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“Know That We Exist”:

Storytelling as Self-Making for UndocuBlack Students

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

in African American Studies

by

Brittnee Alyse Meitzenheimer

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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Professor SA Smythe, Co-Chair

Professor Sarah Haley, Co-Chair

Dominant narratives of immigration are inextricably linked to race and the focus is almost exclusively on non-Black Latinx populations, invisibilizing Black migrants and their experiences in these narratives. We know that Black immigrants are overrepresented in arrests and deportations, not solely as a function of their legal status, but rather as a consequence of being Black in America. We also know that, unlike other immigrants, who's "foreignness" marks them as other, shaping their interaction with the legal system, Black immigrants experience hyper-surveillance, criminalization, are pathologized, and are funneled through the U.S. carceral system at alarmingly high rates. In order to disrupt the violence of erasure, this thesis uses storytelling as a Black Feminist method and political praxis to explore undocuBlack women's interiority which

serves as a wild and sacred dream space. This work is made possible because what is understood about home, belonging, and representation is not taken for granted, and what Black women feel and know is real and valid. Using an interdisciplinary framework, this thesis centers the narratives of five undocuBlack women to describe the possibilities of Black social life and world making that they create. Together these narratives elucidate how undocuBlack subjects: make home spaces in light of geographic dispossession, practice self-making through autonomy and the use of interiority, and illuminate the potential for belonging through rightful, accurate, and meaningful representation.

The thesis of Brittnee Alyse Meitzenheimer is approved.

Leisy Abrego

SA Smythe, Committee Co-Chair

Sarah Haley, Committee Co-Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

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In genuine gratefulness and deepest reverence this work is dedicated to the undocuBlack women who shared their stories with me. Cari, Meera, Chichima, Yarah, and Lena you are visionaries and radical world-makers. Thank you for the gift of your dreams!

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Preface

> We are each other's harvest,
> We are each other's business,
> We are each other's magnitude and bond.
> — Gwendolyn Brooks

> She is a friend of my mind. She gather me man, The pieces I am, she gather them and give them back to me in all the right order.
> — Toni Morrison, *Beloved*

Writing the final edits of this thesis has been punctuated with the backdrop of sirens and helicopters overhead. I have received daily alerts of city and county-wide curfews, put in place in attempts to quell protests only miles away from my window. I say this not to hyperbolize the conditions of my writing but to underscore the political and social moment of upheaval and radical change that I am writing in. Black people all around the country are standing in solidarity with each other in protest, unrest, and righteous rage against the ongoing, state-sanctioned genocide against Black people in the U.S. and abroad. While many of the protests taking place in all 50 states are using George Floyd's name as rallying cry, my heart and mind hold Breonna Taylor, 26, murdered by police in her home, Nina Pop, 28, stabbed in her home, Regis Korchinski-Paquet, 29, murdered by police responding to call for a domestic incident, Iyanna Dior, 21, violently attacked after a fender bender, Liyah Birru, 35, facing deportation to Ethiopia after shooting her abusive husband, Sandra Bland, 28, killed in police custody, Korryn Gaines, 23, murdered by police in her home, Muhlaysia Booker, 22, murdered a month after surviving a public assault, and countless other Black women and femmes who have been murdered by the state or who are survivors of state-sanctioned or intimate partner violence. I march to remember them, to honor them, and mourn those who we have lost. My participation in these protests, and

the countless of other actions occuring across the globe, are remarkable and historic for many reasons, the most pressing of which are the threats posed by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).

Anti-Black racism has long been a public health crisis and epidemic for Black folks, the impact of which has only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The global pandemic caused by the coronavirus has uprooted, displaced, disrupted, and taken lives on a global scale. And as a result of centuries of institutionalized racism, the medical industrial complex, municipal divestment, and benign neglect the virus is disproportionately infecting and killing Black people. Despite this overwhelming context of fear and anxiety, capitalism demands that we labor. The expectations for Black folks specifically in academia to be resilient and persist through the current moment feels unbearable. This requirement for productivity and calls for Black superhuman capacity to work illustrates neoliberal public university's fundamental lack of care for Black life. The disposability of Black life by higher education is evidenced by the hashtag #BlackInTheIvory, which began trending on Twitter the final week of UCLA's quarter. Black academics en masse took to Twitter engaging in a collective sharing of the anti-Black racism they have experienced, while also calling for academic institutions to confront systemic and structural racism on their campuses. As a graduate student, I am burned out by expectations of productivity during this time. I, like many students, am struggling to cope, others struggle to secure access to safe housing, are still experiencing food and financial insecurity, and/or are simply struggling to live.

I navigate academia's expectations for Black labor and resilience as both student and educator. I have had to remind my teaching team of the material conditions of some our students lives and advocate for the team to take seriously the concerns raised about student's emotional,

physical, and mental health this quarter. As the only Black person on my teaching team, and one of few Black folks in this class I pushed to reckon the incongruence with course material and the practices of instruction. Teaching in a Disability Studies course meant we as a team needed to reckon with the academic and political project of Disability Justice. We should be clearly practicing a commitment to addressing anti-Black racism, transphobia, ableism, homophobia, sexism, etc. and all the ways white supremacy reifies itself. It's not enough to teach about it in the syllabus and curricula, but we needed to put these things in practice in all aspects of the course including teaching and learning. I pushed for us to engage creatively in practices of care.

As an advocate, I am aware of how the neoliberal university is adapting systems and policies in ways that had previously been framed as impossible. Before the shelter in place and the social uprisings, I advocated for more diverse representation and to facilitate access to the space and the power that a financial advisory committee I serve on wields on campus. I requested to make amendments to the committee charter and bylaws to allow members to attend meetings remotely or virtually to increase access and think capaciously about participation. Many on the committee disagreed. They argued that virtual attendance would undermine participation and that in person-attendance was the only way to engage on the committee. Ironically, one member who had called in to give their opinion stated, "we can't trust when someone is remote that our conversations are confidential." Three months later, the entire committee now meets virtually as the pandemic has necessitated virtual attendance to maintain any university function. Accessibility was impossible until interest convergence made clear the viability of digital access. The crisis of the current moment has demonstrated that large scale accommodations and an infrastructure of care can exist within institutions. It has clarified the sustainability of mutual aid and collective community care.

While this thesis covers a lot of thematic ground, it is by no means all-inclusive. It however offers examples, choices, and conditions of possibility for: the politics of consent and comfort, reappropriating technology used for neoliberal capitalism, and disrupting the push for increased surveillance and productivity. Conducting all of my interviews via video conference for example, offers methods for doing this work while accounting for the shifting conditions of our lives due to COVID-19, but also expands upon what dignity, care, consent and building from a place of access can look like. Documenting the stories of five brilliant Black and undocumented women, offers theories of valuing Black life outside of structures of labor extraction illuminating what an abolitionist campus can look like. This thesis, rather than centering Black death, offers possibilities of Black social life, examples of Black political practice, and dreams of Black futurity.

Sitting with Gwendolyn Brooks and Toni Morrison's words means sitting with a beautiful and deep love of Black women and femmes. My deep love for Black women and femmes is a lifetime commitment rooted in a fundamental valuing of Black life. I do not value Black women and femmes because of their productivity or labor capacity under capitalism, nor do I value them because they are exemplars of Black excellence. I value Black women and femmes simply because we exist. Unconditionally valuing Black life opens the possibility of interdependence and being in community. Interdependence unequivocally rejects the cisnormative heteronormative imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchal notion of independence. Creating community grounded in a recognition of the value of another person and the vulnerability to be accountable and mutually reliant upon one another is at the root of this project.

Through my own personal growth, I am drawn to the praxis and politic of interdependence as a practice of embracing need. Through this work I embrace the need to understand and, simultaneously, the need to be understood. Black women and femmes have long cared for ourselves and each other not only as acts of survival but politically as practices of refusal. For Black women and femmes care looks like: taking care of children (othermothering), sharing secrets, nurturing movements, being advocates and protectors, creating care networks and mutual-aid, providing blueprints for abolition, organizing cooperatives, offering guidance and advice, holding truths, storytelling, and meeting each other's basic needs. Care often means putting the pieces of who we are back together in the right order after we are broken by the structures and people who harm us. There is no Black liberation without interdependence; quite frankly we need each other. There is no liberation outside of a community of care where we are understood to be each other's harvest, business, magnitude, and bond. Black women and femmes need us to be each other's.

Introduction: Dreaming Freedom and Telling Impossible Stories

> *The spectacle of mass movement draws attention inevitably to the borders, the porous places, the vulnerable points where one's concept of home is seen as being menaced by foreigners. Much of the alarm hovering at the borders, the gates, is stoked, it seems to me, by (1) both the threat and the promise of globalism and (2) an uneasy relationship with our own foreignness, our own rapidly disintegrating sense of belonging.*
>
> – Toni Morrison, *The Source of Self-Regard.*

> *We are born and have our being in a place of memory. We chart our lives by everything we remember from the mundane to the majestic. We know ourselves through the art and act of remembering. Memories offer us a world where there is no death, where we are sustained by rituals of regard and recollection.*
>
> – bell hooks, *Belonging: A Culture of Place*

Writing a thesis asynchronously means that as you start here at the beginning, this is the ending of a journey of writing, and moving, and negotiating the terms under which the ideas, stories, and claims in this thesis came to be. As I reflect on the trajectory of this project, it is quite clear to me the parallels between myself and the undocumented and Black (undocuBlack) women who so graciously and earnestly shared their lives with me. I, too, have been searching for place and belonging, practiced refusal to protect my interiority, and grappled with representation. This project, began in a different context, in a different discipline, under a different orientation and understanding of the world. Leaving a doctoral program in Higher Education and Organizational Change in pursuit of a master's in African American Studies not only helped to facilitate my sense of belonging and fostered substantive relationships with faculty and peers, but it also nurtured my intellectual trajectory by challenging me and facilitating my growth.

My accountability to this work is with Black people and started with two questions that guide much of my theoretical and empirical inquiry in academia: How is anti-Blackness operating here? Where are the Black folks? There where here is both symbolic and deeply connected to a question of how. Where are the Black folks and how are they/we making Black

life and politics? These questions guided not only how I showed up for this work but also the stakes for my engagement in this research. In asking where the Black folks are, my intent was to listen to narratives of Black undocumented people within the larger hegemonic frame of migration that is pervasive in the United States of America (U.S.). While locating and hearing the stories of undocuBlack students is of importance, this project is primarily centered around a desire to critique the erasure and silencing of Black voices, prompting questions about how anti-Blackness is being employed and how undocuBlack women persist *in spite of*.[1] My observations of a lack of visibility around Black immigrants' first-person narratives[2] but hypervisibility in when it comes to their detention and removals prompted lots of questions for me. For instance, what does it mean to be potentially fighting for citizenship, namely citizenship as a Black political subject, in the U.S.? I started this project as a scholar in Higher Education but the mode of inquiry, methods, and theoretical frameworks needed to elucidate the resilience, practices of living and genius of undocuBlack women in college required me to expand into other disciplinary formations and intellectual genres. As a result, this thesis is interdisciplinary in its formation, speaking with and through Black Studies, Gender Studies, and Higher Education and grounded in Black Feminism. Additionally, this work does not take for granted what is known about home, belonging, and representation but rather grounds these concepts in how undocuBlack women narrate the conditions of their lived experience. Black Feminist praxis

[1] Radical Black leader Fannie Lou Hamer said, "I guess if I'd had any sense I'da been a little scared, but what was the point of being scared? The only thing [the whites] could do to me was kill me, and it seemed like they'd been trying to do that a little bit at a time since I could remember." Persisting *in spite of* overwhelming violence and people and structures intent on killing Black women a little bit at a time is the hallmark of Black resistance. In Scandalize My Name, Terrion Williamson writes, "to speak of Black social life is to speak of this radical capacity to live—to live deeply righteous lives even in the midst of all that bring death close."

[2] UndocuBlack narratives have been emphasized, advocated around, and brought to the center of immigration discourse by organizations like the Black Alliance for Just Immigration, the UndocuBlack Network, and the Black Lives Matter global network. This project is indebted to and is building with the ongoing work being done by these grassroots organizations and collectives of Black folks.

provides the anchor for my political and personal stakes in collective liberation[3] and my use of storytelling as method for articulating Black women's dreams.[4]

Research Methodology

Memories and Storytelling

Storytelling is the most important part of the work that I do. It is a more accurate descriptor of the role, responsibilities and task that I as a scholar and researcher embark upon. Storytelling is foundational to my methodological research practice, reflexivity as a critical scholar, and my pedagogical approach in the classroom. I have come to think of myself as a storyteller in response to the training and professionalization of my academic disciplines, and as well as a way to explicitly signal a politic that centers Blackness, honoring the tradition of storytelling Black folks have long participated in.[5] This thesis is a commitment to reimagination and rearticulation of narratives that intentionally center Black women. Reimagining often looked like: making it strange (paying attention to the obvious), grounding it (the value of detail), and revealing the layers and tensions (a story needs to do something).[6] Toni Morrison, one of the most highly regarded and prolific storytellers, emphasized the critical labor of writers, writing, and storytelling in her last book:

> The erasure of other voices, of unwritten novels, poems whispered or swallowed for fear of being overheard by the wrong people, outlawed languages flourishing underground, essayists' questions challenging authority never being posed, unstaged plays, canceled

[3] Terrion Williamson defines Black Feminist Practice as, "a sustained sociopolitical commitment to centering the lives of Black women and girls while actively struggling against racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, [ableism], and other intersecting modalities of oppression that affect even those who do not identify as either Black or female."

[4] Anh Hua, "Black Diaspora Feminism and Writing", 39.

[5] Storytelling is a practice and oral tradition of communicating that predates literacy. Oral historians have been present in many communities of color creating continuity for language, traditions, and generational information passing. Oral histories were deprioritized moving to the industrial age where information and answer to life questions and universal truths were understood only to exist in printed word. However, storytelling has always been used as a mechanism for dreaming freedom, reimagining inner desires, and creative expression for example through folktales.

[6] Mike Rose, *Possible Lives*.

> films—that thought is a nightmare. As though a whole universe is being described in invisible ink. Certain kinds of trauma visited on peoples are so deep, so cruel, that unlike money, unlike vengeance, even unlike justice, or rights, or the goodwill of others, only writers can translate such trauma and turn sorrow into meaning, sharpening the moral imagination. A writer's life and work are not a gift to mankind; they are its necessity.[7]

Storytellers are our most precious resource, the keepers of our histories, cultures, and ancestors; the vessels of trial, conquest and triumph. Good stories inspire, challenge and shift our understanding and perceptions of the world. Stories not only documented the places we've been and the experiences we currently hold but also create space for the imaginative.

Storytelling is not simply people telling stories. Storytelling is a methodology that for the purpose of this thesis makes legible a regime of racialized gender violence rather than obscuring it. It also affirms and centers undocuBlack women's lived experience as valid, real, and critically important to understanding homemaking, belonging, and representation. Storytelling as a method was not only chosen for the deep cultural and symbolic nature of its embeddedness to Black histories and oral traditions of sharing and producing knowledge, but also because of the ways it has allowed Black women to come into fuller view. Storytelling allows for the creation of a robust and nuanced portrait of Black women because it takes seriously Black life. Taking Black life seriously not only in its value but in understanding that the political, social, and economic realities of Black women's lives are indeed real. Storytelling and the process of writing is a process of self-definition and of being seen because much as Elaine Richardson once wrote, "what I write and how I write is done in order to save my own life. And I mean that literally. For me literature is a way of knowing that I am not hallucinating, that whatever I feel/know *is."*[8] Black women's storytelling is a powerful practice used to convey their unique knowledge and

[7] Toni Morrison, *The Source of Self-Regard*, 13.
[8] Barbara Christian, "Race for Theory", 61.

understanding of the world informed by their own, "consciousness of her condition/ing, her position/ing in American society."[9]

Storytelling as a methodology allows me to put the stories of undocuBlack women in conversation with each other, but also myself as the, "collective stories in conversation [are positioned] against dominant narratives and stories that perpetuate white privilege, white supremacy, and patriarchy.[10] Because telling stories is a meaning-making process, when people tell stories, they select details of their experience from their stream of consciousness.[11] Meaning-making in this thesis is an iterative process. Participants make-meaning of their lives in their narration of their experiences, and secondarily I make-meaning of their stories placing them in conversation with each other through various themes and perspectives. In writing about memories and storytelling as forms of resistance, Anh Hua describes storytelling as the, "creative, political, and intellectual tools that Black diasporic women use to fight against their assumed and constructed invisibility, powerlessness, and voicelessness… suggesting networks of real or imagined relationships among scattered people whose sense of community is sustained by various communications and contacts, including kinship, trade, travel, shared culture, language, ritual, scripture, print, and electronic media."[12] Storytelling is central to this research as both a method for inquiry and understanding but also as a praxis for reclaiming narratives.

Design

Three interviews, each semi-structured in form and approximately 60 minutes in length were conducted with college students who self-identified as Black and undocumented to collect data

[9] Elaine Richardson, *African American Literacies*, 82.
[10] Lamar L. Johnson, ThedaMarie D. Gibbs Grey, and April Baker-Bell, "Changing the Dominant Narrative," 471.
[11] Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*, 7.
[12] Anh Hua, "Black Diaspora Feminism and Writing", 31.

for this thesis project. This project was generated from the review, analysis, and synthesis of over 15 hours of interviews and transcripts. Though this thesis project does not cover all aspects of these in-depth interviews, it is an attempt to make clear some aspects of these women's lives that help nuance what we understand about the undocuBlack experience by relying primarily on the words they used to tell their stories. I completed five interviews with the undocuBlack women who agreed to participate in this project from May of 2018 to December of 2019. One additional interview was started with a male student who also identified as undocuBlack; his interview has been excluded from this thesis because the interview was never completed. Interviews were conducted virtually as it gave me access to participants from throughout the U.S. and also helped create a boundary of safety for the participants. Even those who lived closer to me were able to share their stories virtually allowing them to retain anonymity by not using their camera if they chose not to. They could terminate the video call at any time, and since they were all college students, virtual interviews helped facilitate scheduling without the consideration of transportation or traffic.

My phenomenological interview protocol for this study followed a three-interview approach outlined as follows: the first interview "Focused Life History," where I asked participants to tell about me their story of migration/immigration and how/when they became aware of their undocumented status; the second interview "Details of Experience," I asked participants construct their current experience as students; and finally, the third interview "Reflect on the Meaning," where I prompted participants to make connections between their history and context of present experience. Participants were informed of the broad research topic of investigating the intersection of race, gender and citizenship status, with particular interest in understanding how undocuBlack students make sense of complex identities in light of dominant

societal norms. During my conversations with the undocuBlack women, I asked standardized questions across each interview and additional follow-up questions were explored as their response dictated engagement in different aspects of their experience and institutional context. I audio and visually recorded each interview and they were transcribed through a third party. When appropriate and for ease of reading, words umm, like, and other fillers were removed from the paper but were noted upon initial transcription. Ellipses were also used when participants paused, were reflecting, or recalling details in a story. Reflecting the nuance of speech, cadence and patterns is important in preserving the integrity and voice of a participant, so I made all efforts to retain the integrity of their words and intentions behind what they shared. [13]

The intentionality of representing the conversations as they happened also extended to the methods used to build intimacy through technology. In the first interview, participants were asked to bring a photo or create an illustration of what family means to them. Using a familiar photograph to ground the conversation meaningfully in family, kinship, and community helped to create intimacy and avoid the exploitation of migration narratives. Photos of family and community are not only archives of genealogy and kinship but also serve as representation of the intimate complexity of Black life. This request was done deliberately to allow participants to begin the conversation on their terms and frame how family and community are constituted for them, it was framed out of the white gaze and rejecting the overreliance on deviance and dysfunction to describe Black families. In the second interview, participants were asked to think of three words to define or describe their experiences in higher education or education more broadly, and the conversation began with them sharing and explaining the words they chose. These priming activities allowed for focused and direct storytelling from the participants, and

[13] Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*, 124.

resulted in storytelling and narratives that would have otherwise not been captured in a more "traditional" standard of simply asking questions in the interviews.

Creating Intimacy Through Technology

Looking back at videos and reading through transcripts, I cringe at my first attempts at "interviewing." Subsequent interviews feel increasingly conversational as I trained myself to minimize disruptions, listen to the quiet, and practice an exchange of Black Feminist intimacy that resulted in storytelling. I let the conversation breathe in the quiet[14] that sometimes feels awkward but are moments of pause and reflection before folks are ready to continue speaking. These pauses produced rich insights and a depth of knowledge production and meaning making around their experiences that I am grateful to have witnessed. Cari was the first person to agree to talk with me as part of my research. Before our first interview, I obsessively checked my WiFi, worried about disruptions by slow speeds, preoccupied with the possibility that technology would fail to capture the audio from the interview. I held my breath as I dialed to connect and finally exhaled when she connected to the video chat. Unsure of what this interview would reveal and unaware that it would be the first of many conversations with Black undocumented women I smiled, waved, and read the first line of my interview protocol script: "Thank you for taking time to speak with me today!"

Rejecting the pathology of Black female representation and building relationships based on mutuality are necessary components to engaging in storytelling. Building mutuality in the process of storytelling was done through "sitting next to each other"[15] as a method of community

[14] In *The Sovereignty of Quiet* Kevin Quashie writes about quiet as, "often used interchangeably with silence or stillness, but the notion of quiet is neither motionless nor without sound. Quiet, instead, is a metaphor for the full range of one's inner life—one's desires, ambitions, hungers, vulnerabilities, fears." Quiet here is borrowed in recognition that silence did not exist in the conversations but rather rich, capacious, spaces of quiet that Black women retreat to in preparation of sharing their public selves.

[15] Mel Michelle Lewis and Shannon Miller, "How Does It Feel to Be a Problem?", 81.

building and affirmation. While all interviews were conducted virtually, intentional effort was made to build intimacy, understanding, and trust by refusing a detached rational observer role and meaningfully engaging in conversation and community with my participants. Participants were encouraged to ask questions of my experiences, motivations, and interests throughout the interview process to in kind share of myself and engage in the vulnerability they displayed. Metaphorically and emotionally sitting next to each other meant openly acknowledging and discussing the asymmetry of power between each of the participants and myself and working to disrupt that power differential. Aware of how logics of rationality that otherwise deteriorate the mental state of Black women by dismissing and denying their lived realities and experiences, my responses to their storytelling became important. While my responses were genuine, I was particularly focused on their resonance with each of the undocuBlack women. While the ebbs and flow of conversation necessitated different responses and intentional engagement with each participant, I often affirmed, corroborated, and similarly shared my own experiences and lived reality illustrating an intentional and deliberate process of sitting next to my participants.

Black Diaspora

For the purpose of this thesis, Black encompasses a race, culture, history, and consciousness that includes but is not limited to Afro-Latinx, Afro-Caribbean, those who claim lineage through African heritage. Black is used to describe people with ancestral origins in Africa for whom colonialism and slavery distributed across the African Diaspora.[16] Black with a capital 'B' is also used to denote a political, social, and economic opposition to the power differential between white and non-white populations. Other scholars have used "Black Atlantic" or broadly "the Black diaspora" as a term to describe, "a unifying experience of African peoples dispersed by the

[16] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora."

slave trade and an analytical term that enables scholars to talk about Black communities across national boundaries."[17] It is largely unrealistic to believe that a single frame or naming convention can encapsulate the porous and expansive nature of race and racialization. However, for the purpose of naming in this thesis Black will be used. Borrowing from Michelle Wright, Black and Blackness are used in this thesis, because of the, "inherent fluidity of Blackness… as a concept cannot be (1) limited to a particular national, cultural, and linguistic border or (2) produced in isolation from gender and sexuality."[18]

Understanding the undocumented and Black (undocuBlack) experiences in this thesis requires a nuancing of Blackness, immigration, and the fact that some people are racialized as undocumented. An undocumented immigrant is a non-United States born national residing in the United States without legal immigration status. An undocumented immigrant may have: entered the U.S. lawfully and immigration status has since expired; entered the U.S. without inspection; or submitted immigration application/petition that was denied and continued to remain in the U.S.[19] The structural legal context through which immigration has been shaped reifies dominant narratives that are overwhelmingly centered around non-Black Latinx populations. This narrative shaping is in part informed by the flattening of Latinx to a single category of identification that erases Afro-Latinx folks and also homogenizes Latinx as synonymous with Mexican, diluting the diversity within migration from Central and South America. Understanding the process of racializing people as undocumented and the subsequent impact of exclusion placed on people who are undocumented and non-Latinx is important to this research.

