We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting for:

Pan-African Consciousness Raising and Organizing in the United States and Venezuela

by

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Department of Cultural Anthropology
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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
in the Department of Cultural Anthropology
in the Graduate School of Duke University
2016

ABSTRACT

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation draws on fifteen months of field research accompanying organizers, participating in protests, planning/strategy meetings, state-run programs, academic conferences and everyday life in the United States and Venezuela. Through comparative examination of the processes through which African Diasporic peoples engage in processes of radicalization, this work deconstructs tendencies to deify political s/heroes of eras past. Using the framework of "*encuentros,*" as moments and spaces of encounter which facilitate dialogue, insurgent learning, collective research and analysis in moments of struggle, I position encounters as critical to the moments in which African Diasporic youth in particular, realize they are they ones they have been waiting for. The daily labor of determining what Black/African descended liberation and self-determination looks like, in its many facets, is the process of radicalization explored here.

Through comparative analysis, I suggest the vertical structures of "capitalist representative democracy" dominating the U.S. political climate remain unyielding to critical analyses of social stratification based on race, gender, and class as articulated by Black youth. Conversely, I contend that present Venezuelan attempts to construct and fortify more horizontal structures of "popular democracy" under what Hugo Chávez termed 21st Century Socialism, have resulted in social fissures, allowing for a more dynamic and hopeful negation between Afro-Venezuelan youth and the state.

Ultimately, I read the various manifestations of the ways in which Black/African descended youth organizing occurs in the context of their perpetual victimization by neoliberal, genocidal state-politics in the US, and in Venezuela, a state that has charged

itself with the responsibility of radically improving the quality of life of all its citizens, as an example of a Pan-African praxis extant in 21st century global social movements.

For my grandmother, who transitioned before I began writing but whose spirit, grace, sophistication, understanding, and boundless love are the foundation of all that I am and hope to become.

Many years ago you said to me, "you are going to be one educated lady when you're finished." I only hope it has made you proud!

"Freedom and love may be the most revolutionary ideas available to us, and yet as intellectuals we have failed miserably to grapple with their political and analytical importance. I have come to realize that once we strip radical social movements down to their bare essence and understand the collective desires of people in motion, freedom and love lay at the very heart of the matter. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that freedom and love constitute the foundation for spirituality, another elusive and intangible force with which few scholars of social movements have come to terms."

~ Robin D.G. Kelley

"I have learned that a woman can be a fighter, a freedom fighter, a political activist, and she can fall in love and be loved. She can be married, have children, be a mother. Revolution must mean life also; every aspect of life."

~ Leila Khaled

CONTENTS

Abstract …… iv

Dedication …… vi

Epigraphs ……. vii

List of Abbreviations ……..... x

List of Figures …….. xi

Acknowledgements …… xiii

Preface: Encountering Venezuela, Funding My Voice ……. 1
Finding Venezuela, Being Found ……. 4
Finding My Voice ……21

Seein' It for Wearin' It: Methodological Concerns ……. 28
Gaining Access ……30
Collecting Data …… 34
Motives & Thoughts on this Comparative Project ……...37

A Note on Naming Terminology……...44

Pan-African Encounters ……51
The Network of AfroVenezuelans ……52
The International Year for People of African Descent …… 56
Haitian Connections: A Debt to be Repaid ……..59
Encountering Afro-Venezuelan Politics ……...61
Resolutions from the Encounter …… 67

More Terminology: Encuentro as Theoretical Intervention …… 70

To Have the State on Your Side……75
Setting the Stage for the Bolivarian Revolution …….. 78
Bolivarianismo, a 21st Century Socialist Nation Building Project ……...81
Bolivarianismo in Pan-African Perspective ……85
Redefining Venezuelan Electoral Democracy ……92
Venezuela's 2012 Presidential Election ……...96
Election Day, 2012 ……101
Communal Councils ……...104
Chavismo and Feminism ……109
And for Afrodescended Women? …….. 117

Political Economies of Race in two Americas …… 121

Alejandro's Story ……125
Some Points for Comparison ……..130
Census Politics and The Bolivarian Revolution ……138
Racial Encounters ……...144
Fundayacucho ……161

Bearing Witness to the Weapon of History ……169

Re-Centering the Narratives of Radical Black/Afro Women …… 179
We Need New Names: Sketching A Pan-African Feminist Theory ……. 180
Stories of Pan-African Feminist Praxis ……. 188
Merlyn …… 188
Nirva ……. 198
Roraima …….. 200
Luisa ……... 202

An Intellectual Labor of Love ……206

Kinship Connections: My Momma and Daddy's Civil Rights Movement ……213
A Little on my Father's Story …… 242
A Little More on my Uncle Bob …… 245
A Brief Meditation on Being Our Father's Daughters …….. 247

We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For: Intergenerational Concerns …… 254
#BlackLivesMatter ……261
I Did it Because I'm Free Bree's Story …… 264

In the Belly of the Beast: Making "Yo Parents' Civil Rights Movement" Ours …….. 273
The Dream Defender's Congress ……. 287
Josh's Story …….. 298

A Note on the Term Radical ……. 309

Some Conclusions on the Will to Love and Dream …… 312
Musical Epistemologies in the Movement for Black Lives ……. 325
#IfIDieInPoliceCustody ……328
Using Anger In The Name of Love ……..332

References ……322

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A-APRP	All-African People's Revolutionary Party
AAWRU	All African Women's Revolutionary Union
ALBA	Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America
ALD	African Liberation Day
BLM	Black Lives Matter
BPP	Black Panther Party
BYP	Black Youth Project
CORE	Congress On Racial Equality
CELAC	Community of Latin American and Caribbean States
HBCU	Historically Black College or University
SNCC	Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee
UPTBAL	Universidad Politécnica Territorial de Barlovento Argelia Laya

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 – Soy Afro Census Advertisement …….48

Figure 2 – AfroEncuentro Advertisement ……....51

Figure 3 – Garifuna Man Holding Child ……..58

Figure 4 – Norma Romero……64

Figure 5 – "Miko Mandante" …….....75

Figure 6 – Police Shoot Obama Stimulus Chimp ……76

Figure 7 – Bolívar, Digital Sketch……...133

Figure 8 – Bolívar un 1837 …….134

Figure 9 – Casta Painting ……135

Figure 10 – "Nuestra Alegría" ..……..139

Figure 11 – "Mi Belleza" ……140

Figure 12 – Angela's Fro ……141

Figure 13 – Venezuelan Riot Police ……...144

Figure 14 – UPTBAL Graduation ……..165

Figure 15 – UPTBAL …….180

Figure 16 – Vargas State Institute for Women Logo …….190

Figure 17 – Klan Country ……...221

Figure 18 – This Ain't Yo Daddy's Civil Rights Movement …….257

Figure 19 – DD 2010 March 4 Trayvon …… 267

Figure 20 – Bree Captures the Flag ……... 271

Figure 21 – DD March 4 Trayvon ……. 275

Figure 22 – They Fought Then …….. 282

Figure 23 – DD Takeover Day 23 …… 284

Figure 24 – DDs & Talib Kweli …… 285

Figure 25 – Neverlovedus…Remember? …… 326

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Lastly and perhaps most ceremoniously, this dissertation is in honor of my Black Feminist Anthropologist, Freedom Fighting Foremother Zora Neal Hurston. In the 1930s she dared to set off and affirm Southern Blackisms as a graduate student at Columbia University which she later turned in to one of her most famous books *Mules and Men*. In 1955, defying conventions of the day, she called the Brown v Board ruling on desegregation "insulting rather than honoring my race," based on the implication that simply being in the presence of white folks was good for our education rather than a more analytical critique of the structural issues that resulted in Black schools as materially dispossed. She served on the faculty at my Alma Matter North Carolina Central University as a folklorist and playwright. She was blasted into obscurity by her peers like Richard Wright only to be exhumed and interrogated in the 1970s by a class of Black Feminists who made the world acknowledge her brilliance and fighting spirit. She is famously quoted saying these words to live by:

> "Sometimes, I feel discriminated against, but it does not make me angry. It merely astonishes me. How can any deny themselves the pleasure of my company? It's beyond me."

To anyone I have neglected to acknowledge, please charge it to my head, not my heart. The final days of finishing this project were among the most trying in my life. Without you this most certainly would not have been possible.

In Revolutionary Love,

Layla

PREFACE: ENCOUNTERING VENEZUELA, FINDING MY VOICE

When I began my graduate studies the political landscape of the world looked very different. Encouraged by what I understood to be a socialist revolution explicitly committed to improving the material and socio-cultural conditions of Black/African descended peoples, unfolding in my lifetime, I set out to study the role of Afro-Venezuelans in their country's Bolivarian Revolution. I was raised on a healthy diet of Pan-African Socialism, defined by Dr. Osageyfo Kwame Nkrumah in *Class Struggle in Africa*, as total liberation and unification of Africa under an All-African socialist government." (1970,88)[1]. As a child, I was intrigued by the stories my parents and their friends would tell about their political work. The breadth of knowledge and sophistication they seemed to possess when they spoke of international and domestic communities of African peoples struggling for liberation was overwhelming.

In stories about the political work of his youth, my father repeatedly expressed how important it was for him and his comrades, as Black Youth displaced in the United States, to witness examples of triumphant Pan-Africanist struggles. They were particularly motivated by the struggles for independence that swept the African continent in the mid-20th century as well as the Revolutionary nationalist, unifying, and socialist liberation/reconstruction projects in Cuba, Vietnam and other parts of the world. However, more than the "success," of these struggles for independence captured their attention. The possibility of political assistance, asylum and material support in and from

[1] He further dictates that this must be the primary objective of all Black Revolutionaries throughout the world. This objective, when achieved, "will bring about the fulfillment of the aspirations of Africans and people of African descent everywhere. It will at the same time advance the triumph of the international socialist revolution, and the onward progress towards world communism, under which, every society is ordered on the principle of – from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs."

newly liberated territories struggling to build socialist societies such as Cuba, Ghana, Guinea, and Vietnam etcetera gave them hope that alternatives to their material conditions existed somewhere in the world, that there was more to life than their immediate realities.

As an undergraduate in the mid-late 2000s, I began to hear rumblings of a socialist revolution taking place in Venezuela. In our earliest conversations about what was occurring in Venezuela, I remember witnessing his excitement as my father instructed me to keep my eyes on Venezuela. One day, he warned, I might find myself wanting and/or needing to get out of the United States. He always made very clear that he believed travel and exposure tend to nourish the imagination and expose us to new possibilities. Through my studies of Spanish Language and Afro-Latino cultures as an undergraduate, I began encountering Afro-Venezuelans attesting to the importance of Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution in college classrooms, local Black-owned bookstores and even entire conferences dedicated to understanding the revolution from Afro-Venezuelan perspectives. By the time I was accepted to graduate school in 2009, my interest in the political lives of Afro-Venezuelans had been sufficiently watered and I planted the seeds for a dissertation project that would take me there to see what was happening with my own eyes. I was fortunate to arrive in Venezuela as Afro-Venezuelan visibility was increasing exponentially and the social programs of the Bolivarian Revolution were bearing large, sweet fruit. Not long after I completed coursework and began to conduct fieldwork in earnest, my attention was drawn back to my place of birth, the United States of America.

The Bolivarian Revolution had been unfolding for more than a decade when a generation of Black and Brown youth in the United States had the thin veil of American democracy ripped from our eyes following the 2012 murder of Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida. Jolted into action through the desire to believe the (in)justice system could work in our favor, at least once, Black and Brown youth all over the country took to the streets to demand the arrest of Trayvon Martin's murderer. Only through public outcry, was George Zimmerman arrested, charged and tried. A new generation was convinced of our ability to affect change. Zimmerman's subsequent acquittal was met with mixed emotions. Some were angry enough to keep pressing on and others were resigned, once again to the truth of a country that *neverlovedus.* Events reached a tipping point in 2014 when Black and Brown youth across the United States watched live, as Mike Brown's 18-year-old body lay face down in a streaming pool of blood just steps from his home in Ferguson, MO. Through the echoes of a mourning mother and a seething community, the giant of youthful, righteous, Black and Brown indignation awakened and the need for this comparative research project was undeniable.

I began asking myself, what did it mean that mass social movements were flourishing in both the United States and Venezuela? How significant was the fact that both countries were experiencing these upheavals under the leaderships of their first respective, self-identified, "Black/Afro Presidents?" Why, in Venezuela, were Afro-Venezuelans taking to the streets to protect their budding national political project while Black and Brown youth in streets of the United States were there precisely and defiantly against the state, in response to ballooning state violence and repression? Could this be proof that socialism better served the material and cultural needs of Black and Brown

peoples? And, perhaps most fundamentally, how did all of these Black/Afro peoples (particularly women and youth) become politicized and radicalized to the point of action? These questions swirled in my head for years as I struggled to find the connections, articulate the necessity of this particular comparative project, and overcome my difficulties with writing in order to put on paper, what I had become comfortable articulating during discourse with others.

FINDING VENEZUELA, BEING FOUND

In truth, Venezuela was trying to find me long before I was ready to be found. Dr. Marco Polo Hernandez Cuevas, my Afro-Mexican college advisor to my Spanish Language major, was the first person who introduced me to the stories and struggles of Venezuelans of African descent. A rather large, loud, self-assured man who laughed heartily and called it like he saw it, Dr. Cuevas truly believed in the merits of experiential learning, particularly when it came to language acquisition. In actuality, he didn't just *introduce* me to (Afro)Venezuela, he encouraged me to learn more about Venezuela in a moment when its shifting politics were allowing the struggles of Afro-Venezuelans both domestically and abroad to become increasingly more visible. *Visibilizar,* a verb meaning "to make visible" or perhaps more pertinently, "to recognize," is essential to the lexicon of struggle for self-determination and consciousness raising among Spanish Speaking African descendants.

At times, during my undergraduate studies, it seemed as though it was Dr. Cuevas' self-appointed mission to make us, his predominantly Black/Afrodescendant students in the United States, recognize the struggles of our Spanish speaking brethren

and sistren throughout Latin America. This mission to be seen and recognized was likely very important to Dr. Cuevas due to the ways in which Afrolatinidad had been invisibilized throughout much of his own life. Dr. Cuevas, a near six-foot-tall man with a curly Afro, grew up in Mexico City with no knowledge of the contributions made by Mexicans of African descent to the development of his homeland. He recalls that it was not until he left Mexico for the United States that he discovered he was a "different kind of Mexican." Due to his outward appearance, he recalls, people often assumed he was either Puerto Rican or Cuban. Interestingly, Dr. Cuevas and I have this experience in common. While I was a college student, I studied abroad in southern Mexico and was often assumed to be Cuban or Jamaican. I did not know what to make of that assumption then, but it is one of the experiences that continues to drive my personal interest in Latin American understandings of race. In a December 2012 *Los Afro-Latinos* blog post by Nicolle Morales Kern with Dr. Cuevas shares that in learning more about his African heritage, he discovered that the *Chilango* Spanish he and nearly 15 million other lower class and Afro-descended inhabitants of Mexico City spoke, was not unlike the *Loango* spoken by many Afro-Venezuelans or the Black Vernacular English, also referred to as Ebonics, spoken by African Americans in the United States.

In the fall of my junior year in college (2007) Dr. Cuevas told me the Modern Foreign Languages department would be hosting Afro-Venezuelan scholar/activist Jesus "Chucho" Garcia as well as Geronimo Sanchez-Gonzalez, one of the top administrators at what was then referred to as the University Institute of Barlovento, considered Venezuela's only Historically Black Post-Secondary Institution, which has since been renamed in honor of Afro-Venezuelan socialist guerrilla, Argelia Laya. Dr. Cuevas

suggested I attend. Just prior to their visit, I spent the semester abroad in the Dominican Republic, where, due to some great teachers and horrific racialized encounters, my interests in Afro-Latinos was nurtured. Knowing nearly nothing about Venezuela and its ongoing Bolivarian Revolution, I had not initially planned to attend their talk, however I later decided to drop in to check it out, per Dr. Cuevas's suggestion. The talk was very informal, as was and continues to be the style of Dr. Cuevas as he does not believe in a lot of pomp and circumstance. Dr. Cuevas was standing at the front of the room in a white button down shirt with a white hand towel thrown over his shoulder. Chucho was clad in a t-shirt and black blazer with a kufi atop his neatly braided cornrows. Geronimo was even more casual in a white t-shirt and jeans.

The talk covered a range of topics, however, the one that stuck out to me most was the discussion of "*pedagogía cimarron*." *Cimarrones* are formerly enslaved Africans who escaped their captivity and went on to form and live in community with other formerly enslaved Africans. In some cases, those enslaved Africans also formed alliances and communities with the local indigenous populations, a practice more common in Latin America, though not unheard of in the continental United States, as exemplified by the Florida Seminoles. In the Spanish-speaking world these peoples are referred to as *Cimarrones*, Maroons in the English speaking world, Quilombolas or Palenqueras in Brazil, Mawons in Haitian Creole and Bushinengues in French Guiana and Suriname. In its most basic sense, "pedagogy" is the art, method and/or practice of teaching. A Cimarron pedagogy is a weapon of history, a method of bearing witness to methods of resistance, struggle, freedom and dignity passed down from enslaved ancestors to present communities of African descended peoples struggling for freedom.

My interest was already piqued when they began to speak of historical and contemporary connections to Africa but when they then proceeded to link those pedagogical methods adapted from Afro-Venezuelan histories of *cimarronaje* with Venezuela's ongoing Bolivarian Revolution, I was convinced that I needed to know more. Here were these self-identified Afro-descended men whose first language was Spanish, speaking about the ongoing socio-economic revolution in their country and how their struggles as African descended peoples were being supported by their government. I needed to find out if what they were saying was real or if they were pushing pipe dreams. Unfortunately, in true college student fashion, I did not do much to follow up in the months after, because I allowed other things in my life to take precedence. Fortunately for me however, Venezuela kept showing up in my life.

Howard University, one of the premier HBCUs in the country, located in the heart of Chocolate City[2] (Washington D.C.) offered a kind of cultural and intellectual refuge for my family when I was a child, as well as a meeting space for an extended community of Pan-African kinfolk. My family religiously planned and attended African Liberation Days in Malcolm X Park, often referred to by non-Africans and D.C. gentrifiers as Meridian Hill, with most of the smaller political meetings and discussions being held on the campus of Howard University. The very first African Liberation Day, then referred to as Africa Freedom Day, took place in Accra, Ghana in 1958 after Kwame Nkrumah, the

[2] DC has always been a city with a majority of African-American population even though the percentage of blacks in the city has been coming down in recent times. There was even a time when it was the blackest of the city in the entire country. It was in 1975 that a popular band called parliament released an album titled Chocolate City. This was done as a tribute to the fact that Washington DC had become the first black dominated city across the country. The phrase was further popularized by comedian Chris Rock and a scholar named Cornet West when he used it in his book titled 'Race Matters'.

first president of independent Ghana, called for the yearly commemoration of the progress toward African Liberation, and to symbolize the determination of the people of Africa to free themselves from foreign domination and exploitation. The very next year, Malcolm X addressed an Africa Freedom Day rally in Harlem, NY. The first properly named African Liberation Day to occur on US soil did not take place until 1972. In 1976, my father stopped at nothing to attend his first African Liberation Day, hosted by the A-APRP. He was so determined in fact that, when his car broke down on the drive from North Carolina to DC, he ironically, hitched a ride on the back of a watermelon truck the rest of the way.

As a college student, I took the opportunity to make my way to Howard University as often as possible. I was privileged to have been afforded a full academic scholarship for my undergraduate studies at North Carolina Central University, an Historically Black University in the heart of Durham, NC, adjacent to the Hayti Heritage Community commonly referred to as the Black Wall Street.[3] Despite being notoriously under-resourced and staffed by overworked faculty, I had the good fortune of being meticulously nurtured and encouraged by NCCU's overworked and under-paid faculty and staff. So much so that, with no personal intentions of a pursuing a graduate degree upon entering college, my Eagle community laid a path to the PhD that I would only later recognize. My scholarship afforded me the opportunity to travel domestically and study

[3] Durham, North Carolina's Hayti Heritage Community is commonly believed to have been named after Haiti, The First Independent Black Republic in the western hemisphere. In 1911 Booker T. Washington visited the Hayti community and commented that he found a "city of negro enterprises" (58). The community was home to the North Carolina Mutual Insurance Company, Lincoln Hospital and North Carolina College for Negroes, later known as North Carolina Central University. In 1959, only one year after his country gained independence from France, President Ahmed Sekou Touré was awarded an honorary doctor of laws from NCCU during his tour of the American south.

abroad several times. In the latter part of the summer of 2006, I participated in the University of North Carolina (UNC) in Washington Program, which allowed me to live in Washington D.C. for a few months while taking classes and interning with the National Alliance of Black School Educators. In the earlier part of that summer, I spent about six weeks in southern Mexico and the following winter break in Guinea, Conakry. Following those trips, I spent the spring semester of 2007 studying abroad in the Dominican Republic.

I embarked on these journeys primarily with the intention of improving my Spanish language skills, however, having never traveled abroad (with the exception of a Bahamas cruise) I was equally motivated by a desire to see more of the world. I grew up surrounded by communities of several different nationalities but I had no idea what their home countries were like. My first trip abroad to Southern Mexico was fairly typical and without incident, or so I thought until I began to decompress. I had a series of experiences that would only be elucidated as I continued my studies of Spanish language and as my interest in Spanish speaking African diasporic communities grew. On a number of occasions while in Cuernavaca, I was asked by random strangers if they could touch my skin and/or if I was from Jamaica or Cuba. Most of these inquiries felt benign enough until I spent a semester in the Dominican Republic (DR), very small country, bordered by Haiti, and inhabited primarily by the descendants of enslaved Africans. In the DR, I experienced a visceral form of racist bigotry I had never previously encountered, despite being born and raised in the US, a country plagued by a history of racial trauma and paranoia. I was regularly solicited as a prostitute on my daily walk to school; my Professor Blas Jimenez, an internationally recognized poet, was referred to as "*negrito*"

(a term he found racially offensive despite being aware of the claim by many Spanish speakers that it is a term of endearment English speakers are too racially paranoid to appreciate); and I was often assumed to be Haitian and subsequently accused of lying about such when I denied any known ancestral connection to the country. While enrolled at PUCMM in Santo Domingo, two classes, one on Dominican Culture and another on African Heritage in the Dominican Republic, helped me begin to interpret my racial encounters in the DR. They exposed me to the peculiar history of the island of Hispaniola and the centuries long tense relations between the two nations inhabiting the island. When I left the DR, I was so angry and disgusted by my experiences that I couldn't speak well of the country for years after. I did however desire to continue my pursuit of Spanish language as well as the histories and cultures of Afro-Latin peoples.

In April of 2008, I curiously attended a symposium at Howard University titled "What's Up with Venezuela? Participatory Democracy or Democracy as Usual." Despite Chucho's visit to NCCU a few years prior, I hadn't kept up with Venezuela so I was really unfamiliar with what was happening there. I remember wondering who and what motivated such a specific conference at the time. I was toying with the idea of applying for a Fulbright fellowship to Venezuela, which is why I took the initiative to drive myself to D.C. for the two-day symposium. I arrived and found myself in rooms of Spanish Speaking Black folks attempting to explain the myriad ways Venezuela offered a hopeful, and increasingly viable alternative to neoliberal economic governance through wealth redistribution programs and 21st century socialism. The conference, convened by the Venezuela Solidarity Network, hosted over 200 solidarity activists from across the

US, interested in studying and understanding the revolutionary changes sweeping Venezuela.

I remember being awed by the number of darker skinned Spanish speaking people discussing radical change, a feeling likely motivated by my negative experiences in the DR. I also remember being excited and a little intimidated the by level of nuanced sophistication apparent in the way they discussed the progress and pitfalls of the Bolivarian Revolution. One of the featured panelists at the conference was a representative from the Network of Afro-Venezuelans, Jorge Guerrero, who, at the time, also served as Venezuela's Consul General in New Orleans, Louisiana. Jorge offered a panel presentation on the growing communal council programs as an alternative to neo-liberalism. I recall my confusion as the term "neoliberal" was thrown around because I didn't have a sense of what it meant at the time.

That people were suggesting Venezuela was somehow threatening to the US because of the alternatives it modeled was something I had only ever really thought about in relation to the Cuban Revolution. I associated hopeful alternatives with the Civil Rights, Black Power and African liberation struggles across the continent working in conjunction with the Cuban Revolution. I primarily believed such alliances to be a relic of an era I was not born to witness. Finally, I remember people defending the Venezuelan revolution while simultaneously critiquing it, declaring it their responsibility to ensure the revolution served them, that it was not Chávez's job alone. This symposium essentially solidified my interest in Venezuela but I left without a clear sense of how to continue to pursue those interests in a place like North Carolina, where I assumed, Afro-Latinos were

few and far between. Though I was considering a Fulbright, graduate school still wasn't within the realm of what I considered possible.

My admission to a doctoral program was perhaps as haphazard and fortuitous as my presence at Howard's Venezuela Symposium. I applied to several programs, only two of which actually admitted me and they both happened to be master's programs. Duke courted me before deciding to extend admission to ten students, none of which included me. Around April of my senior year in college, I received a call from Duke's department of Cultural Anthropology rescinding my rejection, because everyone they offered admission decided to go with a different program. After getting over the initial rejection, I decided a five-year funding package in my hometown was the best deal I had on the table. Ultimately, I accepted their offer and had to devise a project that would fit within the discipline of Anthropology. By this time, Venezuela's political climate was heating up resulting in significantly increased international attention.

I began my doctoral program in 2009. In February of the same year, President Chávez proposed a constitutional referendum abolishing term limits for a number of political offices, including the office of the president. Endorsed by 54% of the electorate, the referendum passed resulting in President Chávez's ability to indefinitely seek the highest political office in the land. His own constituents (and a good number of his foes) were so enamored with his charismatic persona, the likelihood of his remaining president until his death was all but certain. 2009 was also the year Barack Obama was inaugurated as the first Black president of the United States. Needless to say, 2009 carried an air of political possibility I was eager to follow.

During the summer months preceding my final year of doctoral studies, nearly ten years after our initial encounter, Chucho and I found ourselves together again on the Campus of North Carolina Central University. A few weeks prior to our reconnection, I was sitting in the basement of Lilly Library at Duke University with my husband Joshua when I received a Facebook message, from Chucho. He wanted to inform me of his new post as Consul General of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela in New Orleans, Louisiana. In the ten years or so since we'd met, he evolved from being best known as a well published scholar/activist, to serving as a Venezuelan ambassador to Angola, Mali and Burkina Faso and on to his present position as Consul General in New Orleans, Louisiana. Those accolades alone say much about his dynamic capacities. He further inquired about how I was doing and how my research proceeding since we last spoke. When I informed him that I had moved into the final stages of completing my dissertation he asked me to remind him what it was about.

At this point I remained unsure of that my dissertation was actually about but I came up with something to the effect of a comparative project about radical black organizing in the US and Venezuela. After telling him a little about my desire to write more about the process of becoming radical for Black/African descended peoples, he said he would love to read my work, and assist me in any way he could. He instructed me to call him, immediately, so that we could discuss the subject in more depth. I immediately began to panic. My respect for his work and achievements, and my qualms regarding my particular ability to complete the task I had begun sent me into avoidance mode. Somehow I forgot I had previously given him my number, so when I did not immediately call him, he called me. I did not answer the call because of my anxiety

about speaking Spanish on the phone. In reality, that anxiety was relatively unfounded as I am probably more hindered by my fear of discussing my pending dissertation than language skills or lack thereof. It was also comforting to later learn that despite his new post as Counsel General in New Orleans, his English was not much better than my Spanish. He called a second time, which I still did not answer and then proceeded to message me on Facebook again. Because Facebook allows your network to see when you are active online I couldn't pretend I didn't see his message. I responded, saying I was in the library and had bad reception, which was not a total lie, I was in the library but my reception was perfectly fine. I told him I would call him back later when I had a better signal, which of course I never did.

About a month later I received an e-mail from Baiyina Muhammad my mentor, advisor, and sista-friend at my alma matter NCCU, about a program taking place at the end of August titled "Jazz & Words: A Much Needed Conversation." She went on to explan that the program was to be a discussion of a new book entitled *The Afro-Mexican Ancestors and the Nation They Constructed,* written by none other than my former advisor Dr. Marco Polo Hernandez Cuevas. Now, had I read the program announcement that had been forwarded to me, I would have seen that Chucho was listed as a discussant on the panel. However, since I already decided I would attend, I put the event in my calendar and didn't think about it again until the day of the program. When Joshua and I walked into the Alphonso Elder Student Union at NCCU I spotted Chucho immediately. He was standing, wearing a knit dread cap in the colors of the Rastafarian flag with the ends of his graying cornrows exposed at the back, a black shirt, jeans and sandals – not all that different from the way he looked when I first encountered him almost a decade

earlier. I explained to Josh that Chucho was kind of a political celebrity among Afro-Latinos, particularly among Afro-Venezuelans and that he had offered to help with my dissertation but that I had been avoiding him out of insecurity about my Spanish.

