no background in or knowledge about organizing. That I can call myself an organizer today is due to other, more seasoned members' investment in my leadership development. None of us come to the work of Black liberation having developed all the skills needed to organize in our fullest capacity, but each of us has something important and unique we can contribute to the organization and the larger movement. Through intentional leadership scaffolding, we give new leaders support that is tailored to their needs. In practice, this means providing new members with the necessary training to engage in current work, providing members in new positions of leadership with the proper training to succeed in their area, and encouraging people to contribute to projects in areas that are new to them and that excite them. By meaningfully developing the leadership capacity of as many young, Black people as possible, by pushing one another to grow in the spirit of love, and by organizing ourselves into structures that honor the wisdom and experience of both ourselves and the Black people in struggle who came before us, we position ourselves to take ownership of our lives and growth in a world that fundamentally opposes our right to exist.

Moreover, group-centered leadership in a Black Queer Feminist organization requires us to center and amplify the voices, experiences, and leadership of our most marginalized members. This is sometimes easier said than done, as we all are continuously unlearning ways in which we may contribute to the marginalization of others in this work. For instance, one of our members with a disability highlighted several ways in which we were not radically inclusive of, or sensitive to, the intersections of Blackness

and disability, including making sure that all our meetings and events are physically accessible, or asking if anyone might need accommodations to participate in conference calls. However inadvertent these acts (or lack thereof) are, intent and impact are seldom the same. The member called folks in on that and subsequently offered to facilitate a workshop on the intersections of Blackness, disability, and gender identity as a generative act toward transforming ableism in the organization. Of course, it is not this sole member's responsibility to educate everyone on their able-bodied privilege. However, the act of this member leveraging the expertise of her own experience to foster consciousness and skill in others incited more organizational efforts to strengthen our collective alignment between who we are and who we strive to be.

Transformative Justice and Community Accountability

Many of us have never seen what it looks like to be truly free, but a common thread in our collective freedom dreams is a world full of self-sustaining communities that do not rely on systems that perpetually harm us—including police, jails, and prisons—to keep us safe or hold each other accountable. Black people generally, and specifically Black women, have created microcosms of such a world before. Some examples of queer, Black women and other women of color's collective actions and struggles to abolish oppressive and punitive systems while simultaneously developing models of community accountability include, but certainly are not limited to, organizations like UBUNTU in Durham, NC which helped survivors of intimate partner violence by offering their homes as safe places to stay, providing childcare, researching legal options, and other supportive tactics; or the Safe OUTside the System (SOS) Collective of the Audre Lorde Project in Brooklyn, which created a network of "Safe Spaces" in Brooklyn for community members fleeing from violence, including local businesses in the community where employees were trained to counter homophobia and transphobia, as well as to interrupt violence without calling the police. These are but a couple of examples of community accountability process that strive for Queer Black Feminist principles of collective action; prioritizing safety of the criminal justice system to address gender violence (INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, 2003).

Most of the community accountability processes also point to the concept of transformative justice—a process where the individual perpetrator,

the abusive relationship, and the culture and power dynamics of the community are transformed—as opposed to enacting revenge, retribution, or punishment (Williams, 2015). As conflict is an inevitable element of our internal relationships, BYP100 has had to learn (and is still learning) to develop and implement approaches to making those conflicts generative, and to hold our members accountable to the violence they may perpetrate. Conflict resolution and community accountability through a Black Queer Feminist lens is sensitive to not replicate the punitive and carceral logics, which are inherently racist, classist, homophobic, transphobic, and misogynist. Community accountability, emphasizes the belief in people's ability to transform and grow and does not deem people disposable. At the same time, we do not accept the notion that any member's growth should ever be at the expense of another member's physical, mental, or emotional well-being or sense of safety, especially in cases where there are significant power imbalances between the members in conflict. But sometimes values alone are not enough to concretize justice and resolution outside of punitive systems; most mechanisms of our community accountability and conflict resolution processes were developed *in response to* harm committed.

The most significant precipitating events to the way that BYP100 handles harm in a way that is true to our Black Queer Feminist values came in November 2015 when a woman posted an open letter to BYP100 accusing one of our chapter leaders at the time of sexual assault. This statement was written and posted three days after the survivor brought her concerns directly to BYP100 leadership. The organization had no precedent for how to handle this, but our values require us to take reports of sexual violence very seriously, ensuring to never place blame on victims/survivors, and center the wishes of those who have been harmed. The survivor agreed to community accountability process, and although no one who was involved had any prior experience, BYP100 members had a relationship with a practitioner outside of the organization with years of experience facilitating community accountability processes who was willing to facilitate this one. After a year-long process, the lead facilitator of this process wrote an important takeaway about community accountability and healing:

> CA processes cannot erase harm. At best, they can reduce the impact(s) of harm and they can encourage people in their ongoing healing journeys. There is nothing "soft" or "easy" about this. CA processes test everyone and can be some of the most difficult physical and emotional work that we can undertake. Healing requires an acknowledgment that there are wounds. Healing requires parties who actually want to heal.[1]

This community accountability process also led to the formation of the BYP100 Healing and Safety Council (HSC). The HSC was created to not only build a clear process to address harm involving a BYP100 member using a transformative justice framework, but to also provide support, training and resources to BYP100 members and our contingent communities, and to generally bring healing into what it means to organize through a Black Queer Feminist lens.

In the "Stay Woke, Stay Whole: Black Activist Manual," the HSC provides grounding for the importance of healing in our political work and a guide for harm prevention and intervention. In this sense, healing is not just reactive, but also proactive so that we are able to sustain ourselves for the long term. Organizing—especially in moments of rapid response and long nights of strategizing—can be extremely draining. The HSC explains that healing-centered organizing requires habitual self- and collective-care. It also upholds the right of people to self-determining bodies, which, historically, Black people have not had—from restroom and overall space accessibility to brainstorming support for gender non-conforming bodies if/when they get arrested in a civil disobedience.

Generally, group or chapter self-care in a BYP100 space and many other Black organizing spaces that I have been a part of draw from Indigenous and ancestral practices, including chanting, African drums, burning sage, altar-building, libations and grounding, and taking time to check in with one another before getting down to business. Most meetings are arranged as talking circles wherein everyone can see each other (i.e. no one is at the front of the room talking at people) and community agreements are made with consensus to be mindful of power dynamics and how we hold space with one another. These are but a few examples of how dealing with conflict, harm, accountability, and healing can be reflective of Black Queer Feminist values.

Political Education

Political education is an essential part of building a Black Freedom movement because we can't fully resist and free ourselves of oppressive systems if we don't have a deep understanding of how these systems work, how previous movements have succeeded, and how we can learn from their shortcomings. Part of what keeps oppressive systems operating is the miseducation that there are no oppressive systems at all; that is why it's imperative that we educate ourselves. In the tradition of the Freedom Schools of

the 1960s, we can think about educating ourselves through a pedagogy of questions—a learning process that is structured with questions such as the following which set people up to be active, critical participants in the world: What does that liberation look like? Does it include all of us? What does it take to get there? Political education is a matter of asking the right questions to bring us closer to our liberation.

Political education is done best when it connects people's lived experiences to a structural analysis, connects history to contemporary issues, and leaves people with the ability to explain an idea they learned to someone else. Political education is participatory and attendees contribute to the knowledge presented in the room (physical or virtual). It inspires people to act and there are tangible ways for people to learn more (i.e. handing out a packet with more information, recommending books, or future events to attend). Significantly, political education is facilitated in a way that is open and forgiving, not authoritative or condescending. This is especially important when it comes to topics that can be abstract (e.g. abolition) or uncomfortable (e.g. rape).

BYP100 incorporates political education into our work by incorporating reading and analysis of political text into membership meetings; developing curricula for teach-ins in different community spaces; digital organizing, which includes Twitter townhalls (or Twitter power hours), creating series of infographics, and utilizing webinars; train takeovers in which performance and outreach efforts are mobilized on train cars; and providing opportunities for prospective members to develop a political analysis before they join the organization. A tangible outcome of the community accountability process previously discussed, for example, is an Enthusiastic Consent training. In the spirit of preventive healing, our HSC, along with the survivor, developed this training to incorporate in our membership orientation process to ground our current and potential members in why consent is important given the history of sexual assault and rape against Black women. Completing this training will be a requirement for all active members in the organization.

This goes without saying, but I will say it anyway: Black Queer Feminism is not only for women and femme-identified people. It is just as important for masculine-identified people to embody and practice a Black Queer Feminist politic. Decolonizing masculinity spaces like what we have been calling "#YouGoodMan chats" help us do that. The #YouGoodMan chats are a time when men, masculine-identified folks, and those who carry masculine

energy come together to discuss male privilege and what it is to be working in an organization with a Black Queer Feminist lens, be vulnerable with one another, and struggle through unlearning toxic masculinity.

Policy Development and Advocacy

The U.S. has never lived up to its rhetoric of democracy, especially when it comes to the most marginalized Black people. But as a National Public Policy Chair of a Black Queer Feminist movement-building organization, I have been committed to providing the support across chapters needed to effectively use our power to push our policy ideas to reality in a way that is more transformational than transactional. As apathy toward young Black people in public policy is a continuous bipartisan shortfall, we know that developing our own platforms gives us something to agitate decision makers on. We also know that there are no lobbyists pushing Congress, state legislators, or city council members on issues that affect us; we must do that ourselves.

After a year-long process of collective visioning, gathering stories, discussion, research, and writing from across our entire membership to articulate what a world where the most marginalized Black people can thrive looks like, we released a policy platform, the Agenda to Build Black Futures (Bonsu et al., 2016). We then forged a strategy where direct action and direct lobbying merge to confront state power with our first Build Black Futures Advocacy Day. Most of our members had no prior policy advocacy experience, but true to our values, the expertise of our everyday lived experience was our most powerful lobbying tool. As Samantha Master of the D.C. chapter said in reflecting on the day:

> I think that people are often shocked by how transformative the [policy advocacy] process is not because policy itself is transformative, but because we have a fundamental right to be here and to take what is ours. And to be able to confront the people who often use power to our destruction—to be able to give them mandates and directives—it's in and of itself a transformative process. This is something that Black folks need to engage in.

Demystifying policy and making it accessible to our people is essential, and our digital strategy helps us do that. We used social media to have a policy power hour on the eve of Build Black Futures Lobby Day in order to engage our people in discussion on what policy is and how it impacts

our lives. We also leveraged Facebook Live to be able to bring our community virtually into meetings on the Hill with us. Policy and political processes have long been inaccessible and difficult to understand, but organizing to achieve public policy change is a key part of BYP100's theory of change to create freedom and justice for all Black people.

Campaigns and Direct Action Organizing

BYP100 strives to take a radically inclusive approach to organizing by supporting and creating campaigns that focus on interlocking oppressions of marginalized peoples. Radical intersectional organizing is the work of shifting narratives, and the belief that stories have outcomes. By shifting the narrative that people believe, we change what the possible and impossible outcomes of the story are. By organizing to alter relations of power, we can make outcomes possible for our people that the dominant narrative once deemed impossible.

One way that I have experienced this type of narrative shifting in the context of organizing is through the #SayHerName campaign in Chicago. The courts failed to deliver what the public conceptualizes as "justice" by default, which is a conviction in the case of Dante Servin who shot and killed then-22-year-old Rekia Boyd. This impunity is common and expected in police killings of Black people: officers take a Black life, go on paid leave, a grand jury fails to indict and, if they do, the officer is acquitted of charges at trial, and goes back to work. After the judge dismissed Servin's case in a bench trial, Rekia's family was rightfully hurt and determined to get justice. Taking cues from the family, organizers from various organizations met soon after the dismissal of the case and decided to really take on getting justice for Rekia Boyd, in part by redefining what it means.

BYP100 issued a National Call to Action for state violence against Black women, girls, and femmes, and centered the case of Rekia Boyd in Chicago. This aligned with the African American Policy Forum's #SayHerName report, and the local campaign for Rekia was subsumed under that banner. BYP100 along with organizations like Assata's Daughters, Black Lives Matter Chicago, the Let Us Breathe Collective, Women's All Point Bulletin, and more organized people to come to Chicago Police Headquarters every month to their police board meetings to demand Dante Servin be fired without a pension. This demand of termination with no pension is a challenge to the default indict/convict/

incarcerate notion of justice. In a city like Chicago that spends hundreds of millions of dollars in misconduct settlements, murderous officers' pensions are much better spent as reparations to victims' families. We used our disruptive power to speak up and out for Rekia, and even managed to shut down a board meeting claiming its illegitimacy as an accountability body for police who murder Black people.

The campaign was unprecedented in that, to my knowledge, no other killing by a police officer in the city of Chicago had resulted in a termination recommendation from both the police department's investigative body *and* the police superintendent. Although Servin formally resigned two days before the evidentiary board hearing that would have likely terminated him, there is no doubt in my mind that his resignation was forced by our relentless organizing and direct pressure on Servin, the Chicago Police Department, and their oversight body. Not only that, but the political education throughout that campaign via the member-developed #SayHerName curriculum, teach-ins, and social media on the many ways in which Black women, girls, and femmes experience state-sanctioned, intra-community, *and* intimate partner violence was invaluable.

Conclusion

While this chapter details some elements of Black Queer Feminism in praxis for BYP100, it is by no means exhaustive or perfect. My goal here was to put forth that a Black Queer Feminist politic deepens our analysis of issues, requires centering the margins in our strategies and solutions, and provides this movement with strategic direction. I will not purport that BYP100 or any other anti-oppressive movement organization has it all figured out, nor will I say that our processes have not been messy. We have very real organizational limitations. Sometimes accountability processes are not resolved through restorative justice. Sometimes our people are dealing with mental health needs that organizationally cannot always be met. Sometimes our struggles are practically, structurally, strategically, and politically too real for us to know how to deal with in real time. However, it is in the missteps, the call outs, and call-ins, and trial and error that our ideologies and actions become more aligned. That is why constant reflexivity of praxis is so important. We are building the plane as we fly it, and hindsight is and will always be 20/20.

Note

1. I drew information presented herein from BYP100's organizing manual, our healing manual, and conversations with my comrades. Shout out specifically to Charlene Carruthers, Asha Ransby-Sporn, Je Naé Taylor, Rose Afriyie, Kai Green, Mari Morales-Williams, and Damon Williams.
2. For a full summary of the community and organization accountability process for this incident, see http://transformharm.tumblr.com/post/158171267676/summary-statement-re-community-accountability

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PART III

Pedagogies of Healing

CHAPTER 13

Calling on the Divine and Sacred Energy of Queens: Bringing Afrikan Indigenous Wisdom and Spirituality to the Academy

Derise Tolliver Atta

It is important to start correctly.
—African proverb

Libations. In order to start correctly, and in alignment with the spirit of my African-centered life, I sought permission to engage in this writing. I consulted with Spirit as I poured the libation to honor the Creator. I called upon my Ancestors for guidance in my quest to humbly and powerfully share words of knowledge and wisdom. I asked elders, models of fortitude, integrity and authenticity in my life, to affirm the importance of this project and my decision to participate in this endeavor. They did so. I also recognized the unborn children, whose world we all borrow. I stated my intention to do good work to contribute to a better world in which they can live their future. With this libation, I proceed with blessings and reminders of responsibility, inspired by the words of Sonia Sanchez, "…I write to keep in contact with our ancestors and to spread truth to people" (as cited in Lanker, 1989).

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Racism and white supremacist ideology exist worldwide as challenges to women of African descent (as well as others in our community) who are committed to remain genuine in our cultural and spiritual selves as we work to liberate, heal, and build our communities. Whether the perpetrators of marginalizing Western hegemonic ideologies are of European descent or members of our own Afrikan family who are acting out of injected oppression, we must remain steadfast in our efforts to *remember,* recall who we truly are, in all of our inherited divinity, so that we can *re-member*, come back into wholeness, individually and collectively, from the brokenness that so many of our people experience as a result of the assaults of cultural and racial oppression. This is the spirit of *Sankofa,* the Akan wisdom that tells us that it is not taboo to go back and fetch what has worked and strengthened us in the past so that we can move forward, strengthened for the future. To do so and to promote this is my life mission.

I am an educator, a clinical psychologist by training, and a healer by nature. I am unapologetically, unashamedly, and unabashedly Afrikan. In this chapter, I share some of my lived experiences as a facilitator of learning for non-traditional and traditional-aged college students, in the USA, Ghana, and Kenya. The real sheroes of this text, however, are the foremothers of my immediate bloodline, whom I refer to as Mommas to the 4th power: my great grandmother, Mrs. Fannie Mae Pritchett, my grandmothers, Mrs. Sarah Johnson and Ms. Catherine Myrick, and my mother, Mrs. Gwendolyn Tolliver. African-centered principles informed their lives. These principles have also impacted the lives of many othermothers (Bernard et al., 2012), Afrikan Queens such as Nana Yaa Asantewaa, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Araminta, and Nina Simone, all whose being and actions "stressed the rights, dignity and agency of African women" (Karenga & Tembo, 2012, p. 33). I share how I have called on the divine and sacred energy of these many Afrikan Queens, and its transformative impact on my praxis, to bring Afrikan indigenous wisdom and spirituality to the academy.

African-Centered Perspective and Traditional Worldview

My praxis reflects an African-centered perspective (ACP) which is grounded in a traditional African worldview. This worldview recognizes the presence of a Higher Power or Creator, the centrality of Spirit and our

Spirit-ness (humans as Spiritual beings), a holistic mind-body-spirit connection, understanding that everything in the Universe is interconnected in Oneness, with our individual identity grounded in the community. ACP is driven by collaboration and complementarity, rather than competition. It embraces a purposeful Universe that is organized around dualities, opposing forces that are at the root of order, movement, and vitality. This concept of "twinness," as manifested in concepts of the Creator embodying masculine and feminine energy, for example, is visible in every living organism and interactions between organisms. ACP sees harmony, balance, and equilibrium as key aspects of wellness and well-being (Mazama, 2002; Nobles, 2015; Tolliver, 2010).

The importance of ACP as applied to education is described by Tolliver and Tisdell (2002):

> It (ACP) provides a liberatory approach to education because by its very nature it demands a critical consciousness about one's place and position in a larger world where injustice exists … the principle of interconnectedness leads not only to addressing social injustice directed toward oneself, but also addressing the oppression of others … Consequently, among the objectives of this perspective is the undoing of miseducation of the dominated and dominant through re-education and re-analysis of the experiences of people of African descent. (p. 394)

ACP challenges the distorted narratives and misinformation about people of African descent and their contributions to the world historical stage. As a transformative pedagogy, its power comes from instilling critical thinking in students who will be active rather than passive learners. ACP as lived through the lives of the mothers in my life has provided many lessons as I have developed my transformative praxis as an educator.

Mommas to the 4th Power and Othermothers: Stories and Lessons Learned

To know the end, look at the beginning.
—African proverb

I grew up with the energy of many mothers: my great grandmother, Momma Fannie Mae Pritchett; the mothers who birthed my parents, Momma Sarah and Momma Catherine; and the mother who birthed me,

Momma Gwendolyn. I present their stories below to show how their divine energy, as reflections of the African-centered perspective, manifests in my praxis and professional life.

Fannie Mae Pritchett: Model of Character and Covenant

Mrs. Fannie Mae Pritchett, known to me as Momma Fannie, was my great grandmother. The daughter of subjugated Africans, she maintained vestiges of her ancestral heritage. I remember, as a young girl, seeing this stately elder woman stand out among others as she carried baskets of washed clothes on her head, balancing them with ease, similar to what I have seen more recently among modern-day women in West Africa. My mother told me that many people knew Momma Fannie as "that colored woman in the long skirt and apron walking through the streets …" of Fairfield, Alabama, where she traveled back and forth between her home and those of the affluent whites for whom she worked as a domestic.

Momma Fannie was also a businesswoman. She was the big station master in Fairfield, a manager for the local numbers operation, known as policy. People "played the numbers" in many African American communities prior to the present-day state lotteries. They would bet on three numbers hoping to pick the ones that would randomly be chosen as winners on the following day. Policy was especially attractive in lower-income communities because it took smaller bets and had higher payouts than provided by state lotteries. Numbers runners would pick up people's bets and money, then bring them to Momma Fannie's house for processing and payouts.

Momma Fannie worked for a Mr. Herman, a white man, who was in charge of the local policy operation. He would pick up the bets and money that were gathered every day and provide the money to be distributed when someone "hit" a number. As part of their working relationship, Momma Fannie managed the day-to-day operations while Herman handled money and provided protection for the runners and stationmaster. One day, the Birmingham police raided the numbers stations in Fairfield, arresting the runners as they came to drop off their books of numbers at my great grandmother's house. Herman was supposed to bail them all out, but the police told him not to, saying that Mrs. Fannie, as they called her, had the money to pay. So, Herman left the scene without paying anything and the police confiscated all of Momma Fannie's money to pay for everyone's fines and bail.

Herman broke the covenant that he had with my great grandmother, that he would protect the employees in this business and pay any legal fees and fines related to arrest. Momma Fannie, being the *jegna* that she was (an Ethiopian (Amharic) word for a very brave person who is a protector of the culture and the rights of their people), took care of her own, in the face of the unprincipled behavior of Herman. And she did it willingly because she cared for all the people who worked with her. They were part of her family. She took seriously her responsibility to her community, in accordance with one of the primary tenets of the African worldview.

When Herman came back some months later, demanding that she work for him again, Momma Fannie said no, making it clear that she could not overlook his earlier violation of their previous business arrangement. Continuing in relationship with him was not in alignment with her Afrikan values. Herman, feeling entitled through his white skin and male privilege, threatened Momma Fannie, ordering her to work for him or else. She stood her ground with him. In my mother's words:

> …he raised his voice, he didn't know what hit him. When he knew anything, she had him in his collar with her right hand and was getting ready to puncture his jugular with the scissors in her left hand …. "Oh, Mama, Mama, don't kill that white man!" I was hollering. "They'll put you in jail or kill you!" She relaxed her grip and Mr. Herman ran out of our house so fast. I think he ran past his car at first! That was the last time we ever saw him again … She told me you don't let no man run over you just because you're a woman … You have to learn how to stand up for yourself. (Tolliver, 1993)

My great grandmother walked in the warrior spirit steps of Yaa Asantewaa, another elder who, as keeper of her own Ghananian culture and community, stood her ground, like Momma Fannie, when being threatened by men of European descent. Yaa Asantewaa acted courageously when the British threatened to take the Golden Stool, considered to be the heart and soul of the Asante nation, in the 1800s. When the men did not challenge the British governor who spoke disrespectfully to them, Yaa Asantewaa galvanized the women of the community, saying "if you the men of Ashanti will not go forward, then we will. We the women will. I shall call upon my fellow women." With her leadership, the women successfully resisted the European colonizers, strategizing to give the British a replica of the cherished stool while keeping the real object within the community. Resistance in service of the community marked the actions of both of these mothers.