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[17] Robin D.G. Kelley, "How the West Was One," 31.

[18] Michelle Wright, *Becoming Black*, 4.

[19] "Policy Manual Chapter 3 - Unlawful Immigration Status at Time of Filing - INA 245(c)(2)," U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, accessed April 1, 2020, https://www.uscis.gov/policy-manual/volume-7-part-b-chapter-3

Exploring the experiences of Latinx students revealed, "youth experience their immigration status not as an administrative or bureaucratic obstacle, but as essential to their experience and enmeshed with their racial identity."[20] The effects of dominant narratives on the racialization of undocumented youth is that their immigration status become synonymous, interchangeable, and enmeshed in their racialized identity rendering the two indistinguishable from one another particularly in discrimination contexts. Arguably this enmeshment is not unidirectional but rather bidirectional. Thus, Latinx youth experience their race as tied to documentation, and because understandings of documentation and citizenship are racialized—they are racialized as undocumented.[21] Given this structural legal context, we can, "recogniz[e] the policing practices that reinforce stereotypes of racialized citizenship and Latinos and other groups of color as alien and criminal."[22] Racialization and subsequent politicization of identity acts as a mechanism for citizenship status conflating and entangling the identities rather than analyzing them through a multiplicative lens.

> 'Racializing surveillance' signals those moments when enactments of surveillance reify boundaries, borders, and bodies, along racial lines and where the outcome is often discriminatory treatment of those who are negatively racialized by such surveillance. […] How things get ordered racially by way of surveillance depends on space and time and is subject to change.[23]

Racializing surveillance helps to nuance that framing because it teases out the category of Latinx. Afro-Latinx people may not be racialized as undocumented because of the way that racializing surveillance reifies race to produce discrete categories that read brown and Black people as different and distinct with no discernable overlap in racial identity. Thus Black, Afro-

[20] Kendall A. King and Gemma Punti, "Undocumented Students' Narrated Experiences of (Il)legality," 246.
[21] King and Punti, 246.
[22] Sanchez and Romero, "Critical Race Theory in the US Sociology of Immigration," 784.
[23] Simone Browne, *Dark Matters*, 16.

Latinx, and people from the African diaspora are racialized out of the category of Latinx and made illegible as undocumented. And while Black folk are not racialized as undocumented they are racialized as foreign/other, "fixing and framing the Black subject within a 'rigid and limited grid of representational possibilities'... within a 'racially saturated field of visibility'."[24] This connects to the problem of an overdetermined signifier I discuss later in Chapter 1 where, the category of undocumented is so tied to a narrative of Latinx composition there are no other plausible solutions (answers) to the question of who comprises the undocumented community.

Telling Impossible Stories

Estimate of immigrants residing in the U.S. total in the millions. "In 2018, 46 percent of immigrants reported their race as single-race white, 27 percent as Asian, 10 percent as Black, and 15 percent as some other race. About 2 percent reported having two or more races. Additionally, 44 percent of U.S. immigrants (19.8 million people) reported having Hispanic or Latino origins."[25] While data exists on unauthorized immigrants, documentation is maintained in disjointed and incomplete databases. Estimates from the Migration Policy Institute report Mexico and Central America account for 7.6 million (67 percent of total unauthorized immigrants in the United States population) and 685,000 (6 percent) from South America; 1.8 million (16 percent) were from Asia; 318,000 (3 percent) from Africa; and approximately 351,000 (3 percent) from the Caribbean.[26] Further nuancing this data, we know that Black immigrants in the US are highly diverse representing migration from countries such as Nigeria, Ethiopia, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, Uganda, Sudan, Sierra Leone and others. As of September 2019 there are

[24] Simone Browne, 20.

[25] Jeanne Batalova, Brittany Blizzard, and Jessica Bolter, "Frequently requested statistics on immigrants and immigration in the United States," Migration Policy Institute. February 14, 2020, https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/frequently-requested-statistics-immigrants-and-immigration-united-states#Demographic

[26] Ibid.

652,880[27] unauthorized immigrants enrolled in the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)[28] program and regionally, over 90 percent of "current DACA recipients were born in Mexico or Central or South America (648,430); Asia born (2 percent), followed by the Caribbean (1 percent), Europe and Africa (both less than 1 percent)."[29] This data is comprised of regional not racial representation; thus, although Afro-Latinx and Afro-Caribbean folks are included in this regional data, they are still a minority of overall immigrants. The Black Alliance for Just Immigration (BAJI) estimates that 12,000 DACA recipients are Black. The three top countries of origin being Jamaica (5,302 approved applicants), Trinidad and Tobago (4,077), and Nigeria (2,095). Telling the undocuBlack story is impossible through these metrics and data alone. Not only are the methods used to collect the data vague, incomplete, and incapable of holding the nuance or race, ethnicity and national origin, but they also miss narrative in what is unable to be captured. For example, not all of the participants in this project receive DACA but they are in higher education and do identify as undocuBlack. These folks, like their DACAmented counterparts, bring embodied knowledge to this project.

Black Feminist Epistemology and Theory

The intellectual labor of this thesis was accomplished through Black Feminist Epistemologies and Black Feminist Theory because they value embodied knowledge as a generative framing for

[27] Batalova, Blizzard and Bolter "Frequently requested statistics on immigrants and immigration in the United States"

[28] Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) – an immigration policy under the US Department of Homeland Security where individuals who migrated to the US as children (and meet specific criterion) are given relief/deferred action from deportation for a period of two years (subject to renewal). Individuals are also eligible for work authorization. The policy was established by the Obama administration in June 2012 and rescinded by the Trump administration in September 2017 (Department of Homeland Security, 2017). As of 2017 there were approximately 800,000 persons enrolled as individuals who qualify and successfully received protections under DACA.

[29] Gustavo López and Jens Manuel Krogstad, "Key facts about unauthorized immigrants enrolled in DACA" Pew Research Center. September 25, 2017, Retrieved from: http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/09/25/key-facts-about-unauthorized-immigrants-enrolled-in-daca/

knowledge production and theorizing one's own condition. A critical aspect of Black Feminist Epistemology is the duality within its operation. It works simultaneously as a modality for validating lived experience and operationalizing those experiences as assets while also positioning itself as a critique of masculinist, white, positivist framing of our social world.[30] Patricia Hill Collins writes, "Black feminist thought articulates the taken-for-granted knowledge of [Black] women, it also encourages all Black women to create new self-definitions that validate a Black women's stand-point."[31] Rather than seeking unbiased, neutral, objective "truth" as positivism has traditionally framed, Black Feminist epistemology allows for the multidimensionality of experiences to all work towards constructing subjective truths and reality which are all valid and important contributions to our social world.

I achieve this by using direct quotes and dialogue from the undocuBlack women I interviewed, shared space with, and received stories from. Their narratives read as conversations with myself and each other despite their being physically located in different geographic and social locations. The interviews were meant to connect seamlessly with each other building a cacophony of claims validating their experiences, while simultaneously marking points of departure and difference that create their unique individual lives. Their narratives echo and build upon one another because of the overwhelming structural violence they experience is not exceptional or unique to any one place. These stories are neither ranked nor prioritized, no one person's narrative dominated avoiding hierarchies of validation. While I give specific pseudonyms and locations to situate them in their geopolitical context, their narratives all contribute to a collective understanding of undocuBlack women's experiences broadly.

[30] Patricia Hill Collins, "Outsider Within,"
[31] Patricia Hill Collins, "Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought," 748.

This research project employs a Black Feminist Theoretical (BFT) approach to understand the experiences of undocuBlack women. Black Feminist Thought is rooted in both an understanding of the multiplicity of oppression and the need to mobilize marginalization as a source of strength. Those who occupy the space of political struggle, who are dispossessed, form a "counter-hegemonic cultural practice to identify the spaces where we begin revision."[32] In forming research questions, interpreting data, and analyzing findings, BFT is used to facilitate and interpret storytelling.

Dreaming UndocuBlack Subjects

In each interview, as Meera, Cari, Chichima, Yarah, and Lena told their stories of migration they each distinctly named nation (Belize, Trinidad and Tobago, Nigeria, and Kenya respectively) as their places of origin. My positioning as Black American mediated the language and references of place they shared. The spatial and political markers of place that we offer to ground and place ourselves among people and community are intentional and speak to the strategic and arbitrary.[33] Their declaration of being from a nation-state illuminates the simultaneously strategic and arbitrary nature of placemaking. For example, I grew up in Pasadena, California a city located in Los Angeles County and a place that I would designate as home. If asked by a non-Californian where I am from, my response would be Los Angeles; to a Californian that lives outside of Los Angeles County my response may be San Gabriel Valley, a regional designation situation Pasadena around the San Gabriel Mountains, Altadena, and Glendale. To complicate the specificity of place further, I could describe home as north of NeLA (Northeast Los Angeles) or simply reply I grew up in the same city as Octavia E. Butler and Jackie Robinson. For sports fans

[32] bell hooks, "Choosing the Margin," 15.
[33] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 228.

or other Black Americans who know the history of sports icon Robinson that marker imbues Pasadena with a particular spatial meaning. For Black feminist theorists, those who are engaged in Afro-futurism as a liberatory practice or simply a novelist genre, proximity to Butler and her works located in the Huntington Library (only 10 miles outside of Pasadena) may signify something else. If I were speaking with someone outside of or unfamiliar with the U.S. context, I might say that I am from the United States, which muddies the specificity of my home into a broader national identity and history of Blackness in the U.S. In tracing the histories of empire this chapter contends with both the arbitrary and strategic dialectic of being from and of a place.

What the paragraph above illustrates is that places of home and geographic meaning making is contingent on processes of relation, special meanings, and temporality. Octavia E. Butler and I are of the same place (Pasadena) but not of the same time, the special connection we share is mitigated by our temporality. Katherine McKittrick writes, "pursuing the links between practices of domination and Black women's experiences in place, we see that Black women's geographies are lived, possible, and imaginable… opening up a meaningful way to approach both the power and possibilities of geographic inquiry."[34] Understanding the social lives of undocuBlack women requires geographic inquiry that is geography as space, place, and location in its physical materiality and imaginative configurations.

The focus and scale of nation-state in Chapter 1 is deliberate as a geography represents a physical materiality for the undocuBlack women. While the histories of each nation could be deeply explored and covered, this project is an attempt to do something different and recognizes the relationality of positioning that registers each of the undocuBlack women as being from a nation rather than city, township, or state. In *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice*, Leah

[34] Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*, xii.

Piepzna-Samarasinha explicitly names themselves not as historian but rather as someone committed to remembering:

> This is a partial, incomplete history. Yet I believe like many partial, incomplete histories, it is still of use. I am not a trained historian, but I am, like many people, someone who remembers and fights to remember both as an act of resistance and change the future, who has sought to record my stories and the stories of my communities when I write. [35]

Like Piepzna-Samarasinha, I do not offer regional historiography or enter historical analysis and do not name myself a historian. Rather, I hope that this work is received as a process of contextualization for grounding embodied narratives. These personal accounts offer nuanced perspectives of historical phenomenon such as undocumented migration to the U.S.

I am committed to remembering the stories of women who so bravely shared (of) themselves and their families with me. This commitment is both rooted in my own ways of knowing and being in the world but also tied to a larger history of storytelling as a methodology and a praxis. As a methodological choice, storytelling requires respect for the quiet (the gaps in history, in the archives of nation building, in the inner thoughts of undocuBlack women) and resisting the urge to fill in the gaps that cannot be filled. These quiet moments open up possibilities in the narration of Black women's lives. They are invitations to tell the impossible stories. Audre Lorde generously offers insight into the power and intimacy of naming:

> These places of possibility within ourselves are dark because they are ancient and hidden; they have survived and grown strong through that darkness. Within these deep places, each one of us holds an incredible reserve of creativity and power, of unexamined and unrecorded emotion and feeling. The woman's place of power within each of us is neither white nor surface; it is dark, it is ancient, and it is deep.[36]

Beyond a method, narration and storytelling as epistemological practices guide this work. The magic and alchemy of Black women's world-making, the places of possibility within us that

[35] Leah Piepzna-Samarasinha, *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice*, 80.
[36] Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 37.

Lorde gestures to are explored in the strategic and the arbitrary and, more broadly, are modeled via modes of resistance and refusal.

These stories are firsthand accounts of possibility that have been overlooked in the dominant discourse of migrant narratives including the exclusion of Blackness in Latinx centric rhetoric around immigration and undocumented status in the U.S. Upending the specificity of place and location moves to make real the diasporic conceptualization of culture[37] and also speaks to the creation of different types of intimacies. UndocuBlack women dream of ways of being both of the self and in relation to others challenging the category of undocumented and how Black folks are held within an overdetermined signifier that often cannot imagine them within that category.

Chapter 1: UndocuBlack Subjects and the Making of Home

This chapter serves as an opening to think deeply and complexly about Black people's positioning to one another and takes seriously storytelling and remembering as acts of resistance. To understand positioning, this thesis starts at home. Home as a place of meaning making and epistemology is explored in this chapter. Meera, Cari, Chichima, Yarah, and Lena's conceptualizations of who and what constitutes home for them is critical as they navigate feelings of not always being from one particular place. As undocuBlack subjects, they are continually negotiating and articulating personhood, citizenship, and belonging to nation-state and to community. Understanding what places and people mean to each other, how they are positioned relationally and how intimacies of community and worldmaking is critical to provide insight into modes of creating Black belonging under regimes of anti-Blackness. Understanding belonging and world-making is even more important within a legal context that bars them from

[37] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 223.

going to their place of birth or any other nation-state outside of U.S. borders. As diasporic and undocuBlack subjects, these women's stories point to practices of refusal, reimagination, and are grounded in possibilities of life.

Chapter 2: Interiority and the Grammars of Autonomy and Belonging

This chapter provides valuable insights for interiority and understanding the inner lives of undocuBlack women. Firsthand narrative from the women about their feelings, thoughts, and desires gives theoretical context from which to understand their concepts of self. This insight is particularly poignant in understanding how Black women internalize their socialization and racialized gendered expectations of roles and behavior as evidence through various narratives in the chapter. Interiority in these examples then does not necessarily manifest as a site untouched by racism, sexism, ableism, white supremacy, and the ugliness of the world around them. While it is a place where Black women talk about their dreams, desire for education, and opportunities for access to resources to help them out of their social and economic realities, it is also a place under constant attack from the internalization of the pathology they experience from their environments. This chapter is also particularly insightful in its analysis of Black women and womanhood and the contributions their interiority gives to possibilities of autonomy, freedom, and world-making.

Chapter 3: Educational Enfranchisement and the Precariousness of Representation

Negotiating the terms and type of documentation that undocumented folks opt into provides an important critique about agential practices of resistance and refusal. What does it mean to opt in to being counted or to be present in a space to disrupt the notion of who is undocumented but then by virtue of presence open up oneself to additional surveillance by association? How are undocuBlack students transforming the relations of subjugation by making

themselves visible by stepping into recognition through claiming space in UndocuCenters? This chapter uses higher education, specifically Unodcu/Black/Cultural centers as sites to understand how undocuBlack women practice self-making and engage in everyday micropolitics to claim their right to be represented.

Chapter 1: UndocuBlack Subjects and the Making of Home

no one leaves home unless
home is the mouth of a shark.

you only run for the border
when you see the whole city running as well
you only leave home
when home won't let you stay.
— Warsan Sire, Home[38]

Positions of Enunciation

In this chapter, I explore how histories of empires, colonization, regimes of economic dispossession, violence, and the motivation for movement (forced, coerced, and voluntary) contextualize the experiences of homemaking for five undocuBlack women. I trace migrant diasporas, created in the aftermath of empire, through histories of the nation for each of the women in this project. These postcolonial contexts are situated in part in the Caribbean—Cari is from Trinidad and Tobago and Meera's family migrated from Belize, while the other narratives of migration begin in Africa—Yarah and Chichima both migrated from Nigeria and Lena is from Kenya. While this chapter is by no means an exhaustive account of the social, political, and cultural historiography of these nation-states, it is an effort to begin understanding how 20th century histories of these particular nations reveal how empire maps onto individual experience.

In *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*, Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods write,

> The people of urban and rural communities that are undergoing gentrification, the prisoners, refugees, and orphans, and all displaced persons have different desires for home. They want to build new homes in places that have barred their entry. They also want to explore and reimagine the politics of place. The realization of these desires can transform the world when these visions are based in traditions that see place as the location of co-operation, stewardship, and social justice rather than just sites to be

[38] Audio of Warsan Shire reading Home https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nI9D92Xiygo

> dominated, enclosed, commodified, exploited, and segregated. Black geographies will play a central role in the reconstruction of the global community.[39]

This chapter explores the global community of Black diaspora particularly the ways that undocuBlack women practice ad politics of place and home making. As Warsan Sire writes in her poem home would not let these women stay. Whether they left for economic opportunity, educational advancement, to escape intimate partner violence, or to reunite with their families, each women's stories is layered and complex. While this chapter does not delve into the push and pull factors that impact histories and patterns of migration, it does offer a historical analysis to inform legacies of dispossession, the mouths of the sharks.

Jamaican born cultural theorist Stuart Hall writes, "the practices of representation always implicate the positions from which we speak or write – the positions of *enunciation.*"[40] These undocuBlack women are positioned as speakers grounded in individual geo-political context as but moreover, they are positioned in relation to each other. Foregrounding their positioning in this chapter teases out the overlaps and the distinct points of difference within the African diaspora. This is to say that Hall's framing of identity as discontinuous, unstable, and at times contradictory grounds the approach to understanding the lived experience of these undocuBlack women. Because of the historical and social contingency of identity, there is no universal Black, African or undocuBlack experience. Rather, cultural identity is a matter of becoming and of being. Hall continues:

> Difference, therefore persists—in and alongside continuity... to experience again the shock of the 'doubleness' of similarity and of difference… At different places, times, in relation to different questions, the boundaries are re-sited. They become not only what they have, at times, certainly been—mutually excluding categories, but also what they sometimes are—differential points along a sliding scale.[41]

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[39] Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods, *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*, 6.
[40] Stuart Hall, *Cultural Identity and Diaspora,* 222.
[41] Hall, 228.

Grounded in Hall's conceptualization of cultural identity not as one true 'African self' discovered within a process of identification, but rather as a process of positioning, this chapter explores the contours of imagined and real community and the intimacies of world making that are grounded in various relationships to and of Black diaspora.

I begin the narration of these individual and collective histories in the 20th century to capture a multigenerational experience of identity within diaspora and concepts of home that takes into account the various material conditions that contextualize my participants' migration stories. African and Caribbean mobilities, as understood through the geopolitical contexts of Kenya, Nigeria, Trinidad and Tobago, and Belize are explored throughout the chapter. These individual stories of migration, like the histories of the countries these individuals once called home, are divergent and overlapping. Identities and histories are always relational and the "'cut' of identity — this positioning… is an arbitrary and 'contingent' ending."[42] Questions of diaspora necessitate a reading of Blackness as producing a subject that is not universal but rather embodied with particular cultural histories and divergent experiences. World-making for these individuals is fundamentally impacted by specific geographies of imperialism and configurations of power and domination.

Migrating from the Caribbean

Cari the first participant in interviewed for this project is Afro-Caribbean and Indo-Caribbean from Trinidad and Tobago. In our first interview she described her childhood and family history, going to Hindu school with her brother in Trinidad, and being raised by her Indian mother. Her relationship with her mother informed her deep ties to Indian culture. Though she grew up as

[42] Hall, 230.

Catholic, Hindu school provided an environment for her and her brother to be socialized and acculturated to Indian traditions. Her family immigrated to the U.S. when she was six after her mother left her father, who was abusive and an alcoholic. In preparation for the interview, I asked my participants to bring in an illustration, photo or some other object that symbolized what family meant to them. Cari retrieved a photo from her cell phone of her high school graduation ceremony. In the photo, she's wearing a white cap and gown. Her brother and mother stand beside her, beaming with pride. She comments about how the photo is missing her grandparents, whom she also explicitly names as immediate family.

"I'm from Trinidad and Tobago. I don't know if you ever heard of it?" "Yes," I nod in acknowledgement.

"It's in the Caribbean. When I was about six years old... Let me start out by saying I'm half Indian, half African. A lot of my country, they're split and have Indians or Africans and there's a lot of mix. My dad is African, my mom is Indian. But it's not like ... You know how you're African American and it's different from African African."

"You mean your father is African from Africa, continental Africa, yes?" I clarify.

"Yes!" she replies.

Cari's family reflects the history of racial and ethnic mixing of people and cultures as well as the layered histories of colonization and lasting imperial influence that have defined Trinidad and Tobago. English and French influences on the islands of Trinidad and Tobago are profound. French presence is personified by the presence of Creole, patois, and the origins of carnival, while British presence is reflected in English being the official language, the legal system's roots in English common law, and that cricket is a national pastime.[43] Spanish presence

[43] Alan West and Alan West Durán, *African Caribbeans: A Reference Guide*, 185.

is also seen through the wide practice of Catholicism.[44] In 1802, Spain surrendered Trinidad to Britain under the Treaty of Amiens, followed by the relinquishment of Tobago by France to Britain in 1814. By 1889 Trinidad and Tobago were effectively combined as a single British colony.[45] French Creoles of the Caribbean were enslaved to provide labor to the sugar plantations. As the production needs increased, so did the importation of enslaved Africans. Between secession and the merger of the colonies, slavery was abolished on August 1, 1838. Post emancipation, the majority of the formerly enslaved abandoned plantations, leaving behind the degradation, violence, torture and back-breaking work of the plantation. This mass exodus from sugar plantations creating the conditions for a potential economic crisis in Trinidad and Tobago and other islands in the Caribbean. In response to this labor shortage, indentured workers from India were forcibly immigrated to the islands. Between 1838 and 1917 almost 150,000 indentured Indians were assigned to various plantations in the Caribbean with another 400,000 assigned to British Guiana, Guadeloupe, Jamaica, Surinam, Martinique, French Guiana, and Grenada. When Cari's parents were still in Trinidad and Tobago, the islands had a population of 1.3 million where Indians and Afro-Trinidadians are evenly split, representing 40.5 percent and 40.8 percent respectively of the population.[46] Although indentured servants also migrated from China, they only constituted about 1 percent of the total population. Indian migrants are not only a sizable presence in Trinidad and Tobago, but also contribute significantly to the country's mixed population of 17 percent. Most of those considered mixed are Afro-Indo-Trinidadian, known also as *douglas.*[47]

[44] Bridget Brereton, *An Introduction to the History of Trinidad and Tobago*, 112.
[45] Bereton, 69.
[46]David Dabydeen and Brinsley Samaroo, *Across the Dark Waters*, 4.
[47] West and West Durán, 186.

Our conversation continued. “It's like Caribbean African, so it's different. Like Caribbean Indian, it's different. We share some of the same culture, but we're different in a way because of where we're from. I came up here when I was six years old. First, my mom, she came up here because she was in abusive relationship with my dad, so she came up here and my grandparents was taking care of me. Six years after, she sent for me and my brother to come up. It was like we came on a travel document, but we overstayed our time because she didn't want to go back to that. She felt like America had more opportunity and it'll be a better place to raise me and my brother. Everything that I'd do, everything that my brother do, it's just the three of us at the end of the day, and that's what that picture means to me really.”