Joshua is a true extrovert, so my anxious introverted tendencies sometimes baffle him and other times he just intentionally ignores them. In this particular instance, he had no sympathy for my anxiety and in his usual take-charge manner, he instructed me to go over and speak with Chucho. Of course, I was still reluctant. After a little banter, I agreed to walk over. As we approached, I was relieved to find him next to a familiar face. Chucho was conversing with Ajamu Dillahunt, a founding member of Black Workers for Justice[4] and long-time family friend and political comrade. Ajamu and his wife Rukia had been organizing black workers in North Carolina for over twenty years and had a relationship with my family since before I was born. They also had children who were the same age as my two older siblings and they attended high school together. I smiled and was greeted warmly by Ajamu who looked a little relieved to see me. I think he was relieved because he and Chucho were struggling to communicate and he knew that my Spanish was better than his. When Ajamu introduced me, Chucho immediately realized who I was and chided me for never returning his call. I bashfully explained my insecurities about communicating in Spanish over the phone, specifically my discomfort with words often becoming muddled in my ears and that not being able to read the lips and body language of the Spanish speaker seriously inhibits understanding for me. He

[4] BWFJ is an organization of Black workers formed in 1981 out of a struggle led by Black women workers at a K-mart store in Rocky Mount, North Carolina against race and gender discrimination. After organizing a boycott of the local K-mart store and reaching out to workers at other workplaces and communities, Black workers and community activists from 10 counties met at the First Missionary Baptist Church in Fremont, NC in June 1982 to form BWFJ as a statewide organization.

gave me a knowing laugh, told me he was still interested in my project and said "not to worry because we could always communicate in Spanglish." Fortunately, at this point the program was about to begin so we both took our seats.

The title "Jazz & Words" doesn't reveal much, however, given the prestige of NCCU's Jazz Studies program we assumed we would run into some of Josh's former Jazz instructors and sure enough, Robert Trowers, one of his former trombone instructors opened the event with a number of "Jazz Standards." The first was "Afro Blue", originally written and composed by Afro-Cuban Latin Jazz Percussionist Mongo Santamaria and recorded live on April 20, 1959, at the Sunset Auditorium in Carmel, California. The best known recording of Afro Blue is featured on John Coltrane's 1963 album *Afro Blue Impressions.* The song has been recorded and released by no less than thirty different artists including McCoy Tyner, Dianne Reeves and most recently by Robert Glasper and Erykah Badu on Gasper's album *Black Radio*. The vocals for the evening were performed by NCCU's vocal Jazz instructor, Dr. Lenora Helms. The lyrics to *Afro Blue* read as follows:

Dream of a land my soul is from
I hear a hand stroke on a drum
Elegant boy, beautiful girl
Dancing for joy elegant whirl
Shades of delight, cocoa hue
Rich as the night afro blue

Two young lovers dance face to face
With undulating grace
They gently sway, then slip away
To some secluded place
Shades of delight, cocoa hue
Rich as the night afro blue

Whispering trees, echo their sighs
Passionate pleas, tender replies
Lovers in flight upward they glide
Burst at the height slowly subside
Shades of delight, cocoa hue
Rich as the night afro blue

And my slumbering fantasy assumes reality
Until it seems it's not a dream for two for you and me
Shades of delight, cocoa hue
Rich as the night afro blue
Oh, shades of delight, cocoa hue
Rich as the night afro blue
Shades of delight afro, afro blue

Opening the program with this performance facilitated an introductory discussion about the mutual contributions and collaborations between Blacks in the US, Afro-Latinos and Africans. *Afro Blue*, a love song, pays homage to the rhythmic influences of our African ancestors, those maintained and those forgotten, as the lead vocals allude to that cultural memory with "*Dream of a land my soul is from, I hear a hand stroke on a drum*." The song is one of the earliest Jazz Standards written with the rhythmic 6/8 time that is often felt in African and African Diasporic music such as Highlife and most Afro-Cuban music. Written in the throes of the Civil Rights Movement and made popular by John Coltrane as the Black Power Movement was budding, celebrating the *cocoa hue* of our skin, along with all the other *shades of delight* offers a Jazzy declaration that Black is Beautiful. *Afro Blue* or African Blue references the rich, deep color of the night that often provided enslaved Africans cover for their plans of escaping to freedom. The song represents generations of collaborations between musicians of the African Diaspora.

The panel for the program was itself, also structured to represent the diversity of African Diasporic perspectives. In addition to Dr. Cuevas and Chucho Garcia, the panel included Dr. Christina Cabral, the first Afro-Uruguayan woman to receive a PhD, and Ivorian Scholar/Howard Professor Dr. Celement Animan Akassi. The program lasted for about three hours and introduced many interesting conversations about the newly released text by Dr. Cuevas. He shared some of his personal history which has driven him, over the course of his entire academic career to explore the often obscured existence and contributions of Afro-Mexicans. The degree to which Afro-Mexican contributions have been erased from the narrative of Mexican nationhood was so thorough that the book and subsequent discussion were predominantly concerned with documentation. While documenting the historical contributions of Afro-Venezuelans and African descended peoples in the United States continues to be an important political objective, the existence of the first self-declared presidents of African descent in the US and Venezuela have facilitated an opening in national and popular dialogue about race, nation and belonging. The program concluded that evening with an announcement of a follow-up discussion to be hosted the next day.

We returned the following evening to screen a short film by Chucho entitled "Por Aquí Pasó Chávez," loosely translated to mean "Chávez was here." The film merged footage from Chávez's 2006 visit to the capital city of Bamako, Mali with present day footage of interviews with people who were some of the benefactors of the programs Chávez helped to implement and fund in Mali. The footage of the trip shows Chávez speaking to the people of Mali declaring "we are one people". He goes on to proclaim the shared histories of colonization and slavery are what unite Latin Americans and

Africans in their present fight against neocolonialism. He closes by asking them to receive the words of solidarity from the Venezuelan people and reaffirms his commitment to working together for liberation and development. The film goes on to cover the 17 Malian students studying in the "Salvador Allende Latin American School of Medicine" and another 12 studying textiles elsewhere. The film shows a Malian community named Venezuela, which is comprised of more than one hundred houses that were built with funds from the Venezuelan government. Finally, the film pans to a mission named in honor of Simón Rodríguez[5] also constructed with funds from the Venezuelan government, which was serving more than one-thousand students at the time.

In his comments after the film, Chucho made comparisons between the Venezuelan national heroes Simón Bolívar and Hugo Chávez and Malian national heroes Sundiata and Modibo Keita. He noted the many instances over the course of the film when people said repeatedly that Chávez is not dead but that his spirit lives on through the legacy of his work and the continued collaborative support of the Venezuelan government. Additionally, Chucho explained that initiatives like the ones in Mali resulted from his country's mission to build South-South relations. Under Chávez's leadership, the program to build South-South relations resulted in the opening or revitalization of 18 embassies across the continent of Africa. Chucho instructed us to be on the lookout for collaborations between the Venezuelan government and the people of

[5] Rodríguez, known during his exile from Spanish America as Samuel Robinson, was a Venezuelan philosopher, educator, as well as Simón Bolívar's tutor and mentor. *Mission Robinson* is one of the Bolivarian Missions implemented by Hugo Chávez in 2003 is named in his honor. The mission uses volunteers to teach reading, writing, and arithmetic to Venezuelan adults who were illiterate. In addition to its civilian focus it also sends soldiers to, among other places, remote and dangerous locales in order to reach the most undereducated, neglected, and marginalized adult citizens to give them regular schooling and lessons.

Jackson, Mississippi as they were working to continue a project spearheaded by the late Chokwe Lumumba until his untimely passing in 2014.

Though the film was brief and skeptics may likely read it as propaganda, it highlighted precisely the type of program that initially drew me to Venezuela. Over the course of my undergraduate and graduate career, Venezuela was often covered by American news outlets. Many of those news features demonstrated, perhaps unwittingly, that the Venezuelan government was concerned with the well-being of poor US citizens of color in ways that the US government was not. In August 2005 the United States witnessed one of the worst and costliest man-made natural disasters in its history. When Hurricane Katrina stuck the US (making landfall in Mississippi and Lousiana), Venezuela and Cuba were among the first countries to offer assistance, even before the national, state, or local Louisiana governments. The US state department rejected these offers of assistance (Lake, 2005). When, in 2010, Haiti was devastated by a massive earthquake and subsequent tremors, the US State Department once again, attempted to block much needed aid from Venezuela as well as other foreign aid (Janicke, 2010). Additionally, thanks to Venezuelan owned CITGO Oil's heating oil subsidy, thousands of American citizens received free and/reduced heating services for several brutal north-eastern winters (McDonal, 2011).

The Venezuelan government's decisions about aiding marginalized and disenfranchised populations in the United States prompted, for me, questions about how similar demographic populations were impacted by domestic programs in their country. I needed to see for myself. In the sections that follow, I offer reflections on my earliest first-hand encounters with Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution and the ways in which I

observed Afro-Venezuelan negotiating their support for the government and the hope it seemed to promise, with the everyday realities of their continued racialized marginalization.

FINDING MY VOICE

As the sixth year of my doctoral studies came to a close, I was plagued by enormous self-doubt and loneliness. I had been teaching what was essentially a full load (at elite research institutions) between Duke and UNC attempting to earn a living and produce a dissertation at the same time. The sixth year also happened to be the year my husband moved across the country to the San Francisco Bay area to pursue his own musical aspirations, further complicating our financial situation. At this point, I had theoretically completed all of the necessary requirements, i.e. coursework, fieldwork and a portfolio defense, but still felt relatively clueless about writing a dissertation, much less, what my dissertation was actually going to contribute to a larger body of scholarship. I had a loose configuration of historical personalities and events theories and questions swimming around my head with no idea how I would logically translate this information into a two hundred or more-page scholarly document.

Over the six years I had been in graduate school, which I began at the age of 22 with undergraduate degrees in history and Spanish, I lost my grandmother (a woman who was truly a second mother to me and who up to that point had been a party to EVERY major and most minor triumphs and setbacks in my life) to heart failure; my mother was diagnosed with breast cancer and had a mastectomy; my 11 year old cousin died somewhat mysteriously while traveling between Zimbabwe and South Africa over the

Christmas holiday; my grandfather was diagnosed with a blood cancer; I married my husband and left the country two weeks later for an entire summer to perform "fieldwork"; and to top it all off, I had gained and lost 40 pounds only to regain it as I began dissertating. Needless to say, my confidence was shot and I was under enormous amounts of personal and professional stress. Even as I considered leaving the program SEVERAL times, I ultimately resigned myself not to do so because I believed it would make all of these occurrences that much worse and make the past six years seem like a completely empty time in my life.

In the midst of battling insecurity and uncertainty my mother asked me to accompany her to Cullowhee, NC for a work trip because I had flexible time and she needed a driving partner. I had just finished grading papers for the semester and I told myself this three-day trip would be free of school related stress. I decided I was going to take this time to myself since my mother would be occupied teaching workshops on workplace equal opportunity, diversity and harassment most of the days. I spent most of the days listening to music and watching TV. My parents tell me that when I was young there were two things they could count on to put me in a good mood: music and food. Truthfully, the respective moods of most people I know are positively impacted by the right music and food, and I can say to this day, these two things remain an essential part of my self-care tool-kit.

My particular musical obsession at that moment was Jazmine Sullivan, a big beautiful brown skin woman about my age with a raspy sultry voice that often sounds out of place in contemporary mainstream R&B. As I suffered from a depression flare as a result of the previously mentioned insecurities, circumstances, and events, I stumbled

across a live acoustic version of Jazmine Sullivan's "Mona Lisa (Masterpiece)." I was very much in love with this song for many reasons. I offer the lyrics here in order to convey the sentiment of the message, however the lyrics in no way match the emotion conveyed in her actual performance of the song:

My eyes ain't used to these rays
I'm feeling exposed, but I hide no more
I can't hide
As the sun shines on all of my glory
My flaws don't look so bad at all
What was I so afraid of?

Every part of me is a vision of a portrait
Of Mona, of Mona Lisa
Every part of me is beautiful
And I finally see I'm a work of art
A masterpiece

Who is this I've tried so long fight?
Filling my heads with lies that I'm not good enough
Then I heard something in my ear
Tell I'm perfect, now that I know the truth
Time to show and prove

Every part of me is a vision of a portrait
Of Mona, of Mona Lisa
Every part of me is beautiful
And I finally see I'm a work of art
A masterpiece

And now I see the pretty colors on my canvas
I'm a work of art, a Mona Lisa
I'll share my picture with the world
Not afraid to let it show anymore

I can light the night, shine so bright
(Let my colors paint the sky)
I can light the night, shine so bright
(There is beauty in my eyes)

I can light the night, shine so bright
(And I can see it now, I believe it now, I can feel it now)
I can light the night, shine so bright
(Want the world to see, I'm a work of art. I'm a masterpiece)
I can light the night, shine so bright
(I am beautiful)

Every part of me is a vision of a portrait
Of Mona, of Mona Lisa
Every part of me is beautiful
And I finally see I'm a work of art
A masterpiece

While the song could be interpreted to be primarily concerned with physical or outward beauty, I understood the song to be about self-affirmation in general. Given my state of depression, I could not listen to the song without getting emotional and even crying at times. It made me painfully aware of the ways I had allowed self-doubt and feeling out of place to cloud my self-perception and obstruct my own potential, particularly since entering graduate school. Admittedly, Duke had not been an affirming space for me but I could have dealt more effectively with the toll it took on my self-confidence had I known then some of the things I know now. The song beckoned me to affirm not only my beauty but my intelligence and my ability to successfully complete the doctoral process. The song stirred up memories from my childhood of loving to sing and remembering how good music is therapeutic. For fun, I decided to record myself singing the song, just to see how I sounded after years of not singing in public.

As a middle and high-school student, I sang in the gospel and chamber choirs and continued singing in the university choir at my Alma matter North Carolina Central University. For the first recording I kept the headphones in my ear and tried desperately to keep up with Jazmine's sweet low and soulful register but when I played the recording

back I was horrified, I was out of tune and straining to keep up with the song. A few days later, after recovering from the shock and horror of that awful first recording I decided to try to record it a capella, from memory, without the headphones in my ear. I had been listening to the song on repeat and I felt much more familiar with it, so I went for it. Now, I'm not saying I could give Jazmine a run for her money, but I was pleasantly surprised by how much better the second recording sounded. I realized that attempting to sing the song with Jazmine's voice in my ear, unable to hear my own, forced me to attempt to sing the song with her and like her. The problem is that my voice is not like hers, despite my desires to make it so. When I allowed myself to trust my own voice and hear myself, I was much more satisfied with the end product. My inability to hear my own voice, which resulted in a poor first attempt at recording, I suddenly understood, was also holding up the wall obstructing my ability to craft my dissertation. Up to that point, I had been so consumed and overwhelmed by the idea of contributing "new and original" research that I was paralyzing myself.

I have been around brilliant people my entire life, who have never and likely will never publish a thing, but whose observations, questions, ideas and comments drove my interests in the topic of this dissertation and ultimately became the primary source material to be analyzed here. A love of freedom and one another brought my parents together to create me and subsequently, my investment in this particular intellectual labor of love. At the heart of this endeavor is my parent's intimate, political, radical, and revolutionary love of one another, their love for me, and the self-love they attempted to instill in me. My love of self moves me to interrogate our histories of struggles as Black/African peoples for liberation and love. It is only the love of my community (local

and international) and of my family and friends that has allowed me to endure these past seven years. I have not fully conquered my fears and insecurities and Black/African peoples surely are not free, but I have been assured by my community of loving freedom fighters, whose experiences and opinions I value tremendously, that I have something to contribute and that I owe it to the world as a student, youth, woman, intellectual, and otherwise oppressed person of color to get through this process, to write and make my contribution public.

SEEIN' IT FOR WEARIN' IT: METHODOLOGICAL CONCERNS

The stories presented here, at last the ones that are not my own, were collected between 2011 and 2015. Over the course of those four years, I traveled to Venezuela on three separate occasions in 2011, 2012 and 2014 in order to conduct a total of about 15 months of on the ground research. I collected my U.S. based fieldwork in-between those trips to Venezuela and during an extended period after my last trip to Venezuela. The political projects of African descended peoples struggling for liberation in both the United States and Venezuela are presently on-going, a reality which has made it difficult to decide when to stop conducting research for the purposes of this dissertation. For this reason, the data presented here does not fit neatly within the confines of one extended field-site visit, as is the more common practice for anthropological dissertations.

The primary method of inquiry which distinguishes "anthropology" from other scholarly disciplines in the American academy is "ethnography." Ethnographic inquiry requires a peculiar simultaneity of distancing from and drawing closer to a given researcher's subjects/objects of study. Zora Neal Hurston used the metaphor of the "spy-glass" to offer insight into her decision to record the African-American folklore of her Southern childhood and the subsequent difficulty there within.

> "From the earliest rocking of my cradle, I had known about the capers Brer Rabbit is apt to cut and what the Squinch Owl says from the house top. But it was fitting me like a tight chemise. *I couldn't see it for wearing it*. It was only when I was off in college, away from my native surroundings, that I could see myself like somebody else and stand off and look at my garment. Then I had to have the spy-glass of Anthropology to look though at that." (1990, 1)

Her familiarity with the subject matter and the producers of said matter, made the prospect of recording the tales of her youth seem both possible and worthy of a research project. However, her closeness required a kind of distancing which can stir a certain discomfort in people who are typically stigmatized, othered and otherwise devalued in their respective society. With respect to my dissertation, my parents' tales of activism for me are not unlike the Southern Blackisms such as the tales of Brer Rabbit for Zora Neal Hurston. They are the thing with which I am intimately familiar, the tales that shaped my being in the world, the experiences stirring my curiosity about possible parallels in my own lifetime, the stories that led me to Venezuela and ultimately back home. In many ways, it was not until I went off to graduate school, that I could more clearly see who I was for wearing it. In this regard, Hurston is my model for autoethnographic research.

Feminist scholars/activists have long contended "the personal is political." Autoethnography, rooted in feminist theorization of the personal as political, is, as a disciplinary practice, largely a product of the "reflexive turn" in Anthropology that occurred in the 1970s, despite Hurston's critical deployment of the method decades earlier (Clifford & Marcus 1986; Behar 1993). In the *Handbook of Autoethnography*, Stacy Holman Jones offers the following:

> "… auto-ethnography is not simply a way of knowing about the world; it has become a way of being in the world, one that requires living consciously, emotionally, reflexively. It asks that we not only examine our lives but also consider how and why we think, act, and feel as we do. Auto-ethnography requires that we observe ourselves observing, that we interrogate what we think and believe, and that we challenge our own assumptions, asking over and over if we have penetrated as many layers of our own defenses, fears, and insecurities as our project requires. It asks that we rethink and revise our lives, making conscious decisions about who and how we want to be. And in the process, it seeks a story that is hopeful, where authors ultimately write themselves as survivors of the story they are living." (2013, 10)

Black Feminist scholars and activists from the late 1970s through the early 1990s charted impressive intellectual territory in calling attention to the multiple ways in which structures of inequality permeate every aspect of oppressed people's lives (Hurston 1942; Combahee River Collective 1974; Lorde 1984; Crenshaw 1991). For Black Feminist Anthropologists specifically, which I consider myself to be, "telling our stories," "bearing witness," and "testifying," otherwise referred to as autoethnography, is "an innovative strategy of knowledge production" through which "Black Feminist Anthropologists may theorize and textualize our situated positions and elevate our subjugated discourses to levels recognized by both margins and centers of the discipline" (McLaurin 2001, 56). I have chosen to employ autoethnography as a primary method of inquiry and in the formal writing of this dissertation in order to interrogate my own encounters, over the course of my life, with dialogue, insurgent learning, collective research and analysis across various moments of struggle in my life in order to better understand the ways in which I too, am experiencing a process of radicalization.

GAINING ACCESS

"Snowball Sampling" or "Chain Referral Sampling" is a common method used for gaining access to research subjects in qualitative fields like Anthropology and Sociology. It generally describes the process of expanding a pool of research subjects via an initial subject who introduces the researcher to other subjects, much like a snowball rolling down hill, hence the metaphor. Given the intensifying nature of US –Venezuela relations during my years of fieldwork, I tried to remain forthcoming about my status as a US citizen, but I also often felt compelled to espouse my own political beliefs, including

my support for the Bolivarian Revolution and political familial ties. In my case, my paternal kinfolk served as an initial access grantor to key personalities in both Venezuela and the US. My father's brother, Bob Brown is about seven years his senior and is one of the people my father credits most heavily with his early political exposure and they remain close comrades to this day.

In 1963, at just fifteen years of age, my Uncle, Bob Brown, joined the Congress of Racial Equality in Chicago, IL and remained a member until 1967 when he became the director of the Midwest Office of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. The following year he turned eighteen and, at the request of Kwame Ture[6] (f.k.a. Stokely Carmichael), co-founded the Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party in along with Tommy Carter and Bobby Rush. After a stint in jail for draft resistance, he began to focus his political energies on his work as an organizer with the All African People's Revolutionary Party. In 1983, still active with the A-APRP, my Uncle Bob served as a national coordinator for third world outreach for the 1 million+ anti-disarmament demonstration at the UN. Years later, he served as a national coordinator for logistics and operations and national field director for the 1996 Million Man March under the direction of the Nation of Islam. He has also traveled the world speaking and organizing with Kwame Ture and on his own.

This information is important to note because without it, the amount of political currency the name Bob Brown from Chicago, carries, might not be so obvious. I found

[6] The last official chairperson of SNCC before its demise, Stokely Carmichael is perhaps best known for his 1966 rallying cry of *Black Power*. Over time, his political inclinations took him from Chairman of SNCC to Honorary Prime Minister of the Black Panther Party and ultimately, a central committee member of the All-African People's Revolutionary Party until his untimely death. During that time, he and his new wife Miriam Makeba, otherwise known as Mama Africa, established a home in Guinea, Conakry. During this time Carmichael developed close relationships with Pan-Africanist Presidents Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Ahmed Sékou Touré of Guinea. As their relationships developed, in honor of their political and personal legacies, Stokely officially changed his name to Kwame Ture.

that Venezuelan and US collaborators, young and old alike, more often than not, were put at ease by my familial ties. My Uncle's lifelong commitment to the struggles of African peoples, throughout the entire diaspora is something that, even those who disagree with some of his political positions, respect none-the-less. Often, it is something people already knew about me because they knew me as a child or because someone else was aware of the connection and made a point to introduce me that way. I want to be clear that I NEVER introduced myself as "Bob Brown's niece" in Venezuelan or US political environments, partially because doing so sets extremely high expectations and can come off as pretentious, but also because my family is principally opposed to nepotism. Leaving aside such moral preoccupations about nepotistic access granting, peoples' awareness that I was related to Bob Brown often made them comfortable enough to grant me access to their political spaces and provide me with insight about their political lives. I found this to be particularly so for the people with formal ties to organized political entities in Venezuela, the Venezuelan government and among certain members of the Network of Afro-Venezuelans.

Professor Alejandro Correa was my "initial subject" for my Venezuelan research. I had been introduced to him as an undergraduate by Dr. Hernandez Cuevas when I was working on a Fulbright Application to Venezuela. I also encountered Alejandro during his frequent travels to Durham, North Carolina at the invitation of both Dr. Cuevas and Dr. Joseph Jordan (Director of UNC-Chapel Hill's Sonja Haynes Stone Center for Black History and Culture) to offer presentations on the Afro-Venezuelan experience. Though Alejandro and I had begun to cultivate an independent relationship, his interest in me grew vastly when he learned I was the niece of Bob Brown. In fact, when I arrived in

Venezuela in 2011, these details were frequently tacked on after my name as he introduced me in community and governmental spaces.

This detail carried a similar currency two years prior when I was attending a Pan-African Youth Summit at Howard University. When the student organizers of the conference saw me come in with Bob Brown they inquired about my relationship to him. Upon discovering I was his niece, I was warmly welcomed to join in on a number of conversations where I was the only person who did not know others in the group. It was at this summit that I met student members of the Cimarronean Student group who had themselves already traveled to Venezuela. They put me in contact with a member of an Afro-Venezuelan youth organization who later helped facilitate my participation in the Fourth Encounter of Afrodescendants in the Americas and the Caribbean for Revolutionary Transformations in the Framework of the International Year of Afrodescendants in Solidarity with Haiti.

This particular kinship tie permitted me, on several occasions to overcome awkward introductions and allay suspicions that might otherwise arise due to my status as a US citizen. This was of tremendous assistance while conducting research among radically politicized Afro-Venezuelans because where, among English-speaking peoples of African descent, I might typically code-switch in order to allay concerns about belonging, the ability to do so in Spanish was beyond my reach. My inability to access an Afrodescended Vernacular Spanish, due to having learned Castilian Spanish in American public schools, often made me stand out in ways my physical presence did not, in addition to making it difficult to interpret conversations among Afro-Venezuelans in more informal settings. Being the niece of Bob Brown was, in many ways, a foot in the door,

though for every door his name opened, I was still required to prove myself in order to keep that door open, something I understood quite well intellectually, but nonetheless proved difficult at times for myriad reasons.

COLLECTING DATA

I chose to pursue graduate studies in Anthropology for reasons most driven by individual self-interest, such as a desire to travel the world and continue to engage with languages other than English. Admittedly, I did not truly consider the possibility of being skeptically received due to my intellectual disciplinary choices as much as I should have. Once commonly referred to as the "handmaiden of colonialism," because of its inception as a method of inquiry used to understand and further control the colonial subjects of the American and European empires, "Anthropology" is often a dirty word among politicized communities of color struggling for liberation, including the Indigenous peoples of the Americas, Aboriginal peoples of Australia, the native populations of Africa, Palestine, Southeast and East Asia etc. International scholarly inquiry supported by institutional funding, in the age of neo-colonialism, and US neo-liberal imperialism is increasingly more suspicious to communities of people of freedom fighters, no matter their geographic location. I learned this the hard way during my first summer in Venezuela.

In July 2011, my roommate Arielle and I learned that the 3rd Festival Afrodescendiente de los países del ALBA[7] (the 3rd Festival for People of African descent in ALBA Countries) was going to take place in Maracay, about two hours west of Caracas in the state of Aragua. As Afrodescended people, we were welcomed to attend the

[7] Countries belonging to the Bolivarian Alliance of our America

meetings being held at the festival by Enrique Arrieta, a coordinator for the Network of Afro-Venezuelans, a contact I made through Alejandro Correa. The festival took place during the last weekend in July of 2011 in honor of the occasion of the UN International Year for People of African descent. The weekend consisted of festive activities like musical and dance performances, but also of more formal *encuentros* where the state of Afro-Venezuelan communities and the responsibilities of the government were discussed. In one such meeting, Enrique asked Arielle and I to stand so that he could introduce us to the rest of his comrades in the room. We were introduced and warmly welcomed but as we took our seats an interesting conversation began.

Enrique proceeded to tell a story about a woman named Luísa, who also happened to be present at this meeting. He explained that a researcher from the United States had come to Venezuela a few years prior and had spent nearly a year accompanying La Profesora Luísa in her home of Curiepe, documenting her life as an Afro-Venezuelan woman, teacher, and community activist. In telling her story, after asking La Profesora to verify what he was saying, Enrique began to launch a critique of the people coming to Venezuela to exploit their revolution for personal gains. Specifically, he was critical of people who came to follow Afro-Venezuelans working for the revolution, taking that information, going home to their respective countries and doing nothing to contribute to the work they observed on the ground or to the lives of the people who made that research possible. Though we continued to be warmly welcomed by the community, I received that story as an admonition to be responsible with the information I was given access to and responsible to the communities granting said access. At the time, it sent me

into a whirlwind about whether I could even conduct the necessary research and it subsequently impacted the way I chose to collect data.

In order to put people more at ease, I often chose to forego recording interviews. I sometimes even chose not to take notes at all during less formal conversations. I typically took notes at formal meetings, in classroom settings and at conferences, because note-taking in such venues is fairly standard. On the chance occasions I did ask for formal interviews and a request to record was granted, the recordings themselves were often distorted by the excessive ambient noise of outdoor cafes and general public life, and/or they were constantly interrupted by the social nature of life in Venezuela which made responding to interruptions from people in the general vicinity customary.