Transformative Lessons Learned from Momma Fannie

I am because they, these foremothers, were; they were, therefore I am. This proverb, modified a bit, expresses the essence of the African worldview, a belief in the interconnectedness between all people and our responsibility to and for each other and community. Momma Fannie's and Yaa Asantewaa's courage, character, and attention to convenants made manifested in me when my university entered into a collaboration with a higher education institution in Kenya, to provide a competency-based undergraduate program to adult learners. This undergraduate degree was designed to help support leadership development in Africa, with particular emphasis on women religious. After the administration of both institutions agreed to pursue a memorandum of understanding for the collaboration, a series of events occurred that raised questions about whether the Kenya partners would adhere to my university's espoused commitment to diversity. The issue was raised at a faculty meeting that I, then faculty chair, was unable to attend. Upon my return, I was informed that several white colleagues strongly advocated severing the collaborative relationship. One faculty member noted that while we were familiar with and "used to," and therefore able to accept, issues of racial oppression, we could not and should not tolerate other isms, notably homophobia. A vote was taken, with an overwhelming majority of those in attendance supporting termination of the relationship. The vote was reported to be along racial lines.

After hearing the vote count, I pushed to have the decision rescinded and to recall the vote. My rationale? How could we turn our backs on the Kenyan students to whom we had entered into a covenant? Should they suffer because of issues and disagreements between the administrative leadership? Didn't our university have a moral and ethical obligation to uphold our covenant with them? Shouldn't we work toward reconciliation before termination? Were we willing to repeat a pattern of unkept promises and perpetuation of lies made by the West to Africa and Africans across centuries? I was not comfortable or willing to do this without a fight.

I called on the strength of my Ancestors, Momma Fannie and Yaa Asantewaa, by pouring libations, through prayer, meditation, and through remembering their stories, to know how to best move forward. The call for rescinding the decision and re-voting set precedent, but like Momma Fannie, like Yaa Asantewaa, I had a responsibility to speak truth to power, to advocate for respectful and ethical behavior, even in the face of possible negative repercussions against me. In collaboration with the School Dean

and faculty of African descent, I spearheaded a campaign to provide more comprehensive information about the proposed collaboration and the repercussions of terminating the relationship between the two universities. I invited more discussion about my faculty's concerns that had led to the vote to dissolve the relationship. I called into question the privileging of some isms over others, and finally called for a re-vote at a subsequent faculty meeting. At the second election, equipped with more information and time to reconsider the consequences of the previous decision, faculty voted to recommit to the international partnership.

Soon after, I became the Chicago director of this international collaborative program, a position I held for 4 years (Tolliver, Holton, Grooms, Anzoyo, & Nyambura, 2014). During those years, I worked with a small group of dedicated faculty and staff to support a program where learners drew from their culture, Spirit-ness, and creativity. We deliberately worked to develop a program that honored African indigenous wisdom rather than recreating a solely Western-based curriculum in Africa. For example, while students were more than willing to reference American and European experts in leadership and management, I established the expectation that they draw upon African-based scholarship and look to modern-day and historical models of African leadership, such as Julius Nyerere, Nelson Mandela, Wangari Maathai, and Ellen Sirleaf Johnson. This became one of the criteria for them to pass their senior paper, to provide a section on how African culture informed their understanding of their topic. They also had to have 75 percent of their references from African-based sources. This was done to affirm their cultural selves and the value of their intellectual traditions.

This approach recognizes the African-centered principle of *ukweli*, a Swahili term which means "advancing the truth in our praxis" (Van Wyk, 2014, p. 4). This is grounded in the understanding that effective learning occurs when the creation of knowledge is based in the learner's own experiences, or, as Dei (cited in Van Wyk, 2014) describes it, "local, context-relevant that embraces ancestral knowing, as well as the legacies of diverse histories and cultures" (p. 1). As the purpose of my praxis with people of African descent is to support empowerment and liberation, it is crucial that transformative pedagogy reinforces critical consciousness of self, through one's own cultural lens, rather than through the distorted or devaluing lens of outside culture.

This collaborative partnership was successful, resulting in more than 140 students completing their undergraduate degree. They evidenced their learning through multiple creative ways beyond the privileged

written word to include movement, artistic representations, ritual, and symbolism, all valued expressions within a traditional African worldview. Evidence of the power of maintaining covenant, courage, and character in this project came from one of the Kenyan students who commented, "As a result of going through this program, I fell in love with Africa again!" That renewed love of Africa was inspired by a community effort of African descended faculty with my leadership, because of our interconnectedness with Africa and commitment of our Kenya-based students, to honor the covenant that was made at the beginning of this partnership.

Mrs. Catherine Myrick: Model of Complementarity and Collaboration

Momma Catherine, my father's mother, was tiny and blue black beautiful. Her nickname was Chocolate, because of the deep melanation of her skin and because chocolate was her favorite candy. My grandmother was a model of complementarity. She was an entrepreneur with Poppa Ez, my grandfather. Together, through their complementarity as wife and husband, as partners, they were able to develop and run a business that, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, provided physical nourishment for their clientele. "The Restaurant," as my father affectionately referred to it, also served as a place where people could come together in community to connect with each other and where its patrons could be their Afrikan selves. Within the traditional African worldview and African-centered perspective, community and interpersonal connection are central concepts; we know ourselves through our relationship with others. The Restaurant provided the space for community members to be themselves. If you came by The Restaurant, sometimes you would see Poppa Ez at the grill and preparing plates; sometimes it was Momma Catherine fixing the orders. Momma Catherine most often served the customers and handled the money, but at times she switched roles with Poppa Ez. They did whatever needed to be done to make the business work, with a flexibility around roles that was not gender-bound.

Momma Catherine walked in the spirit steps of well-known community figures, such as Araminta (Harriet Tubman) and Ida B. Wells-Barnett. These two Afrikan Queens recognized and held in high regard the distinctive contributions of each other in their efforts to liberate people of African descent living in the USA. Their efforts coincided with those of Frederick Douglass. In complementarity with him, they shared commitment to

common values: social justice and equity among peoples. They did the work that needed to be done.

African traditional worldview understands the Universe to comprise opposing forces that coexist together compatibly and contribute to the balance and equilibrium in the world. T'shaka (1995) writes about this "twinness" with regard to male/female equality as a traditional hallmark of African people. In alignment with the African-centered principles of harmony, complementarity, and twinness, the power and strength of African women do not need to be antagonistic, nor do they need to downgrade or ignore the important contributions of African descended men, and vice versa. Twinness embodies the complementarity of the roles that Afrikan woman and men share with each other in our lives and in the service of Afrikan liberation. It supports challenging sexism and patriarchy that threatens this traditional value. Twinness and complementarity existed between my grandmother and grandfather.

Transformative Lessons Learned from Momma Catherine

In my educational practice, I have functioned in complementarity with a number of my African descended male colleagues to operate short-term study abroad courses to Ghana. It began in 1996, after a fellow psychologist and I went through a rites of passage program, an educational and cultural process to reAfricanize and reinforce our Afrikan identity and consciousness. Our participation in the rites culminated in a sojourn to Ghana, West Africa. On the Continent, we learned more about traditional African culture and worldview, visited the dungeons where captive Afrikans were taken before being dispersed throughout the Western world, and witnessed the expression of traditional spiritual practices and healing. Experiential learning, connecting with the descendants of our Ancestors who are still living on the Continent, and dispelling myths and misperceptions about Africa reinforced our positive individual and community identity and critical, analytical thinking.

Our visit to Ghana was so impactful, my colleague and I decided to replicate a similar program for undergraduate and graduate students at our university, one that would hopefully inspire the same transformative experiences for these student populations. We designed the program equitably, providing a model of the African-centered principle of twinness in our own working relationship for our students to witness. In our learning activities, which included group discussions, community service project

days, and team activities, we sought to balance what might seem to be polarities along gender, age, race/cultural background, and academic discipline lines.

In working together, collaboratively and in complementarity, with my male co-directors, I have implemented this academic travel program to also provide spiritual and cultural nourishment for our students. That these learners come to better understand some aspects of African culture, history, and spirituality is an important desired outcome. They learn about correspondences between their own lives and the lives of Africans on the Continent. They can better challenge the myths and misperceptions of traditional and contemporary Ghana. More importantly, the students develop deeper self-awareness through learning their own stories, myths, and misperceptions about Africa; this most effectively occurs in interactions with members of West African communities and the community of the traveling student group.

During the study abroad program, we discuss the history of African people resisting subjugation on the Continent and in the USA. We talk about women and men working together and, when necessary, one or the other taking the lead in order for the community to be optimally successful in liberation efforts. Students are introduced to the stories of Yaa Asantewaa and other important Afrikan men and women elders and Ancestors. Students meet with educational, political, and spiritual leaders to learn more about West African life experiences. They also have the opportunity to do homestays to learn about the day-to-day lives of families. Students either write research papers or develop creative work that is primarily informed by their learning "in the field." This assignment reflects and reinforces the value placed on African wisdom, and experiential and holistic ways of learning and expressing one's learning.

After this travel experience, many students return from West Africa to the USA more prepared to confront issues of racism and oppression at school, in their families, and in their communities. Some have made presentations at school, for their families, and in community organizations to challenge the myths and stereotypes about African people. Still others joined organizations that address issues of social justice and inclusion. A number of students changed the focus of their academic studies to coincide with newfound commitment to social justice concerns. Students of African descent became acquainted with a fuller picture of Africa and, consequently, their African selves. They learned through interaction in community, trusting and valuing knowledge gained through relationship.

And they observed that women and men of African descent can have a positive working relationship, something that is not always presented as a possibility.

My contribution to this professional activity, like the work of my foremothers, has been multidimensional. Momma Catherine worked in complementarity with Poppa Ez; Araminta and Ida B. Wells-Barnett not only fought against the oppression of people of African descent, they also championed equity and social justice. They did this in a complementary manner with men of African descent who were also involved in liberation work.

Short-term study abroad, as an element of my praxis, represents a transformative pedagogy that explores issues of power, inequality, and privilege on the personal/interpersonal, national, and international levels. As I have written elsewhere (see Tolliver, 2000), facilitating the self- and cultural identity development of the sojourners of African descent serves to encourage critical thinking, connection, and commitment to the liberation of all in the African Diaspora. My international education praxis has continued with new collaborators, all men of African descent, to model the importance and value of collaboration and complementarity—aspects of African-centered life.

Mrs. Sarah Ann Johnson: Model of Celebration and Commitment to Authenticity

My mother's mother, Momma Sarah to me, was part of the great migration to the North. Born in Alabama, she traveled to Cincinnati, Ohio, to make a better way for herself and her family. Her daughter, my mother, eventually joined her in Ohio once she was settled. My grandmother, like her mother, Momma Fannie, worked for "white folks" in their homes, cleaning, washing clothes, and caring for their children.

Momma Sarah had a strong work ethic and prided herself in doing a good, thorough job at whatever she attempted. She helped teach me the importance of working well. She also taught me to celebrate life and to play joyously. Momma Sarah enjoyed her life. She did so fully and with a confidence and sassiness that was sometimes troubling to others. She was my playmate. We would spend major holidays together and I don't know who was more excited about opening up the presents under the Christmas tree, me or her. What she showed me was that even as an adult, you did not have to lose that inner child, that wondrous, celebrating spirit; that inner child should remain a part of you at all ages.

When I think of Momma Sarah, I am also reminded of Maya Angelou's poem, "Phenomenal Woman", where she talks about multidimensional aspects of Black women and the envy people have of their sassiness, their strength, their courage. That poem describes my grandmother. While Momma Sarah's style may have been outside conventional standards, she was fine with that. She was not apologetic about being her genuine self. When people didn't like her wearing a miniskirt at her age in the 1970s, when people didn't like her wearing her hair golden, when people looked away or scoffed at her as the sun shone off that gold crown that was on her tooth, she was fine with that. She accepted and embraced her beauty, on her terms, unapologetically, unashamedly, and unabashedly. And that is one of the things she taught me.

Transformative Lessons from Momma Sarah

Regardless of the course I am teaching or the professional role I am fulfilling, Momma Sarah's commitment to authenticity guides me. I endeavor to model that value for my students. Authenticity and being genuine are implicit, and very often explicit, aspects of the curriculum of my courses. I talk to students about the psychological, physical, and spiritual risks of being inauthentic (e.g. attempting to completely downplay their cultural selves when trying to fit in with peers or at work, get a job, etc). I encourage all students to recognize and access the strengths of their cultural foundations to help make meaning of the information that we are covering in class. The safe space provided in my classroom may enable the expression of their authenticity not only there but also in other venues.

I begin each class with an exercise that I call "centering." Some might describe it as a guided visualization or a relaxation exercise. I play healing music from Mali (Diallo, 1998), which uses various tones to help students calm down from stressful activities. I "talk" students through conscious and mindful breathing as a way to prepare them to be present through the remainder of our classroom time together. I also have a table in the room, some would call it an altar, with cultural items from Africa: books, water and candles, all pieces representing some aspect of the work of the class session. Centering and setting the table can be considered the beginning ritual of the class. Ritual is a central element of the African-centered paradigm.

I bring the spiritual, the cultural, the cognitive, and celebration into the classroom. It is a reflection of my African-centeredness. My praxis rests on the idea that learning is not simply a cognitive enterprise; it also occurs multidimensionally. Centering prepares students for accessing their whole

selves for effective learning. It recognizes the interconnectedness within students and gives them permission to bring their whole selves, including the cultural, to their learning activities.

I teach a course called *Psychology from an African-centered Perspective.* I have had faculty colleagues suggest I change the name or shift the syllabus in order to teach what they consider to be "real" psychology. However, I have not changed my focus and I keep working in service of student and Afrikan community needs in my own manner. Another example of commitment to cultural authenticity is when I was the stand-in chairperson for a faculty meeting early in 2016. During the middle of the meeting, someone noted that Prince, the artist, had just died. Given how important he was to our culture, I made the announcement and stopped the meeting to play one of his signature songs, "Purple Rain," from Youtube. While some might have thought this was inappropriate, unprofessional, and unnecessary, my cultural self recognized the importance of this artist's transition. In that moment, we celebrated his life and I connected that to what we needed to do as an academic community. A number of faculty members later thanked me and shared their appreciation for making an otherwise arduous meeting "more personal and spiritually meaningful." Similarly, as part of my praxis, I recognize important milestones and celebrate student accomplishments within the classroom. It affirms and supports them in the context of their learning community. I also encourage students to have fun in class, sometimes through dance or creative arts. I provide a balance of work and play (which can inspire stronger work) in the classroom. Anecdotally, students have reported being more receptive to doing their academic work because of their whole person being honored.

I wear traditional African and African-inspired clothing frequently, not just during the "Black month" of February. My confidence in my style of attire opens dialogue about students' fears of being their cultural selves and the anticipated, perceived negative impact on their later life circumstances. Momma Sarah's divine and sacred energy of celebration and commitment to authenticity passed along to and through me assists me to support student transformation into their true cultural self-expression.

Mrs. Gwendolyn Louise Tolliver: Model of Creativity and Cultural Groundedness

Gwendolyn Louise Tolliver was simply Momma to me. Although I was her only child by birth, Momma had many community children, who, when she got older, called her Grandma Gwen. Momma birthed me and

raised me, in partnership with my father, to have "good home training." She believed in self-determination, evidenced by her refusal to name me after her white doctor's wife. This was apparently a custom and for some the expectation in the 1950s. Momma, instead, told her doctor to "Get your own baby so that you can name it whatever you want!" She, like our Afrikan Ancestors, recognized the power of naming and did, in her own way, challenge non-affirming systems.

Momma was a lifelong learner and lifelong creative. She was about the African-centered principles of kuumba-creativity, and improvisation, taking something, going with its rhythm, and making it greater for self, family, and community. She did this with fabric when making beautiful clothes. She did this with food, making delicious meals and desserts. She loved to learn on her own, developing new skills, from macramé and jewelry arts, to making shoes and hats. She learned how to sew at a very early age and was known by all around her as the woman who made all her stylish clothes. She made mine, too. Her kuumba was highly grounded in African culture. This was even more evident in the decade immediately preceding her transition when she began to wear her hair natural, eventually allowing it to lock, and she wore, almost exclusively, African print grand boubous and other traditional African clothing.

My mother helped me to appreciate the importance of learning through mind, body, and spirit, in contrast to the almost exclusive privileging in these contemporary times on cognition and mechanical devices. While she could use the technologies of the day, Momma also valued and used first-tech (a term I use instead of low-tech). She used the spiritual technologies that our African foremothers used. She could envision what others couldn't easily see. For example, she used dreamwork; she might see something that she liked, then she would dream about it. In her dream, she would see how to make it. Once awake, she would make it according to what she dreamed, adding her own flair.

She saw beauty and value in what others sometimes perceived as unattractive. Momma had a patch of plants in her front lawn, what I later learned is known as an English cottage garden. It was a mélange of tall ornamental grasses with fuzzy plumes, white flowerettes, and yellow blossoms at their tops. Poke salet, mint, pachysandra, and hostas were among the groundcover. The neighbors in her suburban subdivision abhorred this walkway to her front door, as its contents contrasted with their sterile, perfectly coiffed green lawns. What they didn't understand or appreciate was that some of those flowers, which they called "weeds,"

were actually nutritional/medicinal plants that Momma would use to tend to wounds, use as teas to aid in digestion, or eat. Her neighbors did not appreciate her rhythm, knowledge, and wisdom, much like the rhythm, indigenous knowledge, and wisdom of Africa are all too often underappreciated. My Momma understood the Oneness principle of an African-centered perspective, connections between the seen and unseen, between humans and nature. Surely there were *sangomas* and diviners in her bloodline, those traditional healers who understood the healing power of plants in nature, who through dreams and ritual found answers to their questions about life! She understood the connection of all aspects of the Creator's universe in learning, creating, and taking care of herself, family, and community. Momma would call on the energy of our Ancestors to "see" and to assist her in nurturing and healing work.

Nina Simone, the high priestess of the civil rights movement, was an Afrikan Queen whose divine and sacred energy, like that of my mother, was an example of creativity and cultural groundedness. She embraced her unconventional voice and African natural style. Her life and performances embodied kuumba; they were both unconventional and creative. She was connected to Spirit and her African ancestry and she used these to guide her in her life and work. Nina Simone used her talent as activism in the service of liberating and healing her cultural community.

Transformative Lessons Learned from Momma

I, too, use my skills as a facilitator of learning, inspired by the legacy of my mother and the talent of othermothers like Nina Simone, to foster creativity, cultural groundedness, healing, and commitment to liberation. In one of the units in my Psychology from an African-centered perspective course, we examine the Nigrescence model of racial identity development (Cross & Frost, 2016). It theorizes how people move into increasing levels of Black consciousness. I use one of Nina Simone's signature songs, "Four Women," as a prompt for learning. "Four Women" presents four women of African descent, Aunt Sarah, Safronia, Sweet Thing, and Peaches, who are in different generations of African American history. The song describes their different ways of knowing Blackness, as well as their adaptations to racism and oppression. My students read the lyrics while they listen to Ms. Simone singing the song. They then go into discussion groups, each group responsible for examining one of the four women, to think about various issues related to the women's racial identities. The student groups are

charged to be creative, collaborating with each other, to develop a way to present their understanding of their particular woman to the larger classroom group. The exercise lasts for approximately 45 minutes.

Over the years that I have taught this course, I've witnessed amazing work done by my students. In one class, they presented a skit about Aunt Sarah, speaking of her experiences on a plantation in the USA compared to her life in Africa. On another occasion, a group that was examining the character Peaches had the class participate in a simulated Black Power rally, discussing approaches to address racism. In another year, students "role-played" Sweet Thing in a "one-woman" show, discussing her experience of the intersectionality of gender and race and her choices in response to sexism and racism. They interrogated the concept of twinness, sharing how the challenge of her circumstances could also reveal, if listened to in the ways of the Ancestors, suggestions for how to return to equilibrium "in support of self-determination, renewal and transformation" (Tolliver, 2010, p. 321). Student presentations illustrated the women's racial identity and consciousness within the context of the Nigrescence model. They also represented students' transformative learning through roleplay and active engagement of the curricular materials.

The importance of kuumba and calling on polycentered ways of knowing and expression, such as the creative arts, to help people understand academic content and to support healing has been an important part of my educational practice. I have been nurtured by the sacred wisdom and energy of Queens such as the High Priestess of Soul, Nina Simone, and my Momma, Gwendolyn Tolliver. In the words of Mary McLeod Bethune, "…I am my mother's daughter, and the drums of Africa still beat in my heart" (as cited in Rappaport, 2001, p. 76).

Concluding Remarks

This chapter is, in essence, a love letter as I pay homage to the legacies of Mommas to the 4th power: Momma Fannie Mae Pritchett, Momma Sarah, Momma Catherine, and Momma (Gwen), as well as to the othermothers (Bernard et al., 2012), those numerous Afrikan Queens. They have provided me with a foundation that clearly rests upon African-rooted wisdom noted above, building upon and expanding a mission of cultural grounding, covenants of ethical behavior, balance between work and play, kuumba (creativity), twinness, and complementarity with men of African descent. I learned from them the importance of being one's

cultural self and embracing one's Spirit-ness—remembering, re-membering, and helping others to do the same. When Chaka Khan sings "I'm every woman, it's all in me" (Ashford & Simpson, 1978), she expresses how I experience the influence, the impact, and the manifestation of the Spirit of these Afrikan Queens in my life and my work.

Who they were and who I am is *because of* their divine energy and African spirit, *not in spite of* Eurocentric oppressions and hegemony. I am because of Africa. And because of Africa, I am African-centered. It is from that center that I embrace their sacred and divine energy and utilize it to develop myself and to facilitate others' learning and development into the powerful warriors, healers, and builders that we can be. Mommas to the 4th power demonstrated and modeled African-ness and African ways of being. I model this African-centeredness in my praxis and the transformative pedagogy that I've utilized to facilitate student learning and transformation. I invite students to look through an African lens, to recall the strengths and the lessons that Africa has to share with us. I invite students to re-member through an African-centered perspective, going back to what has worked for us (TEDxDePaulUniversity, 2016).

My pedagogy is designed to ignite a fire so that students will fall in love with Africa and themselves, so that they can come back into wholeness to healing from the fragmentation that comes with the lies and misperceptions they have been fed through Western hegemony. Through support, love of community, and love of self, with the risks and challenges that go along with that, reascension, revitalization, and reaffirmation of Africa-ness can occur. Healing and transformation is possible.

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CHAPTER 14

Healing Through (Re)Membering and (Re) Claiming Ancestral Knowledge About Black Witch Magic

Lakeesha J. Harris

In keeping with the conjuring of spirit and my belief that the Ancestors should get first word, I begin this chapter with an excerpt from a slave narrative written in poetic formation titled “We Organized” from the book *The Dark Thirty: Southern Tales of the Supernatural* (McKissack, 1992, pp. 22–25):

> We pin Massa’s black button to a straw doll.
> Hang it in a sycamore tree.
> Spinning, clapping,
> Calling the names of the ancestors…
> Old names…
> Powerful names.
> Three days dancing in the dark.
> Three days chanting till dawn.

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…
Come harvest-time Massa be low sick.
Near ‘bout wasted away.
All the mean gone out of him.

…
He free the Congo woman.
He free everybody—glad to be rid of us!
Wrote out the free papers, right now!