Early in the 20th century, Trinidadians began to organize for self-governance. In 1955, the People's National Movement (PNM) was founded, led by Dr. Eric Williams, a moderate nationalist and writer-activist.[48] The British-sponsored West Indies Federation, a political federation established in 1958 represented ten islands in the Caribbean including: Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, Barbados and others.[49] After 165 years of British rule, in 1962, Trinidad and Tobago left the West Indies Federation and became independent, with Williams serving as prime minister.[50] While the period that followed was marked by an increase in political independence and autonomy, Trinidad and Tobago’s economy was owned and largely influenced by foreign power. Growing social unrest in the 60s and frustrations with foreign influence over core sectors of the economy, specifically sugar and oil industries, coalesced in the Black Power uprising of February 1970.[51] Black Power supporters included young, Black, working class people who were disillusioned with the social and economic problems of the nation. Secondary school-aged

[48] West and West Durán, 190.
[49] West and West Durán, 118.
[50] West and West Durán, 38.
[51] Jerome Teelucksingh, "The Black Power Movement in Trinidad and Tobago," 160.

youths, women and men, and Indo-Trinidadians were all included in mobilizing and protesting efforts.[52] Following the uprising a state of emergency was declared, while strikes by workers in the oil, sugar, transportation, and electric industries shook the economy as part of an attempt to push the government towards new economic models. For a period, petroleum and natural gas reserves discovered in the late 1990s helped to stabilize the economy. Industrialization and investment in the tourism industry further shifted the economic landscape and employment options. By the early 2000s, the sugar industry that marked much of the history of Trinidad and Tobago was permanently shut down.[53]

Migrating from Central America

Meera is Garifuna (Afro-Indigenous) and an immigrant from Belize. Her family migrated to the U.S. when she was in elementary school. Her mother was diligent about safety around their migrant/undocumented status and identity, often warning Meera and her siblings to "be careful" and "don't let anyone know you're from a different country." Language and accent marked Meera as foreign or other. To protect their identities, her mother also coached the children to assimilate by changing their accent and speech patterns. Her mother made explicit the dangers of being split up as a family because "we don't have our papers." Meera described her frustrations with having to explain how she came to exist. Her existence as Black and Indigenous, a non-Spanish speaker, born in Belize, to parents who were born in Guatemala evidences the complexity within histories of colonization, conquest, and migration that are present across the Black diaspora. In our conversation, she reflected on whether Black would be a meaningful category at all in Belize, where folks were more likely to make distinctions on

[52] See Victoria Pasley, "The Black Power movement in Trinidad," 27. and Teelucksingh, 165.
[53] Gerard Besson, "Sweet Sorrow: The Timeline of Sugar in Trinidad and Tobago," The Caribbean History Archives, December 12, 2018. Retrieved from http://caribbeanhistoryarchives.blogspot.com/2018/12/sweet-sorrow-timeline-of-sugar-in.html

ethnicity than race. However, in the context of living in the U.S., she was only legible as a "Black American" despite her refusal to be identified as such and insistence on claiming a broader Black identity. Her requests to be identified by other as Black were responded to with hesitation and fear as her peers resisted using the term, in lieu of their ideas of a more "politically correct," but factually inaccurate, African-American.

"When I talk to other people and they'll ask me, 'Where are you from?' I'm like, 'From Belize!' And they're like, 'Oh, so where are your parents from?' 'Oh, they were born in Guatemala but they moved to Belize.' They'd be like, 'Oh, so you're half Hispanic, or half Latino and half Black.' And I'm like, 'No, I just am a Black person who was born in Central America.' And they're like, 'Okay, but which parent is Black?' And I'm like, they're both Black."

What Meera's experience make clear are the ways that the racial identification of Black in the U.S. is overtly tied to a history of slavery and Americanness. People are unable and unwilling to think about Blackness as existing in a larger global and diasporic framework. By only narrowly defining or identifying Black people as "African American" language perpetuate the violence of erasure for Black immigrants and undocumented folks who are neither African nor American.

Belize was declared a British crown colony in 1862. The formerly named British Honduras operated as an intermediary for trade between the British and Guatemala. The British Honduras Company, comprised of prominent families, was the biggest economic influence in the country, controlling investments across the Belizean economy.[54] In 1981, Belize became an independent nation-state, but a lengthy colonial history and even longer process of decolonization impacted their claim to independence.[55] Guatemala refused to recognize an

[54] Hector Perez-Brignoli, *A Brief History of Central America*, 103.
[55] Perez-Brignoli, 18.

independent Belize and British troops remained in the country to defend against Guatemalan territorial claims and threats of invasion. This contestation of independence was not resolved until 1992 when Guatemala recognized Belize as a sovereign and independent state. Despite Guatemalan recognition of Belizean sovereignty, tensions between the nations continued into the 21st Century.[56]

"So, it would be like that." she continues, "It's mostly that, I feel like. Me reiterating to people I'm here."

"So, I think it's mostly me telling other people it's a thing, we exist. Or if someone will talk about undocumented people, like I did this thing on campus where we were getting students to come to our booth and call politicians, to get them to be more towards legislation that brought families together. So, students would come up and they would ask all these questions about undocumented people, and what they can do to help, and all these things. And a lot of the students would be like, 'Yeah, I know it's really hard for people who immigrate from Mexico.' And I'd be like, 'It's not just Mexicans, people immigrate from all over the place, and here I am. I didn't immigrate from Mexico.'"

I reply in response to her labor of making herself and other undocuBlack folks visible to those that cannot imagine their existence, "Yeah. It's a lot of work, right? Sometimes it's easy to have those teachable moments, sort of clarify or demystify, or say 'Actually, you're missing this whole separate amount of people and their experience.' But I know sometimes that work is tiring, to try to get people to validate your existence, that your experiences and histories are real."

[56] Assad Shoman, *Belize's Independence and Decolonization in Latin America,* 76.

In 1973, the country referred to as British Honduras was changed to Belize as the first of many actions towards sovereign independence. Constitutional reforms in 1954 and an entirely new constitution a decade later, introduced universal suffrage for adults giving Belize increased autonomy.[57] According to the Belize Population and Housing Census Country Report conducted in 2010, Latino, Creole, Maya, Garifuna and Mennonite comprise the five largest ethnic groups. Fifty percent of the total population are Latinos (the largest group), with Creoles accounting for 21%. Maya and Garifuna make up 10% and 4.6% of the population respectively. Approximately 6% of the population claimed mixed ethnic origin.[58] The history of colonization and migration shapes the presence of Afro-Indigenous Belizeans and Belizeans of mixed-race descent.

Colonization and external control of Belize by global powers left lasting influence on the country. Over time, a deteriorating economy and social instability lead to mobilization and efforts to gain independence. During the 1930s, the Belizean economy was hit by the Great Depression and the economic devastation was further exacerbated when Belize City was largely destroyed by a hurricane. Decades of instability and unrest ushered in a nationalist movement in the 1950s.[59] During this time, constitutional reforms gave Belize increased, though limited, autonomy and the general elections were won by the People's United Party (PUP) which went on to run the country for nearly 30 years.[60] However, disillusioned by the PUP-run government, the 1960s and 70s, were marked by Belizeans immigrating en mass to the United States. Migration to the U.S. was motivated in part by political disenfranchisement but was also influenced by the familial and communal ties between the U.S. and Belize that made migration commonplace.[61]

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[57] Perez-Brignoli, 28.
[58] Statistical Institute of Belize. *Belize Population and Housing Census Country Report*. Belmopan, Belize, 2013, https://sib.org.bz/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Census_Report_2010.pdf
[59] Shomman, 3.
[60] Shomman, 41.
[61] Barbara Balboni, Joseph O. Palacio, and Jaime J. Awe. *Taking Stock: Belize at 25 Years of Independence*, 258.

Employment opportunities, higher wages, education, healthcare access, and the ability to send remittances in the form of money and material goods back to family in Belize also contributed to the appeal of immigrating to the U.S.[62]

Beginning our first interview, I asked Meera whether she was able to bring in a photo or illustration of what family means to her.

"Oh. Well, I don't have the picture with me," she replied, "but I know what the picture is. It's two pictures, actually. But they're literal pictures of my family. Because we have two pictures of where we went to this church, and there's one from I-don't-know-how-long ago, because I was just a baby in that photo. But then we went again recently. The church is in Guatemala, so we went again recently and now we have kind of an updated picture. My older siblings aren't in it, but I'm in it with my younger brother and my nephews."

"Cool. And why did you choose that photo?"

"It was just, even though... because we don't have one picture all together, so it's nice to know at least there's something that keeps us together. Because the church technically has been visited by all of us, so I really like that."

I am struck by the ways place creates familiarity and ties amongst her family and her articulation of the church as a place with meaning has anchored her family's togetherness as a site of shared and collective memory. A place of collective meaning-making. The politics of place for the church from Meera's photo holds meaning in that it is a site of connection for her family. They are at home there. This place, this home, is in fact situated outside of the country she was born in, outside of the nation-state the utters when asked where she is from. The conceptualization and naming of home for Meera pushes me to think and imagine, to see beyond

[62] See Balboni, Palacio, and Awe, 273 and Michael Smith, "Transnationalism from Below"

the bordered places of origin and linear mapping of migration that assumes home moves with you. Meera is from Belize, but the church in Guatemala that is shared across generational, diasporic and temporal contexts has been a place that held her family at different points. Meera recognizes the church as home.

In *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*, Katherine McKittrick offers an analysis on the relationship between geographies of domination and Black women's geographies writing that the interaction "enables a way to think about the place of Black subjects in a diasporic context that takes up spatial histories as they constitute or present geographic organization."[63] The spatial history of the church allows Meera to articulate her relationship with family and place through a diasporic context that maps onto larger spatial histories. Black women's geographies, specifically Meera's home-making through church makes "visible social lives which are often displaced and rendered ungeographic." [64]

Our interview continued and she shared her family's story of migration. "Because I was undocumented, it clearly wasn't intended. But my mom first moved out here because things are harder back in Belize, so she was just trying to earn enough money and then go back. But I don't remember the full circumstances of everything, but I know how hard it was for her to be away from us, and how hard it was for us to all be separated. Because while we stayed in Belize, we all stayed in different places. So, my oldest brother, he was old enough to be on his own, so he was on his own. Then my older brother and my older sister and I all stayed in one house with my aunt, and my youngest brother, he was still a baby, so he stayed with my other aunt in a different part of the country. So, we were all split up."

[63] McKittrick, x.
[64] Ibid, x.

For Meera, migration was a means of achieving togetherness, and the site of the church as a grounding place for home and family becomes clearer to me in light of these familial fractures. The photographs participants were asked to bring served multiple purposes as photos are multilayered artifacts. Viewed as both record and works of art, photographs, "are thought to embody the personal concerns of the photographer-artist" and simultaneously, "are thought to reproduce the reality in front of the camera's lens, yielding an unmediated and unbiased visual report."[65] Photographs have a contradictory nature. With their assumed representation of realism, they are understood through various interpretations informed by individual perspectives and experiences.[66] By engaging a, "refusal to accept the 'truth' of images" each of these women shared photos and described them through a practice of listening to the images as "a haptic encounter that foregrounds the frequencies of images and how they move, touch, and connect us to the event of the photo."[67]

Meera continued, "And I feel that that was really hard for my mom. So, she brought us out there. She would take my little brother back and forth every once in a while, so he could always be familiar with her. But there was this one summer where she decided that we all would be able to go, so we all came for a summer. And I still didn't know all of it, but from what she's told me, she realized how hard it was to be separated and she figured we're already here, it's safer for us here, we'll have a better education out here, so she decided to keep us here."

"How old were you?" I asked, wondering how many of her early childhood years were spent apart from her mother and siblings.

"I'd just turned eight, it was right after my birthday."

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[65] Dona Schwartz, "Visual Ethnography", 120.
[66] Schwartz, 120.
[67] Tina Campt, *Listening to Images*, 9.

Meera's own definitions of Blackness are expansive and global as her embodied experience in different geographic contexts has shaped what it means to be Black. Despite her family's experience of separations and dispossession, Meera articulated meaningful ways that she created home for herself. Whether grounded in a meaningful place or symbolically carried in those she considers family, Meera was committed to a practice of home-making.

Migrating from Africa

Lena migrated with her family to the U.S. at 12 years old from her home country of Kenya. Her understanding of and personal identification with Blackness is shaped by global anti-Blackness, colonization, and situating herself within the diaspora. As the only member of her family that is undocumented, Lena found family and community in college around other students whose precarious relationships to documentation and citizenship posed similar fears and positionality as her own. While she felt that it was difficult for her family to truly understand her feeling around documentation and she was ultimately grateful to not have to worry about their vulnerability to state violence via ICE or other state apparatus that surveils and polices citizenship.

"The reason I chose this photo is because coming into college I didn't really know what it meant to be undocumented. What undocumented looks like. I just see who kind of helped shape, kind of helped me identify what being undocumented means. Because I'm still trying to figure that out. The reason I was interested was because, we definitely wouldn't have the same college experience without including those people. So, that's why I thought that photo kind of encompassed everyone who I think has shaped so far my college experience at the time."

I reply, "I got you, thanks for sharing that. I guess I'm interested in sort of how family is defined for you. Because it seems like you took a more non-traditional route in the photo that

you chose. So how do you define family?" Lena's photos was of her and two other undocustudent undergrads at her university.

"Well for me, because my family, or my two siblings who are documented, they're actually younger than me with the age gap. My sister is actually nine now and my brother is five. So, it was a big gap between us, but they are U.S. citizens. And my mom, she actually has a work visa. So, she's the only documented [one] in my family. It's been a hard to relate to them on the issue. My mom has a lot of different friends who are immigrants who go through that process. She has an idea of the sense of what it means, but it's different when you're actually going though it."

"So, I think that's really why I chose my community in school and documentary movies, because this kind of helped me learn more about being undocumented. Just knowing it was something I couldn't learn from my family members, something I had to figure out on my own in college. That's the main reason, obviously that I love my family and they're important to me. But I just think in terms of being undocumented, my school experience, my college experience has influenced me more in navigating that."

I replied, "Yeah, no I think that makes a lot of sense, coming from sort of a shared identity perspective. But then also sort of thinking about how college affords you an opportunity to just sort of grow and develop in different ways, outside of the bubble of home." I momentarily think of my own growth, development around identity and, world views that shifted in college. I pause and ask, "Do you have any extended family that's here in the States?"

"My grandma actually was able to come I think two years ago. And she actually sought asylum when she got here. Luckily enough for her, her process actually went well and pretty fast. She was able to get her green card and she now is going to be able to bring her children. They

actually came last month; it was really exciting. The fact that they're not going to have to go through the hassle of getting papers and all that. So yeah, it's really crazy because I'm the only one in the family that's actually undocumented. It's kind of a different experience."

Kenya, located on the Eastern part of Africa, borders Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, and the Indian Ocean. The British East African Protectorate was formed in 1895 as Germany, France, and Britain were carving East Africa for territory and power.[68] Colonization of Kenya via white supremacy was pervasive in all aspects of life. The power of the state was used to restrict the movement and increase surveillance of non-white peoples. Laws including the: Vagrancy Ordinance Law of 1896, the Native Porter and Laborers Ordinance of 1902, the Masters and Servants Law of 1902, and the Native Registration Ordinance of 1915 set the stage for colonial domination by removing land rights and rights of movement as well as facilitating labor exploitation.[69] This legal and political infrastructure preceded the formal declaration of Kenya as a British colony in 1920. By the 1940s, fertile highlands were overwhelmingly owned and monopolized by white Europeans settlers.[70] The legacy of white settlers policing the movements of non-white people is echoed in Lena's personal history. Her mother was able to get a visa via Canadian citizenship, rather than through Kenyan citizenship.

"So, I'm originally from Kenya and I came when I was 12 my mom came earlier. She came to Canada first before we went into the US. She has Canadian citizenship which is how she has a work visa. I didn't have one, so she was trying to apply for me to get the citizenship. That was before she had my siblings, because my siblings came later. It was just the two of us."

[68] Maina Wa Kinyatti, *History of Resistance in Kenya*, 24.
[69] Maina Wa Kinyatti, 22.
[70] Ibid, 91.

By the 1950s civil unrest, social inequity, and lack of political representation in Kenya gave rise to the Mau Mau Uprising (1952–1960). Advocating attacking settler property and violent resistance, the Mau Mau Rebellion set in motion an inevitable path to independence for Kenya.[71] Despite the eventual defeat of those involved in the revolt, the swell of anti-colonial sentiment moved through the country. In the 21st century, Kenya ushered in a new social order via the creation of a new constitution. Drafted in part to address the deep and enduring social and political issues that have divided the country for over 50 years, the constitution was ratified in 2010.[72] Moving through decolonization, African nationalism was marked by dual motivations, "a struggle *against* European rule and hegemony and a struggle *for* African autonomy and reconstruction."[73]

"My mom had everything, because she had already got in, so it wasn't an issue going into the country. When she came to get me, to go back in the country again that's when they had a problem. They really wanted to not let us in, he was threatening about deportation for me since I was a Canadian citizen. I don't know, and there was no reason to even do that because my mom had all the documents, but he was just, he was so adamant about it. It really nothing we could do."

"So, we were just sitting there. We had to be sitting there for at least six hours. I think they felt really sorry for us and they were just wondering why he was trying to keep us that long. We were there until actually like 7 in the morning and then I think the supervisor came in the morning and she was like, "Oh why are you holding this family? What's going on? I don't understand." It was because of that experience that my mom was like, "I don't think we feel

[71] Ibid, 27.
[72] Paul Zeleza, "The Protracted Transition to the Second Republic in Kenya,"
[73] Zeleza, 21.

comfortable enough you leaving the country because this is something that could easily happen again."

"Basically, when I came to the US, eventually my visa expired but we decided to overstay because my mom really wanted me to go to college here. That was her main intention. And she was scared that if we kept going back and renewing the visa with me, that's something that could have happened again. This is what's behind it, the undocumented status. Before she just was renewing her visa back and forth. Then my siblings were born here, so it was never really an issue. But it was mainly that experience that really scared her because she had struggled so much trying to figure out how to get me from Kenya and get me here, and she was just really worried about me having to be deported."

"It's kind of hard sometimes to connect to my family in that sense. But I am very grateful that at least they don't have to worry about that. Because even my aunt was always able to come visit. She got her visa, and I think it was through a non-profit organization. She didn't have issues getting the visa and she came; I think they also paid for her flight ticket. But she did not overstay her visa. She just decided to go back when it expired in order to be able to come back later if she wanted to. So, she had the opportunity at least. Generally, on the family side, my family [was] pretty good. Didn't really have any issues of me worrying about their undocumented status."

Yarah and Chichima were born in Nigeria

Yarah migrated to the U.S. in pursuit of an affordable high school education. Yarah and her twin sister were adopted by their older sister and her husband in order to facilitate citizenship for them. Her family dynamics and shifting responsibilities between sisterhood and dependent status was a source of tension for Yarah during her high school years. Leaving Nigeria was a big decision for Yarah and her two siblings, particularly because she felt the sadness of leaving her

family behind. “I remember leaving the airport and hugging my mom and the rest of my siblings goodbye.”

I began our conversation with the now familiar prompt: “I asked you to think about a photo or something that symbolizes family for you. Can you tell me a little bit about what you brought?

“Just a picture of my nuclear family. My dad's there that day and we're all together.”

“Can you tell me a little bit about who makes up your family?”

“My dad, my mom and my siblings. Yeah. And just like my cousins, my aunt and my uncles. So, we're at seven girls. I'm the last child, but we're two, we're twins. So, we were the last children actually.”

“That's interesting. Can you tell me a little bit about your family's story of migration? How did you all come to the U.S.?”

“So, before I came here I was going to boarding school in Nigeria and then my dad passed away and my mom was struggling with us because she was a housewife, she didn't have a job of her own. So, taking care of seven children was too much for her. And my sister by then was married to a guy that was in the States but he went back to Nigeria.”

“He was Nigerian too, but he lived here for 20 years. So, he decided to bring us here because high school there is more expensive than here. And for here you guys basically go to high school for free but they would have to pay a lot. So, they brought me and my twin sister here.”

“So, then you came here at the start of high school, is that right?” I realize that she migrated later than the rest of my participants and wonder how that experience may impact her sense of identity and socialization in two different cultural and special contexts.

"It was September, exactly."

I quickly try to recall the math of the typical age of a high school freshman and make an approximation of her age at the time "So, you were what, 14 years old?"

"I was a little bit older; I was 16. Just because I already started high school there two years and when I came here, they refused to put me in sophomore or junior year. They made me go back to freshman year."

"I was a little bit mad but then I liked it because I knew I had a lot of growing to do and knowing the culture and everything, I needed more time. So, I was glad that they took me back. I mean, coming here I knew very well that our immigration status was going to take a lot of time. Because even my sister being married to him, it took like a year to get her papers, her work permit, and green card. And for us like being adopted under them, it's going to take much longer. Even till now, it has taken years. So, I'm just like... Yeah I kind of like not over it. Yeah, it's just a really long process."

Nigeria mainly comprised of Yoruba, Hausa, Fulani, and Ibo peoples is home to approximately 250 ethnic groups.[74] The errant and arbitrary combination of ethnicities into a single unified nation-state marks the colonial histories of many African countries. The British did not attend to the differences and diversity of ethnicity, language, and culture; rather colonizers cobbled together peoples and territories claiming Nigeria as a British colonial territory in 1900.[75] For 60 years the British colonial rule of Nigeria was done indirectly by local leaders until the country's independence in 1960.

Chichima talked about the pressure to navigate documentation herself based on her family's expectation of self-sufficiency. Her older sibling, the first born, had to navigate themselves and

[74] April Gordon, *Nigeria's Diverse Peoples: A Reference Sourcebook*. 2.
[75]Olutayo Adesina, *Nigeria in the 20th Century: History, Governance, and Society*.

that expectation was extended to Chichima, and then her younger sibling would be next. While our interviews were the most conversational of all the students I spoke with, Chichima described herself as painfully introverted. She associated her introversion and language barrier in primary school as dictating many of her interactions with peers. She was often quiet and kept to herself describing a conflict with a group of peers and her position as simply, "I'm just the shadow in the background." Despite her self-designation as an introvert Chichima was very forthcoming with her inner thoughts and desires. Interiority as a conceptual framework for the inner lives of Black women will be discussed in Chapter 2, however the willingness for Chichima to share her inner life with me nuanced and expanded the notion of her simply being an introvert or a "shadow in the background."

"So to start us off. I don't know if you had a chance to find a photo or think about a photo of what family means to you?" I ask the standardized beginning of all of my conversations. "Mhmmm" she responds. I quickly adjust my ask to prompt her further, "Can you describe it for me?"

"Like individuals who, you know… Well I'm not really sure, but for me, when you come home from a busy day they make you feel good. Make you feel welcomed. Like you're understood by them more than anyone else. They know you without having to say anything. And people who you just feel comfortable with."

"Yes! Thank you." I affirm her response and ask another question. "And who sort of is in your family for you. Which folks do you consider family?"

"Umm… my best friend, my mom, my little sister, my little brother, and my big sister. That's pretty much it."

“Do you have other family that lives near you? Where is your family originally from? Talk to me a little about you.”

“Well we’re from Nigeria, we came here like maybe 11 years ago. And it’s just us here. We have other cousins and aunties around the United States but that’s pretty much it.”

Reserved at first, five minutes into the interview I ask Chichima about her primary school experiences and she begins opening up about her childhood.

“I was very introverted and my mom always told me I don't have friends and, well she was right I never had friends. There was this one thing I really... When I was in middle school, this group of people let me follow them around. This is the all-white middle school. So, they were having a conflict within the group, so we all had to go to the school counselor, et cetera, and so, they were like, "She hurt me this way" and the other person "She hurt me this way". And I was just sitting there, not really relevant. And that was very sad, and I think that's when I realized I actually don't have any friends. I'm just the shadow in the background.”