Consequently, most of my field-notes are comprised of attempts to re-create conversations and interviews, post-interaction and I frequently paraphrase conversations from Venezuelans who chose to collaborate with me for this research. To some extent, the same is true of the political spaces I encountered in the United States though more people were willing to offer recorded interviews after years of developing relationships. I have chosen not to use pseudonyms primarily due to the reality that most of my subjects already have public political profiles. Where quotations are listed without citation, they have been extracted from my personal field notes. This becomes yet another reason why autoethnography is a particularly salient method for this project. I found over the years, that the more I committed to a personal trajectory of political activism, I was able to better formulate and articulate research questions and I had more to discuss with my collaborators and they were subsequently more willing to share their own stories.

Resultantly, my own processes of radicalization made this project more and more feasible as the years passed.

My attempts to bridge anthropology and activism over the course of this dissertation have resulted in my recommitment to the A-APRP as an adult member with an intellectual contribution. Through attempts to form and support independent African youth organizations by develop political education curriculum for members as well as the community, I have worked to make education useful beyond the walls of the ivory tower. Since 2011, I have conducted more informal than formal interviews, attended public meeting lectures, community council meetings, organizer round tables, participated in various community trainings and generally hung-out with people whose work towards African liberation though daily practices.

MOTIVES AND THOUGHTS ON THIS COMPARATIVE PROJECT

The grounds for the comparative nature of the project before you have, in my mind always been clear, so much so, that I have at times taken for granted the need to "make it plain."[8] My upbringing dictated that I recognize the shared struggles of African peoples throughout the world. In his work on "The Nacirema," Horace Miner attends to American Anthropological preoccupations with "making the strange familiar and the familiar strange" by turning the classic anthropological tendencies to exoticize non-white cultures on Americans (1956). Despite disciplinary conventions which dictate constant attention to difference, this project does more in the way of "making the strange familiar" and is less concerned with "making the familiar strange." The comparative focus on

[8] A reference to the use of rhetorical strategies of skilled orators in the Black community like Malcolm X to speak the truth, clearly and loudly, to testify, regardless of audience.

similarity as opposed to difference in this dissertation is a political rather than an intellectual choice which pushes back against Western, capitalist, individualistic paradigms which have historically aided in the enslavement and colonization, as well as contemporary oppression and disenfranchisement of African peoples.

In a 2008 keynote address at the University of Los Angeles conference "Afro-Latinos: Global Spaces/Local Struggles," Professor Augustin Lao-Montes outlined four main cycles of Black politics in the Americas which he proposed correspond to four critical world-historical conjunctures. The first being the wave of insurrections led by Enslaved-Africans of the 18th century, most notably the Haitian Revolution. Reading Haiti, rightfully so, as the foundation of Western Hemispheric Black Liberation, these insurrections, revolts and revolutions mark "Black politics" as an explicitly emancipatory project concerned with rights and identity. Lao-Montes identifies the second cycle, which developed in the early-mid 20th century, as explicitly political and cultural. Politically shaped by Garveyism, Radical Pan-Africanism, Black Marxism and Socialism and culturally evident in arts movements such as Black Modernism, the Harlem Renaissance, Black Surrealism and the Negritude movement.

The third moment, he dates from the post-World War II period to the global wave of anti-systemic social movements in the 1960s and 1970s including the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, as well as the de-colonial struggles in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean. This period of public struggles for Black Power, he argued, provided crucial language for the new social movements that emerged such as women power, indigenous power, Chicana/o power, etc. Finally, the fourth period began in late 1980s and early 1990s. Marked by a rise in American imperialism and a growing dis-enchantment with

neoliberal state policies, Black social movements of this era are forced to grapple with the complicated reality of the fall of the Soviet Union and what that means for global Black/African liberation struggles' relationship to socialism. Consequently, an array of predominantly peaceful social movements emerges against the effects of neoliberal globalization, particularly the rise of Black and Indigenous movements in Latin America.

Although I do not find the same utility in the theoretical framework of the African Diaspora as Lao-Montes, I find his cycles of Black Politics useful for thinking through some of the structural difficulties of such a comparative project as this. It should be clear by now that I employ a Pan-Africanist analytical framing of this project rather than a Diasporic one, though the reasons why may not yet be so apparent. While I find the term African Diaspora useful for thinking about the forced displacement and subsequent shared cultural retentions of people of African descent, I do not find the term to be politically weighted. The concept generally tends to foreground the dispersal of a group of African peoples, rather than their specific self-determined practices of maintaining connections. Colin Palmer theorizes what he calls Pre-Modern (primarily voluntary) and Modern Diasporic Streams. The former being comprised of 1) "the great exodus" which occurred more than 100,000 years ago and constituted the first great movement of human kind; 2) the great Bantu migrations across the African Continent and the Indian Ocean around 3000 BCE; and 3) the Pre-Modern trading diaspora made of up traders, soldiers, merchants and slaves from Africa to Asia, Europe and the Middle East. The latter, he explains is comprised of 1) the trans-Atlantic slave trade along with the East African slave trade to Asia, which he sometimes breaks into two separate streams; and 3) the contemporary movement of African peoples all over the globe (Palmer, 1998).

Another respected African Diaspora scholar Kim Butler suggests that there are three basic features diaspora scholars seem to agree on, including 1) after dispersal there must be a minimum of two destinations because diaspora implies a "scattering" rather than a singular transfer; 2) A relationship to an actual or imagined homeland; 3) self-awareness of the diasporic groups' identity, members must be consciously part of an ethnonational group; 4. these diasporas exist over at least two generations (Butler, 2001). Consequently, the notion or concept of Diaspora is fundamentally if not primarily concerned with the movement of bodies from one place to another over generations, despite attempts from scholars like Lao-Montes to deploy the concept differently. Though many common formations of identity and various iterations of culture are derived from the concept of a Diaspora, the African Diaspora is frequently depoliticized, particularly in the ivory towers of the United States.

Pan-Africanism better lends itself, in my estimation, to an intellectual discourse shaped by the migration or movement of ideas and shared methods for self-determination. Pan-African socialism strives to be a unifying project, therefore as I explore processes of radicalization through a Pan-Africanist lens, I am fundamentally concerned here with the shared nature of the struggles of Black/Africans in the United States and Afro-Venezuelans as well as the ways in which socialist projects serve the needs of African peoples in ways that neo-liberal capitalist projects do not. In his work *Revolution, Culture and Pan-Africanism,* President Ahmed Sekou Touré of Guinea, Conakry asserts, "If the unity of human being derives from an infinite diversity of its component parts, African Unity too will be founded on the active convergence of the diversities and unities peculiar to the nations and Peoples constituting Africa" (1976, 14).

I take his assertion and explicitly apply it to the realities of peoples in the African diaspora, in this case the United States and Venezuela.

The relatedness of these struggles goes beyond the notion of "strategic essentialism" as posited by Gayatri Spivak in the 1980s which refers to "the ways in which subordinate or marginalized social groups may temporarily put aside local differences in order to forge a sense of collective identity through which they band together in political movements" (Dourish, 2008). Pan-African Socialism understands this collective identity as neither temporary nor strategic, but fundamental to our liberation. That is not to say that Pan-Africanist are not concerned with nuance and cultural specificity. On the contrary, President Touré wrote extensively on culture, which he defined as:

> the sum of the gains, knowledge, modes of action, enabling [wo]man to regulate [their] conduct, [their] relationship with other [wo]men, and [their] relationships with nature; it is through culture that society creates and develops, and expresses itself; it defines the level of general consciousness, technical and technological capacity, the modes of organization, the principles of action, and the objectives which guide society in its struggle for an always new and brighter future. (1976, 9)

Subsequently, the reader should anticipate, over the course of this dissertation, vacillation between the space and time outlined by Lao-Montes. The nature of African liberation struggles as informed by historical precedents and shaped by transnational flows of information as well as global forms of domination, necessitates a rupture in conventions favoring chronology or national specificity. By pushing back against Anthropological preoccupations with demonstrating expertise on a particular geographic location or a particular cultural constellation of bodies, this project both responds to and calls upon the supra-national, trans-temporal realities of African peoples, at least that is

my intention. I attempt, where possible, to group stories from a shared space and time together. However, there are moments when this convention loses its utility.

What follows is a story about stories of becoming or, more specifically, coming into being in two distinct contexts that happen to be simultaneously confronting major social upheavals. For the various subjects of this dissertation, including myself, these are unfinished stories of Black/African youths developing Radical, Black, Feminist and/or Revolutionary consciousness. In one of her latest works Diane M. Nelson frames her research on violence and war in Guatemala in terms of "reckoning," for which she offers several definitions. For our purposes, the following proves most useful: "a measuring of possibilities for the future." In this story of stories, no two are the same, yet each is interconnected through shared histories of colonialism, slavery, rape and pillage yet also through present struggles to *reckon* with such histories in order to measure possibilities for the future.

A NOTE ON NAMING TERMINOLOGY

When referring to people in the United States, I use the terms "Black" and "African" interchangeably, as was the custom among my parents and their political comrades, to refer to people of African descent born on the continent or in Diaspora, regardless of present nationality. Every year in May we would don all white outfits, pile in the car and drive to Washington, D.C. to commemorate African Liberation Day (ALD). Hundreds of Africans would gather in Malcolm X Park or at Howard University for programs associated with the day. One of my fondest childhood memories consists of marching through the streets of D.C. singing:

We are Africans
Mighty, Mighty Africans
Everywhere we go, people want to know
Who we are, so we tell them
We are Africans.

Despite their efforts to instill a sense of ourselves as African, my parents were also products of the Black Power era, so Black as a socio-cultural identity continued to hold significance. In the *Columbia Guide to African American History,* edited by Joseph Harris, Rosalyn Terborg-Penn discusses "Naming Ourselves*"* and attempts to trace the naming preferences of Black Americans over the past century. Citing a study conducted by Howard University Professor Kelly Miller, who found that by the late 1930s names such as "African," "darkie," and "freedman" went out of circulation, while others such as "Black," "Afro-American," "Negro," and "colored" started to become more popular. During the 1960s, the terms "Afro-American" and "Black" vied for acceptance, much like the current trend in Venezuela to use the designation "Afro-Venezuelan" and the

corresponding campaigns to refute negative connotations associated with the use of the Spanish equivalent of Black or *Negro*. Terborg-Penn suggests the use of the term "Black" likely reached its zenith during the Black Power and Black Consciousness movements of the 1970s but by the 1980s, the term "African American" as opposed to "Afro-American" surged in use as the categories of "Black," "African," and "African American" began to take on a plurality of meanings as the numbers of continental Africans and Black Caribbean peoples immigrating to the US increased.

US and Venezuelan proponents of identifying with the categories African American and Afro-Venezuelan argue the terms carry a level of cultural integrity which situates Black Americans (in the continental/hemispheric sense of the word) in a proper context by naming a land of origin and by default a specific historical legacy. Given the difference in the time periods of the evolution of Black/African Americans' self-designation practices, I personally find African American to carry a different significance than the term Afro-Venezuelan. In my experience, identification as "African-American" represents more of a politically correct, assimilationist trend amongst US Blacks and does not actually preform the kind of historical contextualizing it once did. I have personally observed, within the US context, a level of discomfort that some white folks in particular have with saying the word "Black" and as such the terms Afro-American and African-American are often misused as a catch-all phrase for darker Brown people, even when the subjects of conversation are neither African nor American.

In the latter years of my graduate studies I was employed as a Teacher's Assistant for Introduction to Cultural Anthropology, a course offered in my home department. This was a very large survey course of about 250 students. Early in the semester the professor

screened the film "*Cannibal Tours,*" which is a classic ethnographic documentary used in American anthropology courses to discuss everything from representation and modernity to cannibalism and the farce of non-evolving cultures. The film documents European tourists on the Sepik Riven in Papua New Guinea as they tour the home spaces of native Papuan peoples who have some of the most recent histories of socially condoned cannibalism. In reading student reflections on the film, I had a few students (thankfully no more than a handful) who referred to the indigenous Papuans as "African Americans." I found this misrecognition particularly infuriating because it reflected one of two possible sentiments on the part of the students. The first possibility, and perhaps the more egregious one to me as an educator, was that they had not paid attention, saw some brown folks and assumed they were "African-America. The other, only slightly less egregious but equally revelatory option was a discomfort with the use of the term Black to describe people.

Upon reading these students' responses, I realized a major component of my discomfort with the use of the term African American was rooted in the level of discomfort I had observed in some of my white counterparts in referring to Black people, particularly in the presence of other Black people. Because of the "politically-correct" manner in which it is often deployed, I have generally preferred the term Black to African American. In the context of the United States, as a result of the Black Power movement, "Black identity" carries particular cultural referents to a defiantly collective history of struggle for self-determination. Consequently, use of the terms Negro and African American have reflected a brand of respectability politics that no longer make a self-affirming statement about Blackness in the United States. I should also note that I also

prefer African or Displaced African to the term Black, though I tend to not identify as African unless I know I feel like taking the time to explain what that means to people. Furthermore, the move toward understanding one's self as "African" or "Afro"-Anything must be understood as a step in the process of developing a political "African" identity rather than simply a culturally black identity, and the importance of that process must not be understated. Resultantly, I do not use the term African-American in this work.

In Venezuela, the 2011 Census interrupted a more than 150-year practice of refusing to quantify the Venezuelan population according to race, a topic to which I will return in the following section. This new census provided The Network of Afro-Venezuelans the perfect opportunity to launch a campaign that embodied the essence of what is at stake in naming ourselves as African descended peoples. The new census poses the following question, "According to your physical features, ancestry, culture and traditions do you consider yourself: Negro (Black), Afrodescendiente (African Descent), Brown (Moreno), Blanco (White), other/specify." The number of options representing categorical racial identities only begin to scratch the surface of the myriad complexities of racial designations. During the months leading up to the census, the Network of Afro-Venezuelans launched an aggressive campaign encouraging citizens to identify as Afro in their daily lives. The desired impact of this early campaign, according to several members, was to make *autoreconocimiento* (self-recognition) as "Afro," more reasonable and feasible by the time the actual census took place.

Indeed, they posed a question to the entire nation, "Soy Afrodescendiente… y tú ¿cómo te reconoces?"

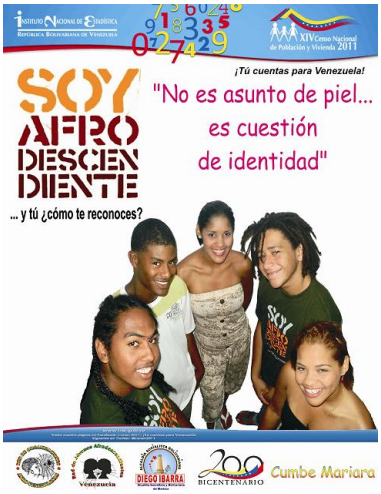

Figure 1 : Soy Afro Census Advertisement
Source:https://fidelernestovasquez.wordpress.com/2011/09/13/censo-2011-y-tu-¿como-te-reconoces/

Throughout Latin America, the categories *Negro*, *Afro*, and *Moreno* have all, to some degree or extent, been used to describe people who, according to racial logic in the United States, would be understood as Black. Recently, with an increase in both domestic and transnational Afro-Latino social movements, the term *Afro* has been promoted as a more politicized racial categorical identity. The more commonly used *moreno* has, through scholarly dissection of *mestizaje* practices, come to be understood as a veil for anti-black sentiments, while the generally pejorative term *negro*, has, according to Ramírez, been stripped of its political potential (2009). In light of Venezuela's history of miscegenation both voluntarily (consensual sex) and involuntarily (rape), and difficulties in advancing beyond the historical stigmatization of the category *negro* or "black," the Network anticipated the need to quantify Venezuela's black/Afro population by understanding *Moreno*, *Negro* and *Afro* as different yet related iterations of Blackness in Venezuela.

In a July 2011 blog post, Maria Cristina Bassalo says the following about what it means to identify as Afrodescendiente on the approaching census:

> "To recognize one's identity as an African descendant requires becoming conscious of our political and social history, as well as an appreciation of and pride in our cultural and ancestral heritage. However, the recognition of the other or another (as an individual) will allow the visibility and respect we deserve as our diversity contributes to Venezuelaness."[9]

Thus, when referring to Venezuelans, I use the terms Afro-Venezuelan, Afrodescendiente (the Spanish version) and occasionally negro, if that person chose to explicitly identify that way. When referring to both groups simultaneously, and/or peoples of African descent outside of the US or Venezuela, I use the terms together, such as Black/African/Afrodescendiente. What to call oneself never ceases to be political, particularly for a people whose subjugation too the express form of stripping us of our names, our languages, our spiritual beliefs and cultural practices. Consequently, the frequent use of multiple designations is an attempt to respect the right to self-determination for the subjects of this dissertation in naming themselves.

[9] Translation mine, via http://kuainabaida.blogspot.com/2012/07/soy-afrodescendiente-y-tu-como-te.html

PAN-AFRICAN ECNOUNTERS

"Nuestra herencia no es cultural.
Es una herencia política, una herencia de la lucha!"

"Our heritage is not cultural
It is a political heritage, a heritage of struggle!"

~Norma Romero
Cumbe de Mujeres Afro

Figure 2: AfroEncuentro Advertisement (Source:http://www.psuv.org.ve/relacionadas/afrodescendientes-solicitaran-celac-reconocimiento-aportes/#.VwXVEBMrJE40)

My first trip to Venezuela coincided with the United Nations declaration of the year 2011 as the International Year for People of African Descent. The year also marked two distinct, yet equally important occasions for Venezuela as a national community. The first, was the bicentennial independence celebration. On July 6th 2011, Venezuelans celebrated 200 years of freedom from Spanish colonial rule. The second, a direct result of negotiations between grassroots organizations, including the Network of Afro-Venezuelans and the state, was the national census. In September of 2011, the National Statistics Institute (INE) agreed to include questions on the national census that would enumerate Venezuela's population according to self-determined racial categories.

This type of statistical data had not been collected at the national level for more than 150 years.

Perhaps most significantly for my research, the Network of Afro-Venezuelans, in conjunction with the Venezuelan National Assembly co-sponsored the *IV Encuentro de Afrodescendientes y las Transformaciones Revolucionarias en América y el Caribe en el Marco del Año Internacional de las y los Afrodescendientes en solidaridad con Haiti* (the fourth Encounter of Afrodescendants in the Americas and the Caribbean for Revolutionary Transformations in the Framework of the International Year of Afrodescendants in Solidarity with Haiti) in June of the same year. That my first field-site visit coincided with this *Encuentro* was purely serendipitous timing, my ability to attend and maneuver through the conference was slightly more calculated.

THE NETWORK OF AFROVENEZUELANS

In early June 2011, I attempted to connect with a young Afro-Venezuelan woman named Roraima Gutiérrez, one of the national coordinators of the Network/Cumbe of Afro-Venezuelan Youth, the youth branch of the national organization, via email. Her contact information had been given to me by a mutual friend of ours from Howard University, a young woman named Kim. Kim was a member of the Cimarron Afro-Latino Student Organization, a student organization devoted to raising political, cultural and historical awareness of the African presence in Latin America and the Caribbean at Howard, whom I'd met two years' prior during the first annual Pan-African Youth Summit hosted by the Kwame Ture Society for Africana Studies and the Political and Educational Action Committee. My relationship with Kim was yet another door opened

via kinship ties, the faculty director of her student organization was something like a mentee of my uncle's. While attending the youth summit, which my Uncle had been invited to speak at, I became a person of interest when it was revealed that I was the niece of Bob Brown. Though her participation in the Cimarron Student Organization, she both traveled to Venezuela and hosted Roraima and her fellow youth Cumbe member Daniel Morocoima Gudino when they had been invited to speak on a panel at Howard University, about Afro-Venezuelan culture, education, and social movements among the country's youth.

About three days later, Roraima warmly replied, "anyone recommended by my sister Kim is surely welcome." She asked me to tell her how she could help me and proceeded to mention the Encuentro, which she described as a "hugely important event for the movement of Afrodescended people in America and the Caribbean." It turned out that she lived about two hours west of Caracas, so this would be the best time to catch her in the city. She concluded the email by sharing her cell phone number with me and the following graphic:

NEGRO es un COLOR
AFRODESCENDIENTE una IDENTIDAD...
¡Soy Afro!

Despite her warm welcome, as a person in a position of leadership in the Network of Afro-Venezuelan Youth, Roraima was preoccupied with administrative duties during the course of the conference, so we would not have the opportunity to develop our relationship until later in the summer. She did however send me a copy of the agenda for the conference, for which I was extremely grateful. An older man by the name of

Diogenes Diaz, also a member of the Network would also become significant in my attempts to navigate the conference.

As I stated earlier, the Encuentro was organized by the various people and sub-organizations that make up the Network of Afro-Venezuelans. Though various political and cultural organizations run by and for Afro-Venezuelans have long existed, the Network has a particular history, one that is tied to Afro-Venezuelan scholar-activist Chucho Garcia. In recounting a brief history of Afro-Venezuelan organizing, Chucho cites Venezuelan writer, Arturo Uslar Pietri's claim that "Blacks did not make a racial contribution beneficial to the nation" (1983), and its influence on the country's white elites, as a commonly held assumption that must be disrupted and contested.

This rather widely accepted declaration, along with the common assumption, across Latin America, that Africa's primary contribution to the Venezuelan nation had been drums and witchcraft, led Chucho in the 1980s, to travel to the Republic of the Congo, scour Venezuelan archives and catalogue oral histories of Afro-Venezuelans, in an attempt to document Venezuela's historic and contemporary relationship to Africa and its descendants. In order to stake claim as Afro-Venezuelans and dignify their role in the development of the Venezuelan nation, such false claims must be addressed (Garcia, 2004). In 1992, rejecting the celebration of Christopher Columbus' so-called "discovery" of the Americas, Chucho and other members of the Afro-Venezuelan community created the *Afroa merica 92* festival, during which they began commemorating "Multicultural Day," in an attempt to reflect a more honest history of Columbus' encounter.

In the year 2000, with the support of the Ministry of Popular Power of Culture, then known as the Consejo Nacional de la Cultura (CONAC – National Council of

Culture) close to forty organizations met in San José de Barlovento and agreed to form the Network of Afro-Venezuelans (Martinez, Fox & Farrell, 2010). The region of Barlovento is presently home to the largest geographic concentration of Afrodescended peoples in Venezuela. Located about 100 kilometers east of Caracas, Barlovento is about 4,500 square kilometers covering four districts of the state of Miranda. In the eighteenth century large shipments of slaves were brought to Barlovento to support the burgeoning cacao industry and to the sugar plantations in Zulia, around Lake Maracaibo. It was the site of intense cimarrón activity throughout the eighteenth century, with several cumbe settlements established around Curiepe and Caucagua.

The Network, which expanded amid preparatory procedures for the 2001 World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance held in Durban, South Africa, continues the work and legacy of *Afroamerica 92*. Serving as an umbrella entity for a number of Afro-Venezuelan organizations in existence prior to its inception, the network's primary objectives consist of facilitating the collaboration of Afro-Venezuelan organizations in order to promote sustainable development of their communities' cultural, environmental, health and economic prospects, as well as sports and education. Through their work they assist in promoting measures that integrate public policies of the central government with local, regional, national, international and private institutions.

Additionally, the Network aids in strengthening grassroots organizations to achieve greater effectiveness in denouncing all forms of racism and racial discrimination in Venezuelan society.[10] The Network has a number of sub-committees referred to as

[10] http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/session12/VE/-RedOrganizacionesAfroVenezolanas-spa.pdf

cumbes, a term referencing the histories of communities of survival and resistance created in order to escape the inhumanity of enslavement (García, 2001). The barrage of state projects centering on the lives and experiences of Afro-Venezuelan people represented a political climax of sorts after having lost battles for constitutional recognition in both 1999 and 2007.

THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR FOR PEOPLE OF AFRICAN DESCENT

2011 was declared The *International Year for People of African Descent* by the United Nations (UN). Despite the questionable nature of the UN as an international governing body which primarily operates at the behest of the United States and members of the security council, it is important to note that the 2011 declaration is a direct consequence of the work and organizing done by continental and disaporic Africans the world over, which resulted in the 2001 World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance (WCAR) in Durban, South Africa. On the homepage of the UN website dedicated to this international declaration, a quote from the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, reads:

> "This International Year offers a special opportunity to redouble our efforts in the fight against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance that affect people of African descent everywhere."

The "we" mentioned in this quote can be read both ambiguously and dubiously given the vested interests, under global capitalism, of maintaining a perpetually subordinate class of people. However, in many respects this attention to the specific injustices faced by international communities of African Descent is itself a commemoration of the WCAR. The "we" for the purposes of this paper, is used to refer

to the masses of African and African descended peoples who have been struggling for their liberation since the first attempt to steal it away from them. If it were not for the relationships, organizational programs and demands resulting from Durban, the UN would not have been pressured to center the concerns of African descended peoples, even if their efforts are only rhetorical in nature. Special attention should be given to the fact that 2011 was specifically dedicated to people "of African Descent" a categorical distinction specifically intended to address people not residing within the continent of Africa, whether they had been the descendants of the trans-Atlantic slave trade (or for that matter, the trans-Saharan or the trans-Indian ocean slave trades) or not. As part of the campaign to raise global awareness about the conditions of life African Descended peoples overwhelmingly face, the UN created a central web page with some basic statistical information. Their homepage reads as follows:

> "Approximately 200 million people who identify themselves as of African descent live in the Americas. Many millions more live in other parts of the world outside Africa. In proclaiming this International Year, the international community recognizes that people of African descent represent a distinct section of society whose human rights must be promoted and protected."
>
> "The Declaration and Programme of Action[11] recognizes people of African descent as a specific group of victims who continue to suffer discrimination as a historical legacy of the transatlantic slave trade. Even people of African descent who are not direct descendants of slaves face the racism and discrimination that persist today, generations after the end of the slave trade."

What is perhaps most significant about the UN declaration, has nothing to do with the actual intentions of the United Nations, but rather, that the increased visibility afforded by

[11] Adopted at the World Conference against Racism in 2001 in Durban, South Africa, the Declaration and Programme of Action is a comprehensive document based on actions proposed concrete measures to combat racism, racial DISCRIMINATION, xenophobia and forms related intolerance.

the UN declaration helped to facilitate an increase in transnational/Pan-African/African Diasporic socio-cultural and political ties.

Cultural theorist Stuart Hall describes *representation* as the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture through the use of language, signs and images which stand for or represent things (Hall, 1997). The image below is the first, and one of very few pictures used to represent African descendedness on the UN's homepage.

Figure 3 - Garifuna Man Holding Child
(Source: http://www.un.org/en/events/iypad2011/)

The photo depicts a Garífuna[12] man with full dreadlocs, holding a child on a beach with white sandy shores. With so few alternative representations of Afrodescendedness offered on the site, questions about the kinds of images that "sufficiently" represent Afrodescended materiality, how they are chosen, by whom and why, abound. What did the person who chose this image mean to convey about the lives of Afrodescended peoples via this image? Representations of Blackness, African Descendedness, Afrolatinidad etc. are rife with the contradictions, contentions, and complexities of racial identity and belonging plaguing African and African descended peoples the world over. I confess, I have come up with no comforting answers to the questions I have just posed. That they remain salient each time I look at the photo, even five years later, is justification enough for me to pose them to you, the reader.

HAITIAN CONNECTIONS: A DEBT TO BE REPAID

The triumph of the Haitian Revolution is perhaps the single most important occurrence in the history of people of African descent over the last two-hundred or more years, despite constant attempts of the countries of the "Global North" to maintain Haiti's status as a pariah. There were perhaps, very pragmatic reasons for dedicating the conference to the peoples of Haiti, particularly considering the devastation wrought by the 2010 earthquake, which claimed the lives of nearly a quarter million Haitians (BBC, 2010). However, by naming Venezuela's Socialist Revolution in honor of Simón Bolívar, Chávez seemed to be making an effort to reckon for a few debts owed to the nation of free Blacks.

[12] Garífuna people are a mixture of African and Indigenous American Carib or Arawak peoples, primarily concentrated on the Caribbean coast of Central America in Honduras, Nicaragua and Belize.

Bolívar, also known affectionately and politically as *El Libertador,* is a controversial figure, particularly with regard to race and liberation, despite Chávez 's constant evocation of Bolivar as the preeminent intellectual and political ancestor to the Bolivarian Revolution. Bolívar is the historical link between Venezuela, Haiti and colonial independence struggles in the western hemisphere. After a lengthy stint as a high ranking officer in the military, and participating in the independence struggles of 1811 under the leadership of Francisco de Miranda, Bolívar began to have disputes with local military leaders and in 1815 he fled to Jamaica in in self-imposed exile where he penned "The Jamaica Letter." In this letter, he puts forth his ideas on the need for the unification of the Americas in the face of the colonial tyranny of Spain, before fleeing Jamaica for Haiti. The letters attention to the shared experience of colonialism for the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean, in many ways, laid the foundation for 21st Century Bolivarian Projects such as the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), the Bolivarian Alliance for the People of Our America (ALBA) and the Bolivarian Oil Alliance with Caribbean nations specifically (PetroCaribe).