I come from a long line of Black spirit women who first believed in freedom and then used everything in their power, including their magic, conjure, and other forms of African traditional religious and spirit work, in movement toward that freedom. The Black women in my family have a legacy of magic, but they've never called it that. There are several examples of these women that come to mind, my paternal grandmother being one of them. There was a time during my childhood when my mother, younger brother, and I were homeless so for about a year, my brother and I went to live with my grandmother. She was the first lady of a church that she and my grandfather ran out of their home. I witnessed her anoint olive oil, saying the 23rd psalms over it—then she would use it and *lay hands on people*, healing them. My grandmother was Cherokee and Black and my grandfather came from the Gullah Geechee nation from the Atlanta gulf coast area of Brunswick. They therefore retained many of the African/Indigenous traditions that have been passed down intergenerationally. In keeping with this notion, bell hooks (1993) reflects on her own roots:

> There was the secret lore of the ancestors—the African and Native Americans—who had given that new race of black folk, born here on this portion of the earth, whole philosophies about how to be One with the universe and sustain life … They knew how to live well and long despite adversity (the evils caused by racism, sexism, and class exploitation), pain, hardship, unrelenting poverty, and the ongoing reality of loss. They knew joy, that feeling that comes from using one's powers to the fullest … the world of spirituality and magic was one where black women teachers, preachers, and healers worked with as much skill, power, and second sight as their black male comrades. (p. 2)

My mother, however, was not a religious person at all while I was growing up, but she would do things, in her own little way, to heal us. She

would blend eucalyptus and Vaseline to rub on my chest when I was congested and wheezing from a cold. She'd also make her own cough syrups blending herbs, berries, and rum. She'd create all of these "potions" and say "I saw my mama do this or that" but didn't equate this to magic or conjuring, but that's what it has always been. The healing process is indeed divine and magical. Now a Baptist minister, my momma insists that she is not "doing any witch work." She got so mad one time when a pastor called her a witch while on the pulpit. She said to me, "I just kept looking at him and feeling angry at how he tried to call me out in public. You know what? His nose started bleeding out of nowhere." I replied, "His nose started bleeding because he got his mouth on you and you don't want to believe in your innate ability to change and shift energy … Your power did that!" To this day we don't even discuss that I call myself a witch. She called me up just the other day and said, "Honey, you know I was just thinking that I should tell you that I have an eagle feather and when I sage my house to clean it, I use the eagle feather to waft it away, to bring the bad energy out of my house and the good energy into the house." I just shook my head. All these beautiful Black women who are healers but utterly refuse to refer to themselves as witches or conjurers. Colonization runs deep and we have been so conditioned to think that these words are "bad." How can we have unconditional love for ourselves when we can't even develop the full spectrum of our innate wisdom and spiritual connection?

We often hide our conjuring behind Christianity. Historically we have had to do so in order for it to survive colonization and enslavement, so that *we* could survive. For instance, Saint Joseph, the Patron Saint of workers and the home in the Catholic faith, is connected to Osain and Obatala in the Yoruba spiritual tradition of Ifa and Lucumi from Cuba. Osain is the healer and owner of wild plant medicine, a giver of life (Gardner, 2010). Osain intersects with Saint Joseph because they both take care of all sanctuaries and sacred spaces, such as homes and spiritual dwellings. Saint Joseph's Day is really big in New Orleans. In the Catholic and conjure communities, spiritualists construct beautiful altars in honor of him. On "Super Sunday" the Mardi Gras Indians come out in their full regalia to honor that earth-based deity and honor the land. And because St. Joseph is aligned with luck, job, and home blessings, there's the belief that if you bury Saint Joseph, you'll get the home that you want or will be able to sell your home. I'm working with one such statue now. I have him buried in my comfrey plant to honor Osain.

As a child growing up in Kankakee, Illinois, I witnessed my Auntie Joyce do these things. She had nothing past an eighth grade education but acquired several properties. Auntie Joyce had a statue in her garden and I didn't know what it was then but I know now and it's the same little statue that I put in my garden—St. Joseph. I saw her put Saint Joseph in the ground at a house and the next week the house was hers. This is the power that we hold. Auntie Joyce was very much a root woman and agriculturalist (or what is often nowadays referred to as an urban farmer). I watched her face abuse from her husband, yet still provide for the family by conjuring and working the earth, growing food, and miraculously building hefty middle-class living. Decades later, I concluded that it was herbal lore—the ritual act of growing and nurturing the land's plants—that gave my aunt strength and her fortune; it kept her sane and whole and outliving her abuser, my uncle. Gloria Wade-Gayles (1993) captures my sentiments about the women in my family in the following statement:

> What I remember most vividly from my youth is my respect for women, especially my elders. To me, they were powerful beings, forces that belonged, I thought, to another world, but chose to live in this one because we needed them. As blacks, we struggle for personhood and freedom in the physical world, but that was not the only world in which we lived. Women guided us to the other world, the spiritual world, where neither race nor gender was of consequence, and there they nurtured us and made us whole. We called the women wise; they were in fact, spiritual. (p. 248)

One of my greatest memories is my mother, aunties, and uncles gathering for the purposes of healing and prayer for a cousin of mine who was on drugs. His wife had put out the call, purposefully avoiding the historically damaging impact of police "intervention" on Black families and communities. As they had always done, my family engaged in communal/restorative healing practices. I remember them storming my cousin's home and bathroom, as he had been on a weeklong drug binge. So there I was bearing witness to the power of prayer and roots. The men kept hold over my cousin until the crack had worn off, telling him that they weren't going anywhere. The women prayed, sang and lit candles, and blended together various roots that would help ease the trauma of coming off the high. In that moment I realized the power of shameless healing; the power of women and the importance of passing down generational knowledge of spirit and conjure; the power of Black voice to locate and ground us; we've

organized and created pathways, cross-generationally; we've actively resisted policies and wars that have been waged on our bodies; we've spoken out and conjured and insisted that our voices be heard; hell, Black women have consistently started, been integral to, and at the forefront of innumerable visible and invisible movements for liberation.

Freedom Song: Migration to the Space of Healing

I have always been a healer and caretaker—of *others*, whether through formal employment or informally in my community. I graduated high school with a diploma and a certification as a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA), and I did that work for many years. I later became a doula, a birthing assistant who helps the mother and entire family unit (if desired) from prenatal, all the way up to birth, and then after the baby comes home. I performed such duties as assisting mothers with lactation support and acclimation to motherhood. This is important political work because sometimes Black women are so disconnected from family, and family can be harmful depending on what the individual's situation is. Creating a non-judgmental, loving, healing space so that one can actualize their own definition of motherhood is empowering. Also, reclaiming birth is critical because racial discrimination during labor has been proven to be linked to increased infant and maternal morbidity rates among Black women. Thus midwives have for a long time insisted that creating and giving Black women access to healthy birthing spaces can help to reduce these rates (Midwives of North America, 2015).

However, many in our community have become so dependent on the medical industrial complex that we forget that there was once a space at home that was sacred and nurturing and whole. For instance, a young woman on the South Side of Chicago said to me, "I want to labor at home and my family doesn't agree with me. They don't think that it can be done." In the process of helping her to labor at home, I helped her mother to (re)member and (re)claim ancestral space. We labored in her tub and her mother and daughter were there the entire time. She was in and out of the tub. She walked around, her mother cooked for her and she ate, we played whatever music she wanted to hear, and when it was time for her to go to the hospital, she delivered that baby in 20 minutes. The colonization of our bodies is so thick and it's so ingrained that we have to be vigilant in pushing that yoke off of us by speaking who we are and what we want into existence.

My whole life has been spent doing healing work in my community. In the neighborhoods that I've lived in, they just call me Lil Mama or the tampon woman. I used to work for Proctor and Gamble doing outreach and education to help girls talk about their bodies and periods and in turn I would get samples of products. Girls would come to the house if they needed pads, tampons, to get their questions answered about their bodies, questions they couldn't or wouldn't ask anyone else. I would give sex workers and women that just got out of bad relationships Epsom salt baths. However, with all of this taking care of everybody else, I failed to care for myself. When we willfully neglect our physical, mental, and spiritual well-being, it's an injustice to ourselves, our families, and our communities.

I graduated with a B.A. in Women's Studies and went straight into my Master's program, while simultaneously taking care of six kids and being with a partner who was not working and not well physically or mentally. Additionally, I was in a constant battle with the State regarding my children. Raising Black children as a Black mama, you have to worry about things like police engagement. For example, teachers and neighbors often chose to call the police when my son with autism was agitated and just needed calming, something I have never needed to do at home. It's like these white folks don't know how to come from a place of healing when dealing with our children who they often do not see as children, or even as fully human. Protecting my children, loving my partner, being an engaged community member, and working *several* jobs ultimately took a toll on my health. I sunk into a depression where I had to leave or I was going to take my own life.

One day I heard the call to freedom just as clear as you are hearing my voice between the lines of this text. It went something like this: "Yoohoo! Yeah you mami—with the bad hair, brittle nails and shotty nerves—the one who gave up her dreams and wild child imagination, my name is freedom. Do you remember your name?" I looked at my partner and told her, "I have to leave." I had never been by myself, ever. I went from being a teenage mom when I was 17 and from that to an abusive and neglectful marriage, to being with my partner for 14 years. I had never woken up to just the sound of my own voice. I decided to go to New Orleans and when it came time for me to board the plane, I was visibly shaking. The last people-pleasing nerve that I had left kicked in and I started questioning myself. Goodness, what had I done? What woman leaves her kids and partner and just goes off to heal? Would they be alright? What would

people think of me if something happens and I'm not there? Internally, the real problem was that I knew that this day would be a game changer, that I'd have no excuse but to release and deal with myself. I also knew that once I was done with my stay in New Orleans, I wouldn't be the same when I returned to Chicago. My radical mission that I had chosen to accept was to actively heal myself, to love myself. I said to myself, "I gotta go save me." I think so many Black women need to do that. We need to put ourselves first at times but this is not what we're taught –strength and self-sacrifice are seen as Black women's virtues—and they eulogize those themes at our funerals (Collins, 2008). You have to engage in the radical act of self-love and people ain't used to Black women doing that—and I was criticized for it.

I won't pretend that New Orleans doesn't have its own problems or glorify it as this mythic place. However, there is something to be said about a city where there is massive healing going on. When I stepped off of that plane, my Ancestors spoke to me on that sacred ground and said, "You are here, you are safe, you have permission to heal." Hell, that was all that I needed to hear. I allowed myself to come undone and look at the pieces of myself, look at ways in which I needed healing, and actually do the necessary work for an entire year. I gave myself permission do things that I hadn't done in over 25 years, or in my life. On Sundays, dance became my prayer and worship as I two-stepped through the streets to second lines and danced my version of the Bomba to the drums in Congo Square. I biked in the rain, ran at sunrise, and sang loudly at the moon around midnight. This was not just for my personal health but to unleash that little girl inside of me that had been contained for all those years to preserve herself. When I was nine years old, I was living in a car, not riding bikes in my neighborhood. Or the times where I was molested and my mother was like, "Don't tell nobody because they'll try to take you from me," which was the truth, so I never did. That little girl held all of that in her for so long. When I did these things, it freed so much of me, so much of that little girl. I made offerings of molasses and honey at Lake Ponchatrain to the Orisha *Yemonja* and *Oshun*. I took red wine and cornmeal to entrances of cemeteries to please *Oya* and ward off death. I allowed Mambos, Iyawos, and my spirit guides to help me heal. Bit by bit, I began to know my name, to call my name, to reclaim myself from between the spaces of societal hatred and self-neglect. I awakened in me the free woman who lay dormant for far too long.

All of these spaces co-created for me to heal were sustained by Black women and Black queer people. I was in spaces where I was able to talk to other sisters about my traumas and have them tell me it's okay to break down and have wailing sessions. I was in spaces where women were talking openly about their fibroids and how they've hindered their fertility. These people were my healers and I was theirs and bore witness to the various obstacles that we continue to come up against to access that healing. It was a presence in my life that was the salve that I needed for my battered body and mind. Then the sisters that were part of the circle that I was in put on *The Healing Room*; the space—accessible to community members and donation-based, was owned by a Black woman where twice a month sisters would sing and chant while others would do Reiki or massage. In addition, the space that I went to for mindful meditation was held by a Black Buddhist woman, and people just donated what they could. Housed in a place called The Healing Center owned by white mambo, this Black healer went to such lengths to make that space hers and to make us Black people feel comfortable enough to release. I was also taught Samba by a Black woman who is a professor at Tulane who comes out to the park district to help women feel confident enough in their bodies to dance. I remember her taking me by my hips after being so rigid in my movements and just off beat. She said, "Sister, you have to feel the music. Samba requires love-making with your hips, it's sexy and it's alright for you to be sexy." Can you imagine someone telling a Black woman that she can be free and sexy and there is nothing wrong with her hips? I was floored. She took my hips in her hands and she swayed them to the music and guided me in the movements of the Samba. That moment was so pivotal for me. I rode home on my bike smiling from ear to ear. I was sexy, thick hips, big butt and all, the words of Ntozake Shange (1982) resonating:

> Where there is a woman there is magic. If there is a moon falling from her mouth, she is a woman who knows her magic, who can share or not share her powers. A woman with a moon falling from her mouth, roses between her legs and tiaras of Spanish moss, this woman is a consort of the spirits. (p. 1)

Thus one of the most significant healing aspects of my group was learning/reclaiming conjure from them, then adding my own understanding of what conjure and magic is, and growing from that point. I started a little garden on my deck with herbs and vegetables and when the neighbors saw

me growing stuff, they'd say something like: "What's that? I'm growing cucumbers—maybe we can trade for some of your tomatoes. What's that herb?" So that's the beauty of New Orleans, this communal living, and it has become even more critical post-Katrina as white moneyed people gobble up property. Simultaneously, there is this continued frequency of death so we have to make room for radical communal spaces of understanding and love in our communities, especially for queer and trans* people—and this is the group that I was among when I was living in New Orleans. The Afro-futurist group *Wildseeds*, which came out of the creative work of members of my healing circle, is a part of the continuation of radical healing spaces where they reimagine what Afro-centered experiences would look like in the future, because in futurism according to Hollywoood sci-fi, there are no Black people. Many Native American peoples think several generations ahead and Black folks, if we can gather ourselves from all of this daily oppression, should center ourselves in that mindset. *Women with a Vision* is another organization that I connected with while living in New Orleans that does this radical healing work. They recently acquired a new space after having had their old location firebombed because of the radical work that they do in the South (i.e. helping Black women as a response to a lack of HIV prevention resources for women who are most at risk: poor women, sex workers, women with substance abuse issues, and transgender women) (Stillman, 2014). The threats that exist against our communities are real so we need to create powerful healing spaces in order to combat these forces.

In discussing ways to challenge these oppressions, we started to talk about the term "witch" and what it means to be a Black witch, or a Black wise woman. Thanks to the mentorship of a Black witch coven and sister circle in New Orleans, I starting to call myself a "Black witch," marking a critical turning point in my life. This was a political decision on my part, with a careful consideration of how the word has historically been utilized to stigmatize marginalized women (Jalalzai, 2009). Even the spiritual community that I'm part of (I am an initiated member of the Lucumi tradition which comes from Ifa, an African spiritual tradition from Nigeria) is still deeply colonized, and doesn't necessarily like witches. You are seen as evil or someone that needs to be watched or monitored, so even there, calling myself a Black witch is political. Doing so is to understand the power that title holds for me—as a Black woman and as someone taking ownership of her magic and her whole body, mind, and spirit.

Calling oneself a Black witch is owning that space by understanding that we have this intricate relationship with nature and do ourselves a disservice by not acknowledging that partnership, that partnership with the divine, that partnership with our brilliant selves, and that we are magical beings. I know that some people hate "the magical negro." Whatever, honey, get over yourselves. We create magic all the time. How do you think we've survived all this time? How do you think we've gotten this far under slavery, under segregation, under all of the continued oppression? We *are* magical negroes. Come on, we are the divine. The divine does not exist in a cloud somewhere. It exists within us. There are scriptures in the Bible, the Torah, and the Quran that speak to this. There's not a book that I can say that I get my knowledge of gardening from. All I know is that I heard my Auntie's voice say, "Just put the seed in the ground and watch it do what it do." This is the divine consciousness, a knowing that when we die we become energy. That energy is all around us and we are hearing the spirits of our Ancestors. They are talking to us. We're constantly connected through that ancestral frequency. We've been colonized out of that frequency, out of our inner voice, taught not to trust it, or if you tell somebody you hear spirits they say, "You need to commit yourself to the psych ward." For instance, Zora Neale Hurston did all kinds of research, went to Haiti and reclaimed that space of Haitian voodoo, and the government paid her for it, kept it, and Hollywood made a whole bunch of money off of that information—but we don't get to claim it as our own.

There is ongoing colonization of Black witchcraft by white people/culture that frequently appropriate it, failing to credit those who created it and invisibilizing/erasing Black witches from modern portrayals of witchcraft. There is the lack of acknowledgement that *we* are the source of *their* information. But the problem extends far beyond appropriation. This motivation to erase comes partly from the fact that white people recognize the magic that the Black community holds. In a Facebook post about a pair of $592,000 candelabra shaped like Black women featured in Architectural Digest magazine, I warned my fellow witches: "Do your research honey pies and understand that our body parts and images hold so much magic." Our body parts have historically been put in jars and auctioned to the highest bidder. Being associated with magic has threatened to erase the Black community itself. As Yomi Adegoke (2016) writes on *Broadly*, legislation in colonial Jamaica made the practice of African traditions like Obeah punishable by death.

For Black people, there's the fallacy that witchcraft derives from Europe (Sprenger & Kramer, 1486). For example, the Salem Witch Trials were all about white women and men dying but rarely discussed is how, since enslavement, Black women have always faced death for conjuring (Bloomberg, 2007). Or there's no discussion about the granny midwives and how the Department of Public Health put them out of business and forbade them to use their ancestral healing knowledge. There is no discussion about African midwives that are in this day and time being killed by Christian people because of they are seen as "witches," and conjuring is associated (as it has been demonized by Europeans) with devil worship. All of this takes away from Black women's knowledge and power.

The parallel between me politically calling myself a "witch" and also politically calling myself "queer" cannot be overstated. For one, queer, trans*, and gender non-conforming people have historically been persecuted, just as witches have. In addition, the term queer, which was originally used by the white supremacist heteropatriarchal establishment to degrade non-heterosexual and non-binary people, is being reclaimed and reframed (Rand, 2014). In addition, whether homophobes like it or not, claiming queerness is also part of the decolonization process, by reclaiming African ancestral ways of being that did not subscribe to the gender binary or rigid boxes for sexuality. Being queer, being fluid in terms of gender and sexuality, is parallel to my ability to shapeshift, to alternate between masculine and feminine energy, and to move toward freedom.

Sojourner's Healing

I returned to Chicago from New Orleans with myself, with my whole self, with my magic intact—and with the knowledge that I can create whatever I want to, and I don't need permission to do it. I don't need a certification, I don't need permission from the ivory tower, I just create that space and that's what it's gonna be. Not everybody wants a Black woman to do that but I do it anyway, without fear or apology. Being a Black witch is about reclaiming ancestral knowledge about witchcraft and using it to fight deep-rooted, systemic oppression. Since we know that "the masters tools will never dismantle the master's house" (Lorde, 1984), it is clear that the tools of conjuring have been demonized because they *do* have the power to dismantle the master's house. *Your* magic will dismantle the master's house. People of African descent can use their ancestral magic as a tool of healing, as well as a potent weapon against harrowing social injustices.

We're so used to seeking justice in the physical realm, asking white people and the State for justice, that we forget to go to our Ancestors through the spirit realm where you can conjure your way to justice. I go right to my Ogun altar which, in African Traditional Religions, is the god of war. Or I seek open roads to justice via Elegua at my altar space to him or at any crossroads. The crossroads, which has been vilified in movies, is seen as a portal to opportunity and newness in my spiritual practice. My spiritual warriors sit at my front door, watching out for my comings and goings. Before I go to a meeting, I first approach my altars and tap into that spirit space. That's the justice framework, really understanding that if you're growing a plant, your plant is more apt to work for you. If you acknowledge your Ancestors and make offering to the land, it is more apt to work for you.

We as Black witches also exist to assert that our legacy of magic and conjure should work and be utilized in times of peace for sustaining and healing ourselves and our communities. It is also very pertinent to use that same magic when we are warring with the powers that be. For Black women, it seems to always be war time, times where we've had to navigate continual healing through the generational fog of trauma, shame, and secrecy. We see this play out in the historical reforms on public assistance, housing rights and access, and of course, the infamous and continual war on drugs. Systems of colonization designed to "protect the public" fail to consider the protection, quality of life, or even existence of Black women and Black queer and trans* folks. Further, if we assert that we need healing from daily trauma, we are shamed for being too weak, because these things are reserved for white women, or anyone other than us—for us they are seen as luxuries that we cannot "afford."

Another part of colonization is how Black people have been separated from the land and made to think that we are trespassers or foreigners on our own land. For example, I was living on the West Side of Chicago, right down the street from the beautiful conservatory—you would think that the cleanup crew would come down our block, right? Nope, so I would take my six kids out on the weekends to clean up the block. Soon enough, our neighbors started to join us. Also, white folks who tried to pack us into hypersegregated impoverished areas didn't want to give us green space, so we created a community garden. There's a movement of Black women in particular that are reclaiming space in agriculture to remedy the lack of access to healthy foods in our communities. For this very reason, the garden is central to my identity as a witch, since the use of the earth's

healing properties is paramount. I consider myself a kitchen and garden witch—someone who uses ordinary kitchen ingredients to cast spells and views gardening and cooking as forms of witchcraft. When I plant something, even if it's in my window, it's a reclamation of space. We do whatever we have to do to help our community; we can't rely on or trust white folks to do right by us. This is decolonization, self-determination, and the awareness of our own agency and capacity as change agents.

Another example of this mindset is that part of my healing regimen in New Orleans was running in a group called Black Girls Run, so when I came back I created one for the West Side of Chicago so that Black women know that they can run and also feel safe in their community. Of course people thought I was crazy and would say things like, "You running on the West Side?" I was like, "Why wouldn't I run on the west side? That's where I live. When Becky run through the hood, nobody questions or bothers her. You just give her space and let her be." Running represents yet another connection with the land. I take up land space as I run my big ass down the trail and refuse to move out the way of the white people—I am reclaiming that space.

For me, and for a lot of the others in my group, running is healing because one, you get to partner with Black women in a different way that is not church. You get to feel your own power and the power of your sisters. If I'm falling off on a leg of running, sisters would be like, "Come on girl. You can make it. We can do this." It's very empowering to see another Black woman beside you running 10, 12 miles, and so on. You're spending a lot of time running with these women and sometimes, if they're going through something, grieving or what have you, we're on the pavement together and they're crying and running and you're holding them up through that grief process. So in that instance, running becomes a grief ritual, a way of purging and cleansing. There's been a lot of sweat and tears on that pavement on the West Side, and not just what you see on the news. Then we started to form a community and we would have brunches and other social events. It was all healing. You also lost the weight and got healthy. I think when I'm running, I'm at my most clear. You're forming a bond with nature. You're clearing up all the toxins and also getting out whatever is going on in your day.

Yes, I am still the person who cares for others, but I know now that I'm the first person that I need to care for. When the Ancestors check in with me and ask, "Keesha what does your freedom look like, smell like, taste like, and how does it sound?" I answer, "Ancestors, my love for self tastes

like the healing salt water of Bahia's beaches, my sweat, and my tears. My freedom looks like the splash of my cowboy boots attached to my feet as I dance in mud at the New Orleans Jazz Fest, smells like fresh cut lemon grass after a summer rain in Chicago, it sounds like Black and Brown babies in my neighborhood asking me 'Ms. Keesha how many miles did your run today?' then the sound of their voices as they say 'woooooow' after I tell them, 'five,' 'ten,' or 'thirteen miles babies.'"

