

Sensing Home and Archiving the Self: A Black Feminist Autoethnographic Mapping to/through Ethnic Studies Pedagogies

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Abstract

Although Black women's internal responses to systems of domination in *places*—in the geopolitical locales of higher educational institutions in particular—of hostility have the potential to inform transformative pedagogical practices, these [often] private negotiations are under accounted for and undertheorized. I argue, however, that leaning into Black women's specific educational experiences offers us tools to refine, develop, and evolve Ethnic Studies pedagogies. In this paper I offer a sensory, Black feminist autoethnographic intervention to this interstice and center what I name as an extended epiphanic moment—a “moment of heightened awareness of the situated self” which was prompted, namely, by my first class as an undergraduate student not only with a Black woman as my professor but a Black woman professor who taught Black Feminist Theory (Durham, 2014, p. 13). I draw on the concept of self-making—the autonomous creation of the self—as a reflective Black ancestral practice within the politics of (re)membering and as a place-based process using endarkened feminisms as frameworks to inspire how we imagine ethnic studies pedagogies (Dillard 2012; Jackson, 2020). I ask, broadly, how Black women's educational accounts may offer portals to inform ethnic studies pedagogy (Butler, 2018).

Keywords: Self-making, Black feminist autoethnography, ethnic studies pedagogy, critical geography

Although Black women's internal responses to systems of domination in *places*—in the geopolitical locales of higher educational institutions in particular—of hostility have the potential to inform ethnic studies pedagogical practices, these [often] private negotiations are under accounted for and undertheorized. I argue, however, that leaning into Black women's individual educational experiences offers us specific segues to refine, develop, and evolve ethnic studies pedagogies in closer relationship with social justice. Since positive educational experiences for Black women students is often facilitated by the pedagogical choices of Black women educators, this practice of writing autoethnographically on said experience(s) simultaneously honors the work and labor of Black women intellectual antecedents. Although this piece centers my own personal reflections, educators in higher education at all levels can benefit from geographical rememberings, antecedent honorings, embracing testimonials to remain rooted in the dreams of ethnic studies, and explicating

the social movements from which the field continues to be built. These elements are essential for ethnic studies educators to refine our own praxis and externally assess others'— with both criticality and affirmation. In this piece, I use italics to emphasize the intimacies of my thoughts, memories, and questions; and to encourage pauses to contend with significant language.

As an experience orientation, and not a fundamentally cross-group orientation, much of what I offer asks us to consider, personally, what a practice and lens of ethnic studies pedagogy looks like for us as both individuals and as parts of collectives. In this paper I offer my own Black feminist autoethnographic intervention to this interstice and center what I now name an extended epiphanic moment—a “moment of heightened awareness of the situated self” (Durham, 2014, p. 13). I conceptualize self-making—the autonomous creation of the self—as a reflective Black ancestral practice within the politics of (re)membering and as a place-based process using endarkened feminisms that has the potential to inform how we imagine ethnic studies pedagogies (Jackson, 2020).

My heightened awareness was prompted, namely, by my first class as an undergraduate student not only with a Black woman as my professor but a Black woman professor who taught Black Feminist Theory. I saw and heard, read, and theorized with, a curriculum that I was fully implicated in—a curriculum where I did not have to search to find its relatability to the materiality of my life, to the lived experiences inhabited by my Black woman-ness. Through this piece and the experiences included, it has become clear that my first introductions to Black Feminist Literature extended the language I had access to in defining my racialized, gendered experiences and self on my own terms— “my language has very much [been] based on what I [have] read and how it affects me” (Christian, 1987). I evoke the senses both literally and metaphorically to highlight this [on-going] experience.