Though Jamaica was where he penned this foundational document, it was the Haitian Revolution and his subsequent exiles in Haiti that provided the theoretical foundations, material support and model for the Great Liberator's dreams of independence from Spain and continental unity. After leaving Jamaica for Haiti, Bolivar received a tremendous amount of support for plans to liberate and unite the Americas. In Haiti, under the leadership of Alexandre Petión, Bolívar found a fierce ally. Within the year, Petión provided Bolívar with 4,000 rifles, gunpowder, food, a printing press, Haitian soldiers, and boats in exchange for a promise to abolish slavery in the territories

he successfully liberated. Bolivar is even quoted saying the following to Petión in the wake of his success, "Should I not let it be known to later generations that Alexandre Petión is the true liberator of my country" (TeleSur, 2014)? Despite Haiti's undeniable role in facilitating Latin American independence, Bolivar went on to reestablish slavery in his so-called liberated territories by 1821 (Blackburn 1988, 348).

In May of 2011, Hector Rodriguez, then Vice-president of the Social Area Council of Venezuela, declared "we have a historical debt to pay to our brothers and sisters in Haiti, because they helped us liberate our Latin America' (Boothroyd, 2011). This declaration was made amidst a public recommitment to continue to repay Venezuelan debts to Haiti through humanitarian aid programs, and this, on the heels of the 2010 decision to cancel Haiti's nearly $400 million USD in debt. This perhaps offers more insight into The New Yorker's February 2016 report that Venezuela's decision to provide the country with approximately "two hundred million dollars a year from PetroCaribe, to spend as his government saw fit" (Anderson, 2016). To offer financial assistance without the expectation that financial contributions make one party beholden to the other is a principled form of solidarity politics rarely encountered in a world where money and morality are often conflated.

ENCOUNTERING AFROVENEZUELAN POLITICS

The *Encuentro* was a major production with a seemingly large budget. The conference activities took place at the Hotel ALBA, a five-star hotel with approximately thirty-six stories, overlooking Los Caobos and El Ávila National Parks. Between June 19th and the 22nd, a host of local and international characters traversed the hotel attending

plenary and breakout sessions and making connections in between sessions. The opening session took place on Sunday evening. President Chávez was listed as the speaker for the opening ceremony, however he was replaced by then First Vice President of the Venezuelan National Assembly, Aristóbulo Istúriz, who would later be appointed to Vice President under Chávez 's successor Nicolás Maduro. At the time, I heard whispers of concern when attendees were informed Chávez would not make it to the opening ceremonies. Unbeknownst to most at the time, Chávez was secretly undergoing cancer treatment in Cuba. At the opening ceremony, a rather large spectacle was made calling attention to the decision to dedicate the conference to the people of Haiti. Considering the information presented in the section prior to this one, the reasons for doing so should be rather obvious.

Monday, June 20th was the first full day of activities on the schedule and the theme of the day was "The Emancipation and Unity of African Descended Peoples in Order to Build a Pluripolar World." This session basically set the tone for the the days ahead with a presentation by Chucho which was moderated by Professor Alejandro Correa. The presentation immediately following Chucho's included former Ghanaian President Jerry Rawlings, Former Minister of Culture and Tourism in Mali and World Social Forum Coordinator, Aminata Traore and others. These sessions were central to the conference so no others were held simultaneously. These presentations/discussions generally covered pertinent histories used to contextualize the gathering and information about the current state of affairs of African diasporic peoples.

Most of the other sessions that took place during the next three days were held concurrently with others so I have a limited perspective on the entirety of the conference.

According to the program, a broad swath of African and African diasporic communities were represented in a number of the conference conference sessions I was unable to attend including Afrovenezuelan-Trinidadian anthropologist John Sorrillo; Afro-Cuban historian Digna Castañeda; Martinician human rights activist and radio personality, Henri Pastel; Angela Jackson of St. Vincent & the Grenadines, a woman who is also an active member of the Rastafarian Community in her home country; Afro-Puerto Rican sociologist and UMass Amherst professor Augustin Lao-Montes; Romero Rodríguez, the Afro-Uruguayan roving ambassador on African Affairs; Director of UNC-Chapel Hill's Stone Center, Dr. Joseph Jordan; US-based historian Runoko Rashidi; and Smithsonian Director of Cultural Studies and Communication, James Early, just to name a few.

Unfortunately, two of the panels I wanted to attend were scheduled to take place simultaneously, fortunately they were located next door to one another. One was on the role of Afrodescended youth in our America which featured presentations by Roraima, another mutual friend from Howard University and youth/labor activist Austin Thompson among others, and the panel was moderated by Merlyn Pirela, a twenty-something Afro-Venezuelan woman who has worked for the national government on behalf of Afro-Venezuelan women, hosted her own cable access television show and fiercely committed to Afro-Venezuelan grassroots organizing. Merlyn's specific and numerous contributions will be explored in more detail later. The other panel was on the role of Afrodescended women in our America. This panel featured presentations by Norma Romero, who at that time was a regional coordinator for the Network of Afro-Venezuelans and thus a high profile figure at the conference who I only met in passing but she offered me her e-mail and we finally caught up on my second trip to Venezuela in 2012. She would later

become the president of the newly formed National Council for the Development of Afrodescended Communities of Venezuela.

Figure 4: Norma Romero seen on the left in tan and white, standing and clapping

The panel also featured Esther Pineda, a scholar/activist studying sociology at the Universidad Central de Venezuela, UCV (Central University of Venezuela) who was a graduate student at the time but has since gone on to earn a doctoral degree in Sociology from the Central University of Venezuela and has published eight books on racism and sexism in afrodescended communities, among others; and Amsatou Sow Sidibé, a Senegalese intellectual and presidential candidate. Finally, in passing, I met a woman named Luisa Madríz, an educator and community activist in Curiepe, Venezuela, during a panel entitled Educación y Diversidad: Construcción del desarrollo Curricular desde la perspectiva Afrodescendientes (Education and Diversity: Curriculum Development from the Afrodescendant Perspective).

On the panel discussion concerning Afrodescended women, I recall an Afro-Brazilian woman presented as well, her name escapes me but I remember her vividly

because I sympathized greatly with the translator, an extremely skilled Haitian man. It should be pointed out here that there was only one translator for the room and at least three different languages were being spoken on the panel. Considering the circumstances, the translator did an excellent job, as professionally paid translators are typically not required to translate between more than two languages, however when trying to connect transnational political struggles, multi-lingual contributors are of particular importance and not always easy to find. I remember at one point, the Senegalese panelist began speaking and because the translator had been moving between Spanish, French, and Portuguese, he actually just started repeating what she said in French. There was an uncomfortable moment when audience members seemed to be frustrated by his slip of the tongue which I found rather unreasonable considering he had already been navigating between three languages for over an hour.

I was also sympathetic because a South African drummer, with extremely limited Spanish skills and zero proficiency in French or Portuguese, sat next to me during the panel. Apparently, when I greeted him, he realized I spoke English and I ended up fumbling through my own attempts quietly translate from Spanish to English for him. Consequently, I have almost no written notes from the day, only a recollection of my sympathies for the translator and a general sense of being overwhelmed by the depth of histories begin recalled, shared experiences generating authentic connections and constant translation.

Speaking of translation, the Encuentro was yet another space where being the niece of Bob Brown served to grant me access to spaces. My Uncle was at the time working on a documentary project about Kwame Ture, for which he was soliciting

support in both Trinidad (Kwame's home) and Venezuela. Given both his and Kwame's commitment to Pan-African organizing projects, my uncle was invited to attend the conference on his own merits and provided a hotel room by the conference. He also took this opportunity to speak with people about the project and gauge interest and the possibility of support for the project. I was already living with a host family across town so I never attempted to get a room in the conference hotel but the nature of big conference is that much happens after hours. Fortunately, I was able to share my uncle's room and spend more time in and around the conference hotel. In a sort of unspoken agreement of exchange for crashing in his hotel room, I informally translated for him in the afterhours moments of the conference. This perhaps made me keenly aware of the limits of my Spanish.

My uncle's level of verbal sophistication is difficult to capture and even harder to translate, so I spent a great deal of time searching for the best words. In the midst of one of our discussions with a few members of a local Venezuelan music group Bituaya in the hotel bar, about possibly doing some music for the documentary, Mireille Fanon-Mendés, the daughter of Frantz Fanon entered the bar with a friend and sat down next to us. I did not know who she was on sight but my uncle did, and they sparked a conversation. She had been invited to speak at the conference on a panel about the cultural legacy and present contribution of Afrodescendants in the Americas, a panel which I unfortunately did not attend. As I was only a third-party to their conversation, I do not wish to recount the details, I only wish to point out the breadth and depth of the entire Encuentro via a quick recounting of some the more notable figures present amongst the estimated six hundred or more participants. The participation of community members, grassroots

activist, scholar/intellectual and state representatives from all over the Americas and across the African continent set the stage for the kind of Pan-African praxis I explore further as this work develops.

RESOLUTIONS FROM THE ENCOUNTER

The closing ceremony included the reading of the Caracas Declaration and Plan of Action of Our America, by Aristóbulo Istúriz, who subsequently read the proposed resolutions of the encounter. The resolutions were as follows:

> First: The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) recognize the moral, political, social and cultural contributions of African descent in shaping our America; to which end this first agreement includes the creation of an Advisory Council for Latin America and the Caribbean.
>
> Second: Create the National Council for Afro-descendant community of Venezuela with inter-ministerial character, to deepen the eradication of racism, exclusion and discrimination.
>
> Third: Create the Afrodescendant Fund of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), whose purpose is to repair the injustices of black communities of the agency and even those who do not belong to Alba.
>
> Fourth: Create a Solidarity Fund to Haiti to help the Haitian people recover their sovereignty.
>
> Fifth: Require NATO Treaty Organization (North Atlantic) to cease the bombing of Libya, military interventionism in North Africa, respect the Route of Peace of the African Union and the diplomatic proposal commander president implement Hugo Chávez Frias.
>
> Sixth: Require the United Nations Organization (UN) implementation of the Permanent Forum of People of African Descent.

Over the course of the four days, conference participants discussed the challenges and opportunities facing people of African descent in the national and international labor movement, issues of racial discrimination, politically and culturally affirming education

and diversity, social debt, as well as the contributions of African thought for the emancipation of peoples and the fight against statistical invisibility, a battle they would be undertaking in the coming months with the initiation of the new census.

MORE TERMINOLOGY: *ENCUENTRO* AS THEORETICAL INTERVENTION

> **"**To encounter oneself is to encounter the other: and this is love. If I know that my soul trembles, I know that yours does, too: and, if I can respect this, both of us can live."
>
> ~James Baldwin

When I first attended the conference and for a few years thereafter I struggled to accurately translate the word *Encuentro*, and consequently, the entire phrasing of the conference. My earliest translations were relatively predictable such as "conference," "meeting," or "gathering," among a host of other insufficient terms, as I attempted to write up my field notes. I'm not sure why I struggled with the word so, nor why I felt compelled to continue searching for a translation that more accurately conveyed its meaning, but I constantly found myself unsatisfied with how I was describing the event. In my search for a more evocative translation of the term, I came to understand *encuentros* as a specific epistemology of political praxis in left-leaning Latin American communities. The use and proliferation of the term describes public "gatherings" with a very specific and important etymology in Venezuelan grassroots politics.

In his observations of *Zapatista encuentros,* and conversations with Subcomandante Marcos,[13] Manuel Callahan explains that "an *encuentro* is not a space to impose an already established political program in order to 'conscientize' a community to a specific issue. […] Rather, *encuentros* are spaces for a collective analysis and vision to emerge" (Callahan 2005, 13). In his work *We Are the State!,* Cristobal Valencia explains

[13] The war name used by the main ideologist and spokesman of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), a Mexican rebel movement fighting for the rights of the indigenous peoples of Mexico.

that *encuentros*, which he translates as "get togethers," were common place and relatively informal across Venezuelan barrios in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Citing Manuel Callahan, Valencia further defines *encuentros* as a tool for "the disruption of despotic democracy and related white middle-class hegemony through the reconstruction of the collective subject," where "dialogue, insurgent learning, and convivial research that allows for a collective analysis and vision to emerge while affirming local struggles," takes place in order to facilitate "a popular democratic process and pre-figurative politics" (2015, 4). Valencia continues by asserting the essential role *encuentros* played for barrio dwelling Caraqueños at the turn of the 21st century.

Encuentros, according to Valencia, were of particular importance for Caraqueños who remained outside the formal sectors of the state economy as a form of *parlamentarismo en la calle* (street assembly), even before Chávez's ascension to power. He asserts, "this participatory political practice among neighbors emerged during the 1980s as barrio residents shunned traditional political parties. Before Chávez, they […] focused on […] strategies for dealing with deteriorating barrio infrastructure and the lack of basic services through informal organizing at the local level. […] After Chávez's election in 1998" he argues "*encuentros* focused on interpreting and creating new legislation to establish popular power (civil-society authority) locally and nationally." I found Valencia's historical account of the emergence of *encuentros* useful for reflecting on the *encuentro* of Afro-Latin American and Caribbean peoples that took place during my first visit to Caracas. Taking the history offered by Valencia into account facilitates an understanding of this gathering as indigenous to the political lives of Venezuelan peoples and grassroots even as it appeared quite "official" and "bureaucratic" at times.

I also find provocative parallels between the notion of *encuentros* and what Adrienne Maree Brown has described as "emergent strategy." According to Brown, emergent strategy is "based in the science of emergence – the way complex systems and patterns arise out of a multiplicity of relatively simple interactions." Through work-shopping ideas about emergent strategy at the 2013 Allied Media Conference (AMC), she published a handbook on emergent strategy where she explains that,

> "We are not limited to how things have been done in the past in terms of how we share leadership, how we manage interpersonal justice, how we make decisions, how we grow our work. Even out smallest acts of integrity grow our collective capacity to live our visions into reality." (Brown, 2014)

Similar to the ways *encuentros* are meant to disrupt hegemonic notions of who can lead or direct, Brown's notion of emergent strategy understood to be intentional yet fractal (the same at the largest scale as it is at the smallest scale, toxic, healthy, joyful, stressed, etc.), strong because it is decentralized, adaptive, interdependent, and creating more possibilities. Rather than laying out big strategic plans for work, Brown suggests, the "invitation of emergent strategy is to come together in community, build authentic relationships, and see what emerges from the conversations, connections, visions and needs. it feels like more and more of my communities are growing comfortable experimenting with, testing, and learning emergent strategies" (2014).

The notion of an "encounter," in the historic sense of Venezuelan public politics, the James Baldwin sense recognition, respect and love, the Brown sense of encountering new possibilities as they emerge in the spaces we share as dreamers and freedom fighters, and lastly in Webster's definitional sense of the word which defines encounter as 1a) to meet as an adversary or enemy, 1b) to engage in conflict with; 2) to come upon face-to-

face; and 3) to come upon or experience especially unexpectedly, provides an evocative theoretical framework for this dissertation, is fundamentally a notion of love and liberation. The various moments at which African descended peoples encounter themselves and one another, in a world which overwhelmingly seeks to oppress and invalidate them, are the rich historical and ethnographic moments which reveal the processes through which said people engage and/or quiet their radical, political selves. The various close encounters of the love and liberation kind explored in the pages to come are intended to document and uplift the reality of what it means to become radicalized.

TO HAVE THE STATE ON YOUR SIDE

Shortly after President Chávez died in 2012, the illustration below was named one of the winners of the first annual Latin American Illustration Competition. Its illustrator, Kiko Rodriguez, is quoted saying his "caricature refers to the injustice of his rule, showing a fight between a wild, powerful gorilla—Chávez and his state apparatus—and a delicate wounded bird representing the mass media" (Schonauer, 2013).

Figure 5: "Miko Mandante" (Source: http://venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/10547)

Rodriguez titled the illustration "Miko Mandante," "Miko Mandante", meaning "Ape Commander" in an effort to mock the affectionate title "Mi Comandante," meaning "My Commander" affectionately used by masses of Venezuelan people. The choice to represent Chávez and "the media" as a blood thirsty gorilla and a wounded/captured bird respectively, is not as racially innocuous as Rodriguez seems to convey, given the overwhelmingly fruit and plant based diet of gorillas. The depiction of Chávez, the Afro-Indigenous Venezuelan President as a primate is no doubt informed by a long tradition of

dehumanizing tropes that associate people of African descent with monkeys suggesting said people are less evolutionarily developed as say, white human beings.

The same trope has been weaponized against the first Black President of the United States, Barack Obama since he announced his candidacy in 2008. The image below was the main editorial cartoon in the February 18th, 2009 *New York Post*, a supposedly reputable American publication, a day after Obama signed the stimulus bill into law.

Figure 6: Police Shoot Obama Stimulus Chimp
(Source: http://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/feb/18/new-york-post-cartoon-race)

The cartoon received a significant amount of public criticism from Obama supporters, to which the newspaper's editor-in-chief, Col Allen, responded by saying "the cartoon is a clear parody of a current news event, to wit the shooting of a violent chimpanzee in Connecticut, it broadly mocks Washington's efforts to revive the economy" (Burkeman, 2009). The cartoon was ultimately retracted, but the damage was done and the farce that we lived in a "post-racial America" thanks to the election of Barack Obama was rapidly unraveling.

As the first self-identified Black/Afro presidents of their respective countries, both enjoyed the general support of their Black populations early on in their presidencies. Keenly aware of the racist legacies in both the US and Venezuela, the Black masses of both countries have a sort of "extra-political" support for both, in that their sympathies are derived from an understanding of a politics of race more, in some instances, than what is considered to be "mainstream politics" like actual policy initiatives. As Afro-Venezuelans struggled with the legacies of racism and mestizaje in Venezuela, early initiatives to develop infrastructure, decrease poverty, increase access to education, health care, and child care vastly improved the material conditions of Afro-Venezuelans as racial hierarchies tend to result in precarious conditions of life for their communities. Over time, as will be seen in the next section, Chávez responded to the challenges of the Afrodescended masses and began to center race in public discourse.

In the US however, the neoliberal global financial crisis showed Obama's limits and the sense of hope and change that formed the bedrock of his 2008 presidential campaign quickly faded. The decision to fund the Wall-street bailout solidified the economic status quo under Obama's presidency, ensuring the domination of the 1% for generations to come. The Obama years also saw the systematic gutting of 1964 Voting Rights Act, the bedrock of legislative efforts to destabilize racial inequality in this country. The Malcolm X Grassroots Movement also released a scathing report on state violence against which concluded that the 313 documented extrajudicial killings of Black people in the US during 2012 meant that on average, a Black person was killed "every 28 hours," hence the name of the report. Also under Obama, student loan debt increased exponentially, disproportionately impacting poor people of color (Kasperkevic, 2012).

Obama even decided to jump on the false yet proliferating belief that Black fathers are overwhelmingly not present in their children's lives (Coates, 2013).

With these two dynamic Black/Afro presidencies unfolding simultaneously, not to mention the antagonisms present between the two countries, I saw an opportunity to develop a research project that would allow me to explore in real time, whether or not the ideological beliefs I had been reared with, particularly whether Black/Afrodescended masses would fare better under socialism as a national economic project, than the neoliberal Capitalism that has worked to ensure our enslavement and subjugation for generations.

SETTING THE STAGE FOR THE BOLIVARIAN REVOLUTION

The 1998 democratic election of Venezuela's first Afro-Indigenous president Hugo Chávez as the leader of the Bolivarian Revolution and the present global battle against neoliberalism is inextricably linked to what Fernando Coronil described as "the largest and most violently state repressed revolt against austerity measures in Latin American History" (1997, 376). *The Caracazo* also referred to as the *Sacudon*[14] or "the day the poor came down from the hills" (Garcia-Guadilla, 2007) is often characterized as "year zero" of the Bolívarian Revolution by Chávez supporters because it represented a turning point in the governing of the country and the collective consciousness of its denizens (Shiller, 2013). *The Caracazo* was the response of Caracas's urban poor to the "bait-and-switch" reform measures implemented by President Carlos Andres Perez and

[14] Ciccariello-Maher suggests, in his work *We Created Chavez*, that the *Caracazo* is a misleading term in that it conceals the generalized and national nature of the rebellion. He prefers the term *Sacudon* which, her argues, connotes the popular uprising as more of a geological tremor than riots isolated to capital city's poor (2013, 93).

imposed upon the country by the International Monetary Fund. Despite running on a distinctly anti-neoliberal/anti-IMF platform, almost immediately following his election he set about implementing policy changes that restricted government spending and salaries, deregulated exchange and interest rates, effectively eliminated farming subsidies, relaxed price controls, introduced sales tax (essentially a poverty-tax), liberalized state resources including most importantly, petroleum and all but eliminated import tax.

During one weekend in February 1989, Venezuelan citizens woke up to an overnight doubling of transportation fares, the first hard hitting blow of the austerity measures to impact daily lives. When many urban poor woke up to discover that they could not afford bus fare to transport themselves to work or any other place they needed to go, rebellion overtook the city. Coronil and Skurski assert that the *Caracazo* was the peoples' response to a "rupturing of a moral bond established between the state and the pueblo" (1991). The *Caracazo* also brought to the fore, racial and class divisions that had been held at bay by a relatively well functioning economy up to that point. With the military and police crackdown following the *Caracazo* and the rapid shift of resources away from infrastructure and social programs increased inequality and most heavily impacted non-white Venezuelans. Nearly a decade later when Chávez ran for office and subsequently came to power highlighting his own indigenous and African heritage, it was clear that race and class were understood as undoubtedly intertwined.

By 1992, Chávez was a Captain in the Venezuelan military career who, in the wake of the Caracazo, had helped form the Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement-200 (MBR-200). In a plan known as Operation Zamora, Chávez and fellow MBR-200 members began preparing a military coup against the government of Carlos Andrés Pérez

(Cannon 2009, 55; Marcano and Tyszka 2007, 64). The coup, though unsuccessful, resulted in increased popular support for Chávez and after his release from prison in 1994, he began traveling Venezuela and Latin America promoting his notion of a Bolivarian Socialist Revolution. It was during this time that he traveled to Cuba, met Fidel Castro and their bond as political comrades began to solidify (Marcano and Tyszka 2007, 220).

By 1998, running on an anti-neoliberal/anti-austerity measures platform, Chávez had managed to gain the support of the majority of Venezuela's poor and working class populations, as well as an increasingly disenchanted middle class allowing him to secure an electoral victory for the presidency of Venezuela (Wilpert 2007, 18). In what was termed a landslide victory, with 64% electoral participation, Chávez won 56% percent of the electorate for an undeniable win. Chávez 's electoral victory disrupted the long held myth of Venezuela as an exceptional democracy because it supposedly operated under a political and cultural system uniquely conducive to stability in Latin America.[15]

BOLIVARIANISMO, A 21ST CENTURY SOCIALIST NATION BUILDING PROJECT

Bolivarianismo in general refers to the political praxis and ideology of Simón Bolívar most clearly extant in his Pan-Americanist vision to unite Latin America against the imperialism of Spain and the United States. Because Bolivar is a salient political

[15] For more on the notion of Venezuela's exceptional democracy see Steve Ellner and Miguel Tinker Salas' *Venezuela: Hugo Chávez and the Decline of an "Exceptional Democracy"* (Lanham, MD: Roman & Littlefield, 2007).

figure throughout the entirety of Latin America, and specifically in the territories he helped liberate, formerly known as Gran Colombia but what are now known to be the sovereign nations of present-day Panama, Colombia, Ecuador, Northern Peru, Venezuela, Western Guyana and Northwestern Brazil, there have been distinct manifestations of Bolivarianismo in each context. As Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution grew in notoriety and influence, its particular manifestation of Bolivarianismo, what many refer to as Chavismo, has overshadowed most distinct expressions of the ideology in other nations. Because Chávez was and continues to be a relatively controversial figure, *Chavismo* is also deployed as a mechanism to embody the political project of the nation in whatever human flaws Chávez may have possessed. Though Bolivar was an equally controversial figure in his day, his name does not carry nearly the amount of negative stigma that Chávez 's does in the present. For this reason, I will use Bolivarinismo in lieu of Chavismo when referring to Venezuela's ideological state apparatus, though I will occasionally refer to the project's supporters as Chavistas.

The Preamble of the 1999 Constitution, one of Chávez's first acts as president, states that Venezuela "is a multiethnic and multicultural society" which "guarantees the right to life, to work, to culture, to education, to social justice and equality without discrimination or subordination". Detailing the "Duties, Human Rights, and Guarantees" of Venezuelan people, Title III pointedly makes reference to Venezuela's diverse population and how all of its citizens should both contribute to and benefit from the state. This document sets important legal precedents national belonging in Venezuela. During the course of his presidency, Chávez developed a number of Bolivarian Missions which directly corresponded to the road-map of governance he laid for himself as President of

the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Chapter IV of the constitution, which addresses "Political Rights and Public Referenda" states in article 69, that "the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela recognizes and guarantees the right of asylum and refuge. Extradition of Venezuelans is prohibited." This short but important declaration and is sheds light on my father's early warnings to keep my eye on Venezuela in case I needed a place to go. In 2013, in the wake of the "Wikileaks" scandal, Venezuela, under Maduro's leadership formally offered Edward Snowden in celebration of his truth-telling and rebellious spirit, a fact to keep in mind.

In Chapter V, on "Social and Family Rights," article 83 declares health a fundamental social right. It further details the responsibility of the State to promote and develop policies oriented toward improving the quality of life, common welfare and access to services. Article 85 reiterates that financing of the public health system is the responsibility of the State and will be funded by state revenue resources and mandatory Social Security contributions. It further declares that the State shall regulate both public and private health care institutions. In 2006, the government announced a corresponding Bolivarian Social Mission it called "Mission Barrio Adentro," or "The Neighborhood Mission," which is a series of initiatives (deployed in three distinct stages) to provide comprehensive and community health care (at both the primary (*Consultorios y Clínicas Populares* or popular clinics) and secondary (hospital) levels), in addition to preventative medical counsel to Venezuela's medically under-served and impoverished *barrios*.

In its gestational stages, the mission was a small scale plan to set up free health care clinics inside neighborhood communities initiated by a pro-Chávez mayor named Freddy Bernal in 2003. Encountering difficulties securing Venezuelan doctors to work in

the clinics, Bernal solicited the help of Cuban doctors, who since the triumph of the revolution had been deployed all over the mal-developed world to provide medical personnel. In her article "Barrio Women and Popular Politics in Chávez 's Venezuela," Sujatha Fernandes recalled that in July 2003, the women of Carretera Negra (a stretch of houses alongside a highway in West Caracas) formed their Health Committee in order to help a Cuban doctor who was sent to the barrio. They found a house for the doctor to use as a clinic, located equipment, chairs, beds and found a home for the doctor. They also organized meetings between the Cuban doctor and the community, took health census and visited families to explain to them the objectives of the Barrio Adentro program (2007, 115). By 2006, the program had gained such notoriety for its success that Chávez turned the program into a national mission, Mission Barrio Adentro.

In article 88 of the new constitution, the nation guarantees the equality and equitable treatment of men and women in the exercise of their right to work. It further recognizes work at home as an economic activity which creates added value and produces social welfare and wealth for the nation, as such stay-at-home mothers/ housewives are entitled to Social Security in accordance with law. In 2004 the above-mentioned community of women began a soup kitchen as a way for the women of the barrio to organize collectively to ensure that the children of the barrio were fed, particularly when the single mothers of the community were not able to do so themselves. These soup kitchens, like Barrio Adentro are nationally funded initiatives that required the barrio women's touch in order to make it compatible with their communities.

When, in 2006, the Bolivarian government launched "Mission Madres del Barrio" or "Mothers of the Barrio Mission" in the state of Vargas, President Chávez pronounced

"With this mission, we want to give a hand to mothers who are in need, and homemakers without a fixed income" (Baribeau, 2006). In accordance with the constitutional proclamation that the work of these mothers is an important societal contribution, Chávez announced that the government would pay 80 percent of minimum wage, or about $180 per month, at the time, to mothers who live in extreme poverty. For many women, Mission Madres del Barrio made a major contribution to their daily material lives and some reciprocate by increased political participation in "*el proceso."*[16] For, others however, there is a desire to ramp up the political education component of these initiatives. Yanahir Reyes, a feminist activist from the Caracas barrio of Caricuao wants to see the collectives of women benefiting from government initiatives to also invest in political empowerment. In a 2012 interview with Michael Fox, Reyes said, "we need to take Madres de Barrio to the next level, so that it is not just a financial grant. And we need to continue to develop people's consciousness" (Fox 2014).