Also because of the inspiration from the healing spaces in New Orleans, and because there were also so few healing services available to Black folks in my Chicago community, I started *Sojourner's Healing Room* where on Saturdays, I opened my home to whoever wanted to come, and they would just donate whatever they could. I've gotten eggs, rice, staples, whatever they can in exchange for Reiki energy healing, tarot readings, food and a talk session, herbal baths (which entail a ritual of releasing, grieving, making offering at the lakefront), whatever I can do. In addition, as more Black folks, particularly Black women and queer and trans* Black folks, are becoming disenchanted with traditional Western religious traditions, the more they feel left out or pushed out, like they don't fit in or have a place, brave spaces that explore healing and spirit work are becoming more imperative. In that vein, I also consider *Sojourner's Healing Room* a healing space for queer people who don't have sanctuary. I consider my house a "migration home" (like the Underground Railroad). I keep a lot of pillows and blankets in my closet so that if people come, they can lay their head in a comfortable manner, and I always make sure my spaces have doors for privacy/safety. For example, for trans* people who come from the South (where they're killing trans* women) who don't have access to hormone replacement therapy, they may come to my house and then go to the Chicago Women's Health Center where they get their hormones and whatever other services they need. One of my friends takes his hormone replacement shot at my house because he doesn't even have a safe space to put his needles, so I make sure that there's a needle container here. Thinking of these things that are outside of cisgender people's experiences—this is all part of creating radical healing space.

Black Witch Pedagogy

In 2015, I co-founded Black Witch Chronicles, a digital coven that serves to communicate from our collective wisdom as healers, artists, visionaries, and change-makers connected to the ongoing story that sings to us from

our ancestral roots and truths, and to serve as an inclusive space for Black witches to educate people about topics such as gender and sexuality in spirit work. This started out as a conversation about activists who need spaces to heal (Michael Brown had just been murdered), to come in off the front lines and be safe somewhere, especially queer activists who have been cast out or marginalized by churches. Out of Black Witch Chronicles evolved my new moon circle which I host every new moon. We gather to set intentions, go over rituals, and reclaim magical space. Right now we're going through the moon book for this year, so studying more closely the cycles of the moon. What can be done as far as magic during particular cycles of the moon, and not just new moon or full moon but all phases, is immense. There are times where it's good to cut your hair to aid in growing it, times where it's good to rotate the bed for restful sleep, and there are even times where you should actively engage in seeking employment via the moon's cycles. Some would call this "witch work," but I call it cultivating community, the real urban renewal, with the well-being of Black folks in mind. The new moon circle is dedicated to that. I also promote community accountability through Facebook posts and a monthly web series. I also regularly host webinars for young Black witches-in-training regarding beginning their own spiritual paths, and learning the ways of ancestral rituals and conjuring.

Within a year of founding Black Witch Chronicles, I discovered a demand for a more structured form of magical mentorship. Every day, there's a person in my inbox at Black Witch Chronicles Facebook page saying some iteration of "I want to make the transition from Christianity to being a witch." I'm always hesitant to tell them to make a transition from Christianity to being a witch because to be honest with you, there's so much witchcraft in the Bible, there's so much conjure that our people use in that Bible so I'm like, "You're throwing out the baby with the bath water. You don't have to do that. You can actually honor the space that your Ancestors took because that was a space of survival." I simply provide them with complementary information—I think it has to be both/and, because there is a tradition there. All these years we had to hide our Orishas behind the Catholic saints so there's obviously powerful magic behind them, so use it. Use all of it. Because of this constant stream of emails I was receiving, I said to myself, "O.k., it's time to set up some system in which we can formalize the learning process." So then I started to envision what a mentorship program would look like. I decided that I can give my mentees the year that was given to me. Out of this notion, Black Witch University was born.

Black Witch University (BWU) exists to mentor student witches of the Black diaspora into being comfortable with reclaiming their magical capabilities. Students explore various aspects of the occult, mysticism, and healing practices via lessons crafted by initiated Black diasporic priestesses and witches. This forms the foundation of what students will need to continue crafting as a Black diasporic witch who will create their own practice or work jointly in a coven or occult group. Our goal is to reclaim and (re) appropriate physical and metaphysical magical space and practices for Black diasporic beings. This is done by:

1. Creating an intentional and inclusive space of learning that is free of homophobia, genderphobia, colorism, ageism, classism, and all isms that seek to oppress our people and hinder magical exploration.
2. When and where we can, providing access to educational material at a low or no cost to the student.
3. Remaining open to new information provided by our students and community as they hold us accountable for evolving and growing.

The program is a year long and classes are broken down into quarters. Students receive their Reiki Level 1 and 2 practitioner attunements, and upon program completion, they receive certification as trained magical practitioners, conjurers, and healers from BWU's mentorship program.

Ineffable as magic may seem, it can be taught like any other subject you'd find in a classroom. My first cohort was 16 people (out of 100 applicants) here in this small house and everybody loved it. It just fit so perfectly. I had a pregnant woman come. I had a woman bring her baby with her. That's the radical healing space that so many Black women don't have access to (which is a major hindrance to Black women in higher education). The goal is to reclaim physical and metaphysical space for Black people to evolve. Students reclaim ancestral concepts such as Àjé, a class of supernaturally-empowered beings associated with female entities in the Yorùbá tradition. Students further their knowledge of African and African American magic through the trips to Chicago and New Orleans, mentorship, and homework assignments requiring tasks like crafting magical oils and, and above all, growing food in a garden. As I told my sisters who are doing this work with me, Toni Maurice Melburn and Lorena Bostic Seals, "We're coming out of the kitchen and into the garden, and then branching out into the universe." There's also a social goal, not to just use your

magic for personal gain. You have to use it for community betterment, for social justice, and my mentees sign a contract agreeing to that.

The course is divided up into quarters and I teach the first quarter titled "Crafting the Magical Garden and Survey in Honoring Earth/Land Based Deities." I provide students with specific seeds for sowing, such as Angelica, Xhosa Dream Root, Balm of Gilead, and several more. Yes, it's reclamation of physical space but it's also reclamation of magical space when you can learn to use what you're growing to benefit the community. The next term is how to use the herbs and create elixirs and conjure oils from them. Tony, who is a decedent of Mambo Marie Laveau, is the instructor for that class. She makes conjure oils from it using high John, the conqueror root and understanding what high John and low John can be used use it in court cases and to turn the tides of the criminal justice system. Loreana, who is the great grand-daughter of Mother Catherine Seals, a well-known healer and spiritualist in New Orleans, is teaching divination. Her lessons are on tarot reading, scrying using blackened mirrors, and dousing using a pendulum as a tool. Dousing tools are also used for finding water so that people have water access, and we all know the importance of water access. I don't do a divination without having water and fire present. They are conduits of energy and cleansers so when I'm sitting across from somebody, whatever energy they have is filtered through the cleansing process of that water and fire. But we have toxic water and our bodies are being dumped in toxic water. Everything—you get the toxins from the water and the toxins from the people. Water access is so very important. Learning how to do all of these things is part of being a Black witch, some of it is spell work but mostly it's healing and showing people that they have the capabilities to do this themselves. I can do work for you but if I teach you how to do the work yourself then you own that for you and your community.

As stated above, all of my students get their certifications as Reiki practitioners. Then they are taught the practice of Reiki, meaning using it on a daily basis for upkeep of their garden, for healing and transmuting negative energy, for whatever outcome they desire. They are empowered and have ownership in their own healing. So when you learn the system of Reiki, you know how to lay hands on people and help facilitate healing. Students also learn how to use herbs and the land as a source of energy. I'm not doing it for them. They're doing it for themselves. Yes, like Ella Baker said, "Strong people don't need strong leaders." The goal is to get them to be able to operate their own conjure practice so that they're able

to go back into the community. It's a creation of economic opportunities for themselves and anyone they decide to educate in this radical way. It's business creation for them and it is also another point of access for community healing and it's that sustainability piece, that empowerment, which keeps me continuing to do this work.

What I think is of most importance in forward movement is the healing. We cannot survive without it. We must be as radical with our healing process as we are with overthrowing the social and political powers. There is a need to be as expansive in our loving within our own communities as possible. We must build bridges of love and hope instead of proliferating the shame and destruction that is so persistent. This is what I see in the Movement for Black Lives—that it is healing, decolonizing, inclusive of all genders and sexualities, and really getting to the meat of the problem which is white heteropatriarchy maintaining a stronghold over Black bodies, personhood, and freedom. We must stop being ashamed of who we are in order to get to where we need to be. We must cease to suffer trauma in silence and alone. We must call out and call in and gather in truth and stand in our magic. Period. And in the famous words of Shirley Chisolm, "If power doesn't make room for you at the table, bring your own damn chair and insist that they make room."

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CHAPTER 15

Another Lesson Before Dying: Toward a Pedagogy of Black Self-Love

Denise Taliaferro Baszile

The university, like all major institutions, is organized according to the logic of the nation-state and for the purposes of governing citizens such that they cooperate with the vision and logic of the governors (Castro Gomez, 2002). Arguably, part of this process also requires defining people such that it is clear who is of the nation-state (citizen) and whose difference is used to consolidate the nation-state (anti-citizen). In the US and other places, these distinctions are made along the binaries of man (logical) and woman (illogical), White (logical) and Black (illogical). Put simply then, part of the work of the university has been to produce knowledge that disciplines people into the logic of white supremacist capitalist imperialist patriarchy. This power/knowledge dynamic depends on the university's ability to obfuscate a simple truth: All knowledge comes from raced and gendered bodies that exist in particular places, across particular moments in time, and in relation to particular others in particular ways. It is the refusal of this truth and the claim to universal knowledge for the common good that works to make academia an inhospitable place for those of us whose knowing suggests otherwise. It is

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within this enterprise of knowledge production that Black women (and others) are often "presumed incompetent" (Gutierrez y Muhs, Niemann, Gonzalez, & Harris, 2012).

Though we are made problematic by this power/knowledge dynamic, Black women's bodies and lived experiences are potentially important counterhegemonic text in academic spaces. Such potential arises not simply from the peculiar burden we bear as woman and Black, but more precisely from our willful attempt at making ourselves subject in the face of implicit and explicit challenges that work to keep us under control. Although these challenges have many faces, they are inclusive of racist-patriarchal practices that come in the form of rules about objectivity, universal claims to truth, and rigor that define good writing, good teaching, tenure worthiness, and so on. Although we are taught that these rules are necessary for getting at the Truth of things, we must always consider whose truth and to what ends. Given this context and being the womanish woman that I am, I have always believed that the most powerful albeit difficult pedagogical work I can do—in, through, and against academia—is *to be myself*, my ever-evolving, always-becoming, certainly resisting Black woman self.

In *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks, however, reminds us that we can't engage education as the practice of freedom as just any old self; it must be a self-actualized self. Engaged pedagogy, she explains, emphasizes well-being, which means "teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own wellbeing if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students" (15). Well-being, of course, is not just about eating well and exercising but it is also about being spiritually in tune and deeply self-reflective, always on a journey of self-understanding, and self-love. Given the fast pace and harsh realities of the world we live in, finding time to connect with and be mindful of one's self is difficult but necessary work. Some of us cannot take self-love for granted, because we must work against the common (patho)logic that says that our blackness and our womaness make us less than, not serious, not worthy of full consideration, not even from each other or ourselves. Quite to the contrary, Black women with revolutionary dreams like myself *have* to *work* toward self-love. For as many Black feminist scholars will tell you, without love, struggle is fruitless and justice is out of reach (Nash, 2011). Many a revolutionary will tell you the same—Sonia Sanchez, Mari Evans, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, and Che Guevara among others. But—there is always a but—love as a revolutionary praxis

is impossible, incomprehensible without self-love, individual and collective. And self-love is unlikely for those of us who live on the underside of the white supremacist capitalist imperialist patriarchy, unless we *work* at it personally and publically. And, to be sure, this is no small feat when the dominant paradigm of legitimate knowing—Rationality—refuses what love actually requires—an intimate and passionate knowing. And yet our well-being depends on it. Self-love blossoms out of a willful self-knowing or a journey that always underscores the fact that we teach—in a classroom or a community center or a book—who we are and who we are always becoming.

Loving Blackness: The Redemptive and Pedagogic Power of Counterstorytelling or This Is Who I Am

In "Loving Blackness as Political Resistance," bell hooks, drawing on the work of Black theologian James Cone, reminds us that love is the only true recourse for intervening on practices of white domination in a way that does not kill us spiritually or otherwise. She contends that,

> Collectively, black people and our allies in struggle are empowered when we practice self-love as a revolutionary intervention that undermines practices of domination. Loving blackness as political resistance transforms our ways of looking and being and thus creates the conditions necessary for us to move against the forces of domination and death and reclaim black life. (hooks, 1992, p. 20)

Loving blackness, as hooks goes on to point out, requires that we be engaged in actively decolonizing our minds. In other words we must commit to unlearning the white supremacist (patho)logic that tells us that blackness signifies a perpetual, inescapable sense of inferiority.

Although hooks is one among many scholars who advocate for decolonizing our minds, there is less emphasis on identifying and mapping decolonizing strategies and processes that center loving blackness. One possible strategy for doing so is counterstorytelling. In the literature, counterstorytelling has been discussed as legal strategy (Delgado, 1989), as research methodology (Solorazano & Yosso, 2002), and as political strategy in social movement building (Baszile, 2015). However, here, I engage counterstorytelling as a redemptive pedagogical strategy through which loving blackness or Black self-love is made possible and sustainable. What is the

redemptive potential of counterstorytelling? Identities are narrative constructions. And as such, the stories we tell and are told are fundamentally about the invention and negotiation of our identities. Jerome Bruner (2002), for instance, noted that, "if we lacked the capacities to make stories about ourselves, there would be no such thing as selfhood" (p. 86). If we accept this premise, then, as Hilde Nelson (2001) points out, it is also plausible to argue that identities can be both narratively damaged and narratively repaired. To elaborate, master narratives through misrecognition and misrepresentation reproduce oppressed and oppressive identities; counterstories or counternarratives, on the other hand, work to resist, to heal, and/or to transform marginalized and marginalizing identities. Below I offer some insight into my own evolving understanding of loving blackness as a powerful and redemptive counternarrative.

I make no bones about the fact that I have a fierce and unrelenting love for Black people, a love that colors everything that I do as a teacher, a scholar, a mother, a lover of justice, and more. This seed was planted early in my life and nurtured often by my family, teachers, and community kinfolks. I grew up in the 1970s, chanting "I'm Black and I'm proud!" and wearing T-shirts with "Black is Beautiful" prominently displayed across the front in red, black, and green letters or little tiny silver studs or plain old black magic marker. Despite growing up in an 85 percent African American city that was suffering and sinking deeply and quickly into decline—industrial and otherwise—I bore witness each and every day to acts of revolutionary Black love. Whether they were from teachers like Mrs. Long who talked to us 4th graders regularly about Black pride and determination or from family folk like my Uncle Chokwe who fought tirelessly and fearlessly—and often without monetary compensation—to defend the human and civil rights of countless Black people. Other times these expressions of Black love were from community folk and family who cobbled together money each summer to set up a Black heritage camp for neighborhood kids with no means to go elsewhere. They were also reflected in my parents' efforts to see that my siblings and I were connected to a variety of Black countercultural spaces in the city that fed our sense of pride and possibility. I see these as revolutionary acts of love because they are actions that have the power to not only save lives, but to transform lives.

The truly beautiful thing about growing up in such a place and time and with people whose love for blackness—for Black people—was agentive was that my education was never in danger of being held hostage by inadequate schooling or biased teachers or curricula that made little or no mention of Black people. Nor was it in danger of being overrun by media

stereotypes, omissions, and willful misrepresentations. Although all of these spirit-murdering things were present and active in my environment, I was always also enveloped by a powerful counternarrative, one that refused the utter devaluation of blackness inherent in mainstream American culture, a counternarrative that emphasized Black self-determination as a vital principle in Black people's perseverance in a white supremacist democracy and one that also rested on the idea that freedom, equality, and justice were nil without the ongoing efforts of Black and other marginalized people who have historically challenged America to live up to its image of itself as a free, equal, and just society. The counternarrative was multifaceted and dynamic and not without its own set of tensions and shortsightedness, but powerfully affirming and generative nevertheless. My access to and submergence in this counternarrative was due in part to my grandparents' commitments to social and political activism, to my father's—along with his brothers' and sisters'—involvement in Black nationalist politics, to old school Black teachers who willfully connected learning to liberation, and to the vibrant Black aesthetic that brought Black dolls, Black books, Black dance, Black music, and Black history into my worldview. Unfortunately, discerning the full weight of such things is not always possible until the structure that has undergirded them begins to erode.

At the very same time I was being fed by this counternarrative of Black self-love, its public and pedagogic potential (as it was being expressed in narratives of Black power, pride, beauty, and self-determination) was literally being undone, wiped out, destroyed as COINTELPRO infiltrated radical Black organizations, as Black teachers and principals were losing their jobs, as colorblind policies were becoming the new norm, and as many Black countercultural spaces were being decimated in the wake of misguided desegregation policies and the lure of White spaces once off limits (Haymes, 1995). The country headed into a decade of serious and strategic retrenchment (Crenshaw, 1995). It wasn't, however, simply Hoover's thug politics or the Reagan-era backlash that dismantled the narratives. They were but strategies in a deeply embedded and more relentless scheme, one that is quite adept at cycles of progression and regression. White supremacy has proven itself to be far more sophisticated, adaptable, and stealthy in its efforts to dismember the counternarrative, to make it seem illogical, backwards, and out of step with progress to love blackness and Black people in all of our diversity.

By the time I left home and ventured out into the world, the counternarrative that encouraged loving blackness as a form of political resistance (hooks, 1992) was barely visible. In fact in many instances I was told that

loving Black people was akin to being racist; it meant hating White people. The mainstream narrative of Black criminality, ineducability, and dependency was working overtime to capture the public imagination, and to tailor even conversations among Black people as responses to these representations.

For me the impact was tangible and my struggle to hang on to something that felt so vital and central to the way I saw/see the world was real. In my early days of teaching in schools and community programs, I encountered many Black children with no knowledge of a public discourse around loving blackness or Black people. And I, of course, was always trying to interject otherwise, much to the chagrin of many colleagues who often believed I was doing more harm than good by emphasizing and affirming Black cultural knowledge and identities. Back then I centered loving blackness in my teaching, because my gut told me it was the right thing to do. These days, however, I am working my way toward a much more complex and sophisticated understanding of Black self-love as redemptive counternarrative. Loving blackness is often undervalued, woefully misunderstood, and yet absolutely necessary; it is the quintessential counterstory in a white supremacist democracy where the devaluation of Black lives has historically been and in many ways still is second nature (Glaude, 2016). It was with these particular challenges in mind that I began working on a course about the agony of Black alienation and the quest for Black self-love. Drawing on counterstorytelling to shape my pedagogical approach, I used three basic strategies: (1) Identify and deconstruct the master narratives and the myths about blackness and black students they reinforce; (2) Engage in reading and discussing literary counterstories paired with countertheories of Black lives; and (3) Encourage the students to explore and write their own counterstories as a strategy for healing and transformation.

Conceptualizing a Pedagogy of Black Self-Love or This Is What I Teach

Forty plus years of empirical research confirms the persistent sense of alienation and marginalization that many Black students experience on predominately white campuses (Allen, 1992; Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996; Fleming, 1984; Willie, 2003; Willie & McCord, 1972). As early as 1972, Charles Willie and Suzanna McCord concluded the first major study of Black students on predominately White campuses, by noting that "the tangle of pathology in race relations in America is revealed on the college campus in full-dress confusion and circumlocution" (1972,

p. 100). Given the current racial climate and the growing reach of the Black Lives Matter Movement, this statement is as true now as it has ever been.

Despite the plethora of scholarship that identifies alienation and marginalization as persistent aspects of the Black student experience on predominately white campuses, responses to this problem are more often than not limited to student affairs protocols. What I have seen on most campuses in response to this reoccurring theme is an effort—sometimes serious, sometimes not—mainly by student affairs staff to address these issues through programming and other kinds of support services. While an onslaught of tutoring services, counseling, and diversity programming may alleviate some immediate feelings of isolation, they by and large will never be able to sufficiently address Black student alienation, because they do not acknowledge the complexity of its historicity.

In 2006, I developed a course designed specifically to put Black student alienation and marginalization into a broader, more complex context. Working with a basic Fanonian premise, I began with the assumption that the alienation often experienced by Black students was far more complicated than making an adjustment to their new surroundings. It needed to be understood not as a static condition but as an ongoing process of othering deeply embedded in the cultural practices and ideologies that make campus what it is and what it is not. Black student alienation is not a discrete experience, but an ongoing process inextricably linked to and played out through academia's proper pedagogical practices, which not only reproduce false images and beliefs about Black inferiority, but which insist, as a requirement of success, that Black students accept such images and ideas about themselves (Kharem, 2006; Woodson, 1990). The problem, as I see it, however, is not that Black students always or mindlessly accept the insinuation of their inferiority, but rather the lack of support they find in their refusal to do so. Any attempt to alleviate Black student alienation on predominately white campuses must attend to its historicity and pedagogical nature, but it must also construct a response that is itself pedagogically significant.

To be sure, such a course is an anomaly on the predominately white elite campus where I teach. I had to be a little subversive in my efforts first to get such a course approved and then to fill it with the students for whom I had imagined it. I almost got away with it, but not quite. The course was approved under the title *African American Education*. Although this was not my choice of title, it actually did wonders to draw

just the right group of students, mostly Black (that's rare) and a couple of critical-minded white students, Black studies minors to be exact. Truth be told, I was actually going for an all Black class. I could never, of course, speak that aloud. It would surely set off a firestorm of debate about reverse racism, separatism, and blah blah blah. No time for all that. I believe that Black students need counterspaces on campus not only get in touch with serious Black intellectual thought, but also explore their own unique experiences and the diversity among them, where they can put to rest any doubts that linger about their abilities or what value they bring to the campus culture. That's not usually possible when they are so few in a class occupied mostly by white students and led mostly by white professors who can easily overlook the idiosyncrasies of blackness on campus and beyond. They tend to get arrested in an us–them binary or they silence themselves altogether, because as they tell me, "I don't want to have to speak for the whole Black race." So one of the things I try to hip them to in this class is how much that statement actually reflects a white supremacist (patho)logic; they don't have to silence you, because you are willing to do it for them and on account of them. This is one among many of the ideas we have wrestled with in the course. In what follows I provide more insight into my pedagogical strategy in this course, which was not simply to help students connect their experiences of not belonging to a broader discourse on Black alienation in the U.S. but to intervene on the discourse of alienation by putting an emphasis on loving blackness, as a form of resistance, healing, and transformation.

Losing the Race: Master Narratives and Myths

Moving toward a pedagogy of Black self-love requires first and foremost that we be able to identify and deconstruct the master narratives that often colonize our thinking. Nelson (2001) defines master narratives as:

> The stories lying about in our culture that serve as summaries of socially shared understandings. Master narratives are often archetypal, consisting of stock plots and readily recognizable character types, and we use them not only to make sense of our experience…but also to justify what we do. As the repositories of common norms, master narratives exercise a certain authority over our moral imaginations and play a role in informing our moral intuition. (p. 6)

Master narratives operate most powerfully on our subconscious minds and through the structure of our feelings, and ultimately linger in our thoughts and behaviors in ways that reflect and reproduce a sense of alienation (Cheng, 2001; Oliver, 2004). And yet we cannot realize the subconscious effects/affects much less counter oppression without first identifying and deconstructing the master narrative. To this end, I opened the loving blackness course each spring with master narratives and the myths of Black inadequacy they work to uphold. One I used quite often was John McWhorter's *Losing the Race: Self-sabotage in Black America*.