She pauses for a second, in reflection, then continues, “Actually, all throughout... I also feel with people, I have classmates, but nobody really... I know I don't have friends, because friends are people you hangout with outside of the place you met them. If you don't hang out with your coworker outside of work, are they really your friend? They just your coworker. If I don't hangout with my classmate outside of school, are they really my friend? No, they're just my classmate, et cetera, et cetera... If I was meeting them to work on the class, that's still different. That's still the same no different. I'm still meeting them because of the class not because we're going to hang out for a different reason not like we're going to go bowling just because we want to have fun.”

“So, I think I was more like an online kid. I had my own online circle of friends. We were all ones that don't fit in anywhere, just communicate with each other. That was my social circle.”

“Yeah?! Talk to me a little bit more about that. I think finding folks online or virtually is an important way to make connections.” I am instantly drawn to Chichima. She is endearing and earnest, genuine in her responses and self-aware and vulnerable in a way that seems effortless. Growing up during the digital revolution with a single mother meant that I had access to the entire world of the internet and little to no supervision while doing it. For kids of the 1980s who were lucky enough to have a family computer in the living room, dial-up internet, AOL, Oregon Trail, and chat rooms ruled our lives. I was also shy as a kid and found digital worlds to be places where I could be a different me. I instantly want to know more.

“It was nice knowing that you weren't alone. There are people like you, of different backgrounds. They're kind of like you, who don't really fit in. But you still want to communicate with people, and you explain your stories and have group chats... It's a short relationship with them because you usually move on to find another one and I communicate with them.”

“It's nice to have that feeling that you can express yourself, and leave that conversation and know that whatever you said is going to be left in Vegas, not going to be used against you.”

While Chichima’s narrative of adolescence sometimes reminded me of my own, I had a hard time reconciling the introverted wallflower with the vibrant and talkative woman who I shared conversation with. We talked about practices of self-care and found that while she preferred freestyle dancing and meditating, and I practice yoga and go hiking to connect to nature we both gravitated towards activities and practices of the self and with the self. By the end of our final interview, I was giving her recommendations for hiking apps and we talked about our queer identities. In the last 15 seconds of our final interview she asked, “And if I'm ever coming down

to LA, and what, can we hike?" My heart is full of joy at the intimacy we have shared and created through storytelling. Our three hours together have shown her bravery of practicing radical honesty and given me the privilege of being witness to her worldmaking. I smile a heart smile, eyes closing to make room on my face for a huge toothy grin, "Absolutely! We can go on a hike."

Conclusion

Thinking outside of the gaze of white supremacy, these undocuBlack women, through the lens of expansive love, made capable alternate ways of conceptualizing life, sociality and community. Their articulations of family and community challenge how white supremacy is ordered through knowledge and relations. These intimacies of love and care are seen in Cari's framing of family in non-nuclear arrangements. "It's just the three of us at the end of the day," she states matter of factly. Yarah's familial arrangements made fluid her relationship to her sister and brother-in-law who became guardians (mother and father respectively) to her and her twin sister. The alternate ways of imagining family and the bonds that create intimacy and kinship are subverted and undermined by the possibilities made real by these women. Grounded in possibilities of life Black women are simultaneously responsible and burdened with having to re-imagine the world. In this reimagination they are both visible and seen. Rejecting narratives of invisibility that would otherwise render them illegible to dominant structures of family and kinship, and in light of abundant images and representation of deviance and defect in Black family life; Meera and Lena engage in practices of unmapping. Lena Defines family through the social bonds of precarious documentation while Meera situates family in relation to a fixed place and makes meaning of home through the spatial formation. Uncovering how spaces produce undocuBlack subjects reveals the global impacts of colonization and recovers dreams of safety,

access, and opportunity for life dreams by families, caretakers, parents and the women themselves. Influenced by their own desires and investments, these stories provide a means of establishing a new narrative of affirmation and presence.

Chapter 2: Interiority and the Grammars of Autonomy and Belonging

"When you gone to get married? You need to have some babies. It'll settle you.'
'I don't want to make somebody else. I want to make myself."
— Toni Morrison, *Sula*

Making the Self

Black women's interiority is inherently a site of political struggle because in their inner spaces subjective realities, dreams, and visions of futurity are made real. Interiority presents a conceptual problem and challenge to the logics of rationality and ablemindedness that have historically framed Black women as racially inferior, mentally disabled, and in need of corporal containment. Interiority is a frame to understand Black women's desires, thoughts, needs, and dreams. It provides space for the real possibilities for Black women to have freedom and autonomy in their own bodies to make themselves. How Black women have imagined themselves into new ways of being and the political stakes of doing so are articulated through their search for autonomy and belonging. Black women adopt, adapt and transform, "dominant ideologies of womanhood in order for identity of 'woman' better reflect the realities of their lives."[76] In this chapter home, the state, and education are sites of control and marking undocuBlack women as deviant, however storytelling is a mode of accessing Black women's interiority, knowledge, and imagination undermines these domains of control. Black women's existence necessitates a negotiation of stability and safety under gendered anti-Black violence because sexism, racism, and ableism work together to dehumanize them. Within this overwhelming context of violence and control this chapter will explore interiority is a generative space where Black women practice refusal, assert autonomy, and seek belonging.

[76]Mattie Richardson, "No More Secrets, No More Lies", 67.

The types of racialized gendered violence that becomes permissible in each site (state, home, school) on a microlevel against Black women pushes them into and toward places of precarity and debility. In the absence of factors pulling them towards life, Black women's social and interior lives are constituted under the perpetual threat of premature death and conditions of violence in their homes, in public, and in schools. While Black women are not solely defined by the threat of premature death, in fact I argue that possibilities of life ground them, the push-pull of this duality is an important context. This push is a gradual form of slow violence, a type of violence as described by abolitionist sociologist Eileen Vanessa Thompson as experienced, "not in spectacular forms, but rather dispersed through time and space."[77] Patriarchal and masculinist understanding of violence renders it only legible as large, visible, and concrete in its material consequences. However slow violence is incremental and often invisible, spreading not in a single instance of explosive energy, but rather distributed over a temporal context, essentially a slow wearing down.[78] Expectations for performance of Black womanhood in domestic spaces like homes and with family units that deny the individual autonomy and interiority of individuals captures the longitudinality of slow violence.

Black women's epistemologies are generative, complex, and political because they are rooted in embodied ways of knowing and being. Through this chapter I am centrally concerned with an exploration of, "how Black women live in, through, and outside of the markers of Black female identity that have come to define them publicly".[79] As discussed in Chapter 1 a universal

[77] In Thompson's guest lecture titled "Policing Blackness in Europe" in my graduate course Blackness and Indigeneity in Europe she engaged Rob Nixon's work on slow violence to describe the racist, sexist, and anti-Muslim policing in France. Thompson described policing as a social practice that moves beyond the institution through the slow dispersion of psychological violence overtime.
[78] Jasbir Puar, Right to Maim, xiv.
[79]Terrion Williamson, *Scandalize My Name,* 15.

and singular Black subject does not exist[80] and the pursuit of one is antithetical to the project of Black diaspora and culture. No claims about a universal understanding of interiority and bodyminds are presented in this chapter. However, utilizing storytelling as a methodological and theoretical praxis, undocuBlack women are centered both in matrix of domination[81] or racism, sexism, and ableism that they are constantly subjected to. In *Scandalize My Name: Black Feminist Practice and the Making of Black Social Life,* Terrion Williamson beautifully articulates why centering Black women and their inner lives is not just the right thing to do but the only thing that one must do in order to truly understand Black *living*.

> I want to think about what those folks think about themselves because, in doing so, I am able to consider Black social life from the vantage point at which it is lived, rather than at which it is merely viewed or policed or looked in on occasionally. This is meant not to deny the force of the world order on Black sociality but to take the view that the way that Black people go about making themselves, both because of and regardless of the conditions of their making, their *own* world order, is as appropriate and necessary a starting place as any other.[82]

UndocuBlack women's self-making is both an appropriate and necessary starting place for this chapter. These women are articulating their own world order in ways that subvert, undo, and refuse the racialized and gendered expectations of who they are and who they must become. Their narratives of challenging norms, rejected expectations, opting into roles for their own self benefit illustrate their desires to not make others, but to make themselves.

Interiority

Black women's intimate inner worlds are fashioned by their own self-making, their desires, thoughts, needs, dreams that exist outside of the reach of racist, sexist, heteronormative, patriarchal models of subjecthood. Interiority then comprises an epistemology of Black women's

[80] Stuart Hall, *Cultural Identity and Diaspora,* 225.
[81] Patricia Hill Collins, *The Politics of Black Feminist Thought*, 18,
[82] Terrion Williamson, *Scandalize My Name,* 15.

own making. Interiority has been explored by many Black Studies and Women's Studies scholars. Elizabeth Alexander described "the Black interior" as a "metaphysical space beyond the Black public everyday toward power and wild imagination… Tapping into this Black imaginary helps us envision what we were not meant to envision: complex Black selves, real and enactable Black power, rampant and unfetishized Black beauty."[83] Interiority serves as a sacred dream space where one can practice processes of searching and becoming. As an "unfettered dream space" the Black interior works as a container and provides, "a way of imagining the racial self unfettered, radicalized but not eliminated."[84] Interiority here is not apolitical or completely removed from the public social self but rather Black women's inner lives are the impetus for other ways of being in the world.

In *The Sovereignty of Quiet*, Kevin Quashie, describes awareness of self as occurring in the interior and in one's own imagination, and that interiority as a self-measure, "is an articulation of what it is to be sovereign."[85] To be sovereign is to self-determine and self-define, namely challenging how external definitions of Black womanhood overdetermined by stereotypes and pathology.[86] Quashie's framing of interiority through the conceptual category and metaphorical tool of quiet brings to bear a call to unmoor Blackness from resistance suggesting that the totality of Blackness is not solely as existing in resistance to oppression. Quiet is neither silence nor an absence of sound, but rather a generative place of possibility. It is the locus in which Blackness resides. For Quashie, the interior is the place of motivation of human action and the source of the capaciousness of our inner lives.[87] Tina Campt in *Listening to*

[83] Elizabeth Alexander, *The Black Interior*, x.
[84] Alexander, 5.
[85] Kevin Quashie, *The Sovereignty of Quiet*, 45.
[86] Patricia Hill Collins, "Learning From the Outsider Within," 516.
[87] Quashie, 8.

Images analyzes various passport, prison, and government photos of Black people to elucidate how archival interrogation of visual archives can produce a way of listening to images differently. Upon listening to the images in the archive Campt writes about, "the quotidian reclamations of interiority, dignity, and refusal marshaled by black subjects in their persistent striving for futurity".[88] Interiority then is not easily captured or articulated through colonial frames and lenses meant to render them as particular types of subjects.

Reading with Alexander, Campt and Quashie, I argue that undocuBlack women's interiority is wild. It embraces the possibility of the unexpected, and it is at times unknowable. Their inner lives are, "expansive, voluptuous, creative; impulsive and dangerous, [interiority] is not subject to one's control but instead has to be taken on its own terms."[89] Building upon the undocuBlack women's alternate world and homemaking in Chapter 1, this chapter offers insights into inner worlds and negotiations of autonomy as their possibilities for living are not articulated through Western Enlightenment paradigms of knowledge. Rather, these women practice a refusal to enclose their lives within structures of violence. To honor those political stakes, this chapter rejects empirical and positivist notions of what we can know and understand about Black women's inner lives and instead, offers firsthand narratives of the radical possibilities for Black intimate life. Those possibilities are not solely housed in interiority as a metaphysical space of the mind but are intimately and deeply felt, experienced, and made real through the body.

The Bodymind

The bodymind as explored by Sami Schalk in *Bodyminds Reimagined:(Dis)ability, Race, and Gender in Black Women's Speculative Fiction* discusses the bodymind as a conceptualization

[88] Tina Campt, *Listening to Images*, 11.
[89] Kevin Quashie, *The Sovereignty of Quiet*, 21.

of the connectedness or, "enmeshment of the mind and body" ideologically distinct from Western conceptualizations and splits between thinking and feeling. Schalk contends that the bodymind as a mode of analysis has great utility for understanding the effects of cumulative racism on people of color. Schalk writes, "The ways experiences and histories of oppression impact us mentally, physically, and even on a cellular level, the term *bodymind* can help highlight the relationship of nonphysical experiences of oppression—psychic stress—and overall well-being".[90] Pleasure and meaningful enjoyment are not solely a result of a Black subject's use of their body in a subversive or resistance practice but also the thought, feelings, and joy from the reclamation of self. The connectedness of the bodymind makes it impossible then to separate the pleasure of resistance as solely being a benefit and experience of the mind or the body but is really operating for both simultaneously. Given these contexts bodymind then, serves a theoretical function centering the connectedness of our existence through thinking and feeling.

Audre Lorde's work gives insight into Black women, rationality, ableism, racism, and interiority. Though her work does not explicitly engage disability or the bodymind as an analytical tool, her collection of essays in *Sister Outsider* theorizes interiority and its possibility for interventions into understandings of autonomy and self making . She specifically calls on embodiment and the bodymind as a source of strength and resistance challenging the narrow production of culture as defined by heteronormative, white supremacist, patriarchal society. Lorde writes, "The white fathers told us: I think therefore I am. The Black mother within each of us – the poet – whispers in our dreams: I feel therefore I can be free."[91] Here, Lorde centers interiority, rejecting the body/mind split of enlightenment era rationale and dominant culture,

[90] Sami Schalk, *Bodyminds Reimagined*, 6.
[91] Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 38.

insisting that all of us have within us the capacity for liberation and we must listen to the quiet whispers of our foremothers to *feel* it. Lorde also discusses interiority as the *places of possibility* within us that we have not utilized to its fullest potential because of the unknowability of it.[92] She argues that we are lacking a vocabulary to articulate interiority and our feelings and that is central to the work to be taken up. Our interiority is our power and, according to Lorde, we have hidden that power, our poetry, but that power surfaces in our dreams, "and it is in our dreams that point the way to freedom."[93] Here, in this sense Lorde gestures towards literal dreams but metaphorical ones as well. The dreams and futurity we are able to create in the interior.

Using bodyminds and interiority as frames for understanding the inner lives of undocuBlack women, this chapter will elucidate how these women are recognized within Black womanhood. Their gendered roles as "good girls" and "good daughters" are sites of control that seek to constrain gendered behavior within and outside the domestic sphere. Leaving the home, the public and state provide additional controls and rigid structures for appropriate performance of gender and sexuality to be recognized as valuable subjects worthy of citizenship and protections. And lastly, education as a site controlled and often governed by the state provides the final site of corporal and mental containment of undocuBlack subjects.

Being a "Good Daughter" for Your Family

Homemaking as Gendered

Growing up close in age to her brother, Cari mentioned the gendered expectations and rules that were applied differently amongst the siblings. She described particular gendered statements that would annoy her: "'Little girls are supposed to be seen not heard,' and I'm like

[92] Lorde, 36.
[93] Lorde, 39.

what? So, my brother could be loud because he's a boy but I can't use my voice because I'm a girl?" Her brother was allowed more freedom and liberty to go out while she was denied that option. In our interview I asked Cari to talk about some of those gendered expectations for instance, where those messages originated, and who placed those types of pressures on her. She identified the gendered roles as coming both from her immediate family but more broadly from her Afro-Caribbean and Indo-Caribbean culture. While her initial feelings about a lack of fairness between her brother and herself existed in childhood she credits a course on the Sociology of Gender in college as giving her a feminist and gendered framework to understand her life experiences.

"In Fort Lauderdale, mostly everyone is Caribbean," Cari began, "and I think I would experience more of the girl thing. I don't know. Like, 'You shouldn't do that, you're a girl.' You wouldn't even think about it as something is wrong with that, but now after taking that class, I'm like why shouldn't I do that if I'm a girl? I can do that. So that was powerful for me. Don't just go along with whatever people say. If they're saying you can't do something because you have a certain label on you and that really doesn't make any sense, you should question it and challenge them and educate them in that way."

I asked her to clarify who 'they' was, wondering where her source of gendered expectations was held. "So, the idea about you not being able to do things because you're a girl, where was that messaging coming from?"

She knowingly replied, "Honestly, from my family. It was just little things like that I would notice and be like wow, I didn't even notice that. But after listening to what was said and certain things, I think even in culture in general. 'I don't want my girl doing this. Girls shouldn't

do this because boys are supposed to be doing ...' Even that, I'm just so annoyed by those statements."

Like Cari, Meera also talked about gendered expectations not only surrounding herself but also the difference with those expectations for their differently gendered sibling. The expectations of conformity to a particular display of girlhood and Black womanhood not only impacted behavior but also appearance more specifically, hair. Over the course of our interviews Meera discussed her feelings around her undocuBlack identity. Her own self-conceptualization, namely her Black and undocumented identities, are intimately tied to who she is. She discussed the intersectional experiences of her race (Black/Indigenous), migrant status, and nationality and noted that her experiences in classes in college exposed her to feminism and thinking more about her gendered identity. Because her experiences growing up had been so largely shaped by her race and undocustatus gender was not as salient for her. Hair was one aspect of self-presentation however, that was deeply gendered for Meera. She described her primary school experiences in white education institutions as creating the need for her to straighten her hair to be "prim and proper". She recalls how her brother didn't have those same pressures to straighten or manage his hair. By college graduation however, when her mom asked her about straightening her hair, she had developed a different relationship with her hair, a symbol of her heritage and culture.

Lena's choice to not straighten her hair illustrates the control she exercised over her own bodymind. Rather than acquiescing to her mother's wishes for her to present herself publicly with hair understood as controlled and proper, so she could be understood and controlled and proper; Lena fulfilled her inner desires. In navigating girlhood and eventually womanhood these undocuBlack women clearly relied on their inner thoughts, desires and dreams to motivate their own self-expression and self-making in spite of pressures from those closest to them. They are

navigating familial norms and pressure trying to find a place within Black womanhood that was authentic and representative of the selves they wanted to be. Cari's rejection of gendered norms applied differentially to siblings and Lena's refusal to straighten her hair for graduation a rite of passage for students pursuing higher education and a very public display of achievement are indicative of their practicing of a micropolitics. Despite the gendered structures of control and interpersonal policing of gender present in their lives, interiority and autonomy over their own bodymind allows them to come to an understanding of identity not solely shaped by external factors. They are ultimately shaping themselves.

UndocuBlack women practiced refusal, claiming agency in ways that may not be recognized by racist, sexist, heteronormative, and patriarchal models of resistance. The practice of refusal has been theorized as, "an extension of the range of creative responses Black communities have marshaled in the face of racialized dispossession… in response to sustained everyday encounters."[94] The Combahee River Collective wrote about sexual and gender-based oppression and the daily interpersonal surveillance and control of their enactment of Black womanhood.

> Black feminists and many more Black women who do not define themselves as feminists have all experienced sexual oppression as a constant factor in our day-to-day existence. As children we realized that we were different from boys and that we were treated differently. For example, we were told in the same breath to be quiet both for the sake of being "ladylike" and to make us less objectionable in the eyes of white people.[95]

Expectations for roles at home are not enacted solely for the maintenance of a racialized and gendered home life but had larger implications outside the domestic sphere under the "watchful eyes of white people." What the Combahee River Collective makes clear are the motivations of

[94] Tina Campt, *Listening to Images*, 10.
[95] Combahee River Collective Statement

the parents and families of Cari, Lena and Meera. Being a good girl and a good daughter not only meant compliance to the racialized and gendered expectations of home, but those rigid expectations were intended to protect them from a harsher and more violent world outside the home.

However, arguably the placement of rigid racialized gender roles worked to actually bring the state into the home. The racialized and gendered regimes of carceral states and of state violence extend beyond prisons and migrate to domestic spheres where in kitchens, homes and other domestic spaces become prisons as well.[96] This phenomenon of punishment and policing is historical as the, "criminal legal system crafted, reinforced, and required Black female deviance as part of the broader constitution of Jim Crow modernity premised upon the devaluation and dehumanization of Black life broadly."[97] To undo the obscuring of undocuBlack women's practices of refusal and self-making requires an analysis of the places that policing and punishment happen. As described by Cari, Lena, and Meera policing and punishment happened at home in an effort to control and mediate their public performance of gender.

Control as Protection

Lena has a strong activist and organizer identity which was clear throughout the interviews. Organizing around undocumented student issues, changing regulations with DACA, and lobbying for protections from deportation were mentioned as focuses of her work. Being an activist however has presented challenges, some of which came from her own family. Lena's mom discouraged her political organizing and involvement for fear of her visibility marking and making her more susceptible to state violence, but also because of gendered expectations of what

[96] Sarah Haley, *No Mercy Here*,
[97] Haley, 3.

daughters “ought to be doing.” She shared particular language around niceness and being pleasant that were framed as ideal for Black undocumented women to protect them from hypervisibility and potential state violence.

Lena described a conversation with her mother: “Even in terms of activism or you want to go do rallies or protests, it’s not registering in her head, especially for Black families. They just want you to put it on the low down, they don't want you to expose yourself. Whereas she's always just trying, always says, ‘Play nice, just go to school, keep your head down.’ But I've kind of gravitated more towards activism, just putting my face out there. So, it's really hard for her to understand that concept of why I have to be the first one to be out there.” For Lena, “keeping your head down” speaks to the literal space of the bodymind illustrating the metaphysical space of interiority. Being “out there” means having a visibility in the public, outside of the control and protection of home life and marking oneself as undocumented. This refusal to comply with her mother’s wishes was not simply an act of defiance of family rules or youthful rebellion, but rather a more intentional practice of micropolitics rejecting gendered norms and using her bodymind for her own desires in spite of the risk of violence. Risks that are very real particularly, as Lena’s mother warns because of the threat of existing as a Black subject in public places.

Black subjects in the U.S. are always already situated outside of belonging to the nation-state, regardless of documentation status or citizenship.[98] The abject racial violence of slavery in the U.S. produced the racial schema of Black and white through a system of racial terror. It also produced the nation-state and citizenship as a mode of producing political subjects. The concept of the citizen as a protected subject of the nation-state was produced through anti-Black racism

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precluding Black folks from rights under the state. Black folks have only formally been recognized as citizens with voting rights in the U.S. for the last 150 years.[99] Citizenship as a marker of inclusion and exclusion to the nation state is controlled by the state but is also highly monitored by citizens who police belonging. Citizens are encouraged and rewarded for taking up the task of surveilling a suspicious, deviant and "out of place" other. Part of the process of citizenship as a system of reification is reliant on identification of foreignness and stranger not as unknown but intimately known, understood and recognized as not belonging.[100] In *Strange Encounters*, Sara Ahmed offers an alternate framework for understanding the phenomenon of the stranger not as an unknown figure but rather a body that is recognized as a stranger, as a migrant. Someone who is read as not at home in the space and place they occupy. Ahmed writes, "the politics of mobility, of who gets to move with ease across the lines that divide spaces, can be re-described as the politics of who gets to be at home, who gets to inhabit spaces, as spaces that are inhabitable for some people and not others, insofar as they extend the surfaces of some bodies and not others."[101] This ocular reading of people is often based on the false assumption that we "know" what Black racialized subjects look like and that we could "recognize" an American. People marked as disruptive are assumed to be visible and legible in a way that relies on the visual recognition of the stranger. The recognition and legibility of a person as strange and not at home, allows a citizen to use their rights and access to state structures of violence (i.e. the police and the judicial system) for removal. The carceral system that hyper-surveils, detains, and

[99] The 14th Amendment, ratified in 1868 granted full U.S. citizenship to African-Americans. Two years later in 1870, the 15th Amendment, extended the right to vote to Black men. The 19th Amendment, guaranteeing a women's right to vote did not get ratified until 1920. Voter suppression and disenfranchisement in the U.S.
[100] Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*, 162.
[101] Ahmed, 162.

destroys undocuBlack subjects, is made more powerful and far reaching through this mechanism of policing.