Because this account is particular to my experience at a Predominately White Institution (PWI), I also query the role of physical space in relation to Black women's processes of self-making, and ultimately ask how Black women's educational accounts, broadly, may offer portals to inform ethnic studies pedagogies. In turn, I ask educators at all levels to consider the role that physical space, the 'cartographic underpinnings' play in their pedagogical choices (Butler, 2018). Building largely from Hartman's (1997) and McKittrick's (2006) work that centers scenes and sites in the context of the hauntings of enslavement, I extend critical framings of space to contemporary iterations of self-making. More specifically, this paper imagines the way that ethnic studies pedagogy provides a lens to both reflect on and read Black women's processes of site-specific (and uses the example of a college classroom at a PWI) self-making.

Next, the discourse of performance is essential in my framing of Black women's processes of self-making because it is fundamental to the argument of *compressed* agency—a concept that asserts that partial transgressions are site specific, locatable, witnessable, and dynamic and that agency itself is not static. Emphasizing the specific, geographical locale at which performances of relative transgression can occur is helpful in conceptualizing the innumerable factors that shape, restrain, inspire and/or enable the specific transgressive performance(s), and ultimately move forward to consider pedagogical implications. As Hartman (1997) describes, “not only is the dominant space pilfered and manipulated in giving voice to need and in making counterclaims about freedom, humanity, and the self (*a reconstructed self that negates the dominant terms of identity and existence*), but also this space becomes ineffably produced as a sacralized and ancestral landscape” (emphasis mine) (p. 72).

Ultimately, I argue that the growth and value of ethnic studies pedagogies must be informed by Black women's own accounts of our educative experiences; and that space, particularly in formal institutions of education, primes these experiences and narratives. I assert that conjuring collective memory in White dominated locales is essential in *creating* the "appropriated space" needed for realizing the potential of ethnic studies pedagogies because of the literal space in which these pedagogies are often developed, used, in proximity to, and implemented. Thus, we must *remember* that these naturalized spaces are, in fact, hostile constructs. These spaces include formal institutions of higher education that are threaded with white supremacy in ways that are both conscious and subconscious. Using Black Feminist autoethnography, this paper offers a sensory exploration of self-making as a Black ancestral practice within the politics of (re)membering to consider ethnic studies pedagogical developments in aims of social justice and liberatory praxis.

Seeing

I saw a living, breathing, speaking, mirror. I saw brown leather skirts, honey blonde locs, witty humor, iced coffees, eccentric frames. The assertion of an insistent preface of "Dr." Her erect and lively posture seductively, respectfully, yet effortlessly demanded attention. "I am here!" said in every non-verbal iteration. Your hyphenated last name doubled down on the demand that we see you; a you that thrives both autonomously and in commune.

Platform espadrilles, vibrant Célines, bold monochrome paired clothing, gravity defiant-sun reaching top-knots, fresh white manicures. "If you miss class, don't ask me if you missed anything "important"- I got up and washed my pits, and if nothing else, you missed that!" Practiced and shared vulnerabilities. "History is written by the winners!" she mockingly recounted harmful iterations of past academic lives whiteness subjected her to. Artistic expressions and spaces of processes. Media, art, music. The beauty of annotation. A capitalized Black. A historian by training and a dreamer by defiance. Unprocessed mesmerization, pleasant shock, and a fogged idolization of my first Black woman professor. I saw you. I can now name and conceptualize this utter fascination that manifested in eager, unyielding hand raises, a desire to "overachieve" and a demand to be noticed. I saw and see a future caricature, a current self, and a past representation. All of whom I subconsciously thought barred from this place. I'd decided that the history of the literal and figurative genocide of Black women in this space, left no room for future me's here. But then I saw you. My own celebrity, a part of my aspired evolution. Toni's playground prompted us to Play in the Dark and insert Blackness in the classroom's Literary Imagination.

Being a Black woman student at a PWI as an undergraduate student was one of my first apparent, conscious experiences of what it means to be a Black woman, and to experience my Black woman-ness. So, during my sophomore year when I had not only my first Black professor, but a *Black woman* professor, I was met with visceral, sensory responses that my body marked *epiphanic* long before I had the language to do so.