In this controversial book, McWhorter (2000) surmises that

> Black students do so poorly in school decade after decade not because of racism, funding, class, parental education, etc., but because of a virus of Anti-intellectualism that infects the black community. This Anti-intellectual strain is inherited from whites having denied education to blacks for centuries, and has been concentrated by the Separatist trend, which in rejecting the "white" cannot help but cast school and books as suspicious and alien, not to be embraced by the authentically "black" person. (p. 83)

His argument is troubling and contradictory and certainly not one that is adequate for explaining the academic struggles of most Black students. In this paragraph alone, McWhorter first suggests that "racism, funding, class, and parental education" are not factors in poor school performance among Black people, and then he goes on to contend that "whites having denied education to blacks for centuries" is the root cause of anti-intellectualism. Yet, the fact that Black people were for so long denied a formal education is itself one of the most aggressive acts of racism in American history, which has both compounded and been compounded by issues of funding, class, and parental education among other dilemmas. And, it does not necessarily follow that this historical denial has discouraged Black people from intellectual engagement. In fact, in many cases, one could certainly argue that it has inspired rather than deterred intellectual engagement. While McWhorter's analysis ultimately lacks a sophisticated understanding of race and racism, it does nevertheless point to some interesting and troubling behavior that should not be overdetermined or completely ignored.

Despite my disagreement with McWhorter's overall thesis, *Losing the Race* is the consummate master narrative in its ahistorical framing of Black

people—Black students in particular—as suffering from the cultural pathologies of anti-intellectualism and victimhood. And for these reasons, I have used it often in class. In the past, we have focused mostly on Chapter 3 entitled "The Cult of Anti-Intellectualism." It offers a perfect scenario for thinking critically about several problems, real and imagined. First, it is an opportunity to raise important questions about the impact of race and racism on the socio-cultural construction of intellectualism and anti-intellectualism. McWhorter's argument along with many others that conjure up notions of Black intellectual inferiority due to biological deficiency, cultural deprivation, or cultural pathology either miss or simply avoid the fact that what is and is not considered intellectual is itself a socio-cultural construction, which has by and large devalued the history and experiences of Black people the world over.

Second, McWhorter makes a classic acting white argument, suggesting that many Black students associate intellectualism or doing well in school with whiteness. This topic inspires considerable conversation in class with many students, at first, identifying with McWhorter when he describes how he was often accused of acting white. I usually follow with a host of questions for them to consider from the perspective of those who are doing the accusing rather than those who are being accused of acting white: When some Black students accuse other Black students of acting white, are they specifically referring to grades or studiousness or are they talking about the actual characteristics—talk, dress, preferences—that student may have? Why would they associate good education with whiteness? When and why do you suppose the phenomenon came to be? Third, McWhorter paints a disturbing picture of Black students as lazy and unprepared for the rigors of college but fails to acknowledge his own complicity in holding them to a lower set of expectations. This becomes an opportunity for students to look at themselves critically and discuss how they think McWhorter's depictions do or do not represent them. Ultimately, class discussions during the master narratives section of the course are always quite intense because students have to grapple with the aspects of master narratives that do and do not reflect who they are or how they want to be perceived on campus.

A Lesson Before Dying: Counterstories and Countertheories

In the next section of the loving blackness course, we turn toward counterstory as testimony, usually in the form of literary texts or films that map

the intricacies of Black life. I choose literature, because it—in many ways—is a metaphor for life. That's its allure. Isn't it? It is an opportunity to think and feel the places, people, and circumstances in which we have been, currently are, will be, want to be, or definitely don't want to be. Vicariously, its power is its ability to draw us into contemplating more deeply the complexities of life. And as Kelly Oliver (2004) surmises in *The Colonization of Psychic Space*, it can often do what theory cannot. It can articulate and ponder Black alienation as the affective phenomenon it is. I pair the literature with a theoretical perspective that helps us contemplate the nuances of the counterstory and compels us to ask more profound questions of it.

For example, one particularly powerful pairing was Carter G. Woodson's *Miseducation of the Negro* with Ernest J. Gaines' *A Lesson Before Dying* (1993), which both map the contours of black alienation and offer self-knonwledge and self-love as intervention to debilitating alienation. In *A Lesson Before Dying*, Gaines landscapes in vivid detail a small town in 1940s Louisiana. There we meet and hear the testimony of Grant Wiggins, a college-educated Black man, who has reluctantly returned to the small Black community in this town, where he was raised by his aunt. Upon returning home, Grant becomes the community teacher, but is at every second tormented by his need to stay and his desire to run from this place, which seems only hopeless to him. While Grant struggles constantly with the fact that his education does little to quell the superiority of the white people with whom he is forced to interact, in even more profound ways he also struggles with the contradictory disposition of his own people, of the Black community that raised him and even celebrated his going off to college, but who also remind him constantly that his education in *some ways* makes him unfit for addressing the needs of the community.

The focal point of Grant's testimony is his relationship with Jefferson, the godson of his aunt's best friend, who has just been falsely but certainly convicted of murder and sentenced to death. In the course of the trial, his defense attorney—in an attempt to get him off—portrays Jefferson as an animal—a hog to be exact—too dumb to plan or execute any such murder. After being sentenced to death and as he awaits his fate in the town jail, Jefferson becomes fixated on the idea that he's nothing but a dumb hog. Deeply troubled by Jefferson's attitude and most worried about saving his soul, Grant's aunt and Jefferson's godmother, Miss Emma, conspire and insist that Grant—as the community teacher—visit Jefferson in jail to convince him that he is a man. For Miss Emma wants nothing more than to have Jefferson walk to the electric chair, to his death, knowing that he is

indeed a man. While Grant resists his aunt and Miss Emma's plan, he grudgingly gives in and finds himself locked into a painful yet telling and in some ways triumphant relationship with Jefferson, as they negotiate a pedagogy of Black self-love in the context of the relentlessly racist and thus ever dehumanizing practices that define life in this small southern town.

Although alienation can be defined as a condition of isolation driven by practices of marginalization, where one is made to feel as if s/he does not belong, what is revealed in Gaines' novel is how such a condition is better understood as an affective process which can wreak havoc on one's ability to love not only him/herself, but the collective through which one makes meaning of self. Both Jefferson and Grant face this challenge albeit in very distinct ways. For Jefferson it's most apparent in the way that he internalizes the image of himself as dumb hog. That he does this without question and begins to behave accordingly suggests, of course, that there was already germinating within him a seed of self-doubt. What we can only assume is that that seed of self-doubt is the result of the ways in which Black inferiority is taken as a common fact. Furthermore, in accepting this image of himself, he alienates the person, the people who love him most. Grant's sense of alienation, on the other hand, can be most explicitly located in his schooling experiences, first with his grade school teacher, who himself was tormented by a deep sense of self-hate and, second, in his university education, which has made him in many ways a classic representation of Woodson's (1990) mis-educated Negro or one among those who, because of their European-centered education, garner an "attitude of contempt toward their own people" (p. 1). While Woodson's thesis draws our attention to the ways in which such an education makes the "mis-educated Negro" all but "worthless in the development of their people" (p. 2), Grant's testimony reveals the agony of that reality, that contempt toward one's people essentially is contempt toward one's self.

Ultimately Grant would have no story to tell at all if the process of Black alienation was not met with an ongoing existential project, which seeks a pedagogy of Black self-love, a pedagogy that engages the practices necessary for survival—physical, spiritual, and psychic—within a context that only exists because it refuses such practices. Without question, it is the women in the lives of Grant and Jefferson who insist on such a pedagogy, when they insist upon the necessity of dialogue as a means of dealing with the alienation that each is experiencing. The drama illuminates Paulo Freire's (2000) contention that dialogue is the way, the means, the

pedagogical dynamic through which people achieve significance as human beings. But, as he goes on to insinuate, such a dialogue must be between people who wish to name the world, between people who want to and seek to love. In other words, emancipatory dialogue is impossible between people who seek to dominate and those who seek liberation. Thus although Grant's sense of alienation is reinforced in his exchanges with Mr. Pichot and his brother-in-law, the sheriff who thinks that talking to Jefferson is a waste of time, he cannot deal with it by talking to them, by trying to convince them of what he himself is not sure of—Jefferson's or his ability to work through their sense of alienation. It is only in dialogue with Jefferson, his girlfriend Vivian, his aunt, and others in his community through which he is able to engage in and struggle toward a pedagogy of Black self-love.

After reading these books, we engage in lengthy discussions about the paradoxes of Black life in white society and the necessity of Black self-love, as an intervention on and resistance to white supremacist logic. I ask students to consider how Woodson's thesis applies to Grant's and Jefferson's struggles for self-love, and then to consider how his mis-educaton thesis relates to their own educational experiences. They enrich the conversations tenfold with plenty of their own counterstories. So I ask them, as a final assignment, to consider writing their own rendition entitled *Another Lesson Before Dying*.

Another Lesson Before Dying: Toward a Pedagogy of Black Self-Love

Many people assume that loving blackness is akin to romanticizing or valorizing blackness. My goal in this course, however, has been to offer complex perspectives on Black humanity, on Black life in the US and through the readings, viewing, and discussions to help students put their experiences of alienation on campus into a broader socio-political and cultural context. Black self-love, no doubt, is impossible without self-understanding, and a healthy self-understanding, I would argue, is held at bay when the cultural knowledge that gives that self a meaningful context is absent, limited, distorted, and/or consistently devalued as normal practice in the environment one must navigate and negotiate on a daily basis. The class is an opportunity for students to have serious dialogues about these issues, and to draw on intellectually and affectively rigorous texts to understand and articulate in more depth what ails them and what drives them as young people who live in the wake of a legacy of trauma and triumph and

ongoing struggles that mark the Black experience/s in the US. While there is much to learn in this course, judging from student feedback in evaluations and the notes I often receive months or even years after, the enduring lesson is that liberation is first and foremost a state of mind that begins with the commitment—in this case—to seek a pedagogy of Black self-love.

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CHAPTER 16

Healing Circles as Black Feminist Pedagogical Interventions

Jennifer L. Richardson

Tuesday afternoon, teaching my course *Black Feminism and Popular Culture*, I'm confronted with weary students wrestling mainstream media representations of Black women. Oppression, violence, misogyny, and racism jump from the pages of the assigned readings—readings selected to provoke questions to which there are no easy answers. Frustrated, the students ask: "Why are we still seeing images of Black women in music videos represented and talked about as 'bitches' and 'hoes'? Why is this just considered 'normal' and no one has a problem with it? Has anything really changed? How does reading this even do anything?" Specifically, the students thirst for strategies which will help them move beyond theorizing in privileged spaces, to more actively working toward collective freedom.

Marginalized students of color (particularly Black women) often feel (re)traumatized by academic spaces in which they may experience debates and/or critiques as uncomfortable, isolating, and even violent. Navigating texts and spaces that don't reflect their lives, these students are quite honest as they grapple with the denial of their identities and

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humanity. Challenged in turn by their questions and demand for *solutions*, I find myself as a scholar and as an educator searching for a pedagogy that keeps my students (and myself) moving *forward* through anger and frustration, toward a praxis that acknowledges pain without becoming paralyzed by it. However, it is admittedly quite difficult to both create and authentically practice feminist, anti-racist, and queer pedagogy in spaces that do not center community, or marginalized peoples' knowledges and experiences. In response to that reality, I have been very purposeful in trying to transform my classrooms into communal spaces of healing (i.e. from epistemic violence) in which assumptions around credibility, truth, and knowledge are fundamentally challenged.

I argue that in order to produce true social transformation and strive for a radical notion of collective freedom, we must pay attention not only to our political/ideological positions, but also to our individual and collective practices of self-care and healing—practices that are themselves deeply political. Pedagogies and praxis in the Black feminist tradition that are accountable to oppressed communities must take a serious look at healing, balance, and self-care as powerful forms of resistance to hegemonic cultures and structures. And although the Black feminist tradition has historically included radical self-care and well-being (see, e.g., the work of Toni Cade Bambara, Audre Lorde, and June Jordan to name a few), much has been lost in translation on the ground, in our research, and in the classroom. Indeed, by exploring healing as a political path of resistance and a radical spiritual project, this practice itself challenges the traditional boundaries of academia.

Specifically, this chapter focuses on the processes and potentials of *healing circles*, both within and outside of an academic setting, especially for Africana[1] women struggling with the damaging effects of hegemonic, popular cultural ideas and images of Black "womanhood." In the following sections, first I review the scholarly literature with which this work engages and the theoretical discussions in which I seek to intervene. Here, I elaborate on both what healing means, especially in the lives of Black women, and why healing is needed. Next, I discuss the context of my thinking by presenting healing circles as a pedagogical tool used in the classroom, with a diverse but sometimes predominantly white cisgendered student body, and how teaching a praxis of healing and self-care can be added to most curricula.[2] This Black feminist pedagogy explores methods of healing, and imagines the dynamics and implications of such healing circles in our classrooms, professional, and activist spaces.

Black Feminist Praxis: Healing as Political Resistance

The political citizenship (Harris-Perry, 2012) and humanity of women of color, and Black women in particular, is connected to their socio-political identity as a marginalized and oppressed group. The history of racism and sexism for Black women is a complicated and painful one. A large and valuable literature catalogs the vast inventory of harmful historical and contemporary representations of Black women (see, e.g., Akbar, 1984; Collins, 1989; Downing & Husband, 2005; Hall, 1990, 1997; hooks, 1992; Richardson, 2012; Richardson-Stovall, 2012). Thus Africana women who have been historically disenfranchised, colonized, objectified, and had their identities violently constructed must turn to the business of healing, self-recovery, and wholeness. In this chapter, I do not engage with healing practices or literature based in the disciplines of mainstream psychology, psychiatry, or self- help, which have historically been damaging to Black people (Guthrie, 1976; Hilliard, 1978; Jones, 1974). Instead, I am suggesting that we focus on the place of spirituality drawn from radical Black feminist traditions as a pathway to a reclamation of self and community, and an ability to articulate what Patricia Hill Collins (1991) calls the "subjugated knowledge" of a "Black feminist standpoint."[3]

I argue that healing is an act of resistance to oppression that can produce counter knowledge, celebrate the spirit, and foster community through affirmation and sharing, particularly as it pertains to Africana women. When I invoke the term "healing," I seek a continuation of Audre Lorde's (1976, 1984) work, which locates healing at the center of our interactions not just with ourselves, but also with our students, co-investigators/subjects, colleagues, and others. Merging insights from hooks (1994, 2005), Leary (2005), Collins (1998), Lorde (1976, 1984), and Ani (2000), in the healing circles that I conduct, I weave together a particular definition and description of healing that includes the following overlapping goals and stages: (1) decolonizing the mind, by "breaking with the ways our reality is defined and shaped by the dominant culture and asserting our understanding of that reality, of our own experiences" (hooks, 2005, p. xxxii); (2) finding and maintaining spaces of joy and affirmation—or reclaiming the *living room* spaces and safe places in our lives (Jordan, 1985); (3) becoming less concerned with affluence and materialism (Collins, 1998; hooks, 1981, 2003) and instead focusing on self-determination and the reclamation of non-essentialized identities

(e.g. cultural/ethnic or sexual identities), spaces, spirituality, knowledge, community, and lineage; and (4) recognizing and fostering critical awareness of a political path of resistance toward self- recovery and wholeness (Richardson-Stovall, 2012).

African traditions predating slavery reveal that “Black women have relied on spirituality to sustain us, to renew our hope, to strengthen our faith” (hooks, 2005, p. 141). Few scholarly works include a concept of spirituality and political self-recovery beyond that associated with religious practice. In *Transformative Feminisms*, Leela Fernandez (2003) defines spirituality as “an understanding of self as encompassing body and mind, as well as spirit” (p. 10). She argues that a reclaimed and integrated spiritual and feminist praxis must deconstruct the false dichotomies between spirituality and religion, self and other, and theory and practice, thus allowing spiritual feminism to look toward self-transformation and lasting social change. However, whereas Fernandez urges us to look away from identity-based practice, I argue that a part of healing must involve Black women’s power to reclaim and redefine their identities. As Collins (1991) puts it: “If U.S. Black women cannot put ourselves in the center of our own intellectual and political work and claim identities as Black women, then who else will?” (p. 223). Thus a contemporary Black feminist ethos calls for disrupting, challenging, and radicalizing intellectual production through centering the voices, stories, experiences, and standpoints of Black women. This also points toward a conscious elimination of and intentional ceasing of the erasure and silencing of Black women in academic and non-academic settings alike (see Christian, 1994; Hong, 2008), and instead the hyper exposure of our voices positioned and grounded in supportive spaces where we can thrive. This becomes possible when space is intentionally provided for healing practices in the classroom and beyond.

A major aim of both my teaching and research has been to offer spaces for Africana women to access and explore a praxis of healing, while critically challenging negative media representations, through the creation of counterspaces and counterstories. The challenge for my work has been to produce critiques of the hegemonic systems of media, culture, and academic institutions that cannot be reduced to simply telling stories that white folks don’t know about. Relatedly, little academic work explores the complex and multidimensional ways that Black women negotiate, explore, resist, and heal from the politics of media representations and identity.[4] My goal and what I see as my responsibility as a scholar is to unearth and

validate those unknown stories as knowledge, and to then use that knowledge to build liberatory and transformative spaces. For example, in an empirical study (Richardson, 2012; Richardson-Stovall, 2012), through life narrative interviews and a series of intergenerational healing circles, I collaborated with Black women participants (in non-academic settings) in co-creating a space to offer testimony and affirmation, share in pain and resistance, and reimagine our future selves as we worked toward notions of healing, self-recovery, and transformation. These healing circles follow in the tradition of the African ring shout where enslaved Africans congregated as a community, and as a means of emotional and physical release (e.g. through music, rhythms, shouting, and talking), shared stories of their daily travails, appealed to the Creator, and paid homage to their ancestors (Diouf, 1998; Floyd, 2002; Stuckey, 1987). The healing circles I've engaged in align to the ring shout as a safe gathering space—a place to discuss shared concerns, values, and solutions, and to resist oppression.

My research (Richardson, 2012; Richardson-Stovall, 2012) has demonstrated that healing circles can be an effective method for Black women (and potentially other marginalized groups) to address the impact of symbolic forms of media violence on their consciousness, humanity, and political voice. The incompleteness and asymmetry of the media's treatment of Black life and the women's awareness of this was thick and palpable within these groups. But what resonated most strongly in our many discussions were the women's critical questioning and challenging of how their stories are told and imagined. Their questioning comprised a political act of resistance, as they met the dominant gaze and pushed back. The idea that healing circles constitute a form of feminist praxis and can actually serve to produce knowledge has largely been dismissed within mainstream scholarly work. Yet, as Marc Lamont Hill (2009) argues with his notion of *wounded healing*, when people bearing the scars of suffering share their stories, it provides a form of release and relief for themselves and others. This goes beyond "the therapeutic dimensions of personal and collective storytelling" and entails a "critical engagement with majoritarian narratives that exposes and produces new possibilities" (Hill, 2009, p. 65). It is possible then to also explore healing as political resistance within the classroom where oftentimes the dominant ideology and practices prioritize subject content, "neutral" or "value-free" research and theorizing, and hegemonic curriculum.

Creating Healing Circles as Black Feminist Pedagogy

Transforming the healing circle methodology and lessons from the data into pedagogical practices in the classroom resides in the following learning objectives: (1) drawing critical connections between personal, lived experiences and Black feminist scholarship; (2) striving toward egalitarian relationships in the classroom; (3) expressing/receiving students as valued individuals; and then (4) utilizing our collective knowledges and experiences as learning resources, validation, and new visions of feminist, anti-racist, liberatory personal, and social change. The healing circle within the classroom takes on a form of inserting self-care, *the erotic*, and Black feminist praxis into the curriculum. This means that the healing circle format that I've practiced outside of academic spaces or specifically for Africana female groups regarding targeted issues (e.g. media literacy, sustaining well-being and radical self-care for activist or college students, etc.) is not exactly the same in the multigendered, classed, and predominantly white spaces in which I teach. However, my teaching philosophy, intellectual interests, and research orientation reflect my interdisciplinary approach as a Black feminist sociologist and educator in every classroom setting. Driven by a commitment to affirm that the political is personal, I am deeply and critically reflexive about my teaching and research practices within and beyond the classroom. In other words, who I am begins with what I do. I have worked to develop pedagogical practices that begin with these principles.

While my work primarily focuses on the lived experiences of Africana women, a pedagogy of healing in the classroom can be generalized to include other marginalized groups, and all people when privilege is acknowledged. Therefore, the following components are always necessary when I frame a classroom around the elements and intentions of healing or healing circles: (1) discussion about some central tenets of Black feminism (i.e. understanding intersections of oppression or multiple oppressions; meaning and practices of self-care; centering standpoint of Black women and epistemology; and putting theory into action or praxis); (2) an exploration of Audre Lorde's (1984) definition of the erotic, which among other aspects asks students to identify what love and joy mean to them; (3) identifying their own stories, standpoint and trying on or considering the standpoints of marginalized peoples all while gaining clearer understandings of oppression and patriarchy; and (4) recognizing and deconstructing privilege and power.

Again, the healing circle in the classroom contains only elements of those I've conducted outside of the academy. However, in classroom settings, we are after the same type of outcomes and transformational change that great feminists such as Audre Lorde (Lorde, 1976, 1984) have asked us to take part in as we learn and change ourselves by working and struggling together with those who we see as different from ourselves, but share the same goals. For example, in my course *Beyoncé: Critical Race Feminist Perspectives and the Politics of U.S. "Black Womanhood*," one of the primary discussions we engage in pertains to mass meditated portrayals of Black women, sexuality, and controlling images. Students identify ways in which they can relate to or identify how negative or empowering images impact their lives or their perspectives and interactions with Black women. By considering standpoint, students can begin to theorize about a false monolith of Black womanhood; raise questions about media audiences as consumers, passive puppetry, or manufactured consent; and look at the ways hegemony and media representations impact well-being, inequality, and even one's humanity. Most importantly, students begin to care about and demand answers to what can be done in the face of institutions or systems of violence. However, this usually leaves students grappling with their own political voice, personal stories, claim on Black feminism and/or allyship, and standpoint. The healing circle classroom leaves space and provides a format for their stories and their own concerns, as it also values their truths as knowledge production and theory building.

In addition to valuing students' knowledge production, I lean on Joan Morgan's (2015) argument that Black women must look at *Pleasure Politics*. She insists that Black feminist theorists "reframe the existing narrative about black female sexuality by positioning desire, agency and black women' s engagements with pleasure as a viable theoretical paradigm" (p. 36). From this theorizing she is able to ask questions about Black women's relationship to pleasure. Much like Morgan (2015), I argue for a *Healing Politic* that includes pleasure and self-care amidst a variety of other life-affirming modalities. Within this *Healing Politic*, I ask (as does Morgan) what possibilities a politics of healing can offer for Black feminist futures. How can deepening our understanding of the multivalent ways Black women and marginalized people read and participate in healing complicate our understanding of Black female subjectivities in ways that invigorate, inform, and sharpen a contemporary Black feminist agenda? But I also investigate how a politic of healing enters into and transforms

our teaching and our classrooms. I argue that the work of healing through political and cultural resistance and the creation of counterhegemonic discourse and knowledge is a valuable form of work with which interdisciplinary anti-racist feminist scholars in particular should engage. Beyond data collection and research, this form of engagement can also take place within the classroom and interactions, particularly with Africana females, and other marginalized students (Richardson, 2012; Richardson-Stovall, 2012).