Article 102 in Chapter VI of the constitution on "Culture and Educational Rights" declares education a human right and a fundamental social duty and further that it is democratic, free of charge and obligatory. It affirms that education, is a public service, and is grounded on the respect for all currents of thought, to the end of developing the creative potential of every human being and the full exercise of his or her personality in a democratic society based on the work ethic value and on active, conscious and joint participation in the processes of social transformation embodied in the values which are part of the national identity, and with a Latin American and universal vision. Between

[16] Ciccariello-Maher explains that "*el proceso*," a reference to the political process, takes on a signifigance beyond the president or state politics under the Bolivarian Revolution because *el proceso* encapsulates "the deepening, radicalization and autonomy of the revolutionary movements that constitute the base of the Bolivarian Revolution" (2013, 6).

2003 and 2004, the Bolivarian government launched three separate education missions, Robinson, Ribas and Sucre. Mission Robinson, as briefly mentioned in the preface, is named after Bolivar's teacher and mentor Simón Rodríguez, also known as Simon Robinson during his time in exile. The mission uses volunteers to teach reading, writing, and arithmetic to Venezuelan adults. The second Mission Ríbas provides remedial high school level classes to Venezuelan high school dropouts; named after independence hero José Félix Ribas. Lastly, Mission Sucre provides free and ongoing higher education courses to adult Venezuelans.

BOLIVARIANISMO IN PAN-AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

In February 2013, after nearly fifteen years in power and less than one month before President Hugo Chávez succumbed to his cancer and transitioned from this world, the Third Africa-South America Summit took place in Equatorial Guinea. Due to the advanced stages of his cancer, President Chávez was unable to be physically present at the Summit. As a show of his unwavering desire to see the political alliance of the two regions he penned what is now referred to as his "Letter to Africa." The letter was lengthy and addressed many issues. About halfway through the letter he made this declaration:

> Those that conquered us in the past, blinded by their hunger for power, did not realise that the barbaric colonialism they imposed on us would become the catalyst of our first independences. Thus, whilst Latin America and the Caribbean share a past history of oppression and slavery, today more than ever, we are the children of our liberators and their heroic deeds. We can and must say with conviction and resolve, that this unites us in the present, in a vital struggle for the freedom and definitive independence of our nations. I won't tire of repeating that we are one people. We are obliged to find one another, going beyond formality and discourse, in the same feeling of our unity. Together we must dedicate ourselves to creating

> conditions that allow us to rescue our peoples from the maze they were thrown into, first by colonialism and then by the neoliberal capitalism of the twentieth century. (2013)

Much can be said and analyzed in regard to the symbolic significance of Chávez's numerous proud assertions of his Indigenous and African ancestry/identity as well as the racist/classist vitriol launched at Chávez and his supporters. In fact, that very subject is the topic I explore in my previous chapter. This quotation however, of the late Chávez, specifically his call to go beyond formality and discourse in order to dedicate ourselves actively to creating the conditions that free us from the bonds of colonialism and neoliberal capitalism are a testament to his cultural and political commitment to Africa and her children, displaced and at home. It is also what forms the basis of my contention that Hugo Chávez and his political legacy, as observed through Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution can and must be read as Pan-Africanist.

In 1945, the Fifth Pan-African (5th PAC) congress convened in Manchester, England co-chaired by W.E.B. DuBois and Kwame Nkrumah. The 5th PAC marked the beginning of a new period which saw the intensification of the mass phase of the African Revolution and Pan-African political organization. The following decade gave birth to both the Cuban Revolution and the All African People's Congress. Not long after that, Kwame Nkrumah called for the creation of the All African People's Revolutionary Party with the ultimate goal of a liberated and unified Africa. Castro and Nkrumah develop a relationship as political comrades and Cuba's contribution to anti-colonial liberation in struggles became an exemplar for growing third-world, anti-colonial and revolutionary alliances. This era also gives rise to a third world politics of alliance that expanded to the Asian continent as seen in the 1955 convening of the Afro-Asian Conference also known

as the Bandung Conference and the 1966 Tri-continental convened in Havana, Cuba. In the United States at this time, the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements begin to engage in their own forms of international solidarity as evidenced though Malcolm X's creation of the Organization of African American Unity after his departure from the Nation of Islam.

In 1974 at the 6th Pan-African Congress, held in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania Sekou Touré, the first president of Independent Guinea, delivered a speech in which he critiqued the philosophy of "Negritude," describing it as the concept of making African people a race or a people who are identified by our race, instead of a people defined by our history and culture, which are directly linked to Africa. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon articulates a similar critique of his former mentor Cesaire's notion of Negritue. Fanon, like Touré advocates a kind of revolutionary Nationalism that finds its origins in a shared struggle against colonization. Touré points out that Negritude developed as a concept during colonialism, a time in which it was imperative to unite as people oppressed by colonialism. Consequently, to identify as "Black" provided a much needed form of shared identification. Touré asserts however, that this was always at best a strategic and temporary analysis our our predicament. He reminded his listeners that before, during, and after colonialism, we have always been and will always be African people. Touré further asserted that "African" is a political definition based on our connection to geo-political territory of Africa and not a racial designation.

Referencing Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, Touré noted that as "white men" they both made unquestionable contributions to the forward progress of Africa and its liberation. Touré referenced Castro's fondness of saying African blood flows through is

veins after which he questioned why any African would reject Castro, who has done everything to advance liberation struggles in Africa including sending military troops to defend Africa, doctors to help cure Africa's sick, and providing asylum for African freedom fighters like Robert Williams and Assata Shakur. For Touré, the issues primarily boiled down to the people's class versus the anti-people's class, and anyone who made contributions to Africa's forward progress was a member of the people's class as far as he was concerned. Ultimately, for Touré, an "African" is anyone dedicated to the forward movement and emancipation of Africa.

This same logic can also be found in the political writings and speeches of South African Steve Biko's articulation of Black Consciousness. For Biko, Blacks are "those who are by law or tradition, politically, economically and socially discriminated against as a group in the South African society and identifying themselves as a unit in the struggle towards the realization of their aspirations." In the Caribbean, Walter Rodney who, in his appeal to 'Black Power' as a means of mobilization "to throw off white domination and resume the handling of their own destinies," made clear that for him, Black included persons of Asian descent who shared a common Caribbean experience in colonial oppression. (1969) According to the logics detailed above, Africanness or Blackness cannot be limited to a matter of pigmentation. A cursory glance at history will quickly reveal that there have always been "Black" people who worked against the interest of Black/African self-determination. For Revolutionary Pan-Africanists, liberation requires land, a homeland, African land must be understood as central to our existence, wherever we are in the Diaspora.

The Venezuela the world has come to know under the Bolívarian Revolution is the product of a particular revolutionary tradition, not least of which being the Pan-Africanists discussed in previous sections. Venezuela's Bolívarian Revolution is informed and animated by the rich legacies of struggle and socialist internationalism of the Cuban Revolution, the Afro-Asian Conference (Bandung), the Sandinistas of Nicaragua, the global battle against (neo)colonialism, and its' own domestic histories of democratic socialism and cooperative movements and the Pan-Africanist legacies detailed above.

The political aims and objectives of Bolívarianismo as well as the socio-economic and political projects mentioned above, and indeed others, bear striking resemblance to the political aims and objectives of one of 21st Century Africa's leading intellectual/ scholar and political revolutionary, Kwame Nkrumah. Nkrumah's Pan-Africanist philosophy and ideology, who's ultimate objective is the "total liberation and unification of Africa" resulted in his call for the All African People's Revolutionary Party, the establishment of the Organization of African Unity. In one of Nkrumah's numerous foundational texts for Pan-Africanism entitled "African Must Unite" he makes a declaration similar to Chávez. He writes: "we in Africa who are pressing now for unity are deeply conscious of the validity of our purpose. We need the strength of our combined numbers and resources to protect ourselves from the very positive dangers of returning to colonialism in disguised forms."

With the shared understanding that the liberation and development of the African continent serves as a basis for our unity, Chávez's commitment to the liberation and the development of Africa and its displaced children offers a lens through which we can

examine the Bolívarian Revolution as a major contribution to a 21st Century Pan-African agenda. I do not, however, mean to suggest that the Bolívarian Revolution should be interpreted explicitly as an exclusively Pan-Africanist project because to do so would negate the centrality of Indigenous peoples and their socio-cultural/political beliefs and practices that serve as a foundation for Bolívarianismo/Chavismo. In the next few pages I will highlight some of the political programs initiated and facilitated by the Venezuelan government that can be interpreted as contributions to Pan-African freedom struggles. *PetroCaribe* is a Pan-Caribbean development project which subsidizes oil for developing countries from the profits made by selling oil to the developed countries at market price. Through *PetroCaribe*, participating Caribbean countries are able to lessen their reliance on exploitative international finance structures such as the IMF and the World Bank.

Another project is the Community of Caribbean and Latin American States (CELAC) which united the multi-lingual Caribbean and Latin American states into one organization which did not include the United States or Canada as members. In a February 2010 interview with Bolivian President and close Chávez ally, Evo Morales, said the following of CELAC: "a union of Latin American countries is the weapon against Imperialism. To invoke Bolívar in this manner is a reference to the Pan-Latin Americanism of the Independence Era as Bolívar was referred to as the "Great Liberator" due to his invaluable role in establishing independence from the Spanish empire for not only Venezuela but Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru and Colombia, a territory which was once referred to as Grand Colombia."

Perhaps the two political projects that resemble one another the most are ALBA (The Bolívarian Alliance for the People of Our Americas) and the OAU (The

Organization of African Unity). Despite its symbolic dedication to the eradication of colonialism, the OAU's vote to remain neutral in global politics taints its legacy as a revolutionary Pan-Africanist entity. ALBA was initially an agreement between Cuba and Venezuela with the intentions of maintain their ability to exist autonomously with their socialist oriented economies. Over the past decade, membership has grown to include eleven Latin American and Caribbean countries with the aim and social and economic integration of member countries. ALBA has also launched a number of subsidiary initiatives including *PetroCaribe* in 2005 which I described above; TeleSur, also launched in 2005 as a media conglomerate broadcasting news and current affairs throughout the ALBA countries; PetroSur, an inter-governmental energy alliance between Venezuelan, Argentinean, and Brazilian nationalized oil companies which fund for social welfare programs in these nations; and UnaSur in 2008 as an intergovernmental Andean integration initiative.

During his presidency, Chávez toured African countries such as South Africa, Mozambique, Algeria, Libya, Mali, Gambia, Benin and Angola, many of which had never before been visited by a Venezuelan president. He also funded a doubling of Venezuelan embassies on African soil and entered agreements significantly reducing the monopolies of multinationals on the continent (Hakima Abbas). Through the government sponsored international scholarship initiative *Fundayacucho*, every year hundreds students from all over the "third world," many of which come from Africa are admitted, funded and housed in higher education degree programs like, teaching, medicine and engineering with the only requirement that they use their education to return to their home country and work in the public sector. None of these initiatives are beyond critique

however, each is important to note for their emphasis on solidarity rather than aid, tangible and concrete examples of pathways to self-determination, and alternative institutions and political processes for peoples fighting liberatory battles daily.

REDEFINING VENEZUELAN ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY

In 2014 I was able to return to Venezuela for the first time since Chávez passed. It was only a two week trip with a Witness for Peace delegation but it was extremely informative in that the two weeks were packed with activities to demonstrate the continuing work of the Bolivarian Revolution. As part of our tour of Venezuela to learn more about all facets of the evolving political process in Venezuela, we met with a representative of the National Electoral Council (CNE), Carmelo Alejandro Velásquez Rodríguez, who also worked as an interpreter an interpreter. Carmelo, a tall brown skinned Venezuelan in his mid-thirties with a background in International Law and Politics, joins us in the lobby of our hotel to talk from a PowerPoint he shows us on his laptop. Carmelo had been with the CNE for about 5 years in Communications. In his presentation he offered us a timeline of the evolution of the electoral process in Venezuela since 1999. He began by explaining that prior to 1999, the Venezuelan political infrastructure operated with the traditional three branches of government, similar to the United States. The new constitution expanded the branches of government to five branches of government. Those branches of government now include the Executive branch, led by the president. At present, candidates can be elected to the presidency by popular vote for two consecutive six-year terms. It is important to note that no such thing as the Electoral College exists in Venezuelan politics.

The Legislative Branch consists of a Unicameral National Assembly with 165 seats. Members elected by popular vote serve five-year terms and three seats are reserved for members of Venezuela's indigenous communities. The Judicial Branch consists of the Supreme Tribunal of Justice. Magistrates are elected by the National assembly for a single 12-year term. The Electoral Branch is essentially the National Electoral Council or Consejo Electoral Nacional (CNE). The CNE administers all elections, including those held within civil society. The National Assembly elects its five principal members for a seven-year term. The fifth and final branch of government is the Citizen's Branch, which ensures that citizens and government officials follow the countries laws. It consists of the Attorney General (or Prosecutor General), the Comptroller General, and the Defender of the People (Human Rights Ombudsperson). The decision to move away from the three branches of government model is politically instructive on multiple levels. In the first instance, the decision to create an electoral and citizen's branch is an attempt (inadequate as it might be) to privilege a new set of voices in the process of decision making in their democratic process. Secondly, the decision to deviate from the model set forth by systems of governance in the US is an intentional renunciation of the need to follow the US's lead in terms of democratic practices.

In addition to the expansion of the branches of government, a number of changes have been made to the entire electoral process since the enactment of the 1999 constitution. Presently, the government no longer funds political parties and candidates have to be promoted by different sectors of civil society. Voting is no longer compulsory despite having been so in the past. People are however, invited and encouraged to participate in the electoral process. In Venezuelan law, there is a mandatory public service

as citizen voters are randomly selected for training the week before election to serve as managers and monitors of the electoral tables. In 2012, Venezuela reported 83% voter participation, the last election of Chávez and 79% in Maduro's election following Chávez's death, with a total of about 17 million voters participating. The CNE is also responsible for putting on electoral fairs to educate people about voting; these fairs also serve as an opportunity to register unregistered voters. In the past members of the military were not allowed to vote but under the current constitution there is no specific demographic group prohibited from voting including military personnel and people presently or formerly imprisoned. Citizens with criminal background can participate in all aspects of the electoral process with the exception of running for office themselves. Military members can only run for public office after they have retired from the military.

The attempt to move from a representative democracy to a participatory democracy also forced a number of changes in the electoral process. Recall referendums require signatures from 15% of the electoral body. Since 1999 elections have been progressively digitized. In 1998 the electoral process was completely manual. In 2003 they introduced an automated counting of votes and by 2012 the entire voting process was entirely electronic. Now when people go to vote, the voter's fingerprints along with their Cedula number (National ID) verify their identity and activate the voting machines. We were told that the process is entirely anonymous, but there appears to be a great deal of concern about anonymity in the voting process since this new method was introduced. The majority of such concerns seem to come from members of the opposition.[17] As of yet, no concrete evidence that the voting process is not anonymous has been produced. There is also a legal process for assisted voting for people with disabilities and all voter

[17] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/08/05/venezuela-presidential-elections_n_1743842.html

assistants must be registered ahead of the election. Biometric technology is heavily used in order to prevent voter fraud.

Each political party appoints an IT technician to participate in electoral audits following each election and anywhere from 17-19 audits occur with each election cycle at every level of the process. They even audit the ink used to prove that people voted. They have a team of scientists who test the ink by putting it through all sorts of scenarios to make sure that it cannot be washed away before the electoral process ends. The ink is used to both declare that one has in fact voted, a sign of dutifully participating in the political process by voting but it is also used to prevent people from voting more that once. After voting, before leaving the polling site, voters are required to dip their right pinky in blue ink that takes a couple of days to wash away. The blue pinky is effectively the Venezuelan equivalent of the "I Voted" stickers people wear on Election Day in the United States. Any independent candidate not affiliated with a political party already recognized by the state must have support from 10% of the electoral roll for their candidacy to be confirmed.

Additionally, there is a "dry law" enacted from 6pm Friday to Monday morning on election weekends. Elections always take place on the weekends and are considered national holidays in order to encourage as much voter participation as possible. In 2012 the CNE held a national campaign to target unregistered voters called "CNE Where You Are" (need to fact check this). In 2012 for 8 months prior to the final election of Hugo Chávez, the CNE set up 1,300 registration tents around the country and in overseas consulates, and 1,360,598 people registered to vote for the first time, while 4,512,000 changed their voting address, according to CNE director Sandra Oblitas. 89% of the new

registrations are youth aged 18 to 25, and who are now eligible to vote. Other new registrations consist of those who have since been granted Venezuelan nationality, people who were unable to register due to rural isolation or perhaps a disability, and people who chose not to register. With the new registrations, over 19 million people are registered to vote in national elections. Only those with Venezuelan nationality can vote in the October presidential elections, while residents will be able to vote in the following December regional elections.

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VENEZUELA'S 2012 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Two days before Venezuela's 2012 presidential elections, referred to by the local media as **7-O**, Prescient Hugo Chávez asked his supporters to flood the streets of Caracas with a "sea of red," commencing at Avenida Bolívar and flowing from the city center

outward. **7-O** marked Chávez's fourth consecutive presidential campaign over a span of thirteen years. A 2009 constitutional referendum approved Amendment No. 1 of the Venezuelan constitution, effectively abolishing presidential term limits. Allowing political candidates to indefinitely seek political office is, at least in the U.S. Context, thought to contribute to, if not encourage the potential or political monopolies. Many on the right viewed the abolition of presidential terms limits as yet another step toward Venezuela becoming an authoritarian dictatorship, a characterization I find ironic coming from the United States and its' supporters given the utter lack of regard for popular vote as evidenced by the existence of the electoral college and the lack of major distinction between the Republican and Democratic parties when it comes to foreign policy and a myriad of social issues. Chávez and his supporters are of the position that a major change in leadership at such a critical point in the country would impede the opportunity to see the Bolívarian Revolution truly triumph, especially when taking into consideration the United States continued financial, mercenary and political support for the opposition party in Venezuela and their role in the 2002 coup de'tat. For these reasons and more, the 2012 Venezuelan elections were a critical litmus test for the continued support and relative success of the Bolívarianismo/Chavismo and 21st Century Socialism.

While in Caracas, I lived in the Santa Monica Hills of the San Pedro Parrish, located about 4 miles south-east of the city center and normally about a twenty-minute commute by foot and metro. On the day of Chávez's closing rally, camionetas (small, dilapidated busses) were lined along the Paseo Los Próceres, with people from all over the country in red t-shirts preparing to make their way to Bolívar Avenue. It was a typical sunny 85 degrees in Caracas but with what seemed like the half the country packed into

several large avenues that converge in the center of the city, the heat was almost unbearable. I never even made it anywhere near the main stage where Chávez was speaking, the closest I got was about two metro stops away. While the Caracas metro is arguably one of the cleanest in Latin America, it is perhaps one of Caracas most intimidating public spaces with elderly people, young mothers with babies in tow being shoved off and on the metro cars. In the weeks leading up to the election, particularly on the day of the closing rally, it could be a particularly intimidating place for Chávez's opposition. I entered the metro at Los Símbolos, the stop closest to where I was living, on one of the secondary metro lines. I should have known what to expect considering I watched three different trains pass before there was one that finally had enough room to squeeze 2-3 extra people on per car. When I finally made it to Plaza Venezuela, the central transfer point for all metro trains, the platforms and trains were filled with people dressed in red with logos and flags demonstrating their support for Chávez. There were the typical crowd chants yelling phrases like "Pa'lante Comandante!" and "Uh, Ah, Chávez no se va!" "¡Se queda!, ¡se queda!, ¡mi comandante se queda! And then there were the Chavistas who only half playfully told people boarding the train at each stop that Chavistas were welcome and all others should even bother getting on the train.

I began examining the crowd for racial identifiers, clearly based on my own biases about race and phenotype, and noticed that even though I never saw any one particularly large gathering of darker skinned people in one place during the rally, I definitely observed more brown people interspersed throughout the crowd at the Chávez rally than I did at the Capriles rally only days before. When I finally disembarked at the Bellas Artes metro stop I walked out to a stage performance by a female rapper whose

name I do not know rapping about how a socialist revolution is the only way to a just world for all human beings.

The two days leading up to the election were interesting for a number of reasons. I lived with a woman named Ana who immigrated from Colombia nearly 20 years earlier, in a neighborhood, as I was later informed by a Venezuelan friend of mine, was one of the most right-wing, reactionary neighborhoods in the city. At this time there was global circulation about the possibility of civil unrest in the country, particularly in Caracas no matter what the outcome of the election would be. In the weeks leading up to the election, Chávez commented that "the real plan of the opposition was a neoliberal austerity package and that its implementation would lead to a civil war." Many mainstream international media outlets and opposition media forces inside the country decided to turn this into a "hot topic" claiming that Chávez was calling for civil war if he did not win the October elections. Most simply chose to ignore the fact that he continuously called for peace on Election Day and thereafter and that he and his administration would accept whatever the outcome might be. More importantly, his comments about civil war were not simple conjecture but were based on the historical precedent of the Caracazo uprising of 1989 when citizens rioted all over the country in response to then President Carlos Andres Perez imposition of a number of crippling economic reforms including the privatization of state companies, elimination of gas subsidies and reduced government regulation of the economy, all of which had enormously negative impacts on the nation's poor.

Two days before the election I was talking to two of my roommates, one who was Ana's college-age daughter Laura and the other a young Iranian woman who was

studying for a master's degree in economics at the Central University of Venezuela. They informed me that the police were preparing for the "aftermath of the elections." Laura told me that she tried to go to the supermarket and people were almost frantically stocking up on food supplies. Somayeh's family back in Iran who had lived through the "Tazahorat iran entekhabat" riots in 2009-2010 after the contested presidential victory of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad were so worried that they asked Somayeh to get enough groceries to stay in the house until she knew things would be calm in the city. Ana herself did not seem to be terribly worried about any overwhelming degree of violence as a result of the elections, mainly because she already viewed Caracas as an increasingly more and more dangerous city anyway, but she said that anything could happen. On the day before the election however, I noticed that she too had stocked up on food supplies. As I prepared to leave the house that day she told me to make sure I was back at the house before dark, which was normal advice from Ana. She reminded me that the elections were coming and that the city is dangerous at night, especially with all the people (particularly the Chavistas) from all over the country descending on the city to wait for the results. Ana is a genuinely nice and caring woman but she constantly refers to Chávez's supporters as lazy, uneducated and always looking for handouts, which I find particularly ironic given that she has not a formal job since her now college-age child began school more than 15 years ago. The vast majority of her income comes from taking in international students and she is guaranteed health care and her child is studying to be a doctor as a result of the public education made accessible to her daughter through the social programs enacted since Chávez was elected.

ELECTION DAY, 2012

It is barely dawn and I am awakened by beeping car horns, cheering crowds, blow horns and fireworks, less than four hours since the last set of fireworks that boomed at midnight signaling election day. In the days leading to the campaign newspapers predicted that more than 10,000 supporters would show, final reports estimated that more than three million Venezuelans from all over the country descended on the capital city of Caracas to show their support for the incumbent president. As mentioned above, Election Day is a national holiday in Venezuela, the Caracas metro offers free service all day long to ensure that as many people can make it out to vote as possible. It is also illegal to sell alcohol on Election Day and all large vehicles are prohibited from being in the city, with the exception of the city metro buses.

I decided to accompany Ana and her daughter to vote on Election Day just to observe. When I woke up that morning a man that sometimes fixes things around Ana's house named Jose Luis was there and he was also going to vote in the same place Ana and Laura were to vote. Jose Luis is probably in his 30s and is from Barlovento, a region in the north east of the country were Afro-descended peoples are largely concentrated. He began to ask me about what I was doing in Venezuela and as I started to explain my research he questioned my used of the term "afrodescendiente." Almost as if following a script, he began by proclaiming that there was no racism in Venezuela. He argued that there was classism but he did not understand why people were so preoccupied with issues of race. He went on to say that "afrodescendiente" was something he never heard until Chávez and therefore declared that it was a term made up by Chávez and was being used

as a form of mind control. The conversation continued as we walked about six blocks up-hill to their designated voting site.

Despite predictions of civil unrest, the voting process I witnessed was organized and orderly and surprisingly efficient. When we arrived the line was at least five blocks long and the sun was blaring but the people came prepared. People were equipped with water bottles, umbrellas to block the sun and comfortable shoes. There was plenty of friendly banter in line and we stood in line less than an hour. I waited outside the voting site as Ana, Laura and Jose Luis came out one by one with their right pinky fingers covered in ink to indicate that they had already voted. As we returned to Ana's apartment Jose Luis and I continued our discussion about the realities of racism, which he continuously asserted was an American concern and not one of Venezuelans.

I tried as best I could, struggling with my Spanish to try to explain the nuanced complexities of race as I understood them, but I also explained to him that afrodescendiente was a term that many of the people I had spoken to and read about embraced as an indicator of some degrees of cultural difference but also societal exclusion because of how they look. I still find it really puzzling that some people insist on the idea that a term like afrodescendiente could have been invented by Chávez and given that others are truly insulted and disenfranchised by a lack of recognition of the work that took place long before Chávez was ever in power. While I am not certain, I am pretty sure that neither Ana, Laura nor Jose Luis voted for Chávez. Around 8pm that night the fireworks began to go off and all I could hear all night long was celebrations and car horns blaring up and down the streets rejoicing in Chávez's reelection.

In April 2013, just four days before Venezuela's second presidential election in six months, following the untimely cancer-related death of President Hugo Chávez, the country was gearing up for the elections and preparing for an electoral battle. This election, perhaps even more so than the October 2012 elections will likely determine the future of the Bolívarian Revolution, its' various social programs and the political progress that has taken place over the past 14 years. The statistics show up slightly differently in different sources, but the general consensus is that since 1998, when Chávez was first elected president, general poverty has been cut in half and extreme poverty is down nearly 25 percent, societal changes that have overwhelmingly improved the lives of a majority of Venezuelan women through social programs, greater access to education, health care, & housing, and pensions for the elderly.

There has been a huge increase in women's participation in the work force — from 43.3 per cent of women employed in 1996 to 81.2 per cent in 2002, and increasing steadily since then. A women's ministry was created, as was a women's bank that provides low interest loans to women's cooperatives, tribunals dealing specifically with violent crimes against women have been set up, and 18 types of violence against women recognized legally, maternity leave has increased and paternity leave created. These institutional advancements are directly reflective of Bolívarian commitments to eradicating essential class contradictions in the country. They have contributed in some ways to alleviation of forms of structural racism in the country, despite the fact that racism and sexism remain major concerns.

COMMUNAL COUNCILS

During my 2014 visit, I had the opportunity to visit a cultural center in Barquisimeto, Lara State to meet with a handful of the community council members at the San Juan Cultural Center in the José Felix Ribas barrio. Barquisimeto is the 5th most populated city in Venezuela after Caracas, Maracaibo, Maracay and Valencia, with a population just over 800,000, over half a million less than the next largest city of Valencia. It is also the capital of the Lara State which Leo told us is the most important dairy producing state of the country. Although with less people, Barquisimeto is is more spread out than Caracas. The weather is also a bit hotter because Caracas lies in a mountain valley and is virtually protected from extreme weather changes. Barquisimeto's average temperature is in the mid 80s whereas Caracas hovers between the high 70s and low 80s. Despite being an urban center is does not have the concrete jungle feel of Caracas, with far fewer high-rise buildings and many more single family occupancy homes enclosed by big metal gates.

The cultural center was founded in 1991 by a local youth group who faced the possibility of having to drop out of school because of lack of textbooks. Finding an abandoned piece of land in the barrio, they claimed it, then worked for 3 years to clear the land, raise funds and build a tiny room that served as community library. Over the years the building grew along with its activities, with a special emphasis on teaching traditional Venezuelan music and dance, especially tambor, cuatro and tamunangue.[18] Today over 200 young people from the surrounding barrios and countryside participate in

[18] Tamunangue is a folk dance in South America primarily Venezuela. It is celebrated in Lara State in Venezuela on the June 13 every year as festival to St. Anthony of Padua the patron saint of that state. It usually begins with an invocation to Virgin Mary. It is combination suite of music, dance, and drums. It is a mixture representing native Indians, the Spanish and African traditions.

the various cultural groups. Each person who learns a skill is asked to teach this to a younger group. With the help of Evergreen students, two new activities were added, a mural project and a small roof garden. The center also houses the Latin America office for School of Americas Watch.