I gained more than a "sense of belonging"— and instead, I realized that the foundations on which "belonging" sat were often antithetical to the juncture at which my situated-self sat. Although not risk-laden, and never completely beyond systems of domination, yet in defiance, I more importantly experienced an example of what it looks like to show up as oneself despite persistent messaging telling you not to do so. However, I quickly moved beyond the inaction of awe, to the irate realization that this professor, who I and others problematically categorized superwoman, was not

coincidentally one of few women of color, and certainly Black women, on campus. This *epiphany* pushed me to confront the oppressive power dynamics that defined and saturated the very threads of this institution—one that Barbara Christian (1987) might describe within the lineage of the Black Arts Movement via explicitly tracing the inception of Black Studies and Women’s studies, and the political attenuation with which these fields have been institutionalized. This tracing maps the inherently political plane that these subversive fields, and certainly their intersections [Black Feminism] have been actualized. In other words, the fact that my first Black woman professor, who taught Black Feminism Theory, was one of few, is in line with the literal and figurative cartographic characteristics and systems that make up the capitalist university.

Hearing

Enterprising Black Women on Wednesdays from 4:30pm from 7:10pm. I heard the words “Black Women” repeatedly. Hearing not bound by audio, a perceptibility beyond confines. I read what I heard and heard what I heard. Annotation checks, Integrative Concept Journals, Concept Maps. Nina’s Four Women, Geographies of Black Feminist Thought, Black Women’s Body Politics, Anti-Slavery Apostles, Race Women in the Age of Jim Crow, Respectability and Black Club Women, Black Girlhood and Black Feminist Dissemblance, Club Women in Defense of Blackness, Black Radical Women, Mothers of the Movement, Queering the Black Freedom Struggle, a Black Feminist Gaze²⁰.

I recognized the rare omnipresence of ancestors’ and I’s voice in an educational space such as this. A language I could hear was newly available. I could speak because I could hear. Making sense of what was in front of us. Who knew syllabi could speak? Words of Fire – incited flames that allowed me to self-eradicate the resistant, ever mutating, white supremacy I consumed as neutral as water. I found out that for us, by us transgressed garments. FUBU syllabi! Product placement and embedded marketing would naively be considered irrelevant to the capitalist university where syllabi have their place.

Home is where the hatred is. Home is filled with pain, and it might not be such a bad idea if I never went home again.²¹

Hearing the collective ring of Blackness in an academic classroom surprised my once limitedly attune tympanum. The prevalence of the vocalized “Black woman” that echoed each class, bitterly emphasized the places where I *never* heard the words “Black women”. I now ask the rhetorical question of who it is that we are hearing and speaking to when no specific demographic is named, and the literal question of what does this mean for the assumed way we teach that which umbrellas under ethnic studies? Then, I began confronting what I already knew—there was an encrypted code of whiteness that many do not have the password to obtain. However sinister, this realization prompted me to begin developing my own voice because I had learned my racial and gendered alphabet. Consonants and vowels, pronunciations and enunciations, meaning making of self could commence. Language could be exchanged and shared. Beyond my self-implication, the larger structural systems that my individual experience highlights suggests that my experience is not the

²⁰ Dr. Wendi Manuel-Scott, *Enterprising Black Women Syllabus*, Fall 2018

²¹ Gil Scott-Heron. *Home is Where the Hatred Is* [Song] (2012).

exception but is instead the rule. Whiteness permeates ideological reckoning, too— “take the Eurocentric curricula that pervades Higher Education. It is the historically contingent, racialized construction of intellect that acts to normalize the whiteness of the curricula, rendering all white male canons the ‘natural’ state of being” (Joseph-Salisbury, 2019, p.7). What is “normal” then, is the sounding absence of hearing Blackness in curricula.

Tasting, Smelling, Feeling

Insatiability. Illocatability. A never-ending search. Until I heard and saw. The always sought, yet unrecognizable chase of reflection was quenched with a glass of my mirrored self.