In engaging, for example, critiques/and validations around the "Beyoncé conversation" to push their political imaginations, students begin to critically question the ways in which individuals and groups participate in and understand the creation of their perceived social reality, and how they see themselves represented in media. I emphasize that students are critical social agents who offer important insights into understanding and exploring the complex social phenomena within their own lives (Jenkins, 2009). Media-centered conversations, for example, push students to explore multiple narratives for themselves to look at or to look away from. Being able to present numerous forms of boundary-crossing in Beyoncé's work and persona, students have argued, becomes a symbol of preservation or loss in very different ways. When elements of the healing circle are central to the curriculum, this type of personal accounting can take place as students reflect on and discuss how media impacts ways that they hold on to or shed parts of themselves that they perceive will support their survival and persistence.

Particularly after reading and discussing Lorde's (1984) *Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power*, students become excited to explore multiple healing modalities and praxes toward vitality. We discuss, in small and large groups, what self-care, pleasure, joy, and love look like for each student. "What brings you joy?" I ask. And students learn from each other and learn about themselves as some contend with the difficulty of answering such a seemingly simple question. We discuss a variety of mediation modalities, yoga, mental health strategies for access, eating and financial practices, and strategies toward health and balance in those areas. The topics of these discussions almost always grow organically from what students identify as self-care or a lack of knowledge pertaining to self-care. And in these discussions there are almost always elements of shame, embarrassment, pain, or discomfort for some students, which is articulated in both individual (one on one; teacher/student) and group settings. In a final exercise, for example, I ask students to address the following prompts: (1) Being a valuable human being, I deserve…; (2) My support system

consists of…; (3) Goals I have to take better care of myself (spiritually, physically, emotionally, intellectually/politically) include…; and (4) When I close my eyes and use my imagination [I ask students to physically do this], my vision of a more just world includes… What does transformation in my day-to-day life and life outcomes look like?

It is always encouraging at the middle and end of the semester, when we revisit these topics, how committed students become in examining ways in which they can thrive not just academically as students, but as whole beings navigating a particular time or season in their lives. And even more telling of the impact of the healing circles infused in the classroom is the sense of community and mutual commitment to supporting and affirming each other's needs and challenges. In the form of verbal feedback, evaluations (formal and informal), assignments (e.g. free writes and musical auto-ethnography), and private Facebook groups where students maintain community beyond the classroom, students share how impactful the elements of the healing circle are on their classroom experiences, in navigating life, finding their political voice, and in working toward collective freedom.

Conclusion

Among other benefits and uses, the introduction of self-care and healing circles in the classroom offers students a space to construct counternarratives to mainstream media representations and normative hegemonic ideologies in general. As such, my work is concerned with the formation of an *oppositional consciousness* to mainstream representations, as well as valuing and empowering oppressed groups (Collins, 1991; hooks, 1990, 2000). Bringing curriculum into a classroom that invites marginalized students to examine, discuss, and practice radical self-care and healing is a part of a Black feminist anti-hegemonic project of resistance. In such work, it is critical to acknowledge both what is at stake and what can be done. As bell hooks (2005) puts it: "Black women deserve to have multiple paths to healing, multiple ways of thinking about spirituality, multiple paths towards recovery… When we choose to heal, when we choose to love, we are choosing liberation. This is where all authentic activism begins" (p. xxx). Media representations of race, gender, and sexuality are central parts of the ideological infrastructure that maintains racial, patriarchal, and class domination. Critically interrogating these representations thus constitutes a form of collective resistance and personal reclamation, just as examining real life narratives and self-care in academic spaces does.

Moving forward, part of this project also involves demanding that the Academy re-value work that incorporates healing as central methodological and pedagogical approaches. Carrying out a pedagogy of healing within my classrooms, working within the Academy toward service that begins dialogue with colleagues about self-care, and submitting this work for publication are some of the ways in which I, along with others, demand this of the Academy. Creating spaces like the healing circles could be easily dismissed as not a "real" academic or intellectual endeavor. However, Collins (1991) encourages Black feminists to challenge hegemonic knowledge production and validation, so that our epistemologies and praxes are accountable to and in line with Black feminism. What are the work and actions that produce liberatory change? Is our only responsibility or legitimate work found in the telling and exploration of "certain" stories that are acceptable within the Academy?

The Black feminist tradition guides us toward praxis that recognizes radically different ways of knowing. It calls also for a Black feminist praxis that is accountable to communities and students *first*, beyond or before the requirements of academic institutions. Although we face pressures to "publish or perish," to focus on service work, we must still find ways to push back in order for the needs of our communities, our students, and our own well-being to take precedence. As Christian (1989, 1994) argues, the values and goals of Black feminist praxis and academia *ought* to be aligned, yet healing and spirituality remain counter to institutionalized norms of "proper" academic pedagogy and methodology. Attention to issues of self-care or balance in the lives of many academics themselves is seen as "hokey" or weak. Yet, if radical Black feminist work in academic and activist spaces is to be sustained, radical steps must be taken to value healing as a political path to the recovery of self and a spiritual project of consciousness.

It's the last day of *Black Feminism and Popular Culture*, and I tell my students that I'm sad the class is over. I share my concern that we've spent too much time talking about what's wrong, and not enough time reimagining how to make things right. I tell them that none of this work is enough if we don't get real with issues around radical self-care and well-being. But the students assure me that the class was useful and relevant, and provided a space that made them "feel powerful" and, perhaps most importantly, "motivated to get to the day-to-day work of self-care." The students say this was the first time they've heard such issues discussed in a classroom setting, but they wish they encountered it more. I am grateful

to them for holding me accountable as I plan to move forward—on to the next class, the next encounter with students struggling to navigate a terrain that was not created for their survival, the next opportunity to speak truth back to power, the next healing circle. And I push forward to create an ongoing course that is solely committed to Black feminist praxis as I realize that what we teach best is what we most need to learn.

Notes

1. This work comes out of research (Richardson, 2012; Richardson-Stovall, 2012) with women (or femmes) who identified as Black. However, the participants involved in the study as well as my Black students represent the African diaspora and are thus referred to as Black or Africana interchangeably.
2. It should be noted that while much of my work focuses on Black women and other women of color, this pedagogical approach will be discussed keeping in mind that the classroom can oftentimes be a predominantly white space. Healing circles can still be discussed and practiced as it is useful for all students; however, marginalized students of color and trans/queer identified students may experience this method in complex and different ways in comparison to cisgendered white students.
3. Historically, as many Black feminists have documented, Black women have had to struggle to tell their stories of resistance to race, gender, and class oppression (Bambara, 1970; Guy-Sheftall, 1990, 1995; hooks, 1981, 1990, 2000; Marable, 1996). However, in highlighting these stories, it is equally important that we remember that Black women's experiences and identities are neither fixed nor necessarily unified, but rather diverse and in constant transition (Gabriel, 1998). Scholars such as hooks (1981, 1992, 1996), Collins (1998, 2005), DuBois (1903), Quashie (2003), Winn (2010), and Camus (1937), among others, have attempted to give the complexities of Black women's lives focused attention.
4. Elsewhere, I have examined the role of popular media representations of Black women, and argued that beauty is political and that hegemonic ideals and images of beauty impact Black women's sense of self, sense of humanity, and sense of political voice and power (Richardson, 2012; Richardson-Stovall, 2012). Here, I further argue that racialized definitions of beauty have a compounded impact on Africana women, who are generously included in the pressure put on women to be beautiful, but simultaneously and "naturally" excluded as Africana by the criteria used to assess that elusive status. Further, popular media is a pedagogical site which many students are already well versed in, connected to, and impacted by. Thus exploring media representations as a site to investigate woundedness, media literacy, and healing is a connection that does not require much of a stretch.

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CHAPTER 17

Kuja Nyumbani (Coming Home): Using African-Centered Pedagogy to Educate Black Students in the Academy

Sharon L. Bethea

Begin in the Beginning. **The Creator**.

Honoring Aset as the embodiment of the creative feminine force that maintains harmony and peace within the community (Hardiman, 2009). Aset is the original queen, daughter, warrior, scholar about whom it is said that in the beginning she was the oldest of the old and the goddess from which all arose (CICARMA, 2016; Hardiman, 2009). I honor celestial, ancient, universal, and personal Ancestors and my Elders. I honor my family, especially my warrior mother and my SUN. I honor those yet to be born and accept my responsibility to build and leave the earth a better place for them. I give thanks for my community for being my solace and my first earthly classroom and lab. I call on Sheshat the goddess of wisdom, knowledge, and writing to guide me in this endeavor. Asate Sana (thank you).

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I poured libations of honor as I embarked on the process of writing this paper and I have permission from my elders to speak through this manuscript. Armah (1979) reminds us that the ritual of pouring libation in African culture is "a sort of continuous reunion of a very large family, one capable of expanding to embrace everyone within reach … across space and time" (p. 24). In many African systems, divinities, deities, Ancestors, and descendants are interconnected and complementary, wherein their partnership and connections to each other and to the communities they serve are an exemplar for humanity (Sefa, 2010). As we embark on writing a book about Black women, it seems only befitting that we honor Aset in this time and space. Aset represents the authority, eminence, and beauty of women. Aset is known as the protector of the living and the most powerful healer whose magic was called on to heal the gods and people on earth (CICARMA, 2016; Williams, 2014).

Introduction

In the commentary that follows, I reflect upon key life events that prompted my reafricanization process (Cannon, 1977). *Reafricanization* refers to studying, observing, practicing, and reattaching to African culture (Shockley & Cleveland, 2011). Consistent with this process, I also describe what Neville, Cross, and Williams (2017) refer to as *racial awakenings*, which are epiphanies and encounters that stimulate "increased awareness about the meaning of being Black spurred by personal experiences and/or observations, education, and activism" (p. 5). To accomplish this, I engage in what Jaraad (2011) refers to as a "griotic framework," to create a narrative and/or a prism between my present and my past that will bridge my inherent connection to Africanness and my reafricanization process. I further explain how the culminations of these constructs and experiences are the cornerstone of my African-centered pedagogy, curriculum, and praxis that I utilize to educate Black students in the Academy and beyond.

The Reafricanization of "Sharon Lynn"

There is nothing wrong with learning from hindsight.
– Akan Proverb

As I contemplate the underpinnings of my reafricanization process, what I realize is that my journey started in spirit and was nurtured by my family and sustained and protected by my community. My first coherent

memories are of sitting on the floor at my Great Grandma's feet, eating with my cousins and listening to African folktales of *Brer Rabbit, Bruh Brer* and *Chicken Little* (see Cumberdance, 2002). She also told once upon a time "scary stories" of captured Ancestors who fled northward to places unknown for a new and "free" life. As a child I certainly didn't think those stories were true. But as I became older and more educated about the history of African descended people, I realized that these storylines told over generations (my aunt Velma recalls hearing the same stories as a child) might have been an amalgamation of reminiscences of real accounts of my Ancestors (Velma, 2017).

Granddaddy had a third grade education, and after spending some time working in an army camp he supported his growing family as an entrepreneur, bootlegging corn liquor. He used the proceeds from his business to purchase the family home and a farm. According to my Aunt Velma, bootlegging corn liquor was a "family business" (Velma, 2017). The family assisted Granddaddy in all aspects of his occupation including protecting him from the police. However, my Granddaddy did eventually get caught with 13 cases of corn liquor. Being connected to retained African traditions, Granddaddy called the community "Witch Doctor" to spend the night with his family while he was in lock-up. During his stay the "Witch Doctor" instructed my Grandma to go with my Granddaddy to court. According to family legend, the judge looked in my Grandma's eyes, dismissed the case and told my Granddaddy to go home and take good care of his beautiful wife. I remember asking my Aunt Velma, "Granddaddy believed in Witch Doctors?" She explained that no one questioned tradition (see Mikell, 2011). They just did what had always been done and in our community people called the "Witch Doctor" to fix things.

The farm was the place for family and community gatherings. My Grandma, Mother, Aunties, and female cousins would be in the kitchen, preparing the feast from my Granddaddy's labor, blasting tunes, singing, dancing, and signifying. I would be outside chasing animals, climbing trees, and roughhousing with the boys, only to eventually hear my name called, "Sharon Lynn," and be told to come to the kitchen to learn what my women kinfolks proudly called "women's work." In the kitchen and at the kitchen table is where I learned the power of being a Black woman in my family. There I learned values concerning spirituality and going to church and the importance of being educated, while I simultaneously learned to cook, bake, sew, design, dress up, decorate, strut, curtsy, sing, and dance. I learned the advantages of being a woman, how to respect myself, take up

for myself, nurture and take care of others (I was the oldest of my siblings), to talk big sh**, and how not to let men take advantage of me or my "cookies" (they told me to hold a nickel with my knees). Although I loved being educated by those Black warrior women, I still yearned to be outside with the boys. When my grandfather decided I had enough "women's work" for the day, he would pick me up and rescue me, proclaiming, "let her play" as he'd send me back outside to be with the boys.

Being with my brothers, uncles, and cousins is where I first learned about gender "equality." They showed me no mercy because I was a girl. I had to hold my own. I still have the scars, and I can still give as good as I get. Although scholarly literature would describe my family as patriarchal with traditional gender roles, for me it was just family and how we were. Most of the women in my family worked and although Granddaddy was the "patriarch," we always knew that Grandma really ran things. The same held true in my immediate family. Rules and chores were "traditional" in my family but we were always clear that my queen warrior mother, Goldie Mae, really had the last say, even if it angered my Daddy. In general, my family experiences and stories reveal the power of African and African descended mothers within their families and communities, women who could not be defined by a "mythical norm" of family (Collins, 2009, p. 9; Welsing, 1991). Thus, placing African descended women at the center of analysis discredits the normality of "Eurocentric masculinist perspectives on family" (Amusan, 2016, p. 7248). Although the specific or special language of an "African-centered" worldview was rarely if ever used during my childhood, my family worked persistently and consciously to instill African-centered values.

Community

Unity is strength, division is weakness.
– Swahili proverb

On April 1, 1960 in Durham, North Carolina, the occasion of my birth manifested in a time and space where the United States of America sanctioned the segregation of African descended people. Yet, in complete contrast to the insidious racism and disparities, I lived in a space where Black excellence and determination to succeed were modeled. African Americans in Durham created communities like the Hayti District, named after Haiti, the first independent Black republic in the Western hemisphere (Jones, 2014). Referred to as Black Wall Street,

Hayti was self-sufficient and had thriving institutions and businesses. In addition, educational opportunities for African Americans were provided, including the founding of North Carolina Central University, the first state-supported liberal arts college for African Americans in the country (Jones, 2014). Durhamites impacted politics, advocated for gender and racial equality, and conducted sit-ins that led to the first court case challenging the legality of segregation laws (Jones, 2014). And it was in this Black community that I was educated and learned African-centered cultural values such as communalism, Black identity, and racial pride. I also experienced a sense of belonging to a cohesive, resilient, and resistant community (see Bellgrave & Allison, 2014).

Life is change. Growth is optional. Choose wisely.
– African Proverb

After a series of unfortunate incidents in my family, my mother left my father and took my two brothers and me to live in Akron, Ohio. I was in fifth grade and it was my first experience living and going to school with white people. It was a struggle for me. During my educational years in Durham, I was nourished and nurtured by Black teachers who understood me and my culture (see Asante, 2003). We were held to high standards of scholastic achievement, we sang the Black National Anthem, and the Black Nationalist flag flew alongside the American flag in our classrooms. During the time of our move, Ohio was going through similar issues of racism and segregation as other states in the South. However, similar to Durham, Akron had its own legacy of resistance in the Black community I grew up in. Black politicians repealed "Black Laws" and Carl Stokes became the first African American Mayor of a major city (Knepper, 1989). In addition, it had a legacy as a safe haven for a host of Black inventors such as Garrett Augustus Morgan and Granville Woods, and notable writers such as Chloe Wofford (Toni Morrison, who received a Nobel Prize and a Pulitzer prize for *Beloved*), Rita Dove, the first African American and the youngest United States Poet Laureate, and Paul Lawrence Dunbar (Gerber, 1976). I was also privy to Ohio's legacy of educating Black people. Daniel Payne was the first Black President of Wilberforce University, the first university owned and operated by African Americans to educate African Americans (Gerber, 1976; Knepper, 1989). Similar to my experiences in Durham, I continued to absorb Black pride, resilience, and resistance of Black people wrapped in the warmth, comfort, and safety of a Black community. These experiences gave me a sense of belonging and further rooted, protected

me, and equipped me to handle the complexities of the Black experience in America.

While I was in high school my stepfather Louis was offered a job opportunity that landed us in the all-white town of Findlay, Ohio. During that time the attack on our Black identity and humanbeingness increased 100-fold. For example, my intellectual prowess that had previously served me well in the face of degradation was challenged. Although I was an honor roll student, my white teachers and advisors told me that I didn't have what it took to graduate from college and they removed me from my college preparatory classes. It was the strength of my warrior mother, Goldie Mae (with weapon in tow), and my tenacity and strong convictions concerning the importance of education that proved them wrong. It was also my earlier experiences and the deep-seated (albeit somewhat unconscious) manifestation of my connection to retained African principles and the lessons from my family and community that held me steadfast to persevere. This way of being was crucial to me and my family's survival in times of assault on our spirit and humanbeingness (see Moffitt & Harris, 2004). Although I did not realize it at the time, these early experiences were the keystones of my reafricanization process.

College and Beyond: A Tribute to Walimu Wangu Na Washauri (My Teachers and Mentors)

It was not until college that I began to pay attention to and be intentional with my reafricanization process. My coming of age in college began a more formal process of reafricanization, which according to Akoto and Akoto (1999) has three broad overlapping stages: rediscovery/historical recovery, redefinition/cultural reaffirmation, and revitalization/national liberation. It was during this time that I experienced a deepening of the first two stages of a formal reafricanization process. I enrolled at San Francisco State University (SFSU), which has a legacy of African Americans demanding education on their own terms (Rojas, 2007). Understanding the racism that was embedded in the curriculum, Black students at SFSU insisted that Black studies courses were needed to create counternarratives, and provide a safe space for a "rigorous intellectual curriculum rooted in Black cultural, political, economic, literary, social, psychological, and historical reality" (T'Shaka, 2012, p. 20). Black students, with the

backing of the Black community, put pressure on the administration to create a Department of Black Studies. When the administration offered pittance to support a Department of Black Studies the students revolted, staging a strike that lasted from November 1968 to March 1969, until the administration acquiesced and created the first Department of Black Studies program in the country (Rojas, 2007; T'Shaka, 2012).

Benefitting from this legacy, I was able to take Black Studies courses, and one in particular, *Black Psychology*, taught by Dr. Wade Nobles, catapulted my reafricanization process into full gear. The experiences in this class *reawakened my African* with profound epiphanies, experiences, and observations in deep soul-penetrating ways. You would find me in class sitting in the front row with every assignment read (sometimes twice), feverishly taking notes, asking questions, and in awe of every word that came out of Dr. Nobles' mouth. As one of the founding members of the Association of Black Psychologists and one of the authors of the seminal article "Black Psychology, Voodoo or IQ: An introduction to African Psychology" (Clark, McGee, Nobles, & Weems, 1975), deeply embedded in Dr. Nobles' curriculum was African-centered precepts, values, and traditions. All I can say is, his lectures were revolutionary and life changing! Specifically guided by African-centered pedagogy, he taught us about the cultural precepts of consubstantiation, interdependence, egalitarianism, collectivism, transformation, cooperation, humanness, and synnergism (see Nobles, 1975, 1986). He connected for me the notions of the permanence of spirit, the connectedness of the universe, how the collective is salient to existence and communal self-knowledge is the key to mental health, optimal functioning, and the illumination and liberation of spirit (see Nobles, 1994, 2005).

During that year, Dr. Nobles also required his class to attend the Association of Black Psychologists' (ABPsi) conference in Oakland, California. This too was an epiphany for me in that the tenets of African-centeredness were further ingrained, giving me an alternative paradigm that embraced the essence of an African cultural context and strengths of African people (Bethea, 2013). At the conference, I talked to, attended workshops and was mentored by, and learned about African-centeredness from many of the architects of the contemporary African-centered movement such as Baba Asa Hilliard, Nsenga Warfield-Coppock, Baba Reginald Jones, Frances Cress Welsing, Robert Williams, Joesph White, Kenneth Clark, Nancy Boyd-Franklin, Marimba Ani, Linda James Meyers, Kobi

Kambon, Mawiyah Kambon, Margaret Beale Spencer, Na'im Akbar, Beverly Daniel Tatum, Amos Wilson, Na'im Akbar, Edwin Nichols, Patricia Canson, Samella Abdullah, Thomas Parham, and William Cross. You talk about Divine; I was totally blown away, in disbelief that I was in that space, gaining such profound knowledge.

I immediately joined ABPsi as a student member. I was barely 23 years of age at that time and 34 years later I am still an active member of ABPsi as a National Board Member and past Chicago chapter President, and many of these amazing people are my guiding Ancestors while others are still my mentors, teachers, confidants, and friends. It was during this time that I realized that I wanted to be a university professor and that I wanted to do it the same way as my Black Studies professors, and the mighty warriors at the Association of Black Psychologists: African Centered.

During my final year of college, I got married and had my SUN (like the sun is the center of the universe, my son is the center of mine so I write "SUN" in honor of that). As a new mother of a male child, my reafricanization process continued to deepen. According to Dove (1998), in many "African traditions, the woman is revered in her role as the mother who is the bringer of life, the conduit to the spiritual regeneration of the Ancestors, the bearer of culture and the center of social organization" (p. 4). And I absolutely feel that way as John's mother. It was the innocent conversations with my SUN concerning his questions about Africa that prompted me to take us on our first trip to West Africa (Senegal and The Gambia) when he was 10 years old. Although the full impact of this experience is beyond the scope of this chapter, I would like to share my first experience setting foot on African soil.

On our first day in Dakar, Senegal we took a walk on the beach. I recall the healing powers of the sun on my body, the intoxicating aroma of fresh ocean water with the cool summer breeze blowing on my face. I felt totally at ease, stress free, and comfortable. And when I turned to gaze at the beauty of the ocean, in a flash seemingly out of nowhere a young Black African (in color and in spirit) ascended from the waters of the Atlantic Ocean with a large pink and white shell in his hand. He handed the shell to my SUN stating, "this is for you little brotha" and said to me, "welcome home sista," and in that moment a flood of emotions overwhelmed me and rocked me to my soul. I fell to my knees and began to cry freely as if all the emotions that my body could muster consumed me (healing, pain, agony, longing, joy, overwhelming happiness, and connectedness). I knew on a deep spirit level that the young man's words were never truer;

I *was* home. As I focused to check on my SUN to make sure that he wasn't shaken by my actions, he was listening to the shell and looked at me with his childhood innocence and curiosity and said, "Mom are you OK? Why are you crying?" He handed the shell to me and said, "listen to the shell, you can hear the ocean." His kindness and honesty made me chuckle, so I took the shell from his hand, put it to my ear, and listened as he ran as fast as he could to chase the waves that had rescinded into the ocean, only to be chased back by them. He was in total bliss. We spent the next four weeks experiencing the grandeur, beauty, magnificence, and contradictions of the Motherland and the kindness of African people, *our* people.