Alvaro and his wife currently work at the center with a number of other community members and they are in the process of training youth who were former patrons of the community center to help facilitate programming for the present youth in the community. Alvaro works as a musician and administrator at the center and his wife also serves as a science teacher. Describing the center Alvaro said they work with the poorest kids in the community and the staff is entirely volunteer. They have not taken any money from the government or private donors. They create their working budget out of fundraisers like raffles and bake sales. When we were there they were a week away from starting their annual summer camp that runs from 2:00pm – 6:pm every day for five weeks. This program is totally free to the children who are only required to bring a T-shirt so that they can screen print the camp logo on the shirt to be able to identify them. They have four programmatic areas for the summer camp, dance, music, sports and crafts. The center also serves as the meeting place for the communal council.

In Venezuela, two primary alternative forms of organizing society outside of the capitalist logic are cooperatives and community councils. Cooperatives serve concrete functions like food production and the allotment of essential resources in any given community but they also are a vehicle through which power and responsibility are shared, and they allow people to feel they have agency in the happenings of their daily lives. Smaller neighborhoods form community councils in order to come together to form the

larger, supposedly more powerful structure of the Asemblea de los Ciudadanos (Citizens' Assembly). 450 people are needed to start a comuna (and can include various members of an individual household, including children) in a fairly urban area. The number fluctuates depending on the population density of a given area, for instance a comuna in a densely populated area like Caracas would need more people than in a more rural area like one of the smaller towns in Barlovento such as Curiepe or Birongo. When any given Citizens' Assembly is formed there are some essential organizational structures —the Comptroller/Treasury, Electoral Committee and Directorate from which the spokesperson is chosen to represent the group in the larger comuna— and then the community members can form other committees as necessary. Anyone who has lived in the neighborhood and is at least 14years old is entitled to a vote in the neighborhood council.

The earliest form of this type of self-governance under the Bolivarian Revolution were known as the Bolivarian Circles, instituted by Chávez in 2001. By 2006 they had been effectively disbanded as the government promoted the new communal council model. These are a group of elected persons from a self-defined residential neighborhood of about 150 to 400 families in urban areas, or closer to 20 families in rural areas, and potentially 10 in indigenous communities. The formal functioning committee is composed of: the Citizens' Assembly, the Executive Body, the Financial Management Unit, the Unit of Social Oversight (Anti-corruption) and the Community Coordination Collective. All council persons are local folks elected by the Citizens' Assembly for a period of 2 years. No person can occupy positions in more than one unit at time. In the process of creating a communal council a Provisional Promotion Team from outside the community is often required to help organize. The first assembly elects a provisional

Promotional Commission and Electoral Commission that define the geographic boundaries of the community, conduct a census and organize the first elections.

The assemblies can elect and revoke community spokespeople to the communal council, as well as approve projects and development plans for the community. The quorum for elections is 20% of the community. Assembly elections are done directly (i.e. proxy votes are not accepted) and in secret. Other decisions are generally made by majority of raised hands. Meetings are 2-6 hour public events often held outdoors in the streets, basketball courts, empty lots or other available public spaces. Attendance varies typically from 50 to 150 citizens. Frequency of assemblies varies from weekly to less than once a month depending on the preferences and needs of the executive body, whichconsists of, one elected spokesperson from each work committee or community organization, one elected spokesperson from each of any defined micro-neighborhoods, and one elected spokesperson from the commissions. There is no formal hierarchy among spokespeople. Specific responsibilities such as administration and meeting coordination are rotated or taken on by those most keen. In practice the internal structure varies with the preferences and capacity of the community and may include land committees, health committees, cultural groups, sports clubs, neighborhood associations, education missions, water, electric, and energy boards, transportation organizations, environmental groups, food committees, grandparent clubs, electoral battle units, political parties, cooperatives, small businesses, non-governmental organizations, and other kinds of groups, without any defined limit.

The Financial Management Unit is a group of five community members elected by the Citizens' Assembly and responsible for administrating financial and non-financial

resources generated, allocated or awarded to the council. They promote the creation of cooperatives for local development projects, and drive efforts towards the participatory budget and prioritizing of community necessities. They support local economies, micro-financing, provide social assistance resources and present accounts when requested. The Unit of Social Oversight is a group of five community members elected by the Citizens' Assembly. They are an independent group who monitor and report on the application of council resources and activities towards the community development plan. They are also known as the Anti-Corruption Unit. The Community Coordination Collective is charged with galvanizing community organization, informing and training community members, and coordinating with the local community-based "militias," or army reserves. Leo revealed that he is actually a really huge fan of this system. He particularly likes that the members of the community are able to vote on the issues that are the most important to them and the council is subsequently able to choose a company or local community member/contractor to perform the work.

I've spent time describing these organizations in detail because they are so different from what is called "democracy" in the US. While they are supported and support the state they are also sites where consciousness is developed and even radical engagements can occur. The question of how exactly to create spaces for engagement and real grassroots organizing is also a challenge facing the US movements I will discuss later.

CHAVISMO AND FEMINISM

Under the Bolivarian state the traditional public/private dichotomies bounding popular understandings of womanhood and femininity are being contested and defended by women and some men at every level of the political process. As the Bolivarian government continues to call for the support and participation of its traditionally disenfranchised citizens, in this case poor people and women of color, categories that tend to overlap, what it means to be a woman and a citizen, and how those categories intersect have produced yet another interesting dynamic in the Bolivarian political process. While the definition of woman may not have changed, what it means to be a woman certainly has. The category of citizen on the other has been revolutionized by this process and is now dialectically constituted from above and below simultaneously. From above, the level of the state, the language of citizenship (and its engagement, as I've shown) is inclusive and makes progressive attempts to address gender inequality and to promote women's participation in the Bolivarian Process. On the ground, however, women are struggling with what it means to be involved and where and how identities like woman, mother, feminist, etc., uphold or counter Bolivarian conceptions of political participation.

Chávez is rather famously quoted as saying that "a real revolutionary, a socialist, must be truly feminist, because the liberation of the people is achieved through the liberation of women, the grasping of machismo, and that's a cultural thing," and furthermore that "The pains of the world are larger for women... and larger for women of the popular classes, of the poorer classes… If Christ carried a cross, how many crosses do the poor women of this earth carry every single day, every night... but at the same time

they have so much to contribute". At least from his rhetoric, it seems that Chávez's chosen successor is equally if not more committed to the continued advancement of the poor women of Venezuela, who are largely black and brown women and single mothers. In response to comments about his wife Cilia Flores as Venezuela's first lady, Maduro replied "she won't be the first lady, but first combatant, first patriot, first socialist, the first woman of the people of the barrios… she won't be a first lady, because that is a concept of high nobility... she's not a posh woman, she was born in slum housing with a dirt floor ... she won't be a *segundona* [person in second place], she'll be in the first line of combat, as the dignified and revolutionary woman that she is."

In addition to the contributions discussed earlier, the Bolivarian Constitution is one of the first in the world to utilize gender sensitive language (Fox and Farrell 2010). This is a major shift from previous constitutions that typically assigned Venezuelan citizens a male pronoun. During his tenure Chávez made pointed efforts to address Venezuelan women in public speeches and writings:

> I've said it before, and I'll say it again. Without the true liberation of women, the liberation of the people would be impossible, and I am convinced that an authentic socialist should also be an authentic feminist. (Suggett 2010)

Though many people looked to President Chávez as the official voice of the Bolivarian Revolution and remain encouraged, what President Chávez said and how his administration and the Venezuelan people responded to his "radical" notions of women's political participation can be entirely different things. In her article "Barrrio Women and Popular Politics in Chávez's Venezuela" Sujatha Fernandes recalls a particular incident when "Carlos" a Chavista mayor was invited to sit in on a community meeting organized around gaining access to funding and civic projects. She notes that when women were

invited to respond to particular points, Carlos would inject his opinions. In direct response to the problems single women faced in the barrios Carlos replied, "I don't want to change the subject, but I can add the anecdote that they say in the home, when there are no men, women urinate standing up." This comment is clearly antithetical to the image President Chávez is trying to promote and evidence of lingering notions and effects of gender inequality.

Recognizing the government's inability to immediately eradicate sexism on the ground, many women have opted to participate in the political process in a number of different ways. Because the official language is unable to immediately eradicate the sexism, racism and classism these women encounter in both Chavista and opposition organizations, many of them choose to become involved in what Jose Duque refers to as the "*proceso*."[19] According to Duque, the proceso is essentially a parallel social revolution that operates primarily underground, defending Chávez's government but following its own trajectory, independent of central government directives. In the barrios the proceso takes the form of soup kitchens projects, mass organized programs like Barrio Adentro and the struggles of women as mothers to provide for their children. By participating in the political process through organizations mentioned above, barrio women in Venezuela do two things: they legitimize particular forms of subjectivities and call attention to the particular forms of gender discrimination they experience that may or may not be unique to them as poor women. For many of the barrio women, being a mother is crucial to their identities and dictates the ways in which they participate in *el proceso*. However, they do not see motherhood as a barrier to political participation, nor do they see their roles as confined to their homes. In fact, many of these women are

[19] Jose Roberto Duque, "Un gobierno, un proceso", *Patriadentro* 1, 5 May, 21-27.

single mothers and being relegated to the home is not even a thinkable option. Their participation in *el proceso* is both an encuentro in the sense I've been using the word, and *lo cotidiano* and they have found incredibly organized and creative ways to make their political participation directly beneficial to their selves and their community.

"The opposition," as the critics of the Bolivarian Revolution are referred to, is typically depicted as middle and upper class white women who are in relationships with the fathers of their children while Chavistas are typically poorer single mothers of color. Many of the women who align themselves with the wealthy conservative oppositional forces tend to define femininity in terms of social refinement and accepting women's positions of subordination and relegation to the private (Mora 2005). During the 2002 International Women's Day a crowd of middle class women and their daughters designated themselves as "new feminists" in opposition to the construction of feminism presented by the Bolivarian Republic, and assembled under the slogan "*Mujeres por la Libertad*" (Women for Freedom) with speakers highlighting how women's patience to procreate, support for marriage and ability to raise children were skills that would assist in displacing the Chávez government. Their leaders made clear that their objectives were a conservative defense of "family and morality", human rights, and "middle-class values". They condemned as "uncouth" the public behavior of the pro-Chávez activists (Rokowski and Espina 2010, 264). In contrast, the Bolivarian Women's rally was presented in the media as supporting social justice and peace and advocated for laws on responsible parenthood, DNA testing for parental support payments and salary and welfare provisions for housework. All projects that I would call "radical" because they address the structural roots of women's exclusion.

Mora further contends women of the opposition are presented in public primarily defending the private realm while Chavistas reject relegation to private life and turn their issues into public concern. It is in the context of this fundamental difference that the opposition constructs a discourse on femininity that is primarily focused on the body. When the difference between these two groups of women is constructed in the manner above, one sees the bodies of poor women (Chavistas) treated as public objects, unattached to men or families and "politically prostituted" by the Chávez government, while wealthier women's bodies are either concealed from public gaze altogether or praised for their compliance with modest standards (Mora, 2005). Reverting to notions of the feminine body as domestic, desirable and nurturing reaffirms the division between the public and the private and condemns the public participation of the Chavista women. Reviving this particular notion of femininity undeniably attempts to disregard poor women's entitlement to citizenship, which according to the Bolivarian Republic, is defined as the right to a public voice and full participation in the public political process. While this discourse on femininity appears to provide a serious barrier to poor women's claims to citizenship, it is likely that the barrier becomes even larger when race intersects with class.

In her work on Brazil, Evelina Dagnino discusses the relationship of culture and politics and offers her definition of what she calls "new citizenship" in a particular moment in Brazil's social and political history that has given rise to a number of social and ecological movements. She argues that this "new citizenship" must be understood as a redefinition carried out by previously disenfranchised peoples' participation in the democratic process with the notion of rights as its core referent. Dagnino contends that

this "new citizenship" arises when people formerly outside the realm of citizen declare and make claims to their rights to have rights. For her, citizenship is less about the definition and most importantly about engagement with the political process. In Brazil, considered part of the "pink tide" with progressive governments throughout Latin America, this may or may not be a one- sided push to redefine citizenship, but in Venezuela, staking claim to citizenship is precisely what is being created through the Bolivarian Republic's participatory democracy (1998). In fact, Chávez's call for critical participation in the Bolivarian process by popular citizens allowed many of his women, poor, Afro and indigenous supporters to realize they had a political voice; to become visible; and to recognize that they indeed had a right to have rights. When asked about how Chávez in particular has influenced Venezuelan women, Carmen Teresa, an activist from the above-mentioned Carretera Negra reveals the following:

> For me this comes since Chávez. I am 40-something years old, and never in my life have I cared about what was happening in my country, and I'm saying my country, but also my Carretera where I live… It's like I am fulfilled. This work fulfills me. I want to be involved in everything, I want to participate in everything, I really feel that something needs me and I can do it… That's why I say it was Chávez who awoke the woman. He gave us importance, value… I studied but I never felt interested to participate or do other things, to care about people other than myself… It was this voice that told us we could do it, that if we are united we can achieve something… (Fernandes 2008).

Despite her utter respect and support for Chávez and what he was doing, she also felt empowered enough in her new found political activity to be able to openly disagree with him and his administration:

> …And then I wanted to face the president himself, and tell him how things should be, you may want to do it this way, but I don't agree, that we should do it in this other way in order to achieve what we aim to do. That's why I tell you, it was an awakening, a calling, and he made us

> women go out into the streets, he made us realize that as women we can also struggle, we can do it and be involved.

While certainly not be all barrio women agree with Carmen Teresa's understanding of what President Chávez and his administration have done for women as a group, her impression should not be understated. The emotions and action that have been awakened in Carmen Teresa are exactly the kinds of sentiments Chávez's administration needs in order to continue doing the work they are attempting to do. Therefore, it is certainly to their benefit to continue to expand notions of citizenship to be more inclusive, less restrictive and open to new forms of political participation.

The right of all people to have rights radically expands notions of citizenship and support for this mode of citizenship is evident in the language of the constitution which defines citizens as "anyone who is a national by birth or legal right and who is not subject to any political disablement or civil interdiction" and the political rights of these citizens are then enumerated. Article 70 of the constitution defines participation and involvement in the sovereign political affairs of the state as follows:

> Voting to fill public offices, referendum, consultation of public opinion, mandate revocation, legislative, constitutional and constituent initiative, open forums and meetings of citizens whose decisions shall be binding among others; and in social and economic affairs: citizen service organs, self-management, co-management, cooperatives in all forms, including those of a financial nature, savings funds, community enterprises, and other forms of association guided by the values of mutual cooperation and solidarity.

This is the official discourse of citizenship and political participation by the government despite the everyday struggle to return to the elite oil politics of yesteryear. The women of the opposition, who choose not to participate in the forms of political action promoted by the current administration, continue to cling to archaic and "traditional" modes of

femininity, perform their citizenship with the assistance of their male counterparts, tirelessly devote themselves to the private rearing of their children and berate Chávez's female supporters or "public women" as masculine and sexually promiscuous. Through different forms of political participation Chavistas and other non-Chavista identified Chávez supporters contest dominant conceptions of femininity by proving each day that one can simultaneously be a good mother and a political citizen. Because the urban setting of Caracas forces these women to be in constant contact with one another, these debates over femininity and citizenship will continue to play out in the everyday public lives of Caraqueños and other Venezuelan citizens. Femininity continues to appear as a political theme integral to women's activism and constitutes one of the many ways that women are produced as political subjects and participants in social and political polarization in Venezuela (Mora). While a definitive consensus on the appropriate intersection of femininity and political participation will probably never be formed, we must understand these contemporary battles as a stage for renegotiating gender identification and relations as they pertain to the country as a whole. Certainly now, perhaps more than ever, women can be mothers, good citizens and political participants in the same moment.

AND FOR AFRODESCENDED WOMEN?

What does it mean to institutionalize revolutionary change and more specifically, what does that look like for Afro-Venezuelan Women? The INAMujer (*Institito nacional de la mujer*/the national women's institute) was created as an organ of the state, through which the Ministry of Popular Power for Women and Gender Equality (Minmujer), could

help facilitate a more permanent protection of women's rights, and in order to facilitate their access to justice and their incorporation into the institutions of power. It is the responsibility of INAMUJER to disclose matters relating to the condition and status of women through various means and types of dissemination including print, broadcast and electronic.

There was a Vice ministry for Afrodescended women under the MinMujer existed, where Meryln worked when I first met her. By 2014, however, I discovered the office no longer existed. Through Marianela Frias, I was able to connect with Gisela Leon, a lawyer by trade and currently the Afro-Venezuelan Women's Coordinator under INAMUjer, a position she only began a few months prior to our first meeting. When I asked her about the former vice ministry she said that it was terminated because there was not a parallel organization at the state level that served indigenous women's needs so in the interest of fairness and equality they got rid of the ministry. I think it's interesting they decided to get rid it rather then add an indigenous women's ministry.

Gisela, in her mid-twenties at the time had a background in feminist organizing and became interested in working specifically with AfroVenezuelan women recently, thought she says she always had an inclination to do such work. I believe she also had a background in social work. Her position was a new one, so she was also responsible for clearly laying out the goals and objections of the post. The primary goals she set for herself were to begin the process of data collection and producing databases about Afro-Venezuelan communities by Afro-Venezuelans themselves. She made a point of reaching out to Afro-Venezuelan Sociologist Esther Pineda and two other people to help contribute to a journal she hoped to publish bi-annually about theories and realities of Afro-

Venezuelan communities. By generating these databases, she hopes to foster an educational process that will make people think differently about race, gender and revolution.

As national coordinator of the section on Afro-Venezuelan women, it is her responsibility to develop and implement the entire operational plan at the national level. The coordination has been planned across two major axes: "Research and Training" and "Community Approach" or implementation. To that end Gisela, with the support of the state, developed a number of programs and forums she had plans to implement in the months following our first encounter. The program she seemed most excited about was a series of Conversation Forums on Afro-Venezuelan women, after which she would produce a series of articles documenting the meetings. The idea being that the texts would be written by Afro-Venezuelan women from their communities, about their traditions, cuisine, songs, and other ancestral traditions which could be distributed nationally. This process of documentation and careful control of the narrative is critical to the work of making the struggles and realities of Afro-Venezuelan peoples, and women in particular, visible. These are not unrelated to the histories of race and racism in the Americas, and Venezuela in particular.

POLITICAL ECONOMIES OF RACE IN TWO AMERICAS

In 2005, after attending a summit for world leaders at the United Nations, President Hugo Chávez sat for an interview with Democracy Now's Amy Goodman to discuss his thoughts on the role the US played in his 2002 temporary removal from power via a coup attempt, his plans to offer cheap oil to the poor citizens of the US, and his thoughts on racism and imperialism. In response to Margaret Prescod's comments that he was "the first Latin American president we know of who identifies as black and indigenous" which she said "breaks a long tradition of racism in the Americas" and her subsequent question "how crucial do you think the defeat of all racism is to making the fundamental economic and social changes needed to save the world from the destruction of the market," President Chávez said the following:

> When we were children, we were told that we have a motherland, and that motherland was Spain. However, we have discovered later, in our lives, that as a matter of fact, we have several motherlands. And one of the greatest motherlands of all is no doubt, Africa. We love Africa. […] But, also there's a lot of pain when you think of Africa. Yesterday, I met with the president of Mozambique, because fully aware of these roots and these realities, we have designed an agenda for Africa in Venezuela.

Perhaps more significantly, he went on to say:

> Racism is very characteristic of imperialism. Racism is very characteristic of capitalism. Katrina is — indeed, has a lot to do with racism–no doubt about it. Hate against me has a lot to do with racism. Because of my big mouth, because of my curly hair. And I'm so proud to have this mouth and this hair, because it's African. So we need a new morality, a new ethic at this point. And from my Christian point of view, we need a revolution of the ethic. And in the political and economic fields we need to take back the flag of socialism, in my view–in order to be able to defeat–with the will of the people, with the participation of the people — to beat those ominous phenomena such as racism.

The concept of race as a physical manifestation of some deeper biological phenomenon, or the notion that "race is real" has long been dispelled by anthropologists and is generally, though somewhat ambiguously, accepted by the public. What often gets left out of that argument is that while race might not be a genetic fact, it is most certainly a real and lived social phenomenon. One of the problems with the way racism is discussed in both the United States and throughout Latin America is that notions of "race" have always existed to some degree or extent because human populations have always consisted of the "haves and the have nots," "the exploiters and the exploited," etc.

In *Capitalism and Slavery*, scholar Eric Williams argues that the roots of racism can be found in a very specific tree, that is, capitalism. He argues, "slavery was not born of racism: rather racism was the consequence of slavery" (1980, 7). Interestingly enough, Williams went on to become Prime Minister of Trinidad and subsequently banned his own book on the grounds of its radical thesis and the possibility of inciting his denizens against his acquiescence to neocolonial capitalist economy. In an essay titled "Racism and the Political Economy of Domination" Professor Charles W. Mills poses the following question: "If earlier, more overt, forms of racism, (asserting the inherent inferiority of non-whites) were rooted in the political economy of chattel slavery and colonialism, what are the politico-economic factors behind racism today? In other words, what continues to drive racism?" To which he answers: "In a phrase, I would say it's the political economy of racialized capitalism: the legacy of these systems (chattel slavery, colonialism) both globally (as North-South domination) and in particular nations (the former colonizing powers, the former colonies, the former white settler states)" (Mills 2010).

In the United States, belonging to a particular racial category comes with varying amounts of social currency. The same can be argued of Latin America in general and Venezuela specifically, though the term "race" doesn't carry the same meaning as in the US. Without a doubt however, the color distinctions made in gradation of skin hue and hair texture map fairly evenly onto US racial categories, with a few exceptions of course. Interestingly enough, Venezuela sits at the nexus of a major geo-cultural boundary. In many respects Venezuela is just as much a Caribbean country as a Latin American one, if not more so, given that it has a longer Caribbean coastline than any island country, the Spanish spoken in the northern parts of Venezuela contains vast colloquial similarities to that of the Dominican Republic and its relatively large Black/Afro population (arguably the third largest in Latin America after Brazil and Colombia).

Barry Cannon writes "The class/race fusion is an essential element needed to explain Chávez's continuing popularity but most political analysis has paid little attention to the impact of race on Venezuelan politics... Furthermore […] racism is an essential, but extremely subtle ingredient in opposition discourse rejecting Chávez and those who follow him" (Cannon 2008). Jesus Maria Herrera Salas writes that the "upper and middle classes opposed to the process of change" regularly refer to Chávez supporters as "'vermin,' 'mixed-breeds,' 'Indians,' 'barefoot,' and 'rabble.'" He further asserts, "This political economy of racism is nothing more than the historical continuation of the long process of conquest and slavery of the Indigenous and Afro-Venezuelan populations that began in 1496." Racism occurs every day in Venezuela; Herrera Salas calls it the useful "ideology of the slave system and of Spanish colonial society" (Salas 2005).

There is a racial subtext to the popular support Chavismo has managed to maintain over the years. On the one hand, the poor's support for Chávez is based on the fact that he is like them: from a poor background and *pardo* (of mixed Indigenous, African, and European descent). Conversely, the rejection of Chávez by parts of the middle and most of the upper classes in Venezuela is precisely a rejection of the very qualities that garners support from the masses, his impoverished upbringing and darker skin (see cartoons above). This rejection is based in deeply rooted historical constructions of Blackness as inferior to Whiteness. An association between Blackness and backwardness remains strong in Venezuela, especially in terms of media depiction of the poor. Dark skin continues to correlate with poverty and, the darker the skin, the more likely that the person will belong to the poorer sections of society.

In his work *Café Con Leche*, Winthrop Wright references a 1944 column in which poet-politician Andrés Eloy Blanco describes the racial composition of Venezuela by likening it to *café con leche* (coffee with milk). This gastronomic depiction of Venezuelan race relations and skin color is quite common throughout Latin America. A few common examples include: *canela* means cinnamon and is often used in reference to someone with a reddish skin tone, an allusion to indigenous heritage; *chocolate* meaning chocolate, used in reference to black people often in a sexual way toward women or in a loving way toward children; and *trigueña* meaning wheat colored, very popular among upper class (non-white) Puerto Ricans). In the particular case of Venezuela, the association of black Venezuelans with coffee, whites Venezuelans with milk, and the combination of the two as the best way to drink coffee can be read in multiple ways.

A cursory reading might lead one to assume that Venezuelans prefer their coffee like they prefer their people, diluted/weakened/lightened through the admixture of milk. Given the histories of blanquieamiento[20] (systemic and institutional whitening) throughout Latin America, and desires to "mejorar la raza" (to literally improve the race through whitening) I don't think one would be far-fetched to assume that the pure blackness and perhaps bitterness of black coffee is as undesirable as Black Venezuelans are to the national imaginary. Wright notes that miscegenation became synonymous with "whitening", which subsequently permitted socio-economic movement along a racial/color continuum toward the somatic norm established by white or Europeanized elites who defined their status in cultural and economic terms as well as by race (1996).

Ultimately, the association of whiteness with social and political mobility as well as respectability allows one to insinuate that blackness, which primarily exists in opposition to whiteness, is characterized by backwardness, ignorance, poverty and failure. Furthermore, despite Venezuela's long history of miscegenation, blackness continues to signify an inferior social position, indeed carries far less currency, through Venezuelan's use of a chromatic scale that links dark skin and African characteristics with lower-class status. For these reasons, *Chavismo* seems to resonate beyond its national boundaries and throughout the African Diaspora and is particularly so among left-leaning Black folks in the US because of its promises to combat manifestations of global-antiblackness and its commitment to a socialist-like, I.e. More economically egalitarian society. To combat global anti-black sentiments and negrophobia while simultaneously improving the material conditions of life and allowing respecting Afro-Venezuelan's right

[20] the definition and/or extended explanation of the historical process and significance in Latin America and use this to think about questions of gender and how whitening and mixture happens through black women bodies and what folks are fighting against (mejorar la raza)

to interact with and demand from the state, Chavismo helps to increase the currency of Blackness or Afrolatinidad.

ALEJANDRO'S STORY

Alejandro is one of the founding professors of an Afro-Venezuelan centered curriculum for college students at UPTBAL (*Universidad Politécnica Territorial de Barlovento Argelia Laya*) in Higuerote, Barlovento. Barlovento is the name of a region about two hours north-east of Venezuela's capital, Caracas. It is generally considered a coastal region, made up of more than a dozen separate municipalities, however, the terrain becomes mountainous rather rapidly as you move away from the coast-line. During the period of colonization, people primarily from Angola and the Congo regions of central Africa were captured and enslaved on cacao plantations in the region, which is why the region remains predominantly Afrodescended today. During slavery and even up to the present the peoples of Caucagua, Rio Chico, Tapipa, Curiepe (founded by free blacks and marooned peoples), Birongo (founded by persons who had escaped slavery), San Jose de Barlovento, Higuerote, and Tacarigua to name a few, are a cocao cultivating peoples who consider their traditional forms of growing and harvesting cocoa to be of particular epistemological importance for them as Barloventenos and Afro-Venezuelans.

The decision to rename the local university after Argelia Laya occurred around the 2011 as Afrodescended populations across Latin America were gaining national as well as international attention. As a member of the communist party, leader of the Movimiento al Socialismo, an outspoken fighter in the Feminist movement, a fierce advocate for recognition and inclusion of Afro-Venezuelan struggles and a native of Rio

Chico, one of the settlements comprising the region, one could hardly find a more formidable mentor/role model for the local university students. The decision to change the name of the only predominantly Afro university in the country/the first historically black university in the country, in her honor, is a testament to the continued significance of the politics of naming ourselves and marking our contributions to society as Black/African descended peoples.

In a country where identifying as Negro or Afro remains controversial, one has to wonder what life circumstances precipitated Alejandro's creation of a collegiate-level Afro-Venezuelan studies curriculum. When asked about the process through which he came to understand himself as Afro-Venezuelan he told the following story: "Since I was 12, I think I have always been aware that I was Black, but I did not have any consciousness of Africa. As a child I saw an American television series called *King*. The series, starring Paul Winfield, was about the life and work of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr." Through watching the series, "I became aware of the history of Black people in the United States. So, I asked myself, who is the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. of Venezuela? After *King*, I saw another American TV series called *Roots*, which really began to give me a sense of pride in Black history.[21] After watching *Roots*, I began to educate myself through paying closer attention to the cultural festivals held in the Black communities of Venezuela." [Such as the *Tambores de San Juan*[22]] I was kind of astounded to learn that

[21] For a more detailed history of the spread of Black Television Shows across the globe see Timothy Havens' *Black Television Travels: African American Media around the Globe*.