I tasted Black.

At the juncture of seeing and hearing I taste a once incomprehensible flavor made unidentifiable to my virgin palette. Or had I just become socially callous to such a sensory experience—a tongue historically and contemporarily subject to ideological and epistemological rape, abuse, and violence to the extent of stupefaction. Partus Sequitur Venetur—my stolen womb now my stolen discernment. White ways of knowing yield damaged papillae—a stripped parlance with filtered reception and expression. Seeing and hearing reclaimed the taste, the palette, of Blackness and Black receptivity and Black language and Black recognition and Black assertion. Seeing and hearing Blackness—I smell coffee beans in an attempt to decolonize the scent-subjected nose, the appropriation of a recognizable whiff, the cleansing of that which has been altered and tainted by toxins masked as perfumes. I, too, could now pinpoint which violently became one in the same—demystified disguised scents, now recognized as worldviews that disintegrated my own. Refinement recouped. Mahogany, dark roast, chocolate and licorice ideologies became nameable.

Mahogany, dark roast, chocolate and licorice ideologies became nameable.

The epiphany that I could feel and be touched by Black.

Here, my realization that a class could reflect my first-hand experiences was perplexing yet incredible. Not only was the presence of Black bodies witnessed, but episteme was equally recognizable. A class I could *experience*. A class I did not have to suppress queries of relevance. A class whose books I opted to buy and not rent.

²²A playlist for the Black girls tryna' feel something again, a playlist for the Black girls holding all the emotions, a playlist for Black girls tryna' find their home in the white academy, a playlist for the Black girls asking is this class seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, feeling me?

- 1) *Time* by Snoh Alegra
- 2) *What Cha' Gonna Do for Me?* By Chaka Khan
- 3) *You Gonna Make Me Love Somebody Else* by The Jones Girls
- 4) *A Song for You* by Donny Hathaway
- 5) *Certainly* by Erykah Badu
- 6) *2* by HER
- 7) *She Dgaf* by The Internet
- 8) *After The Storm* by Kali Uchis ft. Tyler, The Creator
- 9) *CHANCES* by KAYTRANADA & Shay Li
- 10) *Millionaire* by Kelis ft. André 3000

Situating Ethnic Studies Pedagogies

I often think about how I have come to know myself as a Black woman. I chose to tell my epiphanic moments by describing “epistemological watermarks” (Durham, 2014) or “scenes” (Crawley, 2012) and distinctly by drawing sensory, visceral qualities, curating a playlist, and describing my notion of *home* in the white academy to critically engage the material realities and evolutions of what it means to exist in relative isolation as a Black woman at a PWI. The distinction between these senses has more discursive significance than that of material distinction. There is much overlap. However, by evoking the senses, I adopt an embodied practice that builds on the extensive work of Black feminists who have long queered the relationships between text, body, and writing, and is part of the named traditions and research practices of Black feminisms and is methodologically produced by way of critical, performance autoethnography, counternarrative, critical bifocality, and performance writing as research (Collins, 2009; Crawley, 2012, Durham, 2014; Fine, 2018, Ledesma & Calderón, 2015). I include this analysis piece as “center” to invert traditional linear framing confines, and to unapologetically begin and end “I” pieces that do not over rationalize or appease Eurocentrism with such justifications. Finally, it is important to note that the readings from which I draw and the process of layered reflection support my practice and envisioned pedagogical practices. These practices not only embrace an ethnic studies ethos but are also direct manifestations of the pedagogical requirements that accompany such a claim.