Citizens policing deviant, wayward, or immigrant bodies are part of acts of elimination done in service of allegedly protecting the nation-state from threats. Living in public spaces for particular bodies, those read as Black or migrant makes them more susceptible to state violence as they are perceived to embody those threats,

> Those who live their lives in public – sleeping, eating, arguing, loving, drinking, playing, etc. – are the most vulnerable to public order arrests, which effectively imprison them for living, as so much of their lives are lived in public. Therefore, by caging the houseless, landless, and underemployed by living in public, public order charges regulate, limit, and ultimately deny their 'right to be'.[102]

Public policy regulating movement, immigration laws, racially restrictive residency codes like redlining, the illegality of interracial marriages work in tandem to build structures of racial erasure, namely erases those who are racialized as deviant from public view.[103] Citizens who are protected by the state engage in policing those who are perceived not to belong and dare to be in public which increases their susceptibility to state violence. The mothers of these undocuBlack women intimately know the violence of the state and therefore practice gendered and racialized control of their daughters as a form of familial protection. What these narratives illuminate are the ways these mothers are particularly protective of their undocumented daughters because of all the ways that laws and public policies have led to state violence against Black people.

Intimate Partner Violence

Precarity of living and possibilities for life created the conditions where mothers of some of the undocuBlack women in this project decided to migrate to the U.S. The impetus for migration

[102] Kelly Lytle Hernandez, *City of Inmates*, 30.
[103] Lytle Hernandez, 19.

were both in search of safety and security, away from economic and interpersonal violence in the home as mothers became heads of households. We know that Black women of all class, education, age, and employment levels experience intimate partner violence including abuse, stalking, harassment, and sexual violence.[104] We also know that Black women in particular are neither believed nor protected against the types of violence in the legal system in the U.S.[105] Moya Bailey's work around racism, ableism, sexism, and patriarchy is relevant here. Bailey with Trudy the creator, curator, writer and social critic for Gradient Lair, a womanist blog on Black women and art, media, social media, socio-politics and culture, "had significant roles in the creation and proliferation of the term misogynoir. Misogynoir describes the anti-Black racist misogyny that Black women experience."[106] Like intersectionality—a conceptual framework and term to describe the particularities of Black women's experiences in the world that other grammars and language failed to capture—misogynoir frames an oppressive matrix felt only by Black women. Misogynoir explains that "what happens to Black women in public space isn't about them being any woman of color. It is particular and has to do with the ways that anti-Blackness and misogyny combine to malign Black women in our world."[107] Misogynoir helps to clarify the particular mistreatment and secondary violence Black women experience from the state after reporting, seeking resources, or otherwise being a survivor of domestic violence.

Part of that secondary violence is the state's inability to recognize violence and to read Black subjects as capable of experiencing violence. Violence is only legible to the state if it is marked on the body, and because the state operates under a body-mind split the bodymind is not

[104] Carolyn West, "Black women and intimate partner violence", 1487.
[105] West, 1491.
[106] Moya Bailey and Trudy, "On Misogynoir: Citation, Erasure, and Plagiarism", 762.
[107] Bailey and Trudy, 763.

acknowledged. Essentially, violence is only recognized in certain registers that are settler colonial and patriarchal. Additionally, the burden of proof of violence is gendered by the state. So, gender based violence is not a category under which migrant women can receive protection.

Cari's family immigrated to the U.S. when she was six after her mother left her father, who was abusive. Her early childhood immigration to the U.S. left her feeling like part of who she is was missing. Cari began, "First, my mom, she came up here because she was in abusive relationship with my dad, so she came up here and my grandparents was taking care of me. Six months after, she sent for me and my brother to come up. It was like we came on a travel document, but we overstayed our time because she didn't want to go back to that. She felt like America had more opportunity and it'll be a better place to raise me and my brother."

After a brief pause she continued, "After my mom left Trinidad, we was kind of with my dad, but I feel like he had some type of mental illness or something, something was really wrong with him. He would always be in jail and he would always be on alcohol. He would come and go as a father, but he was never in our lives. So, our grandparents took care of us in those six months period."

Cari's mother relied on help from her family to take care of her children while she found stability for them. Stability in this case went beyond leaving the violence of domestic abuse but also leaving her country of origin. Escaping domestic violence meant opting into additional precarity around safety and belonging as an undocuBlack woman. As a Black single-mother of two small children, Cari's mother migrated to the U.S. and would need to make herself legible to the state as a productive, economically valuable, and compliant subject in order to gain citizenship.

Being a "Proper Citizen" for the State

The U.S.–as settler colonial and capitalist regime–produces Black women and regulates Black womanhood as tied to productivity.[108] Thus, the commodified and productive value of Black women is rooted in their performance of gendered and racialized labor. Modernity—capitalism and social reproduction—are direct results of the gestational reproduction of Black women. Hortense Spillers writes, unprotected flesh—female flesh ungendered—offers a praxis and a theory, a text for living and for dying, and a method for reading both through their diverse mediations."[109] Using a historical and discursive analysis Spillers ungenders Blackness interrogating how Black women's bodies are positioned as objects of sensuality not agents with sexuality, and how captive bodies are reduced to flesh—things, lacking a subjecthood renders otherness, and Black bodies become flesh.[110] The reduction of Black bodies to enslaved flesh is accomplished through overwhelming violence as the primary narrative of division is the "ripped-apartness" flesh endures.[111] For Spillers, this reduction precludes Black women from gendering as they operate socially and culturally solely as objects of flesh, existing outside of the bounded construction of gender.

The category of human and our construction of a gendered human are built in relation to and a positioning away from the ungendered Black female. Dispossession and the overwhelming violence of corporeal captivity undoes gender for Black women. By their very existence Black women are socially, politically and historically fabricated as deviant. Given this hierarchy of

[108]Carolyn West, "Mammy, Jezebel, Sapphire and Their Homegirls"
[109] Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," 68.
[110] Ibid, 67.
[111] Ibid, 67.

racial gendering central to the political, social and economic infrastructure in the U.S., undocuBlack women are situated outside of the norm of gender.

> The limits of human legibility for Black female subjects, who could be both literally and figuratively captured because they were perceived to so profoundly deviate from the norms of white femininity. In the white imaginary 'Black woman' was an oxymoronic formulation because the modifier 'Black' rejected everything associated with the universal 'woman'.[112]

Black subjects lack a claim to citizenship or social recognition, categorically a non-subject. The development of gender and gender ideology is a discursive and historical process wherein language, representation, and symbolic meaning constitute and shape the collective U.S. imaginary. Thus, part of the negotiation for undocuBlack women in claims for citizenship includes moves to be made legible before the state. They must first be legible as humans, for the state to grant them subjecthood and subsequently recognize their performance of womanhood. Making decisions around pursuit of citizenship include decision made in the context and structures of sex and sexuality and minimizing perceptions of deviance.

Marriage for Documentation

Negotiating citizenship and being legible before the state as valuable and ideal political subjects means performing Black womanhood in a particular way. Cari mentioned her desire to have a child one day and being invested in marriage or but not having a strong a desire to be married before having a child. Her mother was not receptive to that idea and was very strict about the gendered expectations for her to have a husband before having a child. She shared that many Caribbean people she knows use marriage as a viable pathway to citizenship, but it is not necessarily a fail-safe method to ensure safety in the U.S.

[112] Sarah Haley, *No Mercy Here*, 21.

Cari shared, “My mom said if I don't get married, she's going to kill me. And she's like, "Yeah, you have to get married before you have a child." I'm like, "Okay, Mom." But definitely I do want to get married. I do want that commitment.”

I nod in acknowledgement and the familiarity of what my own Black mother has indicated as her wishes and desires for my life.

She continued, “Particularly why I need to get married honestly, because I need to get a green card to stay. But honestly, I do want to marry for love first of all. I would never want to get ... I know people do. I don't want to get married for the paper, but I need to marry for love. Love is first. No arranged marriage. None of that. But definitely I think that I have...” she trailed off. A moment of pause and reflection passes before she speaks again.

“Yeah. I feel like it's not, in the Black community, well specifically the Caribbean Black community, when it comes to immigration and status, I feel like it's not talked about a lot because they feel like they're targeted, and they're going to be deported. So, they just rather hush about it. Like they keep it on the hush. Most Caribbean people I know, the main way that they get their citizenship is through marriage. I feel like they're probably hush like, ‘Oh no, let's not talk about this. I don't want...’ You know, that kind of like ... I feel like that's why it's more of a hush.”

She again pauses pensively, briefly retreating to her inner self before she begins to speak again. “We don't want to get deported. I know a lot of people growing up, they was never proud about it. They were just like, ‘Yeah, I'm trying to get my papers. I'm trying to get citizenship some type a way.’”

I respond to her, “Yeah, so it's interesting to think about the different pathways to citizenship, or to status. Some people do that through an education route. Some people do it through marriage. Some people do it through military service.”

I am surprised that I mention military service but realize that the example quickly comes to my mind as my ex-partner received their citizenship through serving in the U.S. Army. I had not made that personal connection prior to this conversation. Before I can continue my train of thought Cari responds, “I feel like the fastest way honestly, if you're married, that is the fastest process. And then if you have a family member and they file for you.”

Cari’s conversation with me about marriage as a pathway to documentation reveals what being a proper citizen consists of for undocuBlack women, namely the way that the state recognizes, and rewards gendered participation in society. Marriage is a clear and deliberate engagement in heteronormative and patriarchal gendered performance. Becoming a wife and then mother, as required by Cari’s mother signals a performance of Black womanhood that is not deviant. However, though Cari recognizes marriage as a viable pathway to citizenship she emphasizes that her participation in a union would be for love only, not to achieve status. Cari’s refusal to marry for citizenship is a practice of self-fashioning complex articulations of self. The process of self-making, or what Tina Campt describes as self-fashioning, occurs under sustained conditions of constraint and,

> It is a mode of engagement that creates the possibility for… everyday micro-shifts in the social order of racialization that temporarily reconfigure the status of the dispossessed. Reassemblage in dispossession emphasizes the practices through which racialized subjects redeploy relations of power in unintended ways, with unexpected consequences… a quotidian practice through which the dispossessed reconfigure their status as subjects within a field of limited and often compromised resources.[113]

[113] Tina Campt, *Listening to Images*, 59

UndocuBlack women like Cari are not entirely defined by a marginalized status and do not seek to divorce themselves completely from the conditions that produce their subjectivity. Lena made a similar statement regarding her negotiation of citizenship saying, “I don't really care about being a citizen, but I need to in order to do my career goals.” Rather than engaging in disavowal they are practicing disagreement, a subtle but important distinction for the savvy and sophisticated negotiations they participate in. Marriage as a requirement of family to be a good daughter and a requirement of the state to be a proper citizen is only accepted under conditions of love. This refusal is a clear practice of fulfilling inner dreams and desires to self-make.

The Politics of Silence

Chichima discussed how she self-fashions and orients herself to the world particularly around sex and sexuality. She was aware of how others would perceive her identity as a lesbian or queer person and negotiated disclosures or coming out both as queer and undocumented. This negotiation was intimately tied to her understanding of self and a gendered and racialized subject. At the conclusion of our second interview I asked an open-ended questions meant to offer space for overall feelings and understandings of participants own lived experience.

I began, “So first I wanted to open it up for you and just sort of given what you've said about your identity as Black person as being an immigrant and your student experience generally, what does it mean to be an undocumented Black student for you?”

Chichima replied, “Overall it's something different. Something that is not common. Something I'm not used to, because you mostly hear about Latino's in the media. But so basically passing under the radar at the same time, but also having the identity and relating to things that are going on in the Black community, Black student community at my college. Because however they are treated by their teachers, is how I'm also treated, because their teachers don't know how

to differentiate, so they just see a color and that's it. Which is good because they will never think that, oh that I'm undocumented. But also, if I do tell them, they don't know what to say and they don't know how that's possible because I don't look like I'm undocumented. So, it's very silent, if that makes sense. It's a bit like, oh, and then they just look so confused. But yeah, that's what I will say.

Chichima's response gives insight to her contemplation of the precariousness of visibility versus invisibility in her identities. While she acknowledges that she is visibly read as Black and indistinguishable from her documented peers by teachers making her status as undocumented invisible, she also nuances her sexuality and how she isn't visible as gay, lesbian or queer.

"My experience is also how I'm being seen as documented Black is like. I don't look gay. People who are just… they think I'm doing it for attention, which I don't really care what people think, whatever. I don't tell people I'm gay because I don't identify as gay, just identify as human being. I don't label myself, but just to make it clear to people what my sexuality is, I like women. But what if people that quote, "look" like the stereotypical or "look" like they're gay, experiences different from mine because I pass as straight. If I'm just walking down the street, nobody is going to be like, oh shoot, she's gay, we're going to kill her or something. But other people have that fear and stigma and I can walk around more freely and that sucks for that people, but it's nothing I can do."

After a short reflective pause Chichima continued, "But who am I to say I'm gay, it's like, oh, this bi or straight girl is seeking attention. So, I don't really identify as gay and not identifying as gay and just saying I'm human is like, 'oh, she's just seeking for attention'. 'She is only labeling herself'. So, either way there's no, win-win. So yeah, at the end of the day I just prefer to say my partner is my partner, and usually that doesn't bring any questions. People

would think what they want. And it's the same as I feel as being undocuBlack because I don't have that quote unquote "look" of being that type that I am invisible in a way."

In our third and final interview, I asked Chichima what freedom would look like for her and she replied, "Being able to hold hands with my partner and not be like, oh people are going to shoot me because I'm Black, gay, and undocumented. Even if I'm still undocumented and my status is known, people won't care. Freedom to just be whatever, do whatever, there's no limitations with what I can do. The world is mine basically to venture on about. Yeah. Now I'm like being serious."

What Chichima describes is a practice of the "politics of silence" wherein Black women shield their inner lives through hiding, masking and concealing their interiority as a political strategy to abstain from speaking about their sexuality.[114] Though her vulnerable and marginalized identities are shielded by her passing as documented and heterosexual she still engages in presenting a particular persona to the outside world. This intentional dissimulation or allowing the assumptions around her documentation and sexuality are done to minimize the opportunity for the outside world to inflict harm, implement strategies of domination, or simply know and understand what's happening with Black women's inner lives. Secrecy and withholding of true self is a response to knowing the violence that racism, ableism, sexism, and homophobia illicit particularly in the public. She explicitly notes being attacked, shot, or killed as potential responses to her true self. Not only does her racialized and gendered experience of sexuality undermine the liberal discourse around making sexuality visible or coming out as inherently liberating, but it also illustrates how Black women are visible but not *seen*.

[114] Evelynn Hammonds, "Toward a Genealogy of Black Female Sexuality," 97.

Controlling images and representation of Black women and Black womanhood are abundant,[115] however, hyper-visibility does not equate to access, power, or resources. External contexts of control, domination, and violence create conditions wherein Black women struggle and refuse to [116]share their inner lives. Furthermore, "the limits of human legibility" [117] for Black women begs the question, "Could we be seen, even if we wanted to be?" A "full view" of undocuBlack women that includes Black queer women allows, "a different kind of Black women's history [to] come into focus" creating a more complete and capacious lens for "Black migration, community-building, and formations of family."[118] Given the social, cultural, and historical understanding of the social categories of race, gender, sex, dis/ability and the overreliance on surveillance creating understandings of who people are based on how they *appear* to be, being *seen* as an undocuBlack woman is elusive. Instead, Black women are pathologized as excessive, deviant, dangerous, and in need of control. This control is enacted and mandated by family at home, by the state in public, and by educators and administrators in school.

Being a "Good Girl" for School

Further complicating the experiences of undocuBlack women is the gendered role that discipline plays in their education experiences as children. The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights (2012) reports that while Black boys are over three times more likely to receive an out-of-school suspension than their white counterparts, Black girls double that statistic and are six times more likely to receive an out-of-school suspension than their white counterparts.[119] In addition to higher suspension rates, national data gathered by The Sentencing

[115] Hammonds, 100.
[116] Ibid, 94.
[117] Haley, 21.
[118] Mattie Richardson, "No More Secrets, No More Lies", 73.
[119] U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights Data Collection. "Out-of-School Suspensions by Race and Gender, 2011-2012 School Year."

Project (2015), an organization that works for a fair and effective U.S. justice system and advocates for alternatives to incarceration, revealed, "Girls represent a high proportion of those who are confined for low-level crimes such as status offenses and technical violations such as skipping school or running away."[120]

Yarah shared an experience from high school where conflict from her adoptive parents (her older sister and brother-in-law) led to an explosive interaction and friction in the household. These types of fights and the punishments of Black girls are often the reasons they run away from home. Initial tension built from the gendered expectations from her sister and brother-in-law around labor in the household and what Yarah perceived as unrealistic expectations led to a breaking point in their expectations being incongruent with her own priorities around self-making. Her talking back to her elders was seen as a sign of disrespect and unacceptable behavior. The response to Yarah's "disrespect" caused a fissure in her relationship that has yet to be repaired.

Yarah began, "The whole culture thing, they want me to come home and still cook, and still clean and still wash dishes and it's just so annoying because I had homework to do. Homework that would normally keep me up at like 2:00 AM or like 12:00 AM and then she would like be inconsiderate and still like want me to like wash the dishes. Which is like a lot of dishes, because in our home we don't like to use the dishwasher."

She continued, "Just wash everything by hand. Which is so annoying. Like errands too. It's just a lot. And she was working three jobs doing things so the stress from that. I think she would take it out on me a lot. So, it's like all of us are stressed and taking it out on each other."

[120] The Sentencing Project, "Incarcerated Women and Girls," 4.

After a moment she shared her feelings about her cultural expectations, “A lot of things about my culture I think I wanted to let go of it because some it was toxic. But then some actually made me into the person I am. Like respect of older people, people older than you, I think I still have that. And just the whole family bond, I still care about my family and stuff like that. So yeah.”

Her word choice of toxic immediately strikes me as specific and emotionally evocative, I ask for clarification, “Can you talk to me a little bit about the things you felt were toxic or that you wanted to let go of?”

“I think the part I hated more about my culture was not being able to stand up to my...,” she pauses, and I think she’s going to say her parents. She finishes her thought verbally, “People who are older than you. Because they’re… if you like talk back, or if you question something that you're not clear about, it's like a sign of disrespect and that kind of thing like that. Sometimes you want to like question why someone is that way and that was seen as a sign of disrespect.

“When I got into an argument with my brother-in-law, at a point he was talking down to me like saying, he was like, ‘You're so dumb.’ And stuff like this. And I was like, ‘I'm not dumb.’ I told him that and my sister heard me and that was the first time I spoke back to him. She was like, ‘What are you doing?’ She called everyone at home and I was like, I'm like uncontrollable. I'm untamable or something she's going to ship me back to Africa. And I was like, ‘What?’ I didn't even say anything bad, I was just like, ‘I'm not dumb.’ I just said that I didn't say anything bad about that. Till then I feel like our relationship has gone apart because I spoke back to him. Yeah, those are the things I want to get rid of of course.”

Yarah's adoptive parent perceived her as out of control and untamable, perpetuating the same controlling images of Black women and girls and in need of control because of their assumed essentially deviant nature. Black girls experience sanctions and marginalization when exhibiting characteristic indicators of self-efficacy, independence, and critical voice, traits typically encouraged and celebrated for students. The contradictory nature of the ways Black girls resist and refuse and mechanisms for surviving oppressive and controlling spaces like home and school can be better understood through their interiority. While they are externally perceived to be deviant, Black girls' intentionality and tactics for visibility are profound and varied:

> For Black girls, to be 'ghetto' represents a certain resilience to how poverty has shaped racial and gender oppression. To be 'loud' is a demand to be heard. To have an 'attitude' is to reject a doctrine of invisibility and mistreatment. To be flamboyant—or 'fabulous'—is to revise the idea that socioeconomic isolation is equated with not having access to materially desirable things.[121]

The presence of high-levels of self-esteem and creation of Black femininity that does not fall within the assumed deference or docility, gives Black girls a secure identity to create positive views of education, dedication to schoolwork and pride in their academic achievements.[122]

Chichima was a quiet and introverted kid. Despite her reserved nature, other schoolmates often picked her out to fight or have arguments with.

Chichima shared, "I was very quiet in both of my middle schools, and I don't know. I used to get a lot of racist comments. 'Go back to your country,' from all sides or 'You don't belong here.' And I was very... I guess the stereotypical Nigerian who's very good at math, science, et cetera. But when I went to high school, I got a lot more hate because most Slavics [she shared that the majority of her high school were whites] are racist to an extreme level, and

[121] Monique Morris, *Pushout*, 19.
[122] Morris, 499.

the first day was rough. "She's here, but I think that she doesn't even really do much." So they were like, "Oh, we can just ignore her and move on. Because in middle school, they were going to fight with me. If they were going to fight me, they were also going to beat up my little brother.

Chichima described being jumped and slapped in those schools and the perception of other students the she beleived she was superior to them.

She continued, “We had talent shows, if I was to show a talent, it was like, ‘Oh, you think you're better than us because you show a talent.’ I was like, ‘This is not even a talent. This is something I want to learn that I want to try and demonstrate... I haven't even learned it yet, so it isn't like I was showing it off.’ So, I guess I never really fit in anywhere at all, not in any of those spaces or situations

Black girls possess awareness in using their “loudness” as an act of resistance and their “attitudes” are merely an expression of self.[123] Rather than understanding loudness and voice as a form of deviance, they can be understood and resistance and contributing to positive self-image. “Black girls maintain their self-esteem and their classroom ‘voice’ into adolescence despite the fact that they may feel neglected in education.”[124]Although their “attitude” is used against them in marking them as not performing the archetype of “good girl behavior” or “good student” it gives the Black girls agency and a better academic and social sense of self. However, Chichima talked about not being loud, being an introvert, and keeping to herself. Thus, whether Black girls express themselves like Yarah did, or don’t share their interiority like Chichima they are ultimately still punished. Chichima’s description of never fitting in anywhere points to the overarching structure of violence of education for Black girls. Whether it is expressed in

[123] Joy Lei, “(Un) Necessary Toughness?”
[124] Morris, 497.

interpersonal violence from peers and teachers, through zero-tolerance policies, or systemic anti-Black racism, schools are not fundamentally designed to retain and care for Black girls.

Meera also shared experience of needing to present a particular way to avoid trouble at school and folks assuming she was a "stereotypical Black girl."

During part of our interview I asked, "So I also want to circle back a little bit. You talked about in grade school, wanting to distance yourself from Black Americans culturally, before you did this process of unlearning. What are those things that you think you identified as Black culture that you needed to stay away from, or distance yourself from, or navigate in a different type of way?"

Meera replied, "Pretty much anything negative, because I feel like my mom telling me that stuff, plus having my very first school here being a white school, it really made me... I always wanted to straighten my hair, I was like, I don't even want to get it braided, it just needs to be straight. I was like, I can't wear anything short, because that's what they wear, they wear short clothes. And I was like, have to be prim and proper, because that's the opposite."

Meera's description of a code of behaviors and gendered performance that would signal that she is a "different type" of Black girl is important to nuance the stereotypes of Black girlhood and subsequently Black womanhood. Her mother had internalized anti-Black racism against Black Americans which she worked to have Meera stand apart from. This avoidance of looking" trashy, slutty, ghetto, or hood" demonstrate the understandings held even by other women about the right and wrong ways to be a Black woman. Armed with this understanding Meera's mother again used control to require Meera to perform gender in a way that would distinguish her from undesirable traits and hopefully avoid school discipline.

However, because Black girls are often caught in a racialized and gendered paradox because their behaviors are often coded as masculine, thus wrong and subject to punitive measures or when they are perceived as feminine, it is likely not feminine enough when compared to their white counterparts, they cannot escape being marked as deviant. There is a paradox between the expected and rewarded behaviors and characteristics regarded as positively influencing student persistence and achievement and the racialized and gendered markers of "lady-like" behaviors expected for Black girls. These underlying raced and gendered behavioral expectations undergird "a lack of cultural synchrony between teachers and students and contribute to Black girls' risk for exclusionary discipline."[125] The perception of teachers that Black girls are not adhering to traditional standards of femininity are often the grounds and cause for disciplinary action.