[22] *Los Tambores de San Juan* (The Drumming Festival of Saint John) jointly celebrates the birth of Saint John the Baptist and the summer solstice, given that it begins on the 23rd of June. In Afro-Venezuelan communities, the festival historically provided cover for escape attempts following the cocoa harvest. Each year, for three full days, community members chase a white effigy of a white San Juan Bautista while a simultaneous search for the rarely seen, but highly coveted black effigy of San Juan is hidden in one of the homes of the community. Equally important to the festivities are the unending drum rhythms played on two specific drums called the *mina* and the *curbata*. The exact origins of the drums are not known, though

he had seen these shows in Venezuela in the 1970s and 80s, I'm not even sure I believed he was remembering the timeline correctly when he told me this but I found it fascinating that the history of slavery in the United States led him to interrogate the history of Venezuela's black population. To discover that the African descended peoples of the America's shared histories of colonization and enslavement was critical to my own understanding of the relatedness of our struggles so this assertion resonated with me very significantly. During my time in Venezuela, I would come to learn that traveling media was influential, across generations, in the development of Black consciousness.

"In college, I did a research project on Afro-Venezuelan cultural festivals and the research is what first introduced me to our tangible connection to Africa. Once I became a professor I began to try to create opportunities for my students to learn about Afro-Venezuelan culture. From there, we began to try to develop a curriculum to try to formalize that learning experience. The *Instituto Universitario de Barlovento*, [as UPTBAL was formerly know], was founded in 1991 as a technical school. When Hugo Chávez was elected president in 1998 there was a major opening of access to information and Chávez was actually very supportive of the university. In fact, when Chávez was released from prison [after to coup attempt in the early 90s] the school decided to name him their Padrino. Did you know that the first public speech he ever made was made was actually at IUB?[23] By 2006 the school was able to formalized two courses on African Culture and Afro-Epistemology to offer the students."

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they are widely believed to be West African. The *mina* is a hollowed-out, six-foot, trunk braced by two crossed poles. Its head is made of deerskin and played with sticks on the body and the head. It is accompanied by its smaller upright version, the *curbata*. (Guss, 30)

[23] I have been unable to verify this claim beyond my interview with Alejandro, but I have decided to cite the claim because, if it is in fact true, it is an extremely important and telling detail about Chávez's relationship to the Afro-Venezuelan population.

Our conversation almost naturally drifted into a discussion about the significance of naming practices. Alejandro went on to explain that he prefers the term Afro-Venezuelan to *negro* because "a person needs to be acknowledged not simply by color but through an ancestral history." He was of the opinion that the term "*negro*" has no depth, but that Afro-Venezuelan acknowledges an historical past while calling attention to the fact that something new had also been created in the process. For Alejandro, the choice to identify as Afro-Venezuelan is both cultural and intellectual. The politics of group naming for oppressed peoples is a particularly nuanced and complicated one. The similarities in the trajectory of naming practices among Blacks in the United States and Afro-Venezuelans warrant serious exploration. That the popular choices for group identification seem to follow strikingly similar paths leads me to wonder, to what degree, the evolutionary process of naming for Afro-Venezuelans, is influenced by the fact that many of the intellectual leaders of the Afro-Venezuelan movement have studied the Civil Rights and Black Power movements in the US. I certainly do not mean to imply that the evolution of Afro-Venezuelan communal naming practices does not have its own indigenous origins. I am more interested in "naming" and understanding the similarities of our circumstances over space and time, that result in such similar trajectories.

Even the current battles over the appropriateness of *Negro* Vs Afro-Venezuelan, among those who have already chosen to disidentify as *moreno*, stuck me as eerily familiar. It seemed that some of the push-back from people or groups choosing to identify as *negro* over *Afro* felt the need to distance themselves from other African diasporic histories and emphasize the uniqueness of the Black Venezuelan experience. In 2011, I stumbled upon a small discussion being led by and older Black man named Juan

and his wife in the Belles Arte district of Caracas. I now understand that it was meant to be a counter-discussion to all of the hoopla around *afrodescendencia* being propagated by the UN and La RED. The man on stage was graying man of a deep reddish-brown complexion who welcomed me to the discussion warmly. That is until the Q&A portion of the program.

I had not particularly vocal throughout the program so he must had observed me nodding my head at comments from other people in the audience. At one point he addressed me directly, asking if I believed he was correct in his preference for identifying as Black. Trying to be attentive to nuance in a non-native tongue can be extremely anxiety-ridden, especially when you are put on the spot. I tried to explain to him that I saw validity in both categories as someone who grew-up in the United States, but that I also understood how people were attempting to shift public consciousness around Black Venezuelans relationship to Africa. At that point he cut me off and declared that Black Venezuelans were in fact, "not, African nor Afro-Venezuelan but simply Black." He continued declaring the uniqueness of his identity as a Venezuelan, further declaring that they were treated differently because they were Black, not African.

I had to give it to him, the nuanced perspective he was arguing was not what I expected. Most of my encounters with people who would rather not identify as African in Venezuela were rooted in a desire to be seen as Venezuelan heavily colored by the stigmatization of Africa. During our encounter, he did not appear to be disparaging Africa or Africans. His argument seemed to be that people discriminated against him because when they looked at him, they saw a Black person and that being Black meant something very specific in Venezuela. I did not agree with his analysis but his graying

hair and sincere demeanor had me torn. I did not want to come across as dismissive or disrespectful to him as an elder who had welcomed me (a foreigner) to the space. I also wasn't sure that I could clearly explain my points of contention in Spanish so I let the conversation rest. At the end of the program, he stopped me and gave me some of his information and we connected on twitter. Since then we have continued to have spirited virtual debates and I am grateful for his perspective. Alejandro and Juan's varying perspectives on the politics of naming exist across nearly all communities of peoples of African descent in the Americas and had been particularly well documented and theorized in the US.

SOME POINTS FOR COMPARISON

In the United States the boundaries of racial identity were much more clearly delineated, or so they believed, than their Latin American counterparts. While in Latin America people could purchase status and ascend to whiteness, in some cases regardless of the darkness of their skin, US negrophobia existed in such a manner that disallowed a formal buffer of class between whites and blacks. This did not however preclude all Black folks from social ascension to whiteness. The caveat in the United States was that in order to make that ascension to witness, traces of Blackness had to literally be erased such that light skinned Black people who could be perceived as white were referred to by the phenomenon of passing. It is certainly the case that African peoples of all hues and hair textures exist on the continent, however racial miscegenation is largely responsible for the color variation and its subsequent association with social status that can be observed among the Black peoples of the Americas, particularly those who are the

descendants of enslaved Africans. Venezuela's history of miscegenation is characterized by voluntary (consensual sex) and tainted by involuntary (rape) nature. "Moreno" one of the color categories most often associated with Wright's description of *café con leche* often trivializes that history of sexual violence while the color category "negro" is understood as a constant reminder of Afro-Venezuelan's enslaved "origins". Ultimately, the stigmatization of the category negro and the longer more accepted use of *moreno*, will inevitably make shifting from a "color" based identity to an ethnoracial/experience based identity that calls attention to the history of forced displacement, rape, abuse and murder of African descended peoples difficult to accept.

Owing to the particular labor and efforts of the Black Power era, the term "Black" in the United States does not overwhelmingly hold the same degree of negative associations as in Latin America. The Black is Beautiful Campaigns of that era, the promotion of wearing natural hair styles and rejecting Anglo/European names contributed largely if not almost entirely to the massive shift in US Black relation to the category of Blackness. Unfortunately, despite the valiant efforts to affirm worth, value and beauty of one's physical markers of African descendedness, US Blacks too are still plagued by the hegemonic nature of global anti-black sentiments. This is evidenced in Black/African women of child bearing age in the 21st century still coveting light skinned men with fine hair specifically for the purposes of making "pretty babies" i.e. as light as possible with hair as far from kinky as possible. Or, women who refuse to allow themselves too much exposure to the sun for fear of becoming darker.[24] The work to accept and appreciate one Blackness is related to but not necessarily fully entangled with the work to accept and

[24] For More on this phenomenon in the United States see Yaba Blay's *One Drop: Shifting the Lens on Race*; Marita Golden's memoir *Don't Play in the Sun; Dark Girls* the documentary; Gabrielle Union on her issues with her brown skin in the September 2012 edition of EBONY magazine.

appreciate ones Africaness or Africandescendedness. In Venezuela, the weight of the negative framework Blackness carries doesn't necessarily make it an identity category ripe for re-appropriation. However, the term Afro-Venezuelan or Afrodescended carries a different kind of potential.

In July 2011 as the country celebrated 200 years of Venezuelan independence from Spain and the enduring legacy of Simón Bolívar, I learned that his legacy animates a particular Afro-Venezuelan liberatory imaginary in the form of claims that Simón Bolívar's "wet nurse" and childhood caregiver Hipólita Bolívar was especially responsible for instilling notions of social justice and responsibility in the young Bolívar. The common national narrative of Hipólita is that she was enslaved by Bolívar's family and served as his wet nurse and care taker though most of his formative years. When Bolívar wrote of her, he referred to her as his mother Hipólita. As such, within the national imaginary, Hipólita's relation to Bolívar is very much in line with what most consider to be a stereotypical notion of Black women as Caregiver or in us lingo Mammy."[25]

Among Afro-Venezuelan scholars and activists there is an intentional retelling of her story, and for that matter, Bolívar's story as well, that places Afrovenezolanidad not only at the center of the inception of the Venezuelan nation but as foundational to Latin American notions of independence and liberation as presented through Bolívar. I experienced the significance of this retelling while sitting in on one of the inaugural

[25] In her work *Sister Citizen*, Melissa Harris Perry explains that mammy "is a symbol of black women as competent, strong, and sassy, yet she is beloved among white people because she uses all of her skills and talents to serve white domestic interests. Mammy makes sure that white children are well fed, that white women are protected from the difficulties of household labor, and that white men have a safe and comfortable home to return to at the end of the day. She ensures order in the white world by ignoring her own family and community. Her devotion and attentionare for others, not for herself or her family" (2011, 284)

classes for the Diplomado de Saberes Africanos, a graduate certificate program in African studies at the Pedro Gual Institute in Caracas. The conversation began as a discussion about the numerous pictorial representations of Bolívar all over the city celebrating the Bicentennial Anniversary. Many in the room of about forty were complaining about the tendency to whiten images of Bolívar and the danger that attempt to whiten presents for the nation as a whole and Afrovenezuelans in particular on the occasions of their independence. Their points about the whitening of Bolívar were about the physical whitening of his image, though the issue was not necessarily whether Bolívar had biological African roots, but that one can see in the whitening of his image an implicit association of whiteness with Bolivar heroic image and by association, the Venezuelan nation.

The first image is the digitally enhanced, life-like image of Bolívar circulated heavily during bicentennial celebrations. The image below it is more representative of how he had been depicted up to that point.

Figure 7: Bolivar Digital Sketch (Source:http://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2012/07/120723_venezuela_elecciones_2012_simon_bolivar_aniversario_az.shtml)

Figure 8: Bolivar in 1837 (Source: http://www.militaryheritage.com/bolivar.htm)

To some, the difference in hair texture and skin color may seem nominal but within the Latin American context where there were once more than sixteen legal racial class/caste designations as endorsed by the Catholic Church. (see image below)

Figure 9: Casta Painting (Source: http://negrodocumentary.com/castasystem)

The subtle difference in skin color, hair texture and facial structure is imbued with specific histories of whiteness as social and in many respects economic capital. This discussion of the physical whitening of Bolívar's image eventually gave way to a discussion of the socio-historical whitening of both the image of Bolívar and the Venezuelan nation through the erasure of Hipólita Bolívar's foundational role in instilling values, ethics and notions of liberation that would eventually result in the independence of at least three Latin American nations. I remember distinctly a man named Argenis Delgado, an organizer for the Network of Afro-Venezuelans who would go on to become the administrative coordinator of the degree program in Afro-Venezuelan studies at UPTAL in Higeurote, began to passionately explain the importance of Hipólita to a room full of Afro-Venezuelan activist, teachers, politicians and community persons working on a certificate in the African studies.

It is widely believed and recounted in Afro-Venezuelan intellectual and organizing circles that Hipólita Bolívar most commonly referred to as la Negra Hipólita (Black Hipólita) is the true mother of the Venezuelan nation. Argenis went on to say that Hipólita "very intentionally taught the young Bolívar about suffering and freedom and how to be good to people. That those formative years of being reared in an environment by a black woman who chose to take advantage of her relative power over the young Bolívar in order to teach him values that would go on to liberate the whole of northern South America and would become the archetypal figure of the Bolivarian Revolution." What I find most significant about this retelling of a history is relatively unrelated to its factuality or lack thereof but rather the importance of the utterly defiant act of re-inserting/foregrounding the role of Afro-Venezuelan's in both the literal and figurative

creation of Latin American independence and subsequently as foundational to ideals of the relatively new Bolívarian Republic of Venezuela. It is an affirmation of worth as a people as well as an attempt to associate Blackness/Afrovenezolanidad with something other than slavery.

These anti-black sentiments and practices are indeed a global phenomenon inextricably linked to Eurocentric conceptions of the world. Eurocentrism manifests itself in various ways and is somewhat amorphous, particularly for people who do not understand it. However, when I employ the term Eurocentric, I am drawing from the following definition: "Eurocentrism… envisions the world from a single privileged point. It maps the world in a cartography that centralizes and augments Europe while literally 'belittling' Africa… In sum, Eurocentrism sanitizes Western history while patronizing and even demonizing the non-West; it thinks of itself in terms of its noblest achievements-science, progress, humanism- but of the non-West in terms of it deficiencies, real or imagined" (Shoat and Stam 1994, 2).

Then there is Eurocentrism's next-of-kin, white supremacy, which is "is the operationalized form of racism in the United States and throughout the Western world. Racism is like the generic product name, while white supremacy is the leading brand, with far and away the greatest market share" (Wise, 2014).[26] I would argue that white supremacy has a hold on the entire globe not just the western world. Eurocentrism and white supremacy work hand in hand to create an almost universally hostile, exploitative and violent climate to non-Whites, their aesthetics, values, practices, religious beliefs etc.

[26] http://www.timwise.org/f-a-q-s/

The deemphasis on the contributions of Hipólita Bolívar are without a doubt a product of the legacies of eurocentrism and white supremacy.

CENSUS POLITICS AND THE BOLIVARIAN REVOLUTION

Chapter VIII of the 1999 constitution specifically addresses the "Rights of Native Peoples" in which the State recognizes the existence of native peoples and communities, their social, political and economic organization, their cultures, practices and customs, languages and religions, as well as their habitat and original rights to the lands they ancestrally and traditionally occupy, and which are necessary to develop and guarantee their way of life. This chapter also guarantees native peoples the right to economically sustain themselves, collective intellectual property rights and the legitimacy of their particular medical epistemologies.

Despite the revolutionary and optimistic re-visioning of the constitution, one cannot help but notice certain silences. The new constitution fails, for example, to recognize its citizens of African descent in the same or similar manner as it does its indigenous citizens. Both in response to this omission and invigorated by the apparent opening offered by Chávez's administration, the Network of Afro-Venezuelans demanded that people of African descent be constitutionally recognized. The official estimates of those with "pure" African ancestry, prior to the 2011 census were that 10 to 12 percent of the total population (about 1.8 million to 2 million). Sixty percent of all Venezuelans, however, can be understood to have some African ancestry by the popular use of the racial/color category of *moreno*. Despite a lack of success in their efforts at constitutional recognition, the network has employed what Arjun Appadurai calls a

"politics of patience", in that rather than becoming a project oriented organization they have dedicated themselves to the long term work that it takes to implement institutional and societal changes (2002, 28). The organization's years of political insistence on the enumeration of the Afro-Venezuelan population would finally come to fruition in 2011, a year that held significance for the country in numerous respects.

On September 1st, 2011, more than a decade after the rise of the Bolivarian Revolution and the Durban conference and for the first time in over 150 years, the Venezuelan National Census fashioned questions aimed at ethno-racial and gendered enumerations of the Venezuelan population. The Network of Afro-Venezuelans viewed the new census as a means to quantify racialized disparities on a national scale. Though their preference was to encourage identification as Afro, as evidenced by census campaign propaganda reading "Soy Afrodescendiente… y tú ¿cómo te reconoces?" which loosely translated, means "I am an African Descendant… and you, how do you identify?", they anxiously anticipated statistical evidence of what most in their communities already knew to be true, the further one was from whiteness, the more precarious their life circumstances. Each of the ads included a phrase that began with "Orgulloso de…".

Figure 10: Nuestra Alegría (Author's Personal Collection)

The tag-line in the ad above translate to "Proud of Our Joy" and the one below translated to "Proud of My Beauty" respectively. The campaign made an explicit attempt to visibly represent the wide range of skin colors that could reasonably be identified as *Afro*, as can be seen in the first ad. These ads could be seen on t-shirts, flyers, bookmarks and all over Facebook as well as other available social media sites.

Figure 11: Mi Belleza (Author's Personal Collection)

While black folks in the US have not had to contend with the politics of enumeration in terms of national census data in the same ways as their Venezuelan counterparts, the "*Soy Afro*" campaigns are not entirely dissimilar from the "Black is Beautiful" campaigns of the 1960s and 1970s. These campaigns in the US encouraged Black folks to reject white aesthetic norms and embrace their own natural beauty, in whatever form it took. In this regard, Angela Davis's afro became an iconic image of both the Black Is Beautiful Campaign via images of her participation in Black Power/Black Liberation struggles. Our struggles, on the African continent and

throughout the Diaspora, with accepting our own beauty and value in the face of white aesthetic and socio-economic norms are, in no uncertain form, the product of Eurocentrism. The pandemic of Black self-loathing must be attributed to the insidious subterfuge for the maintenance of white supremacy that is popular media, public school curriculum and children's toys, to name a few.

Figure 12: Angela's Fro

The images of Angela Davis, crowned by her Afro, as she faced the witch hunts of COINTELPRO represented a proclamation of the beauty extant in those who refuse to assimilate to the aesthetic norms of a global white supremacist power structure. Beyond what she represented aesthetically, in her youth, she also represented the embodiment of revolutionary resistance as a member of the Communist Party's Che-Lumumba Club she could be interpreted as a budding Pan-Africanist in addition to being a Black Feminist. Comparing these iterations of campaigns promoting radical Black/Afro identities highlights the ways in which the liberatory struggles of Black/African-descended peoples, no matter where they are in the Diaspora, are linked. I find comparing the conditions of struggle for Black/African descended peoples in Venezuela and the US to

be of particular importance at this juncture in history because of intensifying attempts, on the part of those opposed to our liberation, to erase our contributions from history and weaken us through encouraging us to pay more attention to our differences rather than finding strength in our shared struggles.

During his nearly decade and a half as president, Chávez was able to guide unprecedented government initiatives that led to programs and policies which resulted in significant progress toward combating the historical legacy of racism and discrimination that historically plagued the country. He also provided similar parallel support to other nations with predominantly Afro descendant populations, where their governments were not willing to make it a priority. President Chávez was able to institute many reforms to ensure African descendants in Venezuela could have full and equal access to social, economic and cultural rights. Despite his support for their efforts at getting questions about race on the census, the outcome was a disappointment for the Network, particularly those intimately involved in the campaign.

According to the 2011 Venezuelan national census, Venezuela is home to nearly 29 million inhabitants with 755,626 identifying as Negro/Negra. Of the nearly 29 million Venezuelans only about 182 thousand identified themselves as afrodescendiente on the census, the vast majority of which were concentrated in the three states where the Network has the strongest presence, Miranda (where the Capital city of Caracas is located), Carabobo and Aragua. I think it is also important to note that each of the states have a coastline touching the Caribbean Sea. Everywhere one looks throughout Latin America, high concentrations of people of African descent can been observed near coastal areas, often the areas in which their enslaved ancestors toiled on various kinds of

plantations. The same is true of Black US citizens, who remain heavily concentrated in the south eastern US because that was where their ancestors primarily labored during their years of enslavement.

While less than one percent of the entire Venezuelan population identified as Afro, nearly 50 percent identified as *moreno/morena*, 3 percent identified as negro/negro and about 0.7 percent identified as Afro. The other 46 percent primarily identified as *blanco/blanca* and some as *indigena*. Several of the people I know who participated in the campaign to get people to identify as *Afro* conceded that there was still too much shame in identifying as Afro. Despite the 2005 creation of the Presidential Commission for the Prevention and Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination in the Venezuelan Educational System, folks like Alejandro Correa, suggested that the most critical element of change needed was still in the realm of public school curriculum. He believed that without teaching the history of Africa and people of African descent is taught to children in schools, people had no point of reference for Blackness or Afrolatinidad beyond the negative histories of slavery.

Nearly twice as many men (461,918) identify as black than women (293,708) while the figures for persons identifying as Afro by gender are much closer 95,181 and 85,963 respectively. These statistics are in line with previous arguments that the wages of blackness more heavily affect women's life outcomes than men, leading more women to "mejorar la raza" by identifying as with the slightly more racially ambiguous racial category of "moreno/morena." In this category we see that men (7,001,959) and women (6,592,644) are almost equally likely to identify as moreno. This also suggest that the terms moreno or "black" is a particularly stigmatized category for women, perhaps

because marrying or having children with "black" women does not "mejorar la raza" (improve the race) and as such these women are much less likely to be marriageable partners and much more likely to be single mothers, the single most impoverished demographic in the country.

RACIAL ENCOUNTERS

During the early summer months of 2011, I arrived, for the first time at Simón Bolívar International Airport in Maiquetía, Venezuela, a small industrial port and beach town about 13 miles north west of downtown Caracas. I was very apprehensive and quite frankly a little frightened by the prospect of arriving in Caracas alone. Cursory glances at popular new-media sources before I left the US reminded me that Caracas often graced lists with deceptively alarming titles like the "World's Most Dangerous Cities – Top 10" and "Most Violent Cities in the World," laced with tag lines reading "Venezuelan capital Caracas is a drug trafficking haven. Robbery and petty crimes are commonplace with police having very little say or will to control the situation" (Zeenews.india.com; Dec 14th 2013).

Figure 13: Venezuelan Riot Police (Source: World's Most Violent Cities)

In an article entitled "Venezuela's Homicide Rate Quadruples in Fifteen Years, NGO Reports" published by the Huffington Post in April 2013 the above picture was featured in a list of the "*World's Most Violent Cities*" with the caption "Riot Police shadow a march of university students going along one of the main streets of Caracas March 15, 2011."

Prior to my arrival in Caracas, I attributed Caracas's violent reputation to US propaganda, designed to deter people from traveling there in order to gain their own understanding of the changes taking place in the country. Not that I didn't believe people were killed in Caracas, it's just that I didn't think it could be that much worse than Chicago, Detroit or some other American city constantly portrayed as pathologically violent and poor. I interpreted the depictions of Caracas as one of the many rhetorical strategies employed by the US government to keep Americans naively believing that our lives are so much better in the States, that everyone, other than perhaps some citizens of the European Union, must be envious of of quality of life in the US. More importantly, that "third-world" envy is what makes it dangerous for the haves of the US to travel amongst the have-nots beyond its borders.

One of my earliest experiences discussing race and class in Caracas occurred while eating lunch at Centro Commercial El Recreo in Sabana Grande. C.C. El Recreo is a seven-story luxury mall with an open-air atrium and movie theater on the 7th floor. The view from the entrance looks out over a few commercial businesses, a major promenade and a cluster of barrios[27]. During my first trip to Caracas, I secured housing in the Santa

[27] A Spanish word meaning neighborhood. In several Latin American countries and the Philippines, the term is also used officially to denote a division of a municipality. Though the connotation is not always negative, the terms is commonly used to describe "slums" in the outer rims of big cities such as Caracas and Santo Domingo, as well as lower to middle-class neighborhoods in other cities and towns.

Monica neighborhood of Caracas. I lived in an apartment owned by a Colombian woman, Ana, who had moved to Venezuela more than thirty years prior. The apartment was also occupied by her daughter Laura and a revolving host of international students renting rooms. Two of my roommates at Ana's were also graduate student from the US, one of whom was a blonde-haired, blue-eyed white male history graduate student from the Midwest, Eric and the other, a black music education PhD student from the southeastern United States named Brian. On this day, they invited me to lunch and we were accompanied by a local Venezuelan woman friend of theirs who was fairly light skinned with dark kinky hair named Katerina. We were all about the same age with the exception of Katerina who was a little younger and still in college.

Earlier that day, Brian and I had been discussing our desire to visit a barrio during our time in Venezuela. We were both interested in conducting interviews at some later date so we decided to ask Katerina if she might be able to assist us in finding the right community to visit. Brian asked Katerina if she knew anyone who lived in a barrio and/or would be willing to take us and show us around. Initially she simply frowned, but a few moments later, I guess once she realized the sincerity of our request, she replied that "barrios were very dangerous" and that it would be difficult for Eric, the white male student, to enter. Eric never actually asked to go, so her response was a little off putting. She went on to say that "everyone would know he didn't belong and that would make him an easy target." She paused for a moment and continued… "for you (referring to me) and Brian, it would be easier, we probably wouldn't have any major problems." I had my suspicions about why it might be easier for Brian and I to enter a barrio relatively

unnoticed but I decided to ask her why she thought it would be easier for us to go than Eric. She replied “because you wouldn’t stand out, you’d look like you belong.”

Though she never explicitly stated anything about color or race, it was obvious that the only glaringly visible thing distinguishing Eric from Brian, Katerina and I, was the fact that he was a blonde haired white man. I interpreted her response as a way of saying browner people were generally assumed to live and belong in barrios while “whiteness” tended to preclude poverty dwelling, hence her declaration of Eric’s inability to traverse a barrio relatively unnoticed. The understanding that barrios or slums and whiteness are somehow contradictory, offers a degree of insight into the racial composition of the barrios and more specifically the racialized nature of poverty. Katerina's thinly veiled association of race with poverty is neither incorrect nor uncharacteristic of Venezuela's racial reality.

Since the colonial era, Venezuela's African descended populations have always made up significant portions of the poorest sectors of society. Today's Afro-Venezuelans are predominantly descended from enslaved Africans and later, Afro-West Indian migrant laborers, so it isn’t simply coincidental that poverty and blackness, along with indigeneity are intimately interconnected. Venezuelan notions of mestizaje (racial mixture) help obscure the racialized nature of Katerina's comments by de-historicizing the relationship between blackness, servitude and poverty. Without proper historical context, the role Venezuelan racist/anti-black sentiments play in exacerbating the impoverished conditions of many Afro-Venezuelans lives is obscured and often forecloses honest interrogation of the elements of structural racism and negrophobia seething just below classist discrimination (Wright, 1990).

I spent the majority of the summer the *Encuentro* took place living in an apartment with a young woman named Arielle. She was an undergraduate a Dartmouth I connect with through Dr. Joseph Jordan because we both wanted to live and study in Barlovento that summer but could not afford to live on our own. We had returned to Caracas for a weekend to attend a few events commemorating the UN declaration. We spent the weekend in Caracas at Ana's apartment, a woman I rented a room from in during my time in Caracas. On the morning we were to return to Barlovento, we Arielle and I had an interesting conversation with Ana about Venezuela in comparison to what it was like when she immigrated to the country thirty years ago. We began discussing the price of food and why certain products such like milk, cooking oil, etc., were often difficult to find in stores. This lead to complaints from Ana about the "artificially imposed" exchanged rate of 4.3 BsF[28] (Bolívares Fuertes) to 1 USD. Ana argued that the economy was much more economically stable in the past because the food was domestic and nationalized. Now that Venezuelan's primary, if not only, export is oil, argued Ana, the country has no real material wealth, certainly a valid assertion in many respects. She was also highly critical of Chávez was selling oil to other countries before, as she put it, "Venezuela could even secure it from the ground." In truth, petrol makes up about 80% of all Venezuelan exports with over half allotted to government operations or expenses. (Wilpert, 2005). In January 2010, a fixed exchange rate of 2.6 BsF (for essential items) and 4.3 BsF (for non-essentials) was imposed. Currently, only about 3% of the GDP is currently derived from agriculture which only accounts for about 10% of the national labor force.

[28] In 2008, the "strong Bolívar," replaced the standard Bolívar as the official Venezuelan currency due to inflation. The name diction was necessary because both currencies remained in public circulation simultaneously.