As a Black feminist autoethnography, my story is significant only in relation to the systems of power and larger societal patterns in which it exists and what it means to be an “outsider-within” (Collins, 2009). Although this work relentlessly uses “I” it is not about me. The situatedness of my own

²² I include this playlist as a culmination of the embodiments of this piece. It is an embrace of what Barbara Christian (1987) describes as the freeing potential of creative literature that is not subject to singular, unidirectional creations and responses to the world. It is also an honoring of a multiplicity of literacies that take shape beyond the “conventional” forms of reading and writing, particularly those that are resonant for Black women and girls (Muhammed & Haddix, 2016; Royster, 2000).

positionality in relation to my “scenes”, and these “scenes” relation to larger systems of power is the significance of this chosen method. Also, in the spirit of Black feminisms, the experience is an embodied localization alongside a critical awareness where its relevance is born. The autoethnography is granted the critical qualifier by highlighting the “wider political economy [that] simultaneously shape[s] Black women’s subordination and foster[s] activism” (Collins, 2009, p. 11). Finally, Johnson (2008) powerfully explains the value of drawing on the visceral as a part of methodology and reflects the spirit of my work– “As an ethnographer, I want to capture the fullest picture of the lives I am portraying; to that end, I rely not just on the five senses, but also on my intuition” (p. 10).

I, too, ask “how do we describe the epiphanic moments– moments of heightened awareness of the situated self– when the real and imagined body converge or collide?” (Durham, 2014, p. 13). What is the relationship between seeing, hearing, and tasting as it relates to filling the interstitial spaces of white academia with work reflective of our Blackness and the pedagogies that embrace and encompass such nuance? How are they perhaps interchangeable or at least interlaced? This is in part in aims of re-conceptualizing reciprocity to include linguistic and epistemic exchanges with ancestors and ancestral knowledges (Dillard, 2012).

In other words, I am expanding how we frame Black women as knowers and access to Black women knowledges by asserting that epistemic and linguistic exchanges can transcend Western understandings of conversation by including ancestry and employing Endarkened Feminisms in education (Dillard, 2012). I am interested in how Black women assert epistemic agency when the audiences willing and capable of hearing us are extremely limited (Dotson, 2011). However, by incorporating the five elements of CRT (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002),: (1) intercentricity of race/racism with other forms of subordination; (2) challenges the dominant ideology; (3) commitment to social justice; (4) centrality of experiential knowledge; and (5) transdisciplinary perspective, my work moves from story to counter story and asserts Black women as knowledge producers and knowers. I choose to include a curated playlist with the understanding that a full range of creation allows for communication beyond that which is an active mitigation of epistemic silences in ways that reject consultation with whiteness. The playlist functions as a subversion of that which is deemed academically relevant. The playlist is a declaration that the lines between lived realities, arts of all forms, and classrooms are in fact fallacious. This is an intentional “diverge[ence] from standard academic theory– [which] can take the form of poetry, music, essays, and the like” (Collins, 2009, p. 11). I ask, how is it that Black women make sense of their gendered, raced selves based on varying levels of access to work that reflects their own experiences and identities? I consider the significances of access, exposure, and engagement to Black feminist work as having an impact that is greater than momentous, temporal pride by drawing on Endarkened Feminisms that emphasize ancestral and spiritual connections and epistemologies (Dillard, 2012).

The larger implications/significances are knowing that “mainstream” inclusion of explicitly Black feminist work is relatively limited, but also that Black women have never simply succumbed to the violent, white supremacist, patriarchal false representations to which they have been subjected. Black women have asserted agency through a strength-based approach to self-identity formation and a large part of this has been achieved via counterstory, via multiple literacies (Muhammed & Haddix, 2016). This is inextricably linked to reframing Black women as knowers and expanding how we capture Black women knowledges in a more expansive way. This expansiveness is necessary for ethnic studies generally, as we must confront the colonial forces that have shaped the ways in

which we know, practice knowing, and recognize the knowings of our students, particularly those most subject to multiple precarities.