Conclusion

This chapter makes clear the interconnectedness of racism, patriarchy, and ableism, gendered anti-Black violence and the effects of these structures of violence on the bodymind. Domestic spaces, the state, and education where undocuBlack women are self-making autonomy and identity are interrelated in their ability to exert control over Black girls and women. Interiority, or Black women's inner lives are sacred spaces for practice of refusal and liberation. Because Black Feminist epistemologies emphasize the connection between feeling and knowing to legitimate embodied knowledge production, undocuBlack women's autonomy facilitates experiences of pleasure as mechanisms of refusal to the overwhelming context of control in their lives. Quashie argues that resistance has been critiqued as a flawed category overly attributed to

[125] Jamilia Blake, Bettie Ray Butler, Chance W. Lewis, and Alicia Darensbourg. "Unmasking the Inequitable Discipline," 102.

Black folks' narratives and has been over-relied on as a modality for living,[126] claiming refusal is a more useful frame for how interiority and the bodymind offers possibilities for liberation. Refusal as an analytic is a generative frame when understood through the frame of the bodymind. The bodymind recontextualizes interiority as not solely a metaphysical space but also a literal space of the body enlarging our framing of the possibilities of refusal. As a counter-narrative. resistance in this case is not solely focused on a masculinist framing of violence such as resistance and rebellion on a plantation but also recognizes refusal in other domains. Autonomy over the bodymind means that there is liberation in joy and that joy can function as an act of refusal. In the following chapter, I will connect the themes of precarity, belonging, and autonomy to representation and the ability to be accurately represented in light of stereotypes of deviance.

[126] Kevin Quashie, *The Sovereignty of Quiet*, 3.

Chapter 3: Educational Enfranchisement and the Precariousness of Representation

To write about education is to write about the human condition. It means you're writing about people learning and growing, or running up against their limits, or being thwarted by forces and events beyond their control. The writing, then, is about possibility, challenge, disappointment, failure, meaning, identity.
– Mike Rose, Why School?

representable (*adj*) expressible in symbolic form
a creation that is a visual or tangible rendering of someone or something

We Gotta Represent

Representation is an important component for persistence and belonging for marginalized and minoritized students on campus. Socially, politically, and economically marginalized students, like undocumented undergraduates have asked, "college administrators become allies of undocumented students on campus by recognizing undocumented undergraduates as part of the campus community. [127] This is an ask for recognition and representation. For Black students in particular, having faculty, staff, and other students on campus who share your racial identity is a mechanism to combat the isolation that is often felt in predominantly white institutions or in institutions without a sizable presence of Black folks.[128] This understanding of representation resonated with my participants, who shared these same sentiments with me. They talked about feeling more comfortable with Black faculty and non-Black faculty of color to build relationships and visit office hours[129], finding them generally less intimidating or inaccessible. They also described creating friendships across a diversity of race and ethnicity, but largely finding community and connection from their own shared racial group peers.

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[127] Robert Teranishi, Carola Suárez-Orozco, and Marcelo Suárez-Orozco. "Undocumented Undergraduates and the Liminal State of Immigration Reform," 20.
[128] Lori D. Patton, Lori D. "A Call to Action," xiii.
[129] Benjamin Baez, "Race-related Service and Faculty of Color," 366.

Representation and representability, namely the ability to be represented, are central to the aims and exploration of undocuBlack student's experiences on campus. This chapter will explore what it means to be representable (or not). Furthermore, the narratives of Meera, Yarah, Cari, Lena, and Chichima reveal the stakes of spatial, affective, and geographical representation. Through undocuBlack women's lived experience this chapter seeks to analyze how representation is negotiated around power, access, and resources. UndocuBlack students make themselves visible and representable by opting in to forms of documentation particularly in relation to legal structures that do not and cannot represent them. Because Blackness is codified, legalized, legible, or illegible in the broader matrix of the state, reliance on representability is an important aspect of this chapter. University campuses through its functions, activities, and services provided in Black cultural centers attempt to represent Blackness with various degrees of success and failure as described by Meera, Yarah, Cari, Lena, and Chichima. Black Cultural Centers are one of the dominant representations of the Black student home space on campus making them central to the questions of belonging and representation explored in this chapter.

A Brief History of Black Cultural Centers

Cultural centers or ethnic and gender programming spaces on college and university campuses are deeply indebted to Blackness and student activism and organizing. Student advocacy mobilized to expand fields and disciplines like Black Studies to gain institutional legitimacy and recognition of departmental status,[130] something that my home department of African American Studies didn't achieve until 2014.[131] Further, it created culturally relevant curricula, addressed oppressive campus climate, and tackled issues around recruitment and retention for

[130] Lori D. Patton, "On Solid Ground," 65.

[131] Cynthia Lee, "Faculty Senate Unanimously Votes to Create African American Studies Department," UCLA Newsroom. April 10, 2014.

underrepresented populations.[132] All of these efforts to transform institutions to be more inclusive and less hostile and violent for Black students navigating them were fostered largely by student activism. “There is to date no other discipline in the academy so closely aligned with social protest, student activism, and violence as Black Studies [and Black cultural centers whose] emergence and rapid spread surprised many.”[133] Student activism gave rise to a new type of organizational structure on college and university campuses all across the nation.

Resistance and organizing were not only the impetus for institutional change but provided the material conditions to see Blackness represented on campus. Lori Patton who has done extensive research on Black cultural centers, the history and significance on college campuses writes, “Black student demands for Black Cultural Centers (BCC) were inextricably intertwined with the yearning to see Black culture manifested throughout the entire system of higher education. In essence. they wanted to see their culture recognized in academics (curriculum and faculty), social life (student activities, residential life), and administrative affairs (financial aid, admissions).”[134]

Student organizing and activism directly lead to the institutionalization of Black Studies and Black Cultural Centers (BCCs)[135] on college and university campuses. Organizing and resistance of Black students on college campuses were the impetus and groundwork laid that began cultural centers in the 1960s and early 1970s.[136] Literature on the purpose and significance of cultural centers consistently credits the presence of BCCs and the space and staff’s ability to

[132] David Hefner, "Black Cultural Centers: Standing on Shaky Ground?," 22.
[133] Noliwe M. Rooks, “White Money/Black Power,” 32.
[134] Lori D. Patton, "Power to the People!,” 157.
[135] See Lori D. Patton, “On Solid Ground,” 64. and Lawrence Crouchett, "Early Black Studies Movements," 199.
[136] Kimberly Sanders, "Black Culture Centers,” 31

help attend to the psychological effects of everyday racism and campus climate.[137] Critiques of race/ethnic/gender-specific programming has been called divisive and pushes towards multicultural spaces that will address the ends of all marginalized students has called into question the need for "specified" spaces like BCCs.[138] Other critiques focus on how institutionalization of Black/Africana studies and BCCs undermines the radical foundations of the push for recognition and space and over time is simply a tactic of interest convergence ultimately benefiting the neoliberal structure of most academic institutions. Interest convergence as a phenomenon operates under the guise of racial equality where the needs and interest of people of color are only accommodated when they converge with the interest of whites.[139]

The critique of interest convergence is important to understand how institutions ultimately protect themselves and how the employees that comprise them also work in the interest of self-preservation. The accomplishments of student activism to make material and symbolic space for Black students on campus is central to cultural shifts that created mandates for institutions to adopt cultural center models. However, because universities are neoliberal institutions they are not simply operating under economic and political formations, but also "ideological projects meant to tear down the web of insurgencies that activists have been demanding."[140]

Adoption of the Cultural Center Model

Student activism and anti-Black racism work has shifted from grassroots community work to "diversity work" uplifting and protecting whiteness. Three distinct phases or models frame

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[137] Sanders, 31.

[138] David Hefner, "Black Cultural Centers: Standing on Shaky Ground?," 22.

[139] See Derrick A. Bell, "Brown v. Board of Education". and Shaun Harper, Lori D. Patton, and Ontario S. Wooden. "Access and Equity for African American Students in Higher Education."

[140] Roderick Ferguson, *We Demand: The University and Student Protests*, 69.

organizational diversity in higher education and its chronological shift over the past 70 years: Affirmative Action and Equity, Multiculturalism, and Academic Diversity. The models are temporally bound, with each covering a few decades and centrally rooted on different loci. The first model, Affirmative Action and Equity covered the 1950s and 1960s. It focused around the Civil Rights Movement and consisted of "focused institutional effort designed to enhance the compositional diversity of the university's faculty, staff, and students and to eliminate discriminatory practices."[141] Isomorphism, cooptation, and institutionalization explain the motivations and processes that organizations undergo in order to retain their legitimacy, or in the case of adopting Black Cultural Centers signal adherence to university norms.

Institutions consistently operate in homogenous manners adopting the same structures and practices via bureaucratization and rationality to gain legitimacy, namely isomorphism. Isomorphism operates both procedurally and structurally in an organization. The presence of cultural centers on campuses are made consistent across higher education institutions through coercive isomorphism, "resulting from both formal and informal pressures exerted on organizations by other organizations upon which they are dependent and by cultural expectations in society."[142] Coercive isomorphism helps to explain why institutions chose to implement BCCs as a procedural choice satisfying the need to diversify campuses during the Affirmative Action and Equity era of the 1950s and 60s, essentially responding to a government mandate. Higher education institutions depend, in part, on the federal government for funding and legitimacy and are thus are positioned to respond to governmental pressures. Additionally, in the absence of governmental regulations and mandates providing coercive pressures, public institutions are also

[141] Damon Williams and Charmaine Clowney. "Strategic Planning for Diversity and Organizational Change," 5.
[142] Paul DiMaggio and Walter Powell. "Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality," 150.

accountable to other stakeholders like legislatures, governors, and the local population of voters. Compliance with local and national concerns, or the broadly surrounding campus community invested in the "collective good" can still provide the type of coercive pressures that motivate institutions to act.

During the height of the Black Power movement in the 1960s and 1970s, a period marked by social unrest and mobilizing against institutions, Black students fought for university admissions and civil rights. Multiculturalism*,* the second model of organizational diversity is distinguishable by, "institutional diversity efforts designed to provide services for ethnic and racially diverse students, women, and other bounded social identity groups and secondarily to research these groups and constituencies."[143] Finally during the late 1990s and 2000s, the third model, *Academic Diversity,* followed the diversity movement and focused on integrating diversity into education curriculum and centering it in research issues.[144] Shifting from social, political, and ideological movements that centered people of color and functioned under pro-ethnic and anti-racist frameworks to a movement concerned with the diversity and inclusion of all (not just the marginalized) is indicative of interest convergence. The Multiculturalism and Academic Diversity models are largely what continue to impact the purpose and form of cultural centers today. Identitarian models of student affairs services have been coopted all across various higher education contexts explaining public universities' response around infrastructure, policies, and processes of the experiences of Black students on campus. The process of cooptation as, "absorbing new elements into the leadership or policy-determining structure of an organization as a means of averting threats to its stability or existence."[145] Cooptation of BCCs served as a

[143] Damon Williams and Charmaine Clowney. "Strategic Planning for Diversity and Organizational Change," 5.
[144] Williams and Clowney, 5.
[145] Philip Selznick, "Foundations of the Theory of Organization," 34.

defense mechanism employed by institutions to incorporate external forces into the policy making processes thereby mitigating threats to the organization.

BCCs which were initially framed as an institutional adaptation to respond to student demands and quell student unrest shifted to become an assimilation strategy through isomorphism, co-optation, and institutionalization. Rather than addressing the institutional barriers to Black student enrollment and retention on campus, institutions rely on BCCs to do the heavy lifting of signaling that a campus is a pro-Black environment. As the formal institutionalization of Black studies has occurred over time what is lost and what is gained from bringing the discipline to academic spaces? Again, interest convergence saw the integration of Black cultural centers, and other ethnic gender programming into the normal functions of a university. By institutionalizing BCCs universities have mitigated risks to outside radical pressures and created surface level responses to deep seeded issues in recruitment and retention for Black students, faculty, and staff creating alignment with neoliberal frameworks.

As argued by Abigail Boggs and Nick Mitchell, "the university appears as the *object* of privatization and not as a mechanism of it; it is wrecked *by* neoliberalism, not a destructive force *of* it."[146] Higher education institutions are held up as symbolic and literal mechanisms for upward mobility and progress. However, in actuality, higher education and academia broadly represents the prioritization of profits, productivity, and economic efficiency over people. Public universities use surveillance and increasing agendas of accountability to maximize human capital. Because scholars who critique neoliberalism work in academia, "public universities are assumed to be innocent of the neoliberalism that has come to so thoroughly pervade it."[147] This

[146] Abigail Boggs and Nick Mitchell, "Critical University Studies," 443.
[147] Boggs and Mitchell, 443.

pervasive neoliberalism is quite literally sickening and killing our Black women intellectuals.[148] Alexis Pauline Gumbs demands that we be clear of the stakes of laboring in academia. She writes, "The universities that we mistakenly label as our bright quirky only refuge for Black brilliance have worked our geniuses to death, and have denied us help when we asked for it."[149] Make no mistake, while BCCs are important home spaces for Black students on college campuses, universities are never safe for Black people.

Why Undocu/Black/Cultural Centers?

In light of the many critiques of cultural centers on campuses, most notably the undermining and frames of divisiveness lobbied against Black Cultural Centers, cultural centers are centered as sites of analysis for this project. To write about education is to write about the human condition. Thus, to write about undocuBlack students and to anchor their experiences through cultural centers in higher education is to write about the human condition. As described in the previous section "A Brief History of Black cultural Centers," cultural center spaces on campus are historically and socially rooted in Black people and made possible by the labor of Black people. They are often the social hub for student activity but also serve as sites of political organizing, access to resources, and community building particularly around identity and social issues that are important to students on campus. The physical site of the center serves as a temporary kind of home space for students on campus, a home that operates differently from the domestic spaces of dorms or residential halls. Chapter 1 explored the nation as a site of home, and homemaking in the context of migration and movement, this chapter will use cultural centers to ground homemaking on campus for undocuBlack students.

[148] Myisha Priest, "Salvation is the Issue," 116.
[149] Alexis Pauline Gumbs, " The Shape of my Impact," 4.

Part of homemaking, both in the intimate relationships of who signifies home, and in the collective sense of affective, spatial, and geographic representations of home rely on care.[150] Caring about Black folks is a radical act in the face of a world that continually discards us. Collective communities of care, like those created in cultural center spaces are representative of a type of counter-space created by those who engage community building. Counter-spaces "serve as sites where deficit notions of people of color can be challenged and where a positive collegiate racial climate can be established and maintained."[151] The counter-space serves as a space that can be emotional, intellectual, and also physical. It allows for the validation of lived experience, collective critique of harmful stereotypes, challenging of assumptions and deficit perspectives, and a supportive environment wherein care is communal and a shared responsibility. Engagement in these communities of care work to combat isolation, tokenism and give opportunity for students to utilize their collective agency to resist an otherwise stifling and marginalizing academic climate.[152]

This project, like many other academic endeavors began years ago and in a very different context. Exploring the experiences of undocuBlack students has always been central to this project, however, the first iteration of this work began in cultural centers, specifically Undocumented Student Centers (UndocuCenters). I was interested in both how Blackness was represented in the center space and how Black students navigated the resources and physical

[150] Here, I am drawimg from a Black Feminist practice of care, as conceptualized by the Combahee River Collective Statement (1977) which states, "We realize that the only people who care enough about us to work consistently for our liberation are us. Our politics evolve from a healthy love for ourselves, our sisters and our community which allows us to continue our struggle and work." Engagement through Black Feminists traditions and orientation to ethics and care necessitate a re-worlding of all of our humanity. Care here is rooted in the capacity for spaces as being able to provide liberatory care frameworks that serve as mechanisms of resisting against oppression.

[151] Daniel Solorzano, Miguel Ceja, and Tara Yosso. "Critical Race Theory and Campus Racial Climate," 70.

[152] Teranishi, Suárez-Orozco, and Suárez-Orozco, 18.

space of the centers. In my first interviews, center staff emphasized the role of student advocacy in changing the political landscape of the institution, creating pathways to resources that were previously unavailable, and the power of student voice in building a more inclusive campus climate. While identity based work in centers like African Student Programs/Black Student Unions; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Resource Centers, Chicano Student Programs; Middle Eastern/Arab Centers; Asian American and Pacific Islander Programs; Cross Cultural Centers; and the like center a politics around race and racism in their space, these structures seem to operate differently for undocumented students because their status portend an intimate and complicated relationship with the law, legal frameworks, colonization, and dispossession.

When this project first began, I interviewed Undocumented Student Center directors to get a sense of their work, the obstacles to providing resources and care to students, and how Black students in particular navigated their spaces. The excerpt below from my fieldnotes and subsequent documentation capture the feelings of belonging, care, homemaking, and representation that this chapter explores:

> Within seconds of entering the space I am immediately greeted by the Director of the Center. She is a friendly and warm presence in an otherwise eerily quiet space. My mind instantly juxtaposes the buzz of activity taking place 20 feet away and the calm silence of the center. Before my brain has more time to follow this thought she speaks, "Hi there! Welcome to the Undocu… OH, HI!" A flash of familiarity and smile crosses her face, followed immediately by a furrowed brow and slight twist in her mouth. She's thinking, quickly, retracing and pulling from her mental cache of student information… dates, time… location… placing my face within seconds. The mental exercise of retrieval ends as quickly as it began. "It's Brittnee right?" *She leans towards me for reassurance and confirmation*. I nod. "See I remember!" *She says to herself more than me*. I recall our meeting and interview last quarter. How invested she is in this work. Her passion for helping students, validating their experience, and facilitating their navigation of higher education. I know she is proud of herself to have remembered me, her smile is both a welcoming gesture and an expression of pride. We only interacted substantively once, it's nice to be remembered.
>
> After sitting in the center for about twenty minutes I sneeze. "¡Salud! Oh, I mean bless you!" says a student with a slight smile and bowing of their head. Their affect is a

> response to feeling silly or embarrassed. They caught themselves responding instinctively in Spanish before registering my face, my race, and have assumed I do not understand or speak Spanish. There's a fluidity between English and Spanish here... Spanglish is spoken in the center. To some it may sound broken, each language filling in the gaps for the other. We are in Southern California, only 134 miles from the U.S. border with Mexico, land of the Tongva peoples, the original caretakers of SoCal, an area that many Chicanx folks refer to as Aztlán. Growing up among Spanish speaking communities, I hear it as a crossing. A subversion of the borders and boundaries of language. This mixing of languages is perpetually negotiation and a dance between words and worlds that is familiar to me. A third language, a third space is created here.

This particular visit to an Undocumented Student Center illustrates the importance of using this space as a site of analysis for exploring how it *feels* to be Black in a cultural center. Feelings around representation and a representability of Blackness in the space of the center is a generative site for the politics of care and practices of negotiations that my participants exercise in order to persist on their respective university campuses. The cultural center on a college campus is not only a site of cultural exchange, delivering student affairs services, but is a location that has become synonymous with student life more broadly. For many students, cultural centers are their academic homes.[153] As Chapter 1 illustrated the importance for articulations of home that are non-normative, alternative, subversive, and wayward,[154] so does the cultural center on a college campus. Cultural centers provide the type of analysis that makes clear the process of moving from the abstraction of space, something without any substantial meaning, to the making of place. Essentially, a place is understood as a space that has a social meaning. Social meanings, "function to maintain memories and to preserve practices that

[153] Kimberly Sanders, "Black Culture Centers," 31

[154] I use wayward as a nod and in reverence to the gift of centering and examining the lives of "ordinary" young Black women and the everydayness of radicalism offered by Saidiya Hartman in *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women and Queer Radicals*. The radical acts of imagination and intimate arrangements of Black political life that Hartman explores in the book require a moving away from Black exceptional figures and instead both demand and requite the centering of the embodied knowledge of an "anarchy of colored girls."

reinforce community knowledge and cohesiveness."[155] In the place of the cultural center undocuBlack students are rendered both invisible and simultaneously hypervisible.

The Problem of Invisibility and Hypervisibility

Central to my argument around the experiences of undocuBlack students (people) is that they are invisibilized within a category of identification, undocumented, that has been rendered in such a way that there is no space to hold them or reconcile their racial ascription with citizenship status. This in part is impacted by the dominant narrative about Latinx representation in undocumented as an identity but also as a social and political category. The capacity for undocumented to hold the experiences of Black migrants is also impacted by the tenuous relationship between citizenship and documentation where folks exist in any number of classifications as migrants and have various levels of documentation that reflect a seemingly infinite number of configurations of legal status. Because the narrative of undocumented is criminalized as "illegal," folks with divergent experiences both racially and via status to this signifier are obscured in these frameworks.

This does not mean however that undocuBlack folks do not experience surveillance, it simply nuances our understanding of how, why, and under what conditions are Black people surveilled. In *Dark Matters,* Simone Browne writes about the "facticity of surveillance in black life," arguing that "surveillance in and of Black life as a fact of Blackness… [specifically framing] what it is like to be Black, within the terms of the mode of being human specific to our contemporary culture."[156] Nuancing identity and surveillance is necessary both to describe how the social category Latinx is rendered exclusively brown to the exclusion of Blackness or Afro-

[155] Gaye Theresa Johnson, *Spaces of Conflict,* 48.
[156] Simone Browne, *Dark Matters*, 6.

Latinx; and how non-Latinx undocumented people navigate their identities. Because undocumented folks are racialized as de facto Latinx and undocumented representation of Latinx excludes Blackness, it is insufficient to mark or delineate undocuBlack experiences as different from Latinx. Relying on difference as a narrative reduces the racial categories to discrete silos and furthermore fails to interrogate the nuances between all non-Latinx undocumented folks.

Some research about undocuAsian communities have discussed the guilt, isolation, and invisibility that undocuAsian folks feel around their documentation status and visibility in larger narratives and community, observing that "the 'Latino-issue' stereotype has allowed them to navigate American society without being profiled as undocumented, but it has not come without a price. Because of the backlash that undocumented students face, for many of them, it feels safer not to expose one's immigration status. But this means, never opening up and asking for help."[157] These distinct experiences of visibility are important to name for non-Latinx folks but are not universally true among the undocumented community. Through racializing surveillance undocuAsian people are placed out of the identity of undocumented, which "reify boundaries along racial lines thereby reifying race." This process could be used to also analyze the model minority myth, "positively stereotyping" which works to position Asian people out of categories of illegality and deviance, and away from Blackness. In fact, the model minority myth, a construction of white supremacy, is used to create narratives around hardworking, capable, and deserving immigrants whose lack of dysfunction, deviance, and illegality allows them to overcome and achieve success in the U.S. This positioning reifies white supremacy's pathologization of Black folks as inherently defective. The model minority frame is a myth precisely because it assumes: all Asians are the same; the racial category of Asian is

[157] Beleza Chan, "Not Just a Latino Issue," 29.

homogenous; Asians are not racial and ethnic minorities; Asians don't face racism; Asians do not require help or social resources; Asian college graduates will automatically be successful.[158] This myth does not hold true of course for all Asians, as people who are South Asian and/or darker skinned are not implicated in the myth to the same degree. Anti-Black racism is the framework of racial hierarchy that undergirds the model minority myth.