The best preparation for tomorrow is to make sure today's work is superbly done.
– African Proverb

After college, I utilized my love of my culture and community to secure jobs that directly impacted the well-being of Black people. For example, I did counseling and case management with incarcerated and homeless women and their families. I ran counseling groups and teenage parenting programs in neighborhood schools, and did parent infant psychotherapy, drug counseling, and home-based counseling at children's hospital. One of my proudest moments during that time is when I was the Director of the Mother Infant Care Program. Our program took pregnant teenagers or teenage mothers with children under the age of six out of county juvenile hall or state juvenile prison. This was a pivotal time in my career and my reafricanization process in that I began to apply what I had learned from my training in African-centered psychology. Utilizing African-centered precepts of well-being and a culture-based therapy treatment agenda, the teenage girls made great strides. These modalities were successful in that we received some of the highest evaluations from the state and juvenile justice systems, but most importantly we kept families together, helped teenage girls graduate from high school, and transitioned mothers into jobs and higher education institutions.

Eventually I decided to go to graduate school. I attended the predominantly white institution (PWI) John F. Kennedy (JFK) University in Moraga, California to pursue a Master's degree in Clinical Psychology. To survive in this PWI with my African identity intact, I contested and questioned the racist ideologies and half-truths concerning the world and African people that were espoused by my professors. I also introduced African-centered psychological theories into my classes, course assignments,

and work with clients in my internship. I had long wanted to earn a Ph.D. That longing was intensified at JFK when I was asked to co-teach a course and fell in love with the art of teaching. After graduating from JFK I followed my dreams of getting a Ph.D. I was recruited to come to the University of Missouri at Columbia (Mizzou). While in graduate school at Mizzou, I endured attacks on my identity and scholarship. However, I utilized my classes, assignments, papers, and research requirements to study in more depth the research and literature specific to African, African American, and other African descended people. For example, I wrote my dissertation on Oakland Freedom Schools, an African-centered summer program for African American and African descended children in Oakland. In addition, I had great mentors and a supportive circle of friends at Mizzou. There are two mentors in particular I would like to pay tribute to here. The first is Helen Neville (Distinguished Psychologist of ABPsi), my dissertation chair, who epitomized the meaning of Mwalimu. She was an exemplary role model, she guided me, believed in me when I didn't believe in myself, expected high academic scholarship and rigor from me (I lovingly called her Helly Hell), and even opened up her home to me as a place of solace to get away from the hustle, bustle, and stress of life. The second is Dr. Robert Williams (founding member and Elder of ABPsi who coined the term "Ebonics"). He received an Endowed Chairship at Mizzou and in his acceptance speech he pledged his support to me and joined my dissertation committee. I was having some struggles with Mizzou around my dissertation (i.e. it was too focused on Blackness for them) and Babba Williams called Mizzou out and helped orchestrate a fair and just path to getting my Ph.D. I just want to say here how much I appreciate you both.

To Be African or Not to Be? That Is the Question

In the African tradition speech is divine whereas Mdw Nfr (Good Speech) is beautiful eloquent speech that is profound thought and the accurate presentation of that thought (Carruthers, 1995). Two incidents of Good Speech occurred during my early years as a new Assistant Professor that further advanced my reafricaniztion process. First, I heard a lecture by Marimba Ani (2008) in which she stated that to be African is the most revolutionary act of our time, and as African descended women we come from a tradition where the "female principle, the mother principle is honored, primary and necessary for the healthy development and rootedness of a civilization." Next, I attended a seminar by Ancestor Baba Nana

Baffour Amankwatia II (Asa Hilliard III) in which he posed the most revolutionary Good Speech, saying, “To be African or not to be? That is the question.” Baba Asa repeated this Mdw Nfr several times, with poetic rhythm and Mzee (elder) privilege. His Mdw Nfr, genius, and African deep thought penetrated the very core of my African spirit (see Tusuruta, 2012). These two incidences of Good Speech solidified my ongoing reafricanization process and my need to continue to attach to my African culture. What I realized is that my process of re-awakening my African not only had been transformative and healing but it is a life-long spiritual journey. Why is this understanding of my Africanness important to this chapter concerning my teaching of African and African descended students? It is important because Africa is my spirit and the very essence of my humanbeingness. An African worldview grounds me. An African-centered pedagogy defines my teaching praxis and guides me in curriculum development. It has been the culmination of my experiences as a family member, daughter, mother, student, educator, counselor, social worker, advocate, and living in communities of high levels of Black excellence, achievement, and unity that I realized an African-centered conception of education.

African-Centered Pedagogy

Until lions have their own historians, tales of hunting will always glorify the hunter.
– African Proverb

African-centered pedagogy is an embodiment of resistance that disconnects itself from the hegemonic mainstream pedagogies, paradigms, and praxis that are rampant in educational systems (Merry & New, 2008). Though a multiplicity of explanations of African-centered pedagogy are disseminated (see Ani, 1994; Asante, 1991; Carroll, 2010; Carruthers, 2002; Hilliard, 1998; King, 2005; King, Swartz, Campbell, Lemons-Smith, & López, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Murrell, 2002; Lee, 1994; Nobles, 1986, 2005; Tedla, 1995; Thompson, 2001; Watkins, 2002; Williams, 2008) and complete consensus is debatable, the common thread is centering Africa and the belief that all people of African descent throughout the Diaspora are African (Shockley & Cleveland, 2011).

The African-centered way of living pre-dates Arab, Asian, and European knowledge, civilization, and their invasions of Africa (Asante, 1990, 2003; Akbar, 2004; Mbiti, 1970), and existed long before it was acknowledged by academics. Traditionally, African Ancestors have always used their

cultural practices and beliefs as guides to define, create, celebrate, sustain, and develop themselves (Hotep, 2010; Shockley & Cleveland, 2011; Tedla, 1995). Drawing on a protracted view of African history (Carr, 2002; Merry & New, 2008), African-centered pedagogy is about "claiming what is known rather gaining new knowledge" (Bent-Goodleya, Fairfaxb, & Carlton-LaNeyc, 2017, p. 30).

"African" in this context refers to Black people with an understanding that we have a "unique and distinct worldview and warrant a distinctive analysis" (Thabede, 2008, p. 233). As a cultural framework, worldview is shaped by specific cosmological (understanding of the universe), ontological (nature of being) epistemological (knowledge) orientations, axiological (values) commitments, virtues, and principles that endure across time (King & Swartz, 2016). It also provides us with the foundation for behavior, thought, and assumptions, which govern how we live, and cope with life (Nobles, 2005; Olumbe, 2008). Although there is great diversity of culture and life experiences among and between African descended people, African people have retained some basic principles of the African value system that include, but are not limited to, the following elements: spirituality, the belief in Ancestors, the ideas of the interconnectedness of all things; oneness of mind, body, and spirit; collective identity; kin, non-kin, and extended family structures; and phenomenological time (Thabede, 2008). These threads run through the beliefs, customs, value systems, socio-political institutions, and practices of African and African descended societies (Thabede, 2008).

As a teacher, scholar, activist, and Pan Africanist (a belief in the solidarity of all African people), I share cultural precepts and a worldview centered on the traditions, history, and life experiences of African and African descended people. While an African worldview provides the lens through which I interpret the world, and delineates who and whose I am and where I come from, it does not limit my understanding and appreciating other cultural worldviews (see King & Swartz, 2016). As African-centered thinkers we are temporary custodians, and it is our duty to protect the spiritual, cultural, social, and political traditions for the next generation (Carr, 2002; Watkins, 2002).

S/He who learns, teaches.
– Ethiopian Proverb

My first experiences teaching at the university level were in my doctoral program at Mizzou where I taught several sections of *Child Development*

and team taught in the College of Education's teacher preparatory program. However, my most memorable teaching experience at that time was a class that I taught at the Historically Black College/University, Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Missouri (a 30-minute commute from Columbia, Missouri). I taught a class in the Africana Studies department called *Sociology of the Black Family*. The class consisted of predominately African American students. It was in this class that I began to utilize my African-centered pedagogy geared specifically toward Black students. The students studied the heritage, traditions, transitions, and structures of Black families and the various systems in which they were embedded. Instead of utilizing Eurocentric deficit models (of which I had been taught in my formal education), I spoke to the unique contributions, strengths, capacity, and agency of Black families. For example, consistent with African-centered constructs, I talked about how interdependence and spirituality were protective factors, and how those constructs could be utilized to create interventions and programs that were culturally relevant (Bent-Goodleya et al., 2017; Glocke, 2016; Graham, 1999). I also utilized many of these tenets to tutor Black student athletes at Mizzou, which had a dismal record of graduating Black athletes. Putting into practice many of the lessons that I learned, and the concepts of interdependence, communalism (i.e. we had potlucks at my house to study for exams), and collective responsibility (they made a pact to be responsible for each other, e.g. calling each other to get to class, studying together, practicing Ubuntu by understanding they were their brother's keeper), I am proud to say that 100 percent of the athletes that I tutored that year graduated from Mizzou.

After receiving my Ph.D. I was hired by Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU) as core faculty in Counselor Education, and affiliate faculty in the African and African American Studies program. The following year Dr. Conrad Worrill, Director of the Jacob H. Carruthers Center for Inner City Studies (CCICS), requested that NEIU appoint me as Affiliate faculty in the Inner City Studies Education (ISCE) program housed at CCICS. CCICS is a satellite campus of NEIU located in a historic Black community on the South Side of Chicago with a long and powerful legacy of activism, service, scholarship, and research concerning the Black community. Furthermore, CCICS has had a long legacy of using African-centered philosophies, paradigms, and praxis in their teaching and curriculum as well as their significant work within their communities. The Center's namesake, Ancestor Jacob H. Carruthers, Professor in History

and Education at CCICS, produced works in African-centered philosophy such as *Intellectual Warfare* (1999), *MTR NDR: Divine Speech* (1995), and *The Preliminary Challenge: African World History Project* (2002). Furthermore, Dr. Anderson Thompson, who wrote the seminal article "Developing an African Historiography" (Thompson, 2001), was one of the founders and instructors of the Comuniversity movement (explained later) and the Confederation of African Organizations, and he aligned the ISCE curriculum with an African worldview. Dr. Carruthers was founder of the Kemetic Institue at CCICS and Dr. Carruthers and Dr. Anderson were considered the "Fathers of the [contemporary] African Centered Movement," in Chicago. They were also founding members of the Association of the Study of Classical African Civilization (Worrill, 2017).

Given the importance of the Center to the world (and to my continuing reafricanization process), it is essential that I provide a brief historical context of this space. Scholar-activists such as Don Smith, Anderson Thompson, Barbara Sizemore, Don Bailey, Sonja Stone, and Nancy Arnez founded the ICSE Program in 1966. ICSE started as a graduate program whose mission was to re-train teachers in the Inner City. Jacob Carruthers joined the faculty in 1968 and pioneered the development of both undergraduate and graduate degrees in ICSE. In 1969 an undergraduate major in ICSE was established to assist teachers' aides employed by Chicago Public Schools to become certified elementary school teachers. The program's curriculum evolved over time to focus on the political, economic, social, and cultural conditions that impact the inner city communities from an African-centered perspective.

ICSE has both an academic arm and a community arm. Some of the important community programs that emerged at CCICS include: the *Follow Through* program that researched Head Start programs around the country to follow the children's progress through elementary school; *The Women's Prison Initiative* in Cook County jail; *The Kemetic Institute* that sponsored the *Teaching about Africa Program*; *The Great Black Music Project*; *The Illinois Transatlantic Slave Trade Project*; *The Alternative Schools Network Project*; and *The African Study Tours Project* (conversations with C. Worrill, personal interview with S.B. Bethea, June 5, 2017; Worrill, 2017). In addition, there was the *Communiversity*, a volunteer community independent think tank, where hundreds of students and community members attended. Under the instruction of Harold Pates, Professor Anderson Thompson, and Ancestors Dr. Bobby

Wright and Bob Rhodes, activist scholars and the community examined multiple issues that impacted the African American community worldwide (conversations with C. Worrill, personal interview with S.B. Bethea, June 5, 2017). The *Communiversity* generated its own journal, *The Afrocentric World Review*. Overall, the *Communiversity* ignited the resurgence of the Pan-African Nationalist tradition in Chicago (conversations with C. Worrill, personal interview with S.B. Bethea, June 5, 2017).

Activism at CCICS has had a global reach. For instance, Dr. Worrill, author of the syndicated weekly column *Worrill's World*, went to Switzerland in 1997 with a delegation and 157,000 signatures to formally charge the U.S. government with genocide and human rights violations against Black populations in the United States and before the Commission on Human Rights and the United Nations in New York City (conversations with C. Worrill, personal interview with S.B. Bethea, June 5, 2017). The breadth and depth of the African-centered teaching, research, community collaboration, and activism at CCICS became my ideal teaching and research home. Architects of the Chicago arm of the African-centered movement and Pan Africanism were now my mentors, teachers, and colleagues. Having Dr. Worrill as my colleague and faculty mentor and being affiliate faculty at ICSE enhanced my ongoing reafricanization process (Cannon, 1977); my spiritual and intellectual edification was personally and professionally life affirming and a great fit for me. I took classes at the Kemetic Institute concerning all aspects and all regions of Africa and Professor Yvonne Jones taught me how to read and write sacred text (known by the misnomer "hieroglyphics") (Beatty, 2002). There were so many epiphanic moments and experiences that occurred in this space that are beyond the scope of this chapter. However, there are several key experiences that are pivotal to my reafricanization that must be highlighted.

First, I was assigned to teach two courses in my capacity as affiliate faculty, *Development of the Black Child* and *Introduction to Inner City Studies*. In so doing, I utilized all of the experiences, teachings, lessons, and techniques of African-centered philosophies and frameworks to develop curricula for these courses. Exciting! My students were predominately African, African American, and other African descended students, and I taught them in a space specifically designed to support, honor, and protect African-centered pedagogy. Next, I facilitated relocating the Chicago chapter of the Association of Black Psychologists to CCICS. Several years later I

became the President of the Chicago chapter and with the leadership of the national office, I facilitated the organization's 42nd Annual International Convention and the 6th ABPsi International Congress on Licensure, Certification and Proficiency in Black Psychology. We gathered African-centered scholars from all over the world to convene and discuss African-centered paradigms concerning the mental health and education of African descended people and introduced new scholarship by new practitioners, new professors, and students in the discipline. We held panels to honor great Ancestors such as Bobby Wright, who was the Director of the largest Black comprehensive Mental Health Center in the nation located in Chicago. We had Susan Taylor (Editor of *Essence* magazine) as our main keynote speaker, and keynotes by leaders of the Nation of Islam. I also facilitated an Mbongi (a community forum) concerning Black youth in Chicago's South Side Black community (it was standing room only) and we offered a day free of charge to the Chicagoland community so that they could engage and contribute to the current scholarship in African-centered philosophies. We also held rituals to honor our Ancestors and provided space for Black vendors to promote buying Black. This all culminated with the best Chicago had to offer in Black art, literature, spoken word, dance, theater, and jazz.

One of the most healing and transformative experiences that I have participated in thus far at CCICS is their African Study Abroad Program. For my first study abroad, Dr. Anderson Thompson and I coordinated a trip to Brazil with African American students, none of whom had ever traveled outside of the country. These particular students did not have the resources to travel, so we raised money for a year, selling baked goods, writing grants, asking for donations, and putting on a silent art auction and jazz concert. Not only were we able to raise the money to pay for every student's trip in full, but when we all met at the airport, I handed each student 300 dollars for spending money. I could go on and on about the places we saw, the people we met, the beauty of the land, the history of our people, and the cultural enlightenment that we experienced, but I will share only a few highlights. We visited temples and participated in the African indigenous spiritual practice of Candomblé. We visited schools and activist organizations, churches, and parks. We danced in the street with Olodum (the Brazilian band that backed up Michael Jackson), hung out back stage as VIPs at one of the largest celebrations in the world, Festa de São João (we were invited onstage to witness hundreds of thousands of people attending the concert), visited with dignitaries of government and

presidents of universities. Without a doubt, the best of the best was hanging out with the Revolutionaries, Heroes, Sheroes, Activists, and Warriors of the movement to liberate African people in Brazil. And oh my goodness the food! Beaches! And shopping! One of the most important highlights of the trip was the students experiencing this journey for the first time. We had insightful, intellectual, and explosive debriefing sessions every night. They were always laughing, studying, questioning, embracing, and giving out their love (see Lee & Green, 2016).

My second study abroad trip was with 75 (mostly) students to Egypt to visit the ancient land of our African Ancestors. I have to take a deep cleansing breath here. This trip was the most breathtaking, jaw dropping, heart skipping a beat, life transforming, and healing trip I have ever taken. I can't speak for the students but based on their reactions, they would probably say the same thing. I could write volumes about that trip (I took over two thousand pictures). First, our hotel was on an island on the Nile: amazing. On the first day we visited a temple, kind of an inverted pyramid that went very deep underneath the ground. I am a bit claustrophobic so at first I passed on climbing down into the structure. One by one I would hear my students gasping as if they had viewed the most beautiful thing their eyes had ever seen. They kept yelling to me to come down. So I did. It was a long climb down in a very deep crevasse, and you had to go in backwards. However, when I turned around, OH MY CREATOR! I had never seen such high intelligence, high technology, high art, literature and science, beauty, grace, grandeur, and miracles, done by my people for my people. I texted everybody in my phone, "I am so happy I am African." You talkin' about a major elevation to my reafricanzation process—this was it! And that was our first stop of a 16-day trip that got better and better each hour of each day.

The Center for Inner City Studies not only gave me the opportunity to teach and take educational trips with Black students, it also gave me the space to work in the community serving and researching Black children. I ran groups for African American teen girls, did workshops with Black children in neighborhood schools, consulted with schools concerning cultural competency, and conducted research with African and African American youth in Chicago and Tanzania, giving them the opportunity to define their own concepts, views, beliefs, and definitions of civic engagement.

Another experience that I would like to highlight is through a series of spoken word events in Chicago, we raised money to pay for Phenom and K Love's youth performance group L.Y.R.I.C (Let your Rhymes Inspire

Creativity) to present at ABPsi's International conference in New Orleans. They presented their spoken word theatrical performance of *Get that Loud* concerning the impact of disorientation, (racism, oppression, and mental health issues) on their lives. Utilizing spoken word and hip hop as a vehicle for transformation and healing, these youth transformed and healed the hundreds of Black psychologists and the people on Bourbon Street (they took their performance outside) who were privileged to experience this phenomenon of youth genius.

I Learned I Am Magic and I Know How to Fly

Though I typically teach graduate students in the Counselor Education program, most of whom are white, as affiliate faculty in the African and African American Studies Program one my favorite classes to teach is *Intro to African and African American Studies*, which mainly consists of Black undergraduates. This is where I feel most at home. This class is an excellent example of how I structure my classes in an African-centered way. A brief anecdote from that class provides a powerful example.

It was the final class of the semester and I had just gotten in the night before from a study abroad trip to Ghana, Togo, and Benin. Albeit a bit jetlagged, I was very excited to see my students. During the two weeks of my travels, I emailed the class often and shared with them places seen and lessons learned and relayed to them the pride I felt when my colleague, who took over my class in my absence, shared with me the deep conversations they had during my time away. When I returned to class, I requested a brief synopsis of their two weeks without my presence and I reciprocated with a brief recap of my travels. I was anxious to hear the two remaining student presentations concerning African women throughout the Diaspora and the Health of Africa and its Diaspora. The two presentations did not disappoint; they were genius, scholarly, creative, and reflective of the many lessons that we had learned during the course of the semester.

After their break, I conducted what I refer to as a community final, where students were able to work together as a community and rely on collective knowledge to answer questions on the exam. I instructed students to answer two questions concerning Carter G. Woodson's *Miseducation of the Negro* (1990) and in a manner that demonstrated the knowledge they had acquired throughout the semester from lectures and assigned readings. I watched as my students immediately formed a community—they made a circle to organize, discuss, and take notes. However, what was literally breathtaking was the narrative that came from their

responses to the second exam question. For example, "I learned to love and be proud of being African," "I learned that I am brilliant and good enough," "I learned that African/African descended people will double by 2050," "I learned that Africa is the birth place of humanity and human civilization," "I learned to think for myself and critically read and question scholarship that is presented to me in my classes," "I learned more in 16 weeks about African people than in all my schooling," and "As an African I respect how much you know about Africa and our people." One student even shared that our class was her safe space that gave her much needed solace to deal with her daughter's illness. Another student thanked me for letting his children come to class when Chicago public schools were closed and informed me that his daughter still asks if she can come to class with him.

At the end of the exercise a student called out, "I learned that I am magic" whereupon several students joined in and said, "and I know how to fly." "Black Power Y'all" resonated throughout the room. Their honest, enthusiastic, and sometimes deeply personal statements literally brought the class full circle. This is because on the first day of class I told my students that this class was essential to their lives because they would learn that they were magic and that they know how to fly (referring to Virginia Hamilton's Black folktale, *The people could fly (1985)*). And I ended many of my classes with, "Black Power Y'all." After hearing the student responses to the two exam questions, not only was I teary eyed, but also I was very clear that not only were these students educated (not schooled) as a result of my African-centered pedagogy, but also they had experienced a transformation and healing of their human spirit.

Teaching and reinforcing the importance of rituals in African societies, on that last day, I took 25 black candles and 25 packets of 7 cowry shells from my bag. First, I told the class what an honor it was to be their Mwalimu (teacher). As I passed out the black candles to each student, I explained that the black candle represented the principle of Umoja (unity), which symbolizes our class' unity as a community and the unity of our people: "I am because we are." Next I passed out the packet of cowry shells and explained that the cowrie shell represents "goddess and ocean protection, prosperity and a complete cycle," whereas the number seven is the "resolution of dualism and a symbol of perfection and unity" (Gadalla, 2013). As I dismissed class every student walked up to exchange hugs with me and each other and many of them stayed and engaged in further conversation. It was a good day, a truly spirit-filled day. As I drove home I stopped at the lakefront and gazed at the

calm and power of the water, the power of the moment, proud and thankful for the transformation and healing of my spirit (reciprocity); thankful to be African, thankful for my students, and thankful that I was called to teach.

Conclusion

When there is no enemy within, the enemies outside cannot hurt you.
– African Proverb

The journey of writing this chapter has had its own healing power for me. My journeys over my life have taken me home—to engage and dance with indigenous priests and priestesses, spend time with healers, and talk to Elders. I have climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro to the third door, and hiked gorges in Tanzania to swim in pools from waterfalls. I have sung *Wade in the Water* in the Last River, and traveled the roads of the Ngorongoro Crater (lovingly referred to as the Garden of Eden), where I came pretty much face to face with lions, wildebeests, zebras, elephants, and giraffes, and I have watched my SUN pet and play with alligators. I have hung out with the Masai in Kenya and I have looked at the footprints and out on the plains of Olduvai Gorge from a cliff where Lucy's (one of the oldest hominids found by man) Ancestors walked to safety to Ethiopia. It is stated that a good conclusion is the capstone of writing an essay and the last thing people will encounter before they finish reading your piece. However, instead of recapping what I have written or leaving readers some witty provocative statement, I will end where I began, **honoring,** and began where I ended, because today is the first day and the beginning of so much more to learn, experience, and complete in my reafricanization process. The final phase is fully reattaching to an African culture. I'm not fully there yet but I look forward to going all the way home.