Since there is much to be gained by Black women's increased access to explicitly named Black feminist work, we must not only ask *how* knowing and defining ourselves vacillates depending on this exposure and engagement, but also how is it that we can increase these works' availability in a meaningful, accessible way that mitigates foreseeable appropriation, weaponization, and consultation with whiteness. I emphasize "explicitly" named Black feminist work because Black feminisms' *influences* are arguably omnipresent. However, my interests are in the engagement of this work that is *named*, uses the clear language of Black feminism, and that permeates arenas typically reserved for whiteness, such as classroom spaces at universities and the syllabi that are often artifacts of such exclusion (Dotson, 2011).

Concepts of collective trust and epistemic agency, both distinctively and at juncture, are reminders that the ways in which us Black women have been exposed to "work" representative of our own identities, happens beyond contexts considered formal or accepted by white notions of legitimacy, like music. It is vital that my work frames Black women's self-making and self-identity formation with the possibility of being understood as active processes not totally subject to whiteness. Collective trust expands the applicability of Endarkened Feminisms as the "collective" must include ancestry and spirituality (Dillard, 2012). Similarly, epistemic agency in relation to Black feminisms demands that we holistically consider Black women as knowers. I am suggesting that these "knowings" are informed by collective trust, which is characterized by aspects of ancestry and spirituality, and is ultimately contributory to Black women's agential, strength-based approach to self-identity formation that is a part of historical knowledge (Christian, 1987).

My work is ultimately an intervention in what Kristie Dotson (2011) names testimonial quieting, which is a type of epistemic injustice that is inflicted upon a less-privileged group by a more-privileged group and deems them as unknowable or as incapable of producing knowledge (Dotson, 2011). Ethnic studies must contend with this exchange. Because Black women have historically and contemporarily been subject to epistemic injustice, and deemed unfit from producing knowledge, the "legitimized" canon also excludes their voices. In turn, the rarity of Black faculty and the Black ideological absence in curricula and in white universities continue to be part of a long tradition of failing to take the intellectual lives and accounts of Black women seriously. It is one manifestation of the 'institutionalized epistemicide' of Black women in higher education. Kristie Dotson (2011) describes testimonial quieting:

However one identifies the harm in a given practice of testimonial quieting, the epistemic violence present in such happenings should be located at the juncture where an audience fails to accurately identify the speaker as a knower, thereby failing to communicatively reciprocate in a linguistic exchange due to pernicious ignorance in the form of false, negative stereotyping. (p. 243)

Despite the epistemic injustice Black women have been subject to, Black women's self-identity development that is characterized by self-love and self-worth in the context of a racist, sexist society can be considered a significant form of resistance. Contemporarily, it is not uncommon for scholars to practice framing Black women beyond mere subjects of racial and gendered oppression, and to include highlights of agency that have always been a part of the story. However, I believe

that resistance practiced via intentional *self-definition* holds particular significance. It is a miraculous example of one learning to speak in a language often barred from institutions of alleged education for all. Although miraculous, this fluency despite institutional validation is not fortuitous, as embodied by the work of Black Feminisms.

Quotidian mustn't be equated with mindlessness. Instead, understood as a compounded, regularized phenomenon. This phenomenon is far from simple as it relates to my life as a Black woman in academia. The daily decisions that are made are far from mindless, no matter how "regular". Even decisions that are made with relative ease and with developed instinct, require a certain form of emotional and self-expenditure. I consider my contention with home and these dependent reliance of the visceral, embodied emotions within it, as my confrontation with the twoness of my daily relationship with the Academy. It is my hope that this place-based, sensory experience offers a lens through which ethnic studies pedagogy can contend.