How undocuBlack people are simultaneously visible and invisible is rooted materially and, "takes up Blackness as a metaphor and as a lived materiality and applies it to an understanding of surveillance."[159] Unlike undocuAsians who are positioned outside of undocumented identity and feel guilt for not being surveilled or vulnerable to state sanctioned violence via ICE, undocuBlack folks (Black, Afro-Latinx, of the African diaspora) are still always surveilled by virtue of their Blackness. Negotiating, resisting, and refusing surveillance, then, operates differently for undocuBlack people who come into contact with state organizations and under surveillance because their Blackness is "a key site through which surveillance is practiced, narrated, and enacted."[160]

Visibly Invisible

This project received funding from the UC Collaborative to Promote Immigrant and Student Equity (UC PromISE) in 2019. UC Promise is a collective of principle investigators from throughout the University of California (UC) system that, "aims to promote cutting-edge, policy-relevant research on the extent to which immigration policies have exacerbated vulnerabilities among undocumented students and expanded collateral consequences to citizen

[158] Samuel Museus and Peter Kiang, "Deconstructing the Model Minority Myth," 5-15.
[159] Simone Browne, *Dark Matters*, 7.
[160] Ibid, 9.

students with undocumented parents."[161] The fellowship funding from this grant was an invaluable source of resources for compensating participants and completing interviews. During a UC PromISE conference held in November 2019, panelists in the opening session titled, "On Being Studied: A Panel Discussion with Undocumented Student Services Staff and Students" offered perspectives on their positive and negative experiences working with researchers. The panelists were generous and critical with their offerings, thinking through harm reduction, labor, and controlling access to vulnerable populations. One panelist asked a critical question of the academics and researchers in the audience, "What does it mean to be over-studied?" The question, a response to the increase of information on undocumented students and their families has produced an unprecedented number of requests for data and has created positions and point persons to field those requests. While the panelists nodded in agreement and offered anecdotes about how students are feeling over-studied the audience either snapped in agreement or reflected in consideration of the provocation, I however sat with knowledge that the undocuBlack women I spoke to as my research participants had a fundamentally different experience.

At the end of each of my interviews, I told participants that I recognize the inherent power imbalance and the vulnerability they have shared with me. I gave each of them an opportunity to ask questions of me to also participate in vulnerability, no question was off limits. I answered openly and honestly and offered information and my own life experiences throughout our conversations.

Lena asked, "I don't think I know what to say. But, I would ask what prompted you to do this research into undocumented Black students or undocumented Black community in general?"

[161] UC PromISE, "About Us."

Cari said, “I think this is very interesting. I've never heard anything about any ... It's mostly Latinos that you hear about.”

Meera asked, “How did you decide to make this your research? I'm hoping it'll help a lot of people figure out what to do for undocumented Black students on campus.”

Yarah asked, “Are you an immigrant?” What was your name, Meitzenheimer? Sounds like a Russian or like Czechoslovakian maybe.” I replied that I wasn’t an immigrant, that I was born in the U.S. She followed up, “Well, maybe like what sparked your interest into want to interview Black people? I know it's never ... We never get represented.”

Chichima asked, “What made you interested in doing this research? We need more people fighting for trying to understand and write about it, so maybe other people can read it and say, ‘Oh wow.’”

None of these women felt over-studied and each recognized a lack of representation and information about undocuBlack immigrants when they similarly all asked why I was interested in this work, I told them the stakes for collective Black liberation I was invested in. Each time I was asked in the interviews the questions felt more inquisitive than accusatory and interested in understanding the motivations behind why this work was being done, since they identified from their own experiences, the ways in which they were not seen, heard, or represented. What is clear from the framing of undocumented students being over-studied from a panelist of student affairs professionala and subject-matter-experts and a room full of researchers is that undocuBlack folks are visibly invisible. They occupy a particular type of marginal space where, “the intersectional identity of Black immigrants, being Black and foreign, renders them effectively invisible in the

immigration debate and vulnerable to policies that affect them both due to their Blackness as well as their status as foreigners."[162]

In my interview with Lena, she described her experiences taking courses in Black studies and learning about anti-Blackness and developing the ability to use that frame to become critical about different aspects of her lived experiences.

She began, "Learning about undocumented student issues at the same time, and the intersectionality between the two and just learning how Black undocumented immigrants are very vulnerable, other than the entire immigrant populations, and how you're three times more likely to be deported. Which is really crazy. But they're not things people really talk about or think about because they aren't really mentioned in the mainstream media and stuff like that."

"So I think it was just me kind of learning about anti-Blackness on its own individual spectrum and then about undocumented issues, like all the different laws in the undocumented community, which states are immigrant-friendly, which states are anti-immigrant, like which communities are most prevalent in the undocumented community and what does the AAPI community look like? What does a Black community look like? What are the differences and similarities among those different groups within the undocumented community and then just trying to combine those together. So, it wasn't like we were learning specifically about the undocumented and Black community at the same time."

The concerns Lena raises about the lack of information regarding the incarceration of undocuBlack folks speak directly to the paradox of being visibly invisible. As of 2016, 4.2 million Black immigrants resided in the U.S. increasing from less than a million twenty years

[162] Bolatito Kolawole, "African Immigrants, Intersectionality, and the Increasing Need for Visibility," 373.

ago.[163] While foreign-born Black people make up only seven percent of the noncitizen population, they comprise twenty percent of immigrants facing removal from the U.S.[164] Unlike other immigrants, who are racialized as undocumented marking them as "other" and shaping their interaction with the legal system; Black immigrants, like their U.S. born counterparts, experience hyper-surveillance, criminalization, and are funneled through our carceral system at alarmingly high rates. Invisible in narratives around immigration and thus less likely to receive support and resources navigating the legal and judicial system, yet overrepresented in arrests and surveillance thus hypervisible by virtue of Blackness.

She continued to describe the forced separation she felt in the representation around her multiple identities, "I think it's just me discovering along the way this is what it means to be Black and this is also what it means to be undocumented, so there's that intersectionality. The most obvious thing that I've learned recently about being undocumented and Black, especially as a student is there's little to no visibility, because there's very few undocumented Black students. And even if they are, they're very afraid of coming out."

She lamented at the inability to connect with other undocuBlack students, "It's really hard to interact with those people because you don't want to come out. And the old coordinator that you met she knew another undocumented Black student and I really wanted her to introduce me but she said the person was not comfortable at all disclosing their status. That made it really difficult, because you couldn't interact with them and get their perspective. There's a lot of closeted undocumented Black immigrants because they just don't, A) They don't disclose themselves because of fear of deportation and B) I think also the fact that there's no

[163] Monica Anderson and Gustavo López, "Key Facts about Black Immigrants in the U.S." Pew Research Center, January 24, 2018.
[164] Juliana Morgan-Trostle, Kexin Zheng, and Carl Lipscombe, "The State of Black Immigrants Part I," 20.

representation within the undocumented community. Just lack of visibility and having to work extra hard to reach out to those communities."

Lena's struggle to find other undocuBlack peers to connect to and create community support was fostered in part by fear of identification and subsequent deportation. UndocuBlack people are intimately aware of the invisibility they face in narratives around immigration and acutely aware of the risks to state violence they face by being visibly Black. In my conversation with Cari she echoed similar sentiments of Lena's experiences around visibility describing what it means to be a Black, undocumented student.

"It's a very interesting experience because you stick out in a way," she began. "When you're Black you stick out, because there's a lot of white people. But if you're immigrant, if you're a proud immigrant, or you talk about being immigrant, that's another way you stick out again. So, I think it was a very interesting experience being a Black immigrant. I feel like more odds are against me, but at the same time, I felt like I had more to prove. Honestly, all these odds that I've had against me, I was still able to do it. So, I think that was very beautiful [being Black and undocumented]. So that's what it meant to me."

Her comments resonate to part of the original aim of this project which was to disrupt what we "know" about undocumented students. I respond to her comments, connecting them to the larger research project, "Yeah I think that there's ... Part of what my interest in this research is looking at how do we talk about undocumented students nationally, and our national conversations about undocumented students don't focus on Black people."

Seeing Black

The following excerpt from my expanded field notes describe my observations in an Undocumented Student Center on a university campus. My field observations were part of an

original iteration of what has culminated in this thesis. After an initial welcome from a student staff no one engaged with me, and I was able to sit relaxed and observant for most of the time. In the last ten minutes of my site visit something shifts:

> A tall, slender, Black student walks into the center. The center is a buzz of activity and conversations, but everything quiets in my head and I immediately shift in my seat, sitting straight up, and locking my eyes on them. I pay attention intently to their every move and interaction. The student is wearing casual athletic clothes, a red hat and has a beautiful bundle of hair sticking out of the back of their hat. An afro. Thick. Curly. BLACK. It forms a halo slightly above their head when looking at them directly. Questions began racing through my head: Is this student familiar with this space? Are they actually Black and Undocumented? Visit here often? How comfortable do they feel accessing the services here? They are looking around the center while I'm thinking about identities and frequency of visiting the space. Locating the clipboard they had been searching for, long Black fingers reach for a pen and move swiftly across a paper, signing a name. I wonder if they have at least been to the center once before since they knew to look for a sign in sheet, or maybe I have forgotten the protocol, the steps. The practice of signing in, for these spaces, provides validation and legitimacy for using institutional funds to support marginalized students. I realize that as a first-time visitor I did not operate with this protocol and most of the Latinx students who have visited the space over the past hour have not signed in either.
>
> A student seated at one of the desks turns towards the Black student. "Do you need to print?" "Yea", they reply. "You can sit over here." gesturing towards an empty computer station, they take a seat. And I finally exhale.

Reflecting back on this observation, I realize how singularly focused I am on capturing a sense of the Black student. The tension between my mind wondering and constructing a narrative, experience, and context for this person. I undoubtedly missed other details in my notes as their presence was both unexpected and pleasant. Again, Iam pulled back to my research questions, motives, positionality. I am searching for Blackness, what that constitutes it is elusive. Is it there, can I simply not see it? The Blackness I embody comes from a history of chattel slavery, my Blackness served as the raw materials for the construction of plantation capitalism, The lineage of my Blackness experienced Jim Crow and de facto segregation. But my Blackness is centered in an enduring resistance. Do I know enough of the sounds, tastes, feels, representations,

embodiment of a DIASPORIC BLACKNESS to know it when I see it? Or to know when it's missing?

My fieldnotes and reflection illuminate the institutionalization and socialization I have received as a higher education professional trained to understand the symbolic contexts and structural demands necessitated by a sign in sheet. I wrote with an expectation and understanding of the material conditions that must exist for legibility and recognition by an institution. Tracking date, services rendered, which populations of students visit a center space, and other tangible, material evidence is needed to legitimize and justify the use of institutional funds. Working through how to articulate my reading of Blackness or how Blackness can be mad visible and represented in geographic, spatial, and affective ways in cultural centers grounds the ability to "see Black". What do my observations and the centers themselves illuminate and simultaneously obscure? I wonder, "do my reading practices act to reinscribe violence and a remaking of Blackness, and Black bodies, as objectified?"[165]

Geographic Representation

In full recognition that space and place are active agents in our everyday lives that shape how race is lived and experienced Geographic, spatial, and affective representation can be mapped to perceptions and understanding of race. Place as a lived, embodied and meaningful, field of care can be used as a canvas through which things happen. Geographically mapping places of nation is a process of representation and meaning making. Meera details an experience of erasure and invisibilizing on campus that helps to underscore this point.

"They started a Central American club," she said, "and I had a friend who told me, she was like, 'You should join, it's gonna be great!' And I was like, 'I would honestly love to join

[165] Simone Browne, *Dark Matters*, 67.

but I don't think it's an actual Central American Club.' Because literally on the map, they'll have the entire map, and then all the other countries are bolded, and Belize is ghostly looking, because they're like, 'This isn't a Central American country.' And other people would be like, 'It's a Caribbean country.'"

"Then you'll see on that map that it's not even on that map. So, it would be great to be on somebody's map, you know? But yeah, I feel like that's another thing. Even in spaces on campus where you're like, I'm supposed to be there, there's not really space for me there."

She continues, "Even at conferences, when they have that, I don't know if it's a game, but they'll post up all the identities and tell you which one you identify with the most. And I'm just like, they all really affect me, so I don't know which one to walk to. I'm undocumented, I'm Black, and then sometimes it's like, oh my gosh. I'm a woman too."

Meera's experiences of her home country appearing ghostly looking on a map of Central America presented during a meeting of a Central American Club illuminated the visibly invisible reality for undocuBlack folks. Literally visible on the map but rendered invisible through a process of situating Belizeans outside of a region and geography of Latinx ancestry. This erasure is a powerful symbol of multiple layers of exclusion, illustrating a literal unmapping of undocuBlackness.

Spatial Representation

Spatial representation is not solely accomplished through Black cultural centers, but also looks like Undocumented Student Center spaces disrupting normative understandings of who is undocumented, but also providing space for Black students and contending with anti-Blackness even in the absence of undocuBlack students. Additionally, part of the work for holistically supporting Black students is a recognition that Black Student Unions, African Student Programs,

and other BCCs have a responsibility to address xenophobia and anti-immigrant sentiments that can be pervasive in those spaces. National organizations, with offices all across the U.S. are invested in disrupting the notion of migration only impacting Latinx people and in fact argue that migration is fundamentally a Black issue. Organizations like the Black Alliance for Just Immigration (BAJI) which educates and engages African American and Black immigrant communities to organize and advocate for racial, social, and economic justice,[166] the UndocuBlack Network, a multigenerational network of currently and formerly undocumented Black people that fosters community, facilitates access to resources, and contributes to transforming the realities of our people, so we are thriving and living our fullest lives,[167] and Black LGBTQIA+ Migrant Project (BLMP) build and center the people and political power of Black LGBTQIA+ migrants to ensure the liberation of all Black people through community-building, political education, creating access to direct services, and organizing across borders.[168]

"In my first year I was trying to get the exchange student fellowship sponsored by the Sustainability Resource Center, but it was through the Center for Black Cultures, which is just a new center that was developed for Black students. That's how I was able to get involved with that center as well and then reach out to more Black students as well because I don't feel like Black students have space do that often. That was a space where there was actually more Black students who came there to the space."

"My second year, that's when I decided, like, oh, I'm going to try to work at the DREAM Center, so I worked in the DREAM center second year and also the Center for Black Cultures. I stayed with the fellowship in this connection between two centers. It was a good experience

[166] Black Alliance for Just Immigration, "About Us."
[167] UndocuBlack Network, "About Us."
[168] Black LGBTQIA+ Migrant Project, *Transgender Law Center*.

because I got to work with both communities, which is pretty unique, and I would also try and organize events to both centers. I remember I tried to do an UndocuBlack dinner for those who go to the DREAM Center and the Center for Black Cultures. I think it was just really cool way to be in both of my identities. Felt like sort of uncomfortable. Again, it was also challenging because I had to move in those individual spaces, it combined those identities because it's kind of hard to talk about in both spaces. I feel Blackness when I was in Latinx spaces going all to my friends- (silence) and also in Black space, a lot of them also had microaggressions towards the undocumented and they're like, "Oh my God, isn't that illegal?" Me being in the middle ground, having to speak up and just kind of let it go because I don't have to explain that."

Lena's experiences speak to a lack of special representation where neither the DREAM Center not the Center for Black Cultures fully supported her or represented her experiences as Black and undocumented. Feeling at home in either space wasn't complete despite her attempts to create cross-cultural programming that would bring together students from both spaces to work in community around important social issues and dine together. Lena through her own work and expectations feels entitled to receive campus support and services that speak to her lived experience. Entitlement here is defined as, "recogniz[ing] the value of all people and that individual actions always have larger consequences for the community… demands to be, first of all, accurately seen and, subsequently, properly cared for and protected."[169] Lena is entitled to recognition, representation, and care. Yarah's experiences of spatial underrepresentation illustrate how feelings of entitlement manifest in belonging and placemaking for undocuBlack students.

[169] Aimee Meredith Cox, *Shapeshifters: Black Girls and the Choreography of Citizenship*, 71.

I asked, “Are there other spaces on campus that you hang out in? Do you go to the women's center? I don't know if you all have a Black student union. Or are there other physical buildings?”

Yarah replied, “Yeah, we do have that. It’s the African Diaspora Student Center. We had a study jam yesterday and I actually went there. In study jam, it's... We just... Do you guys have study jams too in school?”

“Is it like sessions where people can just go and study for finals and stuff?” I ask. I haven’t thought of a study jam since undergrad, and even then, I never attended. I giggle internally feeling old at the idea of a “jam sesh”.

“Is that a space that you're in frequently? Do you feel comfortable in that space?”

“Yes, I feel very comfortable,” she quickly replies.

“Can you tell me why?”

“What?” she replied, clearly not understanding why I was probing her further.

I continued to press, “So can you tell me why you feel comfortable?”

Yarah looked directly at me and clearly responded, “Because it's just all Black students. Why wouldn't I be comfortable? It's our space.”

Yarah’s response to my question beautifully illustrates the importance of cultural centers and affinity space on campus for students. Extensive research of the benefits for belonging, persistence and overall satisfaction with college experience cite cultural centers being deeply impactful for student outcomes.[170] Beyond having affirming space that meets student needs, Yarah’s declaration of the African Diaspora Student Center being “our space” is also a declaration of critical entitlement. Critical entitlement, “is an empowered statement that disputes

[170] David Hefner, "Black Cultural Centers: Standing on Shaky Ground?," 22.

the idea that only certain people are worthy of the rights of citizenship and the ability to direct the course of their lives"[171] Yarah a Black, undocumented woman, a student in her declaration is asserting her right, and the rights of other multiply marginalized students to visibility, the right to access space, to have their needs met in earnest. The assertion claims, "a life in which intrinsic values as well as desires and dreams are honored and protected"[172]

Affective Representation

The interviews for each of my participants all began with the same questions. In the hours and interviews prior we explored their sense of self in relation to their identities as Black women. Their understanding of Blackness, migration, intimacy and care deeply informed their articulations of home. We discussed not only the physical and material manifestations of home but what people, communities and spaces constituted home for them. The beginning of our second interviews began with each woman providing me with three words or phrases that they felt could define or describe their college experience thus far. Yarah used mind-opening, time-management and balance.

Yarah explained, "I always aim for that balance wherever you can get it. Yeah. And I go with the flow. When it gets too overwhelming, I just feel myself... I just go with the flow. I'm just living anyway. Yeah."

I'm curious about what constitutes for her and what things feel in or out of balance. I respond, "I think that last one you said, balance is a really interesting one. Can you talk to me a little bit more about the idea of what are you trying to balance and what does balance look like for you?"

[171] Ibid, viii.
[172] Ibid, 67.

“I'm trying to balance my academics as well as my personal life, my mental health, and social relationships basically. Yeah. I want to get good grades and everything, but I don't want to lose myself in the process. So yeah.”

I immediately understand the sentiment about losing oneself. I am in my last year of graduate school and at this time have decided not to pursue a Ph.D. I worry about having lost myself in a student identity that has been so encompassing in how I navigate the world, I am not sure who I am outside of it. I wonder what she means about losing herself. I continue the conversation, “So that sounds, like you said, like a little bit of mental health? How would you describe it?”

“Oh my God. I don't know. I would say it's at a six,” she replies ranking her mental health on a scale of 1 to 10. “Yeah, because... Yeah, sometimes I just feel down. Just everything going on. I try to encourage myself with the fact that the outcome is going to be something greater and something better. So yeah. And then I also try to make plans to plan my days better. And just stay positive and be around people that are also very positive.”

After a brief pause she continues, “For club meetings, there's... I mean, there's a club called Sister, Sister. It's a Black girls club. We just go there and talk about our mental health and everything. So, I feel like that has been a lot in that. Also talking to people that are very relatable to me. That helps a lot. So that's how I deal with [stress].”

“Yeah. Yeah, I think groups like that are really important. There's one kind of like that here at UCLA called Sisters in Scholarship.”

Yarah’s positive experience of finding collective care community in Sister, Sister shows how a politics of care looks different through a Black Feminist lens. Politics have not created space for Black women’s experiences and the spaces we inhabit though filled with Black bodies

do not necessarily care for us. Healing and emotional justice as mechanisms of resisting against oppression connect centrally to how these undocuBlack women navigate academia. Healing justice is defined as:

> A liberatory care framework that shifts the discourse from self-care to community care, and centers a 'political and philosophical convergence of healing inside of liberation.'… It deconstructs the rigid border that separate the self from the broader community by recognizing that we are interdependent; self-care requires community care and community care requires self-care.[173]

This theorizing around the transformative and healing properties inherent in emotion, community and interdependence are present in Black women's decision to perform this gendered labor. They chose to engage in creating communities of care to create safe and nurturing space and ties in what otherwise may be a toxic and debilitating climate.

Meera similarly described the need for affective representation among her peers in our interviews. Noting an explicit need to seek out Blackness or at least folks who were non-Black people of color but who she perceived to have shared experiences and affective representation." What is your social life like?" I ask.

"I feel like I have multiple circles. My roomie, she's been my friend all four years, because we lived together every year but our second year. By my third year I feel like that's when my social circles got kind of awkward, because my first two, I was just friends with people in my dorm and my hall, and then by second year I started realizing I needed my space with people who understand me and my experience. So, I became more friends with Black students and students of color."

Meera continued, "So then by my third year I decided I wanted sorority, it wasn't a Black sorority. I decided I wanted to join that because I went to an all-girls school in high school and I

[173] Harsha Walia, *Undoing Border Imperialism*, 268.

was like ‘I kind of miss that whole sisterhood thing.’ So I was like maybe this would be the same, so I joined it and it was really fun, but I didn't end up putting as much effort into it as the other girls who were a part of it, and I realized that was because I felt like I had to keep explaining a lot of things to the girls in there. Like why what they’re saying isn't okay, and the thing that kind of upset me about it is because I chose the sorority because the philanthropy was domestic violence. Everyone was very knowledgeable and aware about that topic, and really good about it, but everything else they'd just be like, like you'd have girls saying the N-word and going ‘Oooo.’”

Meera’s description of finding community and sisterhood differs from Yarah’s experiences most notably because of the racial compositions of their communities. Yarah’s experience in Sister, Sister provided the type of affective representation that allowed for support of her mental health and overall well being as a Black woman in higher education. Meera also sought out the type of community and gendered bonds that were familiar to her from her experiences in gendered segregated primary education. Meera attended an all-girls high school and the majority of the students were Black. However, anti-Black racism and antagonisms from her sorority sisters' use of “the N-word” and description of fraternity boys of color as “exotic” undermined her efforts to find a sustainable community.

Anti-Black Antagonism/Racism

Experiences of anti-Black racism and antagonism did not only manifest in places where my participants navigated feelings of discomfort and lack of representations, but they were also present in the campus more broadly. Meera described her frustrations on campus and the multicultural framework that privileges white students and non-Black students of color. She talked about additional burden of labor having to teach her peers how to interact with her, how to

identify and recognize her. Meera's description of her experiences illuminate the visibly invisible nature of being Black and undocumented on a college campus. Experiences that are framed by anti-Black racism and antagonism. She notes, "Another thing is just how many people have actually never met a Black person, that was something. Because I was like… okay, I've heard the whole culture shock thing, there's going to be people who don't know how to interact with me, but I was just like… It also felt really unfair, that they don't know how to interact with me, but I'm supposed to know how to make them feel comfortable. That was something like, that I didn't know. I was just like I didn't know I had to work this hard to make them feel okay with being around me, which was difficult."

Meera continues and provides and example of what the labor of "making peers feel comfortable" entailed, "The fact that a lot of people in general just calling me Black, they kept referring to me as African American, which was like, I mean I don't know how many people are okay with that term but I'm not because I wasn't born here. They'd be 'I'm sorry what else do I say?' I'd tell them, 'Oh you can just call me Black!' and they're like, they look so scared to say it. I was just like 'I don't know what to do now because I was just trying to make this easier on both of us'. It was a lot of like, I don't know how to make you feel comfortable. It's unfair first of all that I feel like I have to do that, but I don't know how to do that."

"How did that discomfort first become aware to you?" I ask, wondering about the moment in time where someone vocalized their discomfort. I also asked because for many Black folks the experiences of discomfort around non-Black people does not have to be said or made explicit. It is a general feeling of unease. A discord in the air that we can often feel materially in the air, though there aren't ways to necessarily quantify the feeling of not belonging and being others that is all too familiar for Black folks. I ask, "Did someone say to you literally 'I've never

met a Black person before.' or was it a more subtle thing that you started to feel, how did that come about?"

"No one ever said it directly, well I just assumed that they hadn't because a lot of them did come from predominantly white or Asian neighborhoods, and it was just the way that we would interact. It was just questions that they would ask, like me saying that I live near Inglewood and they would say, 'That must have been so scary for you!' It's just like, 'No it's fine.' I'm like there's also a lot of parts to Inglewood, like if you look at it now it's so gentrified, I don't know why you'd be so scared of Inglewood at this point.