To bring this chapter "home" I end with the following poem, *Homecoming.* Not only does the poem encapsulate an expression of my feelings about reconnecting to Africa and African traditions, it is also special because it embodies the essence of the importance of family. My sister wrote this poem specifically for this chapter. I am grateful and appreciative of her contribution to my efforts to share my love of Africa and African descended people and my experiences and joy in teaching Black students in the Academy. Interestingly and fittingly, her birth name is Afrikahna and in a ritual to honor her coming of age, she was named Mutsia, which means

mother of insight, and her namesakes are a befitting celebration of our African ancestry. I (we) have come home.

Homecoming

Foreign Lands with familiar faces
Leave traces of vibrations not so foreign to my soul
Bold colors, drum beats, and air sweet to the smell
It smells like home.
Like freedom
Like love
And the reality that there is more to this skin I'm in, than I have been shown
The sun rises and sets in places that paint me beautiful here
Beautiful stares of others whose hips span the stretch of time, like mine, remind me that I have been here before,
That I have been here and more
More than your interpretations or limitations of me
African incarnations move across lands and spaces
Creating places for genius
Ingenious are those who know see us true
And when I am here I see us through the eyes of all who came before me,
And to ignore me would be futile, as every true child facing the sun and the moon, first came through my womb
This place is hallowed ground
And every hallowed sound wiping through the breeze speaks to me,
Mother Earth, Mother Africa, Mother Land
I stand, in honor of all that is grand and majestic,
The souls of our feet blessed with,
The soil of strength
A love that won't waiver
I bow with bare knees and open palms giving praise for everyday in your favor

Sia Stewart, 2017

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CHAPTER 18

Afterword: Giving Life—Black Women's Liberatory Praxis

Helen A. Neville

I had the privilege of organizing a short study abroad educational experience to Tanzania for a group of brilliant women of color undergraduate students (most of whom were African American). We spent the academic year establishing a collaborative relationship with peers at the University of Dar es Salaam. As part of this experience, my Dar es Salaam colleague and I encouraged students in both locations to identify and develop a collective research project on a topic of their choice—the Malkia wa Nguvu (Strong Woman) research team was born with the purpose of exploring and disrupting gender-based violence in college settings. I provide this information only to contextualize the inspiration for the title of this afterword. Because of our intensive work together over the course of the year and, in part, because of the empowering space we co-created as a collective, students talked freely in my presence. I had the opportunity to observe casual, authentic conversations. In one such conversation, students talked about the courses they completed on campus that "gave them life."

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The courses that gave students life shared many of the components of the pedagogical approaches described in *Black Women's Liberatory Pedagogies (BWLP)* in that the courses (a) focused on the lived experiences of people of African descent, (b) adopted a critical and intersectional perspective in which the lives of Black women were centered, and (c) provided space for students to interrogate their own narratives and place them in conversation with the theories covered in the text. Students were drawn to the courses grounded in the Black radical tradition, with a deep commitment to understanding structure, developing critical analytic skills, and a pledge to contribute to community transformation. Like the narratives shared in this collection, students talked about experiencing alienation on campus, and through these courses they felt a sense of belonging and radical hope.

BWLP will give life to Black women radical intellectuals today—whether as students, educators, researchers, artists, organizers, activists—in the same way seminal texts such as *But Some of Us are Brave* (Hull, Bell-Scott, & Smith, 1982), *Sister Outsider* (Lorde, 1984) and *Ain't I a Woman: Black women and feminism* (hooks, 1981) gave life to many of us three decades earlier. Building on the bold analyses of Black academic mothers and grandmothers and great grandmothers, the women in this collective describe transformative pedagogies to feed the body, mind, and spirit in preparation for the liberation of our communities. And, the authors are unapologetically Black and women in their epistemological stance. They break from traditional western and male ways of knowing to embrace Black women theorizing in multiple forms, whether it be through messages from ancestors, storytelling, literature, empirical research, or magic. Much like Hull, Bell-Scott, and Smith (1982) and later Collins (1990), the editors of this collection center Black woman being-ness—validating the truth that our lived experiences are worthy of studying and that this truth is based on centuries of a rich intellectual tradition and struggle for liberation.

Although a number of texts on Black women's intellectual traditions take up core themes discussed in this collection—such as being silenced, identifying and naming one's racial-gendered-classed-sexual identity experiences, finding one's voice, resisting hegemonic expectations—this collection is unique because the contributors bring to life Black women's pedagogies of praxis. Thus, the collection not only challenges the hidden curriculum dominant in K-16 education (King, this volume), but explicitly endorses an education to "decolonize the spirit" (Edwards, this

volume) and to unveil radical hope in which one both envisions a more equitable future and adopts practices linked to community transformation (Ross, this volume). The work differs from hooks' (1994) groundbreaking *Teaching to Transgress* in that the collection incorporates a diverse range of Black women's theorizing about best pedagogical practices to promote informed practice based on a critical analysis. Another distinctive contribution of *BWLP* is the inclusion of a section devoted to teaching methods that heal. In this section, the authors of the five chapters write on the importance of promoting well-being and self-love, which in and of itself is radical because health and well-being are foundational for any sustained acts of struggle for social change.

I challenge the readers of *BWLP* to promote the long legacy of Black women mothers, workers, warriors, healers, activists, and intellectuals by engaging in the following three interrelated transformative practices inspired by the current collection:

1. Identify ways to create sites of Black women liberatory praxis in communities and in the academy. This could include the formation of healing circles (Richardson, this volume) in which Black women theorize, tell their stories, testify, and dream of a different, more egalitarian tomorrow. Perhaps women could engage in the questions Harris (this volume) raises: "What does your liberation look like, smell like, taste like?" Attending more closely to the theory aspect of praxis, these sites could create, circulate, and discuss works in a Black women liberation syllabus.
2. Promote pedagogies for transformation. The authors in this collection highlight the core aspects of any liberatory pedagogy, including being guided by democratic principles and demonstrating unconditional respect for one's mutual humanity. Although these ideals seem relatively straightforward, they are remarkably difficult to attain in the real world (see Bonsu, this volume). The chapters in this volume offer some practical insight into using one's self as an instrument of love and transformation and relying on the wisdom and resilience of the collective to promote community accountability. Additionally, it is important to implement effective ways to promote efficacy in Black girls and women, to increase an understanding that they come from a long tradition of liberators and that they too can create change. This sense of efficacy is foundational to taking action.

3. Foreground community members, activists, and students' analyses. Find ways to reinforce the intellectual brilliance across class and social location. Work collectively to demonstrate the ways in which we all are producers as well as consumers of knowledge.

"We are the ones we have been waiting for," June Jordan.

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Index[1]

A
Academyland, 85
Acculturate, 25
Activism, 7, 8, 25, 33, 36, 41n10, 50, 52, 54, 60, 110, 135, 139, 145, 161, 162, 164, 170, 171, 176, 179, 189, 191, 193, 241, 269, 289, 296, 307, 309
Adegoke, Yomi, 254
African ascendance, 86, 90
African-centered, 11, 228, 233, 235, 238, 240, 243, 295, 305
African-centered paradigm, 238
African Centered Pedagogy, 295
African-centered perspective (ACP), 228–230, 234, 239, 241
African Diaspora, 58, 237, 291n1
Africanist aesthetics, 184
Africanist performance, 184
African ring shout, 285
African Traditional Religions (ATR), 86, 256
African worldview, 228, 231, 232, 234, 305, 306, 308
Agency, 8, 9, 11, 12n1, 34, 54, 55, 57, 65, 93, 116, 128, 175, 176, 228, 257, 287, 307
Akiwowo, A. A., 200
Ancestors, 7, 8, 61, 86, 107, 166, 182, 227, 232, 235, 236, 241, 242, 245, 246, 251, 254, 256, 257, 259, 285, 295–297, 302, 306, 310, 314, 322
Androcentric epistemologies, 126
Angelou, Maya, 41n13, 67, 238
Anger, 9, 93, 101–118, 203, 212, 282
Angry black woman stereotype, 107–110, 112, 113, 117
Ani, Marimba, 5, 85, 283, 301, 304, 305
Anthony, Adelina, 187, 188
Anti-sterilization activist, 161
Anzaldúa, Gloria, 38, 40n8, 41n13, 68, 87, 94, 97, 156n1, 178, 179
Aphorisms, 200
Apostasy, 103
Aset, 296
Assimilate, 25, 80, 105, 126

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Authenticity/cultural authenticity, 56, 96, 227, 237–239
Axiological, 306

B
Baker, Ella, 12n2, 34, 36, 41n10, 41n13, 41n15, 50, 54, 58, 215, 261
Baldwin, James, 41n16, 161
Barry Farms, 47, 59, 60
Beloved, 299
Bethune McLeod, Mary, 12n2, 242
Black bourgeoisie, 52
Black Buddhist, 252
Black Enslavement, 85
Black feminism, 10, 77, 126, 127, 143–155, 164, 181, 182, 213, 286, 287, 290
Black Feminist pedagogies, 11, 181, 281
Black Feminist praxis, 283–285, 290, 291
Black immiseration, 48
Black inferiority, 49, 271, 276
Black liberation, 2, 87, 211, 213, 216
Black Queer Feminist lens, 213, 214, 218, 219, 221
Black radical tradition, 58, 322
Black self-love, 11, 251, 265
Blackspeak, 103
Black student alienation, 11, 271
Black urban vernacular, 87
Black witch, 245
Black Witch Chronicles, 11, 258, 259
Black Witch University (BWU), 11, 259, 260
Black Youth Project 100 (BYP100), 10, 211–216, 218–220, 222, 223
Bootlegging, 297
Brooks, Gwendolyn, 182, 204, 207, 208
Butler, Octavia, 86, 186, 191
BYP100, *see* Black Youth Project 100 (BYP100)

C
Capitalism, 51, 58, 59, 104, 115, 167
Casino capitalism, 172
Castle Doctrine, 60
Centering, 36, 146, 163, 164, 214, 223, 238, 284, 286, 305
Chisolm, Shirley, 12n2, 41n13, 262
Choi, Franny, 199
Choreo-pedagogy, 9, 21–39
Classism, 55, 115, 178, 214, 260
Close/Bye, 10, 181–193
Closeness, 10, 183
Coates, Ta-Nehisi, 49, 88
Cohen, Cathy, 211, 214
Colonialist paradigms, 67
Colonization, 5, 25, 127, 172, 247, 249, 254, 256
Colonizers, 106, 231
Colorblindness, 110
Colorblind racism, 110
Colorism, 52, 260
Combahee River Collective, 125, 127, 155, 214
Commodification, 67, 107
Community accountability, 10, 215, 259, 323
Complementarity, 11, 42n19, 229, 234–237, 242
Congo Square, 251
Conjuring, 245, 247, 248, 255, 259
Contemporary activism, 54
Cosmological, 306
Counterstorytelling/counternarratives, 267–270
Critical discourse analysis, 198
Critical race theory (CRT), 66, 77, 126, 127, 138, 204

Cultural responsiveness, 33
Cultural shift, 47
Cultures, 2, 4, 6, 12n1, 22, 34, 35, 37, 39, 52, 54, 80, 85, 86, 108, 126, 131, 154, 167, 170, 177, 184, 199, 200, 207, 218, 231, 233, 235, 236, 239, 240, 254, 269, 272, 282–284, 296, 299, 302, 303, 305, 306, 314

D
Dalkon Shield IUD, 161
Decolonial, 9, 85–98
Decolonization of the mind, 89, 98, 267, 283
Deplorables, 111
Diamond, John, 202
Diaspora, 35, 37, 58, 129, 237, 260, 305, 312
Dillard, Cynthia B., 6, 85, 86, 89, 97
Dissident intellectuals, 53, 111
Dissident voice, 111
Diversification, 71
Divinities, 228, 296
Douglas, Frederick, 58, 149, 201, 234
Dove, Rita, 299
Drapetomania, 102
Dreamwork, 240
Durham, North Carolina, 298

E
Elicit resistance, 66
Engaged pedagogy, 266
Enslavement, 24, 67, 247, 255
Epistemological, 7, 126, 160, 161, 193, 197, 306, 322
Equality Act 2010, 69
Erotic, the, 286
Eurocentric, 7, 125, 126, 129, 153, 163, 243, 298, 307
Eurocentric pedagogy, 75
Eurocentrism, 68
Excorporation, 153, 154
Exile pedagogy, 111

F
Fang He, Ming, 111
Fanon, Franz, 5, 51, 58, 77
Feminist pedagogies, 181, 282, 286–289
Foundational Sociological Worldview, 200
Freire, Paolo, 4, 52, 55, 56, 58, 60, 61, 97, 175, 276

G
Gaines, Ernest J., 275, 276
Gender nonconforming, 255
Globalization, 128, 129, 161
Good Speech, 304, 305
Gottschild, Brenda Dixon, 184
Griotic framework, 296
Group-centered leadership, 10, 215–217
Group self-care, 219, 288
Gynocide, 24

H
Harris, Laura, 102, 109, 145
Harrison, Paul Carter, 184, 190
Hayti, 298
Healing, 2, 3, 11, 22, 32, 33, 90, 172, 213, 218–220, 235, 238, 241–243, 245–262, 270, 272, 281–291, 302, 305, 310–314
Healing circles, 253, 281, 323
Healing Politic, 287
Healing Room, The, 11, 252, 258
Hegemonic discourses, 65

Hegemonic dominance, 53
Hegemony, 2, 8, 12n3, 23, 29, 34, 35, 52, 70, 106, 111, 116, 146, 243, 287
Heteronormativity, 176, 191, 214
Heteropatriarchal, 255
Heterosexual, 173, 214
Heterosexual essentialism, 173
Hidden curriculum, 21, 22, 27, 33, 322
Higher Education Funding Council of England (HEFCE), 69
Hill Collins, Patricia, 35, 41n13, 86, 107, 127, 155, 156n1, 176, 182, 283, 322
Historically Black College/University (HBCU), 9, 47, 105, 131, 307
Homecoming, 314, 315
Hooks, Bell, 3, 4, 8, 12n3, 32, 39, 41n13, 51, 53, 55–58, 60, 72, 77, 86, 92, 103, 105, 106, 109, 113, 117, 138, 145, 153, 154, 175, 178, 201, 246, 266, 267, 269, 283, 284, 289, 291n3, 322
Hull, Gloria, 88, 102, 156n1, 322
Human Rights in the Headlines, 177
Hybridity, 89, 96

I
Ifa, 247, 253
Imperialism, 59, 68, 134, 176
Imperialist paradigms, 67
Inauthentic, 71, 238
Infantalisation, 76
Institutional racism, 8, 48
Integration, 21, 22, 47, 113, 134, 146, 161, 175, 202, 284
Intellectual and emotional labor of repetition, 148
Interanimation of texts, 184
International education praxis, 237
Intersectionality, 10, 38, 66, 143, 160, 164, 165, 171, 173–175, 197, 201, 207, 242
Intersubjective(ties, 37
Intra-racial, 52
Invisibility, 3, 25, 66, 67, 69–73, 77, 79, 191

J
Jegna, 231
Jim Crow segregation, 51

K
Kuja Nyumbani, 295–315
Kuumba-creativity, 240

L
Ladson-Billings, G., 5, 33, 77, 112, 201, 305
Leadership scaffolding, 216
Lewis, Amanda E., 110, 202
Libations, 101, 190, 219, 227, 228, 232, 296
Liberatory education, 4, 6, 51, 52
Liveness, 184
Lorde, Audre, 35, 41n13, 58, 86, 93, 101, 102, 109, 113, 116, 117, 139, 179, 198–200, 213, 217, 255, 282, 283, 286–288, 322
Loving blackness, 11, 267–270, 272–274, 277
Lucumi, 247, 253

M
MAAT, 6
Macroaggressions, 76
Magic, 11, 161, 245, 268, 296, 312–314, 322

Mardi Gras, 247
Marginalization, 7, 9, 67, 72, 74, 92, 125, 216, 270, 271, 276
Marx, Karl, 51
Master narratives, 90, 105, 268, 270, 272–274
Matricide, 24
Matrix of oppression, 66, 130
McKenzie, Mia, 103
McWhorter, John, 273, 274
Mdw Nfr, 304, 305
Mentoring, 22, 79, 97, 125, 128, 133, 135–137, 139
Mestiza, 87
Metabolic reading, 153, 154
Metabolic reading of incorporation, 153
Microaggressions, 8, 69, 91, 114, 125–127, 131–133, 135, 138
Microinvalidation, 113
Misogyny/ism, 24, 176, 281
Mommas to the 4th power, 11, 228–243
Morgan, Joan, 287
Morrison, Toni, 299
Motherwork, 21, 34, 39
Mwalimus, 6, 304, 313
Mythopoetic, 22
Mzee, 305

N
National Center for Human Rights Education, 163
Neoliberal, 115, 129, 130, 167, 172
New Orleans, 247, 250, 251, 253, 255, 257, 258, 261, 312
Nigrescence model, 241, 242
Non-binary people, 255
Numbers, the, 206, 230
Numbers runners, 230

O
Obama, Michelle, 108
Obatala, 247
Oneness principle, 241
Ontological, 197, 306
Oppositional consciousness, 289
Orishas, 251, 259
Osain, 247
Oshun, 251
Othermothers, 228, 229, 241, 242

P
Pan Africanist, 306
Patriarchal, 1, 2, 9, 49, 50, 53, 59, 104, 107, 116, 127, 198, 215, 289, 298
Patriarchies, 92, 102, 110, 128, 146, 178, 235, 265, 267, 286
Patricide, 24
Pedagogy of Black self-love, 11, 265–278
Pedagogy of questions, 220
Performance as epistemology, 184
Performance of Literature, 181
Performance pedagogy, 183
Phenomenological experiences, 67
Pleasure Politics, 287
Plural consciousness, 178
Poet, 10, 40n6, 191, 192, 197–199, 201–204
Poetry, 10, 41n17, 135, 183, 184, 186, 187, 197–201, 203, 204
Poetry as praxis, 204–208
Political education, 8, 10, 143, 215, 219–221, 223
Positionality, 37, 96
Postcolonialism, 129
Post-Katrina, 253
Praxis, 3, 4, 8–11, 22, 29, 41n11, 41n15, 47, 95, 96, 111,

126–128, 130, 133–135, 137, 139, 148, 159, 174, 175, 185, 207, 211, 228–230, 233, 237–239, 243, 282, 286, 290, 296, 305, 307
Public pedagogy, 111

Q
Queer, 10, 11, 109, 173, 181, 188, 205, 211–223, 252, 253, 255, 256, 258, 259, 282, 291n2
Queer theories, 29, 213, 214

R
Racial inferiority, 68
Racial performance, 185
Racial smog, 102
Radicals, 3, 8, 10, 11, 54, 57–59, 110, 143, 146, 148, 155, 160, 165, 171, 172, 174, 178, 213, 214, 222, 251, 253, 258, 260, 262, 269, 282, 283, 286, 289, 290, 322, 323
Reafricanization, 296–298, 300–305, 308, 309, 314
Reardon, Betty A., 176
Reflective, 5, 10, 42n18, 66, 164, 215, 219, 286, 312
Reiki, 252, 258, 260, 261
Re-member, 11, 96, 98, 228, 243, 245
Reproductive justice, 10, 159–179
Reproductive Justice framework, 10, 163–167
Resistance, 1–3, 5, 6, 9, 22, 29, 31, 32, 47, 65–67, 73–78, 80, 90–92, 94–97, 101, 125–139, 160, 174, 179, 183, 184, 191, 212, 214, 231, 267, 269, 272, 277, 282, 283, 285, 288, 289, 291n3, 299, 305
Revolutionary pedagogy, 9, 47–61
Revolutionary praxis, 9, 47, 59, 266
Rituals, 11, 21, 22, 26, 31, 33, 39, 40n1, 183, 184, 234, 238, 241, 248, 296, 310, 313, 314
Roe v. Wade, 162, 167
Russell, Michele, 143, 144

S
Safe OUTside the System (SOS) Collective, 217
Salem Witch Trials, 255
Sanchez, Sonia, 40n6, 41n13, 227, 266
Sangomas, 241
Sankofa, 7, 228
Scholar activists, 147–149, 308
Scholar-activists, 60
Segregation, 105, 202–204, 254, 298, 299
Self-care, 11, 127, 135, 219, 282, 286–290
Self-determination, 160, 161, 174, 240, 242, 257, 269, 283
Self-love, 30, 251, 266, 267, 269–278
Sex workers, 250
Simone, Nina, 228, 241, 242
SisterSong, 159, 163, 170, 173, 178
Slave narrative, 245
Social justice, 2, 5–8, 22, 54, 55, 59, 91, 92, 105, 115, 116, 133, 135, 146, 159, 161, 163, 164, 169, 170, 176, 183, 213, 235–237, 261
Social scientist, 197–199, 201, 204
Social transformation, 54, 163, 174, 182, 193, 282
Spirit decolonization, 93, 95, 97
Spirit work, 246, 258, 259
Stand Your Ground, 60
Storytelling, 9, 86–90, 93, 96, 164, 204, 285

Study abroad, 235–237, 310–312, 321
Sue, Derald Wing, 111–113, 126, 133
Systematic oppression, 50, 57

T
Testimonies, 86, 87, 89, 90, 152, 153, 274–276, 285
Thompson, Kush, 201, 203
Trans, 11, 25, 172, 213, 214, 253, 255, 256, 258
Transdisciplinary, 95, 96
Transformative justice, 10, 215, 217
Transformative learning, 242
Transformative pedagogies, 8, 10, 56, 229, 233, 237, 243, 322
Transnational, 40n9, 126–128, 134, 136, 138, 145
Transnational feminism, 126–128
Tutu, Desmond, 104
Twinness, 229, 235, 242

U
Ubuntu, 6, 165, 217, 307
Ukweli, 233
Urban violence, 48

V
Venerated space, 146

W
Walker, Alice, 34, 41n13, 86, 104, 112
War on drugs, 47, 256
Webster decision, 162
Wellbeing, 136, 250, 266, 267, 303, 323
Wells, Ida B., 12n2, 41n13, 60, 110, 156n1, 234, 237
Western religious traditions, 258
Whiteness, 2, 47, 68, 107, 113, 114, 146, 151, 274
White privilege, 67
White supremacist, 1, 3, 6, 9, 49, 50, 59, 67, 77, 79, 92, 103, 104, 106, 107, 115–117, 127, 163, 175, 228, 255, 265, 267, 269, 270, 277
White supremacist brutalisation, 65
White supremacist (patho) logic, 267, 272
White supremacy, 5, 9, 24, 51, 52, 55, 60, 67, 68, 70, 101, 146, 160, 162, 167, 174, 176, 178, 269
Womanism, 189
Womanist pedagogies, 9, 22
Womanness, 25
Woodson, Carter G., 6, 51, 271, 275–277, 312
Worldviews, 12n3, 163, 200, 206, 228, 231, 232, 234, 235, 298, 305, 306, 308

Y
Yemonja, 251
Yorùbá, 200, 247, 260