Sensing Home

Home is Jes Grew, genealogy, Black Power, transgression, caged birds, the S.O.S. Band, cookouts, dissemblance, 1619, okra, embodied discourse, Baptist shouts, sought and discovered maternal gardens, Sethe, presumed competency, a history beyond A.D. Home is a money tree, blue bouncy balls, bonnets & scarves, back rubs, poems seen and felt. Home is resiliency, belly breaths, medium-free texts. Home is a crystalized ginger candle, fresh white linen, an intentionally prepared meal, oversized windows, mint tea, Afro-centric art, gifted lilies, mildly stocked pantries, Café Bustelo, warm baked cookies, love seats, semi-organized closets, honeybun cake, brown sugar pie, and perfectly humidified air. Often, my search for this home feels in vain at University. I crave the taste, look, feel, touch, and sound of home. Leaning into hooks' (1990) notion of homeplace, as a "site where one could freely confront the issue of humanization, where one could resist"— where Black women cultivated spaces in which "we could be affirmed in our minds and hearts" despite the myriad systems working against us, I use 'Home' to consider what restorative spaces look like in higher education and as a part of an ethnic studies pedagogy (p. 384). *Remembering* the historical sacredness of how Black women have politically asserted homeplace is a practice we are all tasked with.

I accept that Home is ever changing, because I am ever changing— my identities, their points of juncture and their contextualized words are water. How can I be fixed if my world is not? How can I understand my relationship between the white academy and myself, when the latter is unstable? Why doesn't the notion of codependency connote the toxic relationship between identity and world, between self and non-self? This world is the enabler of my identity conundrum, the sins that make defining home impossible, and certainly speak to the tensions with finding home in the academy. The sins that name the search of an absolute identity in vain. The myth of a finite self is the most exhausting lie. To look for an alleged fixed Self, is to neglect the connection between Self and Home, and Home within the white academy. How do I taste, see, feel, touch, and hear this home?

My Bildungsroman is a coming-to-know-Home. Home is everything and everyone that are inscribed on my life's ever changing acknowledgement page. Home is where this page has been made legible and literate. Where and how did I learn to read this granite inscribed page— how has it been demystified? My home is on the page with my ancestors who have always known better

than to accredit themselves for the knowing of themselves. My home cultivates my me, my home has been built by them. Collectivity, community, ancestry, and sisterhood are all sacred notions that should be treated as such. Home is a mirror, an affirmation... it is illimitable. Home is the ability to transgress time bound knowledge that is fallaciously defined by Truth— it is not coincidental that the word “knowledge” lacks a plural form in the English language. Plurale tantums feel more like Home. Home is knowing that my struggles are not unprecedented. Home is the privilege to situate my own plights amongst those of my ancestors. I yearn to taste, see, feel, touch, and hear this home.

I look for Home in the classroom when emotional expenditure is expected, the risks of Black women exerting such vulnerability unacknowledged. What does it mean for daily conversations in classrooms to speak directly to my embodied fears? Despite feeling seen— being genuinely listened to and my experiences as a racialized, gendered being centered on the weight of what it means to discuss these things in the classroom *while living them* presents both risk and reward. I leave class and attempt to decompress from such conversations and burdensome realities, which I can only do with restraint. At least I have my BFT canon to hug. I am beginning to taste, see, feel, touch and hear this home.

Today's acknowledgments are not tomorrows—the page told me that. The realization of an interdependent, codependent, dynamic identity is a release of the reins. It is a hopeful, forceful blow onto the lit wick of control. The resultant smoke signifies an atmospheric release that may or may not send parabens into the air that I breathe and that fill Home. Patricia told me that this is the overlooked definitional dilemma of intersectionality (Collins, 2015). Brittany told me that we can't site ourselves when our ancestors have not been cited (Cooper, 2017). Toni demanded that I write this page beyond consultation with whiteness. Nina taught me to harmonize the pain. Are we there yet?

Praxis + Reflection

I often think about how I have come to know and am continuing to know myself as a Black woman. The nuanced, evolving answer to this question has been fundamentally shaped by my own exposure to Black Feminisms, and has also shaped Home and how I locate myself in the academy. It has also given me the language to make sense of the weighty dissonance. My introduction to explicitly named Black feminist work has marked a distinct genesis and remembrance of major moments of self-understanding. It is in this understanding that I locate Home. This locale is one that transcends time and place— and is a chameleon characterized by an inherent resistance of shapeshifting. Home, alas.