Meera's experiences of anti-Black antagonisms continued, "That's the thing, you know so... there's not that many Black people on campus, so few of us. It's like how do you not recognize me? If someone would tell me a story they'd be like 'Yeah and I was talking to Araya, you know Araya right?' and I respond 'No I don't know her.' And there like 'I just figured because…' and I say "Yeah because she's Black, but I don't know every Black person on campus.' There'd be times when I'm walking with my friends and I'd see another Black person and I'd just smile and wave and they'd ask, 'How do you know that person?' and I'd say, 'Oh no there just another Black person on campus so I'll say, Hi!"

I nod in agreement, acknowledging the understanding of the unwritten social exchanges that create community and collectivism in spaces where Black folks are not the majority. I reply, "That's Black code, you nod, you acknowledge. We're one in a thousand, so you acknowledge that the other person exists. It's insider stuff that others don't think about or doesn't operate that way for them."

Meera describes another situation of anti-Black antagonism where knowing other Black people or being in proximity to other Black people creates assumptions by non-Black peers.

“Yeah I feel like that was something, because the High School I went to was predominantly Black, it was an all-girls high school And our counselor and she was Black ... she is Black, my counselor, she didn't change. My college counselors Black and she went to college but she never really told us about this, and I'm kind of upset that she never mentioned any of this stuff to us, because it would have been nice to know if I'm ever studying with another Black girl on campus someone might assume we're sisters. It would just be nice to get a heads up about these things. That was something that really happened, someone was like "oh my gosh Michelle you brought your sister to campus" and I was just like "no we're just studying for our writing class, that's it, I just met her two days ago."

What Meera’s experiences illuminate is the grid of intelligibility framed by anti-Black racism that renders undocuBlack and other Black subjects unintelligible. There is no space in the frames of Blackness held by her non-Black peers to individuate her from other Black folks they have encountered, so she is visible to them as a Black subject, but her individual identity as not the same Black person they have previously encountered is invisible. She is further invisibilized through the unnaming she experiences. African American is an identifier that she neither choses to use but is also not actually representative of her lived experiences. However, her peers refuse to name and appropriately represent her accurately by simply referring to her as Black. Invisibilization then, is a process and not a fixed fact. It is a process of rendering a person invisible by refusing to use categories of identity names that represent them. This process is not only persistent, but it is totalizing. Being visibly invisible frames more of the condition of Black and undocumented people. Furthermore, she is both angered and disappointed about the lack of honesty and transparency from her high school counselor, a Black woman, who did not adequately warn her of the anti-Black racism she was likely to experience in college.

Chichima's descriptions of anti-Black racism specifically around feelings of nonbelonging or an air of unwelcoming energy corroborate and further nuance the experiences Meera also shared. Chichima said, "I feel like I belong in the... When I go to the Center for African Students... that center, I feel like I belong. Because some places when you go to, you don't feel... Even the air is not welcoming towards you, but that area is like, 'Don't care. Do what you need to do, do your own thing. If you want to communicate with us we will talk to you, but you're free to be whoever you are.' And I feel also in the LGBTQIA Center I also feel that same way. I go there sometimes to study and I feel like I belong, nobody cares. Like I'm part of the community. So those are the places I feel like I truly belong on campus. I can go to and feel safe and feel welcome. So yeah."

"Thank you for sharing that, I reply acknowledging her experience, "Are there spaces on campus that you feel like you don't belong or maybe you feel unsafe in?"

Chichima continued to share, "I feel a little bit hostile energy if I go to a center that's primarily for Chicano/Latino students. I don't feel like... I don't feel welcome. I feel judged like, 'Oh why is she here?' But then also there's a lot of people who identify as Chicana/Latino but they actually look me so it doesn't make sense to me. But I don't know. It's just... People stare at you and you're like, "Oh okay cool. I'm just going to go." So that's why I also in the undocumented center now I don't really feel like I'm fully welcome because it's mostly students there are like that. But apart from that the good outweighs the bad and I know where I can go to feel comfortable so I just avoid the places I don't feel comfortable in."

Chichima's noting that Latinx students who "look like her" and still make her feel uncomfortable in the Undocumented Student Center point to a larger nexus of anti-Black racism within Latinidad. AfroIndigenous poet, organizer and artist Alán Pelaez López

(@migrantscribble) has worked through their poetry and digital activism to increase visibility for AfroLatinx folks. Their work challenges the colorism and erasure of Blackness in Latinidad but further makes an analysis and critiques of the implications for anti-Black racism from Latino/a/x globally. As a non-Black Latina who was critiqued, Aura Bogado later wrote,

> We need to remember that, as powerful as it is to identify as people of color, Black people face a unique set of oppressions that non-Black people also perpetuate. And we need to recognize that, as non-Black Latinos, our silence does, at times, protect us. We find comfort in our silence around our anti-Blackness, but that silence is nothing more than collusion with white supremacy. We need to talk about anti-Blackness in our communities -- half as much as we need to listen to and take seriously what black people say about it, in digital spaces online, as well as in everyday life. It is impossible to assert that we stand against white supremacy while we allow it to inform our anti-Blackness. It is impossible to be allies to Black people if we are unwilling to carry a conversation about our biases, and begin to lay claim to our faults.[174]

As Bogado makes clear, this is not simply a Latino versus Black issue. Pelaez López through their activism and continue to assert that issues of racial hierarchy, geo-specific understandings and categorizations of race, misunderstandings of the relationship between race and ethnicity, and for many Latinx folks internalized anti-Blackness all impact the experiences Chichima described.

Opting in(to) Documentation

Higher education institutions typically rely on critical mass or quantitative statistically significant frameworks for allocating funds and resources. Enough verifiable and identifiable people must be present to argue for an institutional mandate or make a case about the importance of an issue. This framing is used to justify the creation of cultural centers or allocating space and financial resources for sizable populations of students. In order to create programs and space for belonging in the institution there must first be a numerical significance through absolute nor

[174] Aura Bogado, “A matter of death and death": Confronting anti-black racism among Latinos,” *Salon*.

representational numbers. Because representation is financially incentivized to access material resources, like scholarships and other individual financial supports in addition to cultural center space, opting in to documentation or allowing oneself to be documented through institutional structures is a political practice.

Cari's opting into documentation looked like disclosure to other immigrant communities and U.S. born Black peers. For her, the stakes of opting into documentation and representation under the identity of undocumented were rooted in educating others about her existence and disrupting the dominant narratives around her identities. Disclosure for her outweighed the risks. Real risks of deportation, discrimination and violence she was aware of but decided to engage in the everyday acts of resistance by willfully being represented and documented,

"Well, I feel like honestly, if you're undocumented, you can hide that, but at the same time I'm Black, but there's Black Americans, and there's even some Black Caribbean people because of their parents. I feel like no one truly sees that you stand out unless you talk about it, unless you share your story. But, I mean, as far as being Black, you stand out."

She continued, "But unless you don't share your story ... I can be talking with somebody and like, 'Yeah, you know I'm not a citizen.' They're like, 'Oh really! How?' Then you go to educate them because a lot of people they don't understand what that means. But I feel like, I don't know, when I was younger, my mom would say, "Don't tell anybody you're undocumented." But as I got older ... because she was scared, obviously, with the whole deportation thing and everything. As you got older, and the people around you, they start listening to your story, and they start understanding you, I felt like that was a way that I stood out. I was able to educate some people on an issue that they probably have never heard. Or like

they kind of hear about because we lived in a Caribbean community too. They kind of know that their mom was an immigrant, but they don't know how it is."

Cari's politics were negotiated in the everyday acts of telling peers about her undocustatus and doing the work on educating them. Despite warnings from her mother about potential deportation she pushed to claim entitlement for a recognition and representation of her full self. In "Becoming Modern Racialized Subjects," Hazel Carby writes, "looking for the simultaneous imagining of past, present and possible future triggered in my examples by movement or migration, forced or voluntary. We need to be alert to the occasions when racialized subjects not only step into the recognition given them by others but provide institutions of a future in which relations of subjugation will (could) be transformed."[175] These undocuBlack women are stepping into recognition to transform the modes of representation that are limited by the narrows frames of subjugation that they were created under.

Understanding undocuBlack women's embodied experiences legible small acts of resistance. In "The pleasures of resistance: enslaved women and body politics in the plantation South, 1830-1861" Stephanie Camp writes, "ordinary people were rebelling everyday day in ways of their own invention. In order to regain control over their own body and their own conditions of life, and their relations with one another oftentimes their struggles are on a small personal scale."[176] This interrogation of what constitutes resistance, at what scale does it register for it to be quantified as a political act is a valuable and compelling argument. Not only does this framework for nuancing resistance destabilize the over-reliance on violence as the sole modality for creating change, but it also introduces the concept of place and scale to understanding body

[175] Hazel Carby, "Becoming Modern Racialized Subjects," 627.
[176] Stephanie Camp, "The Pleasures of Resistance: Enslaved Women and Body Politics," 538.

politics. Complicating the private vs. public split of politics and achieved through the scaling of resistance. Resistance, intimate and small in the private lives of individuals is here scaled to be read as large acts of protest and refusal by undocuBlack women.

Lena's small intimate acts of resistance sometimes manifest in her work as a student activist, other times it was through advocacy for undocumented students navigating higher education without the temporary protections and resources provided for those who qualify for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA).[177] Lena said, "It's also hard to get people who are active to be involved because they just want to be complacent and they have financial aid, so just chilling. They want to go to school, do whatever they need to do. I feel like for me, being a student is just... I can't be a student without being an activist on this campus because that relates to my academics as well. They just kind of go hand-in-hand."

She continued, "I feel like it's necessary, which I think is why I'm doing it, because I'm an unDACA student and I work in the DREAM Center. It turned more into, like, oh there's no one else that's unDACA here and there's a lot of unDACA students on campus, so I have to be the voice for them, I guess. Also just being an undocumented Black student as well, so also representing the minority populations like AAPI and Black folks and advocating for them. Any time we would plan programs, we'd make sure they include those within the year's programs for the DREAM Center and making sure they host private dinners or events."

"I think it was the end of the year that I realized my role the space was really important. Everyone else there had DACA, so I don't feel like they would advocate with the same drive and

[177] An immigration policy under the US Department of Homeland Security where individuals who migrated to the US as children (and meet specific criteria) are given relief/deferred action from deportation for a period of two years (subject to renewal). Individuals are also eligible for work authorization. The policy was established by the Obama administration in June 2012 and rescinded by the Trump administration in September 2017 (Department of Homeland Security, 2017). As of 2017, there were approximately 800,000 people enrolled as individuals who qualify and successfully received protections under DACA.

passion as I did. Because even when I asked them to join meetings of allies, it's not like the same because they aren't really going through it and they feel like if you're someone who goes to it, you're advocate with more passion, just differently."

Lena's advocacy work, informed by her personal stakes are performed to make the signifier of undocumented more expansive to hold the nuance in race of undocuBlack folks and status for unDACAmented students. Her politics of negotiating identity are what Aimee Meredith Cox identifies as *shapeshifting* or the "choreography of citizenship" a series of negotiations, claims, and entitlement to visibility, protection, and ways of living fully and under self-definition that are normally inaccessible to low-income Black girls who are dispossessed from citizenry and marked as unworthy of care. For Cox, "shapeshifting is an act, a theory, and in this sense, a form of praxis that—although uniquely definitive of and defined by Black girls—reveals our collective vulnerabilities."[178] Shapeshifting then, provides not only a useful analytic for understanding how those who are multiply marginalized are situated outside citizenship in the U.S. through normalizing ideologies, but also how they subvert dominant logics of life and living under a dominant white supremacist, patriarchal society through micro politics. These micropolitics are constituted by the methods Black girls and women employ when negotiating with friends, family, supervisors, partners, center staff, and each other to, "shift the shape of spaces that restrict and punish them as well as those that offer care and support."[179]

For Chichima, her intimate politics include creating community and fighting for folks who are both rendered invisible in larger narratives, but are also invisible to her as she has never met them. She states, "I think maybe being a part of a community... like undocuqueer. I think I

[178] Cox, 7.
[179] Ibid, 26.

expect that. Then I was like wow. I am part of the community, but maybe I should be more active. And also, I think I need to find someone else that's undocuBlack. Because then I feel like maybe I'll be able to have that, because I once I heard your story and heard how you're also fighting for the undocuBlack. I fought to represent undocuBlack, but have I ever met someone that identifies being Black and told me that? No. So I'm fighting for people that I've never actually seen, like invisible. But I know they're out there, but they're probably not comfortable coming out and saying that they are undocuBlack."

Representation and the stakes for being representable go beyond the interest of Chichima and impact a larger community and network of undocuBlack folks. Building upon genealogies of other scholars who theorize Black politics, and like Camp's "pleasures of resistance," Cox focuses on the small/micro politics of the most marginalized Black folks who are targeted by normalizing ideologies and logics of life and living under a dominant white supremacist, patriarchal society.[180] These micropolitics impact Black social life because of the everydayness of its production. The quotidian micro-politics of freedom and liberation are not solely tied to overt political activism, movements or large-scale organization; but rather through grounded and sustained personal efforts that inform the political. hooks describes the nature of this work in academia as an educator, but it bears true for those committed to education as a site of liberation, "Our notions of social change were not fancy. There was no elaborate postmodern political theory shaping our actions. We were simply trying to change the way we went about our daily lives so that our values and habits of being would reflect our commitment to freedom".[181] The

[180] Cox, 8.
[181] bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*.

connectedness of the personal every day and the implication for a political reorientation to social life is the epitome of the personal as political.[182]

Conclusion

Understanding conceptualizations of home, representation and belonging, and access citizenship, and rights to life are critically shifted by centering Black womanhood as the entry through which to understand them. These demands and negotiations for representation—their practice of shapeshifting—illustrate the quotidian nature of politics and everyday resistance creating epistemological insights to undocuBlack women's particular forms of theorizing their own conditions. The relationships between dispossession and freedom, care as a practice and representations, refusal, and resistance is upended by the everyday acts of subverting dominant paradigms enacted by undocuBlack women. How do they push for visibility and representation without reproducing forms of violence? The mechanisms they use for refusal and practices of opting into documentation serve as "sources of a generative politics of transformation"[183] Opting into documentation is a move done to create a more capacious space of identification and to be rendered visible within it.

Meera, Cari, Chichima, Yarah, and Lena choose to engage in a practice of micropolitics rendering them visible to structures within the university. Because these structures are informed by larger national and global discourses of migration and citizenship, undocuBlack narratives are invisibilized within them. While these micropolitics disrupt the visibly invisible paradox outlined in this chapter, it also pushes to make the institution accountable. By opting in to signaling and identifying that these women are Black and undocumented they are potentially

[182] Combahee River Collective, "A Black Feminist Statement," 1977.
[183] Cox, 61.

opening themselves up to violence through the vulnerability of being marked as other. However, the activism that made possible Black Cultural Centers and pushes for institutional accountability to address anti-Back racism is also what these students are engaging in. While student activism takes many forms, the protest, the sit-in, the letters of demand; the activism, protest, and refusal of the violence of erasure that Meera, Cari, Chichima, Yarah, and Lena engage in provides new ways of understanding resistance. Resistance as practiced by these students is both insightful and inspired. The commitment to homemaking and self-making as explored in Chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis are tied to their experiences on college campuses where sense of belonging and homemaking, or finding space that is safe and accurately reflects the lived experience of undocuBlack students, is critically important.

Conclusion

> i survive on intimacy & tomorrow / that's all i've got goin
> bein alive & bein a woman & bein colored is a metaphysical
> dilemma / i haven't conquered yet
>
> – Ntozake Shange, *For colored girls who have considered suicide/When the rainbow is enuf*

My stakes for this project have always been invested in intimacy and care particularly for documented, representing, and describing configurations of Black life. The way in which these women live, persist, and thrive in spite of overwhelming structures of violence and erasure is remarkable yet practiced so simply in everyday acts of living for their communities and themselves. It's the everydayness of their lives, the acts of resistance, deciding to live on their own terms in the face of exclusion, family pressures and responsibilities, and the persistent threat of erasure that make their contributions to our understanding of home, belonging and representation so unique. What Meera, Cari, Chichima, Yarah, and Lena's stories reveal and create the space and language for are ways to reconceptualize home, autonomyand belonging, and representation. Their narratives together create the conditions for a capacious understanding between Blackness, gender, citizenship, and self-making. Their narratives are not only analyzed using Black feminist practices of intimacy and care but are also exemplary examples giving insights to the ways they are constantly engaging in Black feminsit practices of intimacy and care.

The initial inquiry of this thesis project sought to understand broadly the experiences of undocumented Black students as they were invisibilized in majoritarian narratives of migration and documentation in the U.S. I designed the interview questions to explore how undocuBlack

students negotiated safety through embodied experiences that are always already marked as deviant, dangerous, in excess and pathologized. The conversations in those interviews revealed what modes of belonging, through the politics of space and place, look like for undocuBlack women. Grounded in Black Studies, Gender Studies and Higher Education, the analysis of their interviews and meaning making of the methodological and political practice of storytelling Meera, Chichima, Lena, Yarah, and Cari revealed how despite their vulnerability to violence, they create language and grammar of autonomyand make meaning of their lives and selves.

Invisiblization, an overarching theme of this thesis is discussed in Chapter 1 particularly as the modes of family and home-making register beyond conventional notions of kinship. As that first chapter outlined, cultural identity and understanding oneself is accomplished through a process of positioning. These undocuBlack women positioned themselves in deliberate ways to claim and align with nation-states, to explore the contours of Black diasporic community, and strategically engaged in the intimacies of world making to articulate their notions of home. Grounded in various relationships to Black diaspora, each woman explored their sense of self and home through the geographies that informed their experiences. Navigating geographies of imperialism that trace how undocuBlack students come to be in the U.S. illustrated how these undocuBlack women practice homemaking. Home as a place and home as a group of people were expansive moving beyond tradition ties of kinship and community making. They reached beyond borders, time, and place articulation practices of community and collective care illustrating their strength and resiliency to persist under conditions where they are perceived to be lacking place. Home was not defined by lack, deviance, of deficits but rather opportunity to connect meaningfully and position themselves in community with other Black subjects. Their

homemaking required a looking beyond citizenship or belonging to nation-state to create community reimagined through a fundamental valuing of Black life and a pursuit of the conditions under which Black life can thrive.

In my final interview with Yarah, she shared with me what being visible in a place that she belongs to and would or could call home looks like. Recalling one of our original conversations I asked her, "We've talked about it in the first interview, but I'm curious about if you thought about any more or, the process of becoming documented, of getting citizenship. What does that mean for you?"

Yarah replied, "It means a whole lot to me because I feel foreign. Like I officially belong here. The title, I mean, it makes it official. I also see different opportunities that are coming towards me. I feel like I'm unstoppable, basically, I can do anything. I can live the American life, that kind of thing. To know that nothing stops you reaching your goals, the height of your goals physically. It's a good feeling."

Like other participants in our final interview I asked, "What does freedom mean for you?" So much of what these women had shared are their "freedom dreams"[184] and though they had been shared in part throughout the interviews, I was sure to ask them explicitly at the end of our conversations what freedom looked, felt, and meant. I continued my question, "There's a way in which you've talked about how not being documented restricts you or doesn't give you access

[184] Borrowed from Robin Kelley's book of the same name, I expand upon his argument that these, "renegade Black intellectuals/activists/artists challenge and reshape [our world] and in doing so produce brilliant theoretical insights and critical visions," 6.

to things, or being a student, certain places, certain pressures and things like that on you. What would being a free person without some of those stressors mean to you? What does it look like?"

"Mean to me?" she began. After a moment of reflection Yarah continued, "A free person, I think I would imagine someone who doesn't have to worry about, if my category is accepted, falling into a category basically, it's like what if I'm excluded from this whole situation. So not having to think about that, knowing that your safe, I think that makes the whole difference."

Later in the interview I asked, "As a part of these interviews have there been things that we've talked about that are things that maybe you haven't thought of before or things that you don't share with your family or friends that we've discussed?" This question for me was a necessary part of processing and acknowledging the intimacy of storytelling that had been created through our conversations. Rather than asking as an evaluative tool, this question served to underscore the recognition of the vulnerability of my participants and the labor of recalling and making meaning of their lived experiences that I asked them to engage in.

Yarah's response surprised me, "I mean, yes. Us talking for example, I didn't know this was ever going to be personal. Like just a space for undocumented Black students. To know that people are actually thinking about that makes me realize that there's hope for us or something. That makes me very happy and I didn't think about that before."

Until this point, I had not considered that this would be a project about hope. I had started with my own hopes, investments in Black folks, insecurities and worries about being able to represent these stories, these women in authentic ways. I hoped to share their stories to challenge the assumptions held about migrants and citizenship. What this project ended up being, however, was reveal the ways that undocuBlack women upend what is known about home and belonging,

how they unmoor notions of who practices politics and who is a political subject with the autonomyto self-make from their raced and gendered understandings. Their stories gave me a hope for the type of collective liberation and freedom dreaming that can happen when the political, social, and economic realities of Black women's lives are assumed to be real and valid.

I concluded my interview with one final prompt, "In the spirit of that, are there things that, because as I talked about this research as a part of my thesis, writing my paper and stuff. Are there other things that I haven't asked you that you want me to know or to include? What are some things that you think are important either for other black undocumented students who maybe will read the paper, or maybe anyone else that you want them to know about sort of like your experience or community or things like?"

Yarah offered, "I guess I just want people to know that there's more of us [undocuBlack folks] than they think there is. We actually need like our own space and we need help I guess basically. But they ignored us, so I'm glad, I just want you to know that we exist, and we need our own safe space."

Acknowledging the existence of undocuBlack folks and creating space for them on college campus is rooted fundamentally in representation as explored in Chapter 3. The history of political organizing of disciplines like Black Studies and Ethnic Studies and for campus spaces specifically for cultural/ethnic/gender centers on college and university campuses began with the social and political organizing of the civil rights movement in the U.S. in the 1960s. Integrating college campuses and admitting students of color meant that Black students were looking for safety and sense of place in historically white institutions. Black students continue to look for place at institutions that have majority or sizeable student of color populations because higher education institutions are rooted in anti-Blackness. Despite the numbers of Black students

on campus or even a critical mass of undocuBlack students' experiences of anti-Black racism, xenophobia, homophobia, sexism and other identify based antagonisms persist. Representation then, is the question and answer Meera, Cari, Chichima, Yarah, and Lena navigate on campus. The ability to be fully represented in Black spaces or undocu-spaces that neither register their experiences as whole, complex, and nuanced is the question of how they are invisibilized on campus. However, opting into representation and other forms of documentation, to be counted amongst students groups, to claim space amongst the landscape of student activists, and to make demands to be seen and to be represented is the answer to how these undocuBlack women have attempted to make themselves visible.

The limits of visibility and fight against invisibilization occurred in community building, on college campus place making, and within understandings and expectations of Black womanhood. Black womanhood for Meera, Cari, Chichima, Yarah, and Lena was made in the interior part of themselves described in the second chapter of this thesis. Their bodyminds held sacred their interiority, a space where their dreams, visions of self, and dreams for the possibilities of making worlds where they could be represented, safe, and belong. They navigated and grappled with pressures to be a "good daughter" for their family, to be a "proper citizen" in the eyes of the state, and to be "good girls" for teachers and peers in school. These refused to allow their lives to be eclipsed by structures of violence at home, in school, and from the state. Instead, Yarah, Lena, Chichima, Cari, and Meera in various ways created themselves within the context of xenophobic nationalism, sexism, racism, and ableism without being overly defined by those superseding structures of violence. In the quiet spaces within themselves, they created tools and language to express and make a self that sometimes satisfied these external pressures and sometimes represented who they felt they ought to be. Creating a safe home, demanding accurate and rightful representation, and speaking as sovereign Black subjects who belong in the world in

the ways they feel they ought to be is simply how these women are conquering the metaphysical dilemma of being alive.

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