I locate the texts written in Black feminist tradition as Home within the academy because it is here that I have been able to make sense of myself...it is here that I learned to reject notions of racialized, gendered culpability and to conjure the liberating powers of contextualization. It is here that I have released the question “why is my curriculum so white?” (Joseph-Salisbury, 2019). Home, here, has provided comfort, guidance, safety.... in a way that a place or person could not. Across contexts and time, these texts also showed me that who I am will change, because socially constructed identities that I hold are also changing. Here, a resilient home not completely bound by time and place has been offered. In other words, by showing me that what my Black-woman-ness means will vary, I have a sense of self that is not based on a fictionally bound foundation. My foundation is,

ironically, flux and the naming of socialization, construction, and power. Knowing and naming that tension is shelter.

How did I understand myself as a racialized, gendered being pre-*Words of Fire*, *The Crunk Feminist Collection*, and *ain't I a woman*? But more importantly, what does it mean that access to these texts, “finding” them, —my Home amid a home to others— is a luxury, and perhaps even coincidental? If we expand the notion of Homelessness to include that of ideological vagrantness in the Academy, the already grand social justice issue of the housing crisis may be considered an unparalleled pandemic. Homelessness. Home is a phantom to those whose histories remain hidden and/or sterilized. Home is ethereal to those who have the privilege of affirming c(s)itations.

If the curation of homeplace is one cartographically part of my ontology, why does the actualization of such a space not feel nearly as instinctive as its abstractive existence? I *remember* that survival here is predicated on such a space despite my often-fleeting stability to sustain, provide, and create such an exhaustive, yet nourishing space that requires an ongoing confrontation with the self, but Zora applauded me for telling lies. Folklore, truth, bedtime stories, spells, curses, praises, conjures, and prayers— their spheres indistinguishable. I will evoke these when I don't have myself to give.

What happens when this story is written from a place of callousness, of dissonance, of spectacle time and time again? How can I not write a story from this place of attempted removal and still preserve a fraction of myself? Does truth demand shared skin-to-skin intimacy of pain and suffering that is characteristic of this, previous, and future worlds? The story depends on me, but what if I have nothing to give the story?

The indelicacies of today will unlikely be the crassness of tomorrows. “There's nothing new under the sun” my mom tells me— and today's (and yesterday's) pandemics, racial reckoning, senseless violence, and perpetual colonial projects are certainly ancient, and are not escapable from the sun. Today's story doesn't feel too hopeful but I'm thankful for tomorrows. Home today may or may not be Home tomorrow but discovering that this fluidity is at the core of what Home can be for myself, is an honor I owe to the Black Feminist writers who have come before me, and the educators who have chosen to embrace their praxes.

Conclusion

Educators who embrace ethnic studies must reflect seriously on their own experiences of witnessing antecedent educators who have meaningfully practiced such pedagogies. This embrace is an embodied honoring, solidarity, and work with our teachers as living archives. By offering my own Black feminist, sensory, autoethnographic account of my first experiences with a Black women professor who taught Black Feminist Theory, it is my goal to both consider the ways that this ongoing epiphanic moment has shaped me, but also to honor the work and labor— the ‘homeplaces’— created by Black women with whom I trace my own self-making. This process of critical reflection also allows us to look to our own experiences for examples of what worked pedagogically— ‘knowings’ of what ‘worked’ that are often embodied and felt as I hope to have made evident by centering sensory elements. Next, ethnic studies pedagogies must attend to *where* they are practiced. The geo-spatial underpinnings of where we uptake particular pedagogical choices must inform those choices considering that the space in and of itself is laden with power dynamics that must be disrupted both ideologically and physically. This understanding has

motivated my embrace of hooks' (1990) notion of homeplace. Ultimately, ethnic studies pedagogies must embrace dynamic processes of remembering, honoring, reflecting, and s/citing while simultaneously moving the conversation to the contemporary and future moments.

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