Conceptually, social class designations form at the nexus of socio-economic status, residential location and certain social group characteristics. *La clase baja* or the lower class reside in barrios (shantytowns), lack sufficient access to food, money, employment and other basic needs. They tend to constitute the majority of the support base of the revolutionary Bolívarian régime and are most often described as delinquents by members of other social classes. Their lives are the most frequently impacted by random and organized violent crime. *La clase media* or the middle class generally live in apartments. The middle-class in Venezuela is interesting because by some theoretical constructions no Venezuelan middle-class actually exists. The middle class as defined by the Bolívarian government is largely comprised of persons who would consider themselves poor. The middle class is conceptualized as both a working and professional class and the primary *luchadores* for a better life and better Venezuela. Political division between the "chavistas" and the "opposition" also complicates the middle class category. Opposition forces, such as my host family in Caracas often classify chavistas as poor delinquents while chavistas often classify the opposition as conservative right wingers with upper-class aspirations, otherwise characterized as capitalistic and/or counter-revolutionary. *La clase alta* or the upper class most often live in large single-family dwellings with access to wealth that has, more than likely, been transferred through kinship lines rather than actual labor. They are further characterized by their conspicuous consumption and affinities for brand names and private universities.

I do not intend here to provide an exhaustive analysis of the Bolívarian economy. I offer the above conversation as context for a very coded discussion of poverty, socialism and race in Venezuela that unfolded as a result. Between 2011 and 2014 Ana

warmly welcomed me into her home for several extended stays, at extremely reasonable rates. She cared about my well-being; when returned home, after purchasing a Venezuelan cell phone to discover it had not been activated, she offered me a motherly smile, grabbed her purse and marched me back to the store where she reprimanded the clerk for taking advantage of my limited Spanish skills had the phone activated; she lovingly congratulated me over dinner one night when, for the first time, I understood a joke she told in Spanish without additional explanation; she walked with me step-by-step as I learned to navigate Venezuelan public transportation; she even graciously engaged in dialogue about my research despite her distaste for the Chávez régime. I truly could not have asked for a more kind and attentive host. The insidious nature of racism however, allows it to remain undetected in a number of circumstances and scenarios, but when it shows itself, it is difficult to dismiss.

On numerous occasions Ana generally declared that Venezuelans are lazy and expect to be supported by the government without working for a living. Knowing that Ana supported the opposition party, her declarations didn't surprise me, but they felt uncomfortably similar to the racially coded ways many of her American counterparts deployed "poverty," "welfare," and "urban" as synonyms for Blackness. As of July 2011, Venezuela was hope to approximately 27.5 million people with about 20% of the entire Venezuelan population living in the Caracas metro area and about 55% of the total Venezuelan population occupying the five largest cities in the country. This statistic reveals Venezuela to be a geographically underdeveloped country in that most citizens have to migrate or commute to one of these five major cities to find enough work to earn a living. With so many people seeking employment in relatively limited geographic areas

jobs must be extremely difficult to procure, therefore it is unlikely that laziness is the primary culprit of unemployment. Ana's implication that certain people choose poverty and unemployment activates a "racial paranoia," theorized by John Jackson as "that deep seeded knowledge that one is experiencing racism, racial bias/bigotry but the evidence is not explicit enough to prove it." Jackson suggests that is racial paranoia is one of the "unintended consequences of political correctness."

From the day I arrived in Ana's home she constantly warned me to return home before dark. Most businesses in Caracas begin to close as soon as the sun goes down, which in June and July is as early as 6:30 - 7:00pm, a huge contract from other Latin American counties I've lived in/visited. I would later come to learn more about the origins middle-class, often white, Caraqueños fear of being out after dark. Race and/or "color" rarely, if ever, came up during discussions in Ana's house, that is unless I initiated them, so I tried to put aside my qualms about Ana's racially coded language for the sake of my comfort living in her home. However, I could never fully escape the reality when Ana would contend that Chávez's election, fueled predominantly by the electoral support of Venezuela's poorest Black and Brown citizens, had resulted in a plummeting economy and a surge in public safety concerns, and how it uncomfortably reminded me of phrases abounding in the United States, predominantly among conservative whites, like "taking our county back" and the erroneous ways the American public over-associates the use of government assistance with black people driven by negative stereotypes they hole about black peoples work ethic.

When we left Ana's that day, I encountered another force of opposition that wasn't so middle class or white. On the way back to Higuerote from Caracas, Arielle and

I decided to leave from the Petare metro station stop rather than the La Hoyada, the stop we typically used. Petare is one of the largest Barrios/slums in all of Latin America. It is considered a distinct municipality thought it is also part of the Greater Caracas area. Home to nearly 370,00 inhabitants, Petare consistently ranks among the most violent slums in the world. On the bus ride, a man named Orlando and his daughter sat next to me. They were Afro-Venezuelans (my designation, not theirs) from Mamporal, a small municipality in the Barlovento region. We had a very long and interesting conversation that lasted almost the entire two-hour duration of the bus ride. He initiated conversation with me because he overheard Arille and I talking to one another. He interrupted to ask if we were speaking English. I replied that we were, which prompted him to ask if we were Haitian. I replied that we were not Haitian. He looked confused and responded, "But you're speaking English?" I confirmed, once again, that we had been speaking English then explained that the official languages of Haiti were French and Kreyol, neither of which I spoke. I must not have sounded convincing because he then asked, "so Haitians don't speak English?" I replied once more that they did not, which then prompted him to ask where we were from. I told him we were from the United States.

He paused for a bit then threw a question out that caught be by surprise, so much so that I didn't have the opportunity to be offended before he continued. He then asked if we couldn't find work and make more money in the United States. When his question finally registered, I responded by saying that there was certainly an abundance of money in the US, but work was another question. I continued by explaining that I was in Venezuela as a student to conduct research. My response did not however, deter his queries about money. With a rather dubious expression of his face, he plainly asked if I

was in Venezuela to "triple my money". I assured him that I was not earning any money while I was in Venezuela and that I was not rich by any stretch of the imagination. He asked how, if I wasn't rich, I would be in Venezuela with no job, just to do research. I explained that I basically had a scholarship to be there. I not sure he fully believed me, but he did at least appear to accept the scholarship explanation. This led to a longer conversation about money, Chávez, Socialism and US/Venezuelan relations. He went on to tell me that he was not a Chávez supporter to which I replied with an inquiry about his issue with Chávez. His reply was that "things were worse since Chávez". He said that it was true that things had gotten better in the capital of Caracas but for the most part things were no better for people in the rural areas outside of the capital.

He ultimately admitted that his real qualm with Chávez was that he hadn't done enough for people in rural areas, but that he didn't actually oppose any of the social programs that had been put forth by the government under Chávez. In light of that revelation, I reconsidered his comment about things getting worse. In retrospect, I think he meant that comparatively rather than absolutely, in that as he perceived things to be improving in some places and staying the same in others, the conditions appeared to be worsening comparatively. What I gleaned from the remainder of his comments was that most of his frustration with Chávez had to do with the change in currency and the new exchange rate. He also seemed to believe that Chávez was doing so much more for other countries in the world by giving them loans and resources when things were not drastically improving on the homefront. He questioned the motives behind these diplomatic agreements and how they could even be possible given the state of the country. He then asked me what I thought about Chávez's opinion of the United States. I

told him that I didn't think Chávez was wrong to proclaim that the US was a country too rich and powerful to be good for the rest of the world. Unfortunately, our conversation was cut short because we had arrived at his stop. We said our goodbyes and he departed.

On a separate occasion, Arielle and I were standing in line at a bus stop near Altamira, a very wealthy district of Caracas waiting for a bus to take us to Ocumare de la Costa where we had been invited to to attend a Network meeting. Ocumare de la Costa is a small costal city in the state of Aragua, located west of Caracas but generally lies in the north-central region of the country. It is also a home community to one of the larger San Juan drum festivals in the country. Resultantly, many Afro-Venezuelans who have migrated throughout the country return home to attend the festival there annually. My roommate, Arielle can be described as fairly light skinned, at the time she was in her early 20s and wore braided extensions. By this point in the summer I had become quite a few shades darker than my winter complexion. My skin tends to vacillate between a wide range of tones depending on the season and after living in the coastal region of Barlovento for the larger part of the summer, I was about as sunkissed as I could be. I had waist length dreadlocs at the time which tended to make stand out most places we traveled. The only people I regularly encountered with dreadlocs were the people who sold small trinkets, jewelry and art on the streets every day. While standing in line waiting for the bus this day my roommate and I were chatting, in English, when a man in line behind us interrupted and asked us if we were speaking English. We responded that we were indeed speaking English. He then smiled and proceeded to ask us if we were from Aruba. We both laughed a little and replied no. Before we could tell him we were

both from the United States he rattled off a series of other English speaking Caribbean countries including Trinidad and Jamaica that he thought we might be from.

I was only mildly taken aback by his relentless attempt to guess where we were from without actually asking due to similar encounters while traveling in Mexico and the Dominican Republic as an undergraduate. Most people I encountered in the former country often surmised I was from Jamaica or Cuba while people in the latter people almost uniformly insisted I was Haitian or of Haitian ancestry. I do not believe I have ever had the experience of being presumed to be a US citizen during any of my time traveling throughout Latin America. I have found in my travels throughout Latin America, likely due to the histories of whitening, that Black/African descended peoples are often assumed to be foreign, or at best from some remote area of the same country. Only later did I come to understand the ways in which these assumptions reflect histories of mass migration and proximity to what people consider to be "Black nations". Not-with-standing the language discrepancy, the assumption that we were Haitian couldn't be seen as completely erroneous considering Chávez offered humanitarian aid visas to thousands of Haitian displaced by the 2010 earth quake. As of 2012 there were at least 40,000 Haitian immigrants living in Venezuela with more than half being undocumented. The vast majority work in informal sectors with estimates of close to 12,000 Haitians selling ice cream on the streets of Caracas making about 1200 BsF or $300 USD a month (Shaw, 2012).

I decided to ask him why he seemed surprised about our nationality, to which he replied, that most people who looked like us and spoke English he'd encountered in Venezuela were from Aruba if not one of the other countries he mentioned. I concurred

that made sense enough but given our interest in understanding the experiences of Afro-Venezuelan people, I decided to probe a little more. I had a hunch that when he said people like us, he meant people with darker skin and/or kinkier hair. He went on to assert that people from the U.S. don't usually look like us. Again, I asked for clarity and he eventually said that most people he encountered from the US were white. I think he sensed a little awkwardness so he attempted to clean up his statement by saying most people from the US were tourists and didn't tend to take the cheap forms of public transportation that more Caraqueños did. We accepted that response without any additional attempts at clarity and let that conversation end awkwardly as we continued waiting for the bus.

My experiences as a perceived racial outsider while traveling through Latin America in general and the urban spaces of Venezuela in particular, in some ways, mirror the experiences of Afro-Latinos. Often perceived as foreigners both in and outside of their "home communities," Neil Gotanda articulates the ways in which persistent perceptions of being foreign are part of the radicalization process, particularly as it relates to Asian Americas. Tanya Hernandez draws on Gotanda's assertaions in order to interrogate the specificities of the experiences of Afro-Latinos in the United States. Hernandez argues, "[…] Afro-Latino/a identity is a contested terrain in which self-identified Afro-Latino/as are visually viewed as Anglo-Blacks and hence not 'authentic' Latinos. Self-identified Afro-Latino/as are inassimilable foreigners who challenge the notion that mestizaje has molded together a racially unique people separate from Anglo-Whites". She continues with the familiar example of Afro-Cuban Pedro Velez, Jr experiences being regularly addressed in English while shopping and enduring people's

surprise when he declares he is Cuban and they subsequently reply that he does not look Cuban.

Though Hernandez focuses on the experiences of Afro-Latinos in the U.S. these experiences are not uncommon for African descended peoples in their native countries, particularly when they migrate away from their "ancestral homelands" to urban centers. This was the case for Jonathan, an Afro-Venezuelan drummer friend I met in 2011. He was from a small city on the Paria Peninsula more than eight hours away from Caracas. According to him, it was not even possible to travel to his home by car. Given the regions proximity to Trinidad and Tobago, it is another region heavily populated by African descended peoples, not all of whom identify as Afro-Venezuelan. The African descended population there reflect generations of mixture between African descended peoples from all over the Caribbean and Latin America, consequently, a dying creole exists there that is a mixture of Spanish, English, and French along with Afro-Indigenous influences. Though this friend did not actually speak the creole, his Spanish dialect was heavily inflected with those influences, so much so that I often observed other Afro-Venezuelans comment on his Spanish fluency in the same breath as a they asked him where he was from. He never seemed to think much of, though he eventually revealed that he was always puzzled by the questions about his origins.

On another day I was leaving Caracas for a relatively short trip to Higuerote to visit the University there and to conduct a few interviews. I took a seat in the far back next to the window because Higuerote was one of the last stops this bus made. A few seconds later a man about about my complexion who looked only slightly older than me sat down. About thirty minutes into the two hour drive he began attempting to make

conversation with me. When he noticed my accent he asked me where I was from. Now at this point I had experienced so many people questioning the truth of my claim that I was from the US so I decided to go with what I assumed was an easier answer to receive because I didn't feel like going through that explanation again. I told him I was from Trinidad. As soon as I saw his face light up I knew I had made the wrong choice. He began to tell me that he had family in Trinidad and he started asking me more about where I was from. At this point I just decided to come clean. I told him that I had lied, that I was from the US and I went on to explain to him why I lied. When I finished he only laughed and said he understood.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, is yet another traveling encounter with racial prejudice. In this instance, I was at a significantly more run down bus station near the La Hoyada/Nuevo Circo metro stop. This bus depot's clientele was, on average, much darker than depots with buses destine for the western part of the state because most of the people at this station were headed north east of Caracas to a series of towns that make up Barlovento, a region of the country that has been predominantly made up of Africans and African descendants since slavery. The buses leaving this depot were in immensely worse shape than at other depots in other parts of the city and even the station itself was out doors and hardly maintained, it was dusty, trashy and most of the signs designating final destinations appeared to be cheaply made, another of the more obvious consequences (if one is willing to see it) of the lack of socio-economic currency Blackness or Afrolatinidad carries. All of this of course because these buses were destined for places with high concentrations of Afro-Venezuelans so of course most of the traveling clientele was also Afro-Venezuelan. Many of these passengers commuted two

hours from their homes in the Northeastern costal region of Barlovento into Caracas and back for work daily.

It was a Saturday around 11am, not long after the big encuentro at Hotel Alba in Caracas. I was officially moving to Barlovento, so I was traveling with four bags (two suitcases, a small duffle and a book bag). While at the *Encuentro,* I met a Nigerian man about my age named Ayo who had been living and working in Venezuela for the past two or three years. He had been working as a translator at the conference. When I told him I would be moving to Barlovento soon after the conference he offered to travel with me and assist with my unnecessary amount of luggage. He said he'd be happy to help because he had business in a nearby town for his job so he would already be traveling to the area and. Because he was Nigerian we could speak English to one-another which was comforting for me at the time. Additionally, he was much more familiar with the terrain and the dialect so I was relived and grateful for his offer. Despite the traveling with four bags it was relatively easy to board the bus, secure my luggage and find a seat. After boarding the bus and beginning to take off, the bus pulled into a corner of the terminal.

After about 10 minutes the bus had not yet departed the station. As I glanced around I noticed people began to get antsy and were whispering to one another. I asked Ayo what was going on, since he could understand the chatter better than I could but before he could answer I glanced out the window and noticed a group of municipal police walking in our direction. They boarded our bus and ordered all of the men aboard disembark with all of their belongings. I was getting a little panicky in my head because I was both worried about what would happen to Ayo and I didn't know what was going to happen to all of the women left on the bus. He stood and exited the bus. All of the

women were anxiously looking out of the windows. From what I could see, they were taking all of the men's cedulas (government ID), searching their bags, and subjecting them to body searches. While this was happening a woman officer boarded the bus and asked all of the women to open their bags. She very superficially checked our bags but did not search our persons nor did she ask for IDs. I couldn't understand much that was being said among the other riders, partially because I was still becoming accustomed to Venezuelan dialects and partially because I was a little too preoccupied with what was happing outside of the bus to translate everything that was going on.

When Ayo re-boarded the bus I asked him what was going on. He, rather nonchalantly, replied that they were looking for drugs. He revealed they warned him personally that if his cedula didn't check out properly they were going to take him to jail. After everyone re-boarded the bus one of the women asked the police what they were looking for but they refused to respond to her question. The chatter began again, this time, because I was a little calmer, I could understand more of what was being said. People were angrily repeating that the police were so corrupt and always looking for money. Finally, after detaining us for nearly an hour without finding anything they let us go. The rest of the ride to Higuerote was fairly uneventful except for a flat tire along the way. After arriving in Higuerote were both hungry so we began to look for a place to eat dinner. On the way, we passed one of the many makeshift stands on the streets of Venezuela that sold candies and bootlegged DVDs. Two of the men working were brown skinned, about my complexion and the other two were significantly lighter. Almost immediately they asked us where we were from, they first suggested Haiti but we replied that we were from "Africa" and the United States respectively. The stand owner reflected

for a moment on how he had left a job in Caracas and moved back to Higuerote because of the racial discrimination he had suffered from white Venezuelans, he then replied "somos hermanos" (we are brothers) and the other lighter skinned vendor chimed in "la misma raza" (the same race).

FUNDAYACUCHO

It's possible that the vendor's comments were an effort to ease us into buying a bootleg DVD or two, however, Barlovento in general and Higuerote in particular did have a familiar vibe, especially farther away from the tourist beach areas. As mentioned earlier, the only historically/predominantly Afro serving institution of higher education, UPBTAL is located in Higuerote, the flagship of Barlovento. It was in this town and at this university that I encountered young people who were benefitting first hand from The Bolivarian Revolution's educational brand of third-world internationalism. During Chávez's presidency, over the course of four years, Venezuela opened eleven new embassies across the continent of Africa, bringing their total embassy count in 2009 to eighteen (James, 2009). As part of his plan to improve South-South relations Chávez expanded a program called *Fundayacucho: Formando para el Socialismo*.

According to the government homepage for the program, Fundayacucho has existed in some form or another since 1975 when the foundation was developed "with the aim of contributing to the training of professionals to join the country's development plans." Since the onset of the Bolivarian Revolution in 1999 the program has evolved to "promote higher education among the lower-income population and mitigate the marked asymmetries between the capital and the interior region" and the international component

of the program is tied to the development of bilateral trade agreements along with the creation of ALBA and PetroCaribe. In 2015, one of the national newspapers *Correo del Orinoco*, published the following statistics:

Since 2006 the scholarship program of the Gran Mariscal de Ayacucho Foundation has opened the doors of 36 Venezuelan universities more than 4,000 students from 56 countries in Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa and Asia. Institute President César Trompiz described the program as "a system of international solidarity." As an example he offered the case of the delegation of young Palestinians who came last year to the country to study at the Latin American School of Medicine. As for the number of Venezuelans served through the scholarship program Fundayacucho, he said Trompiz recalled that 30 thousand were approved in 2014 by President Nicolas Maduro, most students opting to study Engineering, Architecture and Technology. According to foundation data, the program serves 813 scholarship holders with disabilities, in addition to 1,172 students from 36 indigenous communities. Since 1999, Fundayacucho has granted nearly a quarter-million scholarships. The Plan Return to the Motherland is one of the new projects of the foundation with the goal of integrating students who study abroad into national development plans (Pereda, 2015).

This program operates all over the country but I had the chance to interact with student participants in the program while in Higuerote, Barlovento at Universidad Politécnica Territorial de Barlovento "Argelia Laya" (UPTBAL). This program grants hundreds of thousands of dollars, yearly, in economic aid in the form of scholarships to international students to come to Venezuela and earn four-year technical degrees. Students from various countries who have entered into this agreement with Venezuela are

awarded scholarships and modest stipends to live and study in Venezuela in order to become engineers, doctors, teachers etc. In exchange for covering their education expenses, these students have agreed, upon completion of their respective degree programs, to return to their home countries and use the knowledge they have gained as participants in the program to serve the public good in their respective home countries. Although Venezuela has made formal arrangements with dozens of countries, there is a specific scholarship fund for students who are citizens of ALBA countries, African and/or Caribbean countries.

On the programs webpage there is a tab that reads "Becarios del Alba, África y el Caribe" (Fellows from ALBA, Africa and the Caribbean) and the program description reads as follows:

> In order to promote regional integration, we have received on Venezuelan soil, students from ALBA countries, Africa and the Caribbean in order to support the training of human resources in regions with higher needs for university education in order to promote transferrable knowledge and educational cooperation in the South.

Below this declaration of the program's aims and objectives are the testimonials of a number of students who have since completed the program. The testimony of Merlina Elwin, a native of Dominica reads as follows:

> Merlina graduated Magna Cum Laude in Business Administration in International Trade. She urged the leaders of other regions to follow the example of cooperation led by Chavez. "I am grateful to President Hugo Chavez for the opportunity to study in this beautiful country, an opportunity that changed not only my life but the lives of my family and my country. It is an example of integration that must be replicated."

During my time in Higuerote, I spent a great deal of time with a group of African fellows in the program. In this particular cohort there were two male students from the Gambia, one male student from Guinea Bissau and one male and one female student from Sierra

Leon. They ranged in age and level of maturity but one of the Gambia students, Modou who was studying Civil Engineering was quite dedicated to the ideals of the program and very appreciative of the opportunity to study in Venezuela despite recounting stories of ill-treatment due to either his dark skin or his foreign status.

Modou shared that opportunities for education in his home country of Gambia were limited and extremely expensive. He told me he was raised in a very rural village and that he was ecstatic when he first heard of the opportunity to travel abroad in order to attend school for free. His ultimate goal, he said, was to return home and become president of Gambia one day, but in the meantime he was interested in doing all that he could to improve the infrastructure in the country. One of his main concerns was water resourcing. Gambia is very small country in West Africa where most of the people living in the country are in close proximity to natural bodies of water yet clean running water is extremely scarce. The other Gambian student in this cohort was named George. George was also studying Civil Engineering but did not have the same aspirations as Modou though was similarly grateful for the opportunity to study engineering in Venezuela, to travel and to learn a new language.

Figure 14: UPTBAL Graduation

In the photo above the university's director Geronimo Sanchez is pictured in the middle flanked by Modou on the left and George on the right. I have used this photo, which is published on his Facebook account with the permission of Modou and I would like to call attention to one of the comments made on the photo.

> "Perseverance, dedication and love demonstrated. It is no easy feat leaving your country to grow in Venezuela thanks to the policies of bilateral cooperation between Venezuela and the Republic of Gambia. Congratulations brothers, may the all-powerful with the help of the magical ancestors continue guiding you on the supreme path..."

It was a feat indeed to leave his Gambian home and fly across the ocean to study in a country where he did not speak the language with one other student whom he'd only met during the preparatory stages of his journey. It is likely for this reason that when Modou and George encountered my roommate Arielle and I speaking English to one another in the courtyard eatery of the university trying to figure out where we should go, that he took it upon himself to say hello and became our friend and guide, equally invested in our research. He told us that of the five African students in his cohort at UPBTAL, four of

them spoke English, the other spoke Portuguese because he was from Guinea-Bissau. He explained how hard it was for all of them adjusting to Venezuela, though he said Barlovento itself as a region reminded him a lot of home in the way that it looked and felt and the way the people related to one another. He said that the student from Guinea Bissau had helped them with their Spanish because his Portuguese gave him a slight advantage and they were teaching him English so that he could be part of their little community. He said he would be happy to help translate for us and guide us whenever he could because he remembered how hard it was for him when he arrived in Venezuela.

Modou's genuinely kind nature led him to constantly seek out people that would help answer my questions about what it means to be an Afro-Venezuelan in the country as well as generously sharing his own stories. One day, while sitting in the cafeteria area waiting for Modou and George to finish class, Ariel and I began talking with a few young women students who Modou had introduced us to earlier. I decided to ask if they identified as Afro-Venezuelan. One of them named Mayeli, replied: "My mother is blanquita (which is this case, I believe, translated to "white-ish" or very light, as opposed to white proper), my brother is lighter than me but I am black, yes."

She then began to recount a story similar to Merlyn's about how experiences being mistreated because of her darker complexion. She described racism as something one encounters more in the mixed urban space of Caracas rather than the rural space of Higuerote and explained by telling the following story:

> Once, I was in Caracas riding on the Metro and I accidentally bumped up against a woman on the train. The woman brushed her arm off dramatically and said to me "no me toca negrita" (don't touch me little black girl). A few moments later the woman accidentally bumped into me so I replied by brushing myself off just as she had done to me and told her

> not to touch me. After a moment, I said to the woman "now you see how it feels."

In reality, Meyeli didn't seem overly disturbed by the incident, which lead me to believe that it might be a little more commonplace than she let on. She told me the story as if it only came to her as a result of being asked about racialized experiences. Modou arrived in the middle of the conversation and added that he too had similar experiences. He reiterated that he felt relatively at home in Barlovento because it was similar to where he lived in the countryside of Gambia but he shared that he hated traveling to Caracas because of the ways people looked at him, whispered about him and move away from him, especially on the metro. I found these stories extremely telling given the great lengths most Venezuelans go to in order to claim that they are all "mixed" yet such blatant bigotry seems to be an all too common occurrence. The last time I was able to check in with Modou he had gone home and done exactly what he had planned, to become a Civil Engineer for the government in his Gambian home.

The development over the past decade of Bolivarianimso or Chavismo at home and abroad is no doubt a major contribution to the improvement of the material and psychological conditions of women and Afrodescendants in Venezuela and wherever else people might be taking note of their progress. The present reality of what it means to have the right to have rights as poor people, people of African descent and as women give pause for reflection on what has been accomplished but is also a reminder of the serious work that remains to be done.

BEARING WITNESS TO THE WEAPON OF HISTORY

"What we are writing here is history. Or at least the personal account of an eyewitness to history. Our brother, Jimmy Baldwin (peace be unto him), used to constantly tell us in SNCC that "you all have to bear witness." That is all we are doing here, bearing witness to what we have done and seen in the hope, God willing, that it will prove instructive to those who follow us. And it was President Ahmed Sekou Touré (peace be unto his fighting spirit) who unfailingly reminded us that "only the people make history. It is not individual heroes, not individual geniuses but only the people who make history."

I have never forgotten his teaching. So you should understand that, more than anything else, this is an account of my people. My remarkable, heroic, struggling people who have supported, inspired, and protected me in all my years of strife.

It is for this reason that I am embarrassed by the relentless repetitions of the first person singular, the omnipresent and egotistic I, I, I, which is so inappropriate to an account of this kind. But we are stuck with it. My literary friend and other assures me it is merely a "convention of the form" which I am stuck with because when all is said and done that is what I am, an eyewitness to history. Hence the omnipresence of the dreary "first person confessional." It is purely formal not egotistic, but I fear we cannot escape it. You have been duly warned. Get used to it.

With undying love for our people,

~ Kwame Ture

Conakry, Guinea

December 1997

"[…] It is the nature of humanity to review the past, for in doing so we not only define our own essence but also seek to learn lessons if we genuinely desire to do so."[29]

~ Charles Abugre

The popular adage "history is written by the victors," commonly attributed to Winston Churchill, asserts that "history" is rarely "what happened" but rather, an account of what happened from a particular standpoint, to a certain end. This notion speaks more

[29] Cited in Ama Biney's work on *The Political and Social thought of Kwame Nkrumah*, p.2

to the control the powerful have over the means of disseminating information rather than a lack of desire on the part of the "losers" to offer their specific version of accounts. We lay citizens, most often, read histories written by, and in the interest of, societal elites. When the masses of a given society do not control knowledge production, nor the means for disseminating said knowledge, we are force-fed a-historical travesties like Scholastic's recent picture book, "*A Birthday Cake for George Washington*" in which the authors would have readers believe that an enslaved man named Hercules and his 6-year-old daughter Delia pranced about happily baking birthday cakes for George Washington. Amid controversy which ultimately resulted in Scholastic pulling the publication, it was revealed that this same enslaved man escaped his captivity not long after Washington's birthday. Later, it is claimed, when his young daughter was asked if she was sad her father had run away, she reportedly replied that she was happy because he was free. This 2015 transgression struck a chord with me because memories of similar battles from my own childhood came flooding back, battles I now understand to have initiated a sense of agency and urgency in my personal radicalization process.

I have, for the most part, enjoyed school and been a relatively successful student for as long as I can remember. Intellectual work came relatively easy to me, which I'm certain, was made possible by having parents with the time, ability and will to assist with me with homework, even as I traversed my graduate career. However, I always had a difficult time with the imposed sociality of school and what I now understand to be Euro-American socio-political indoctrination. When I was about 9-years-old, and a student at Creech Road Elementary School in Garner, North Carolina, my third grade teacher tried to force her similarly a-historical notion of "happy slaves" on my classmates' young

impressionable minds. On this particular day we happened to be discussing slavery and the conditions of servitude for most enslaved Africans in the United States. I cannot remember the larger context for why we were having this particular discussion but what ensued was something that has remained with me to this day, for better or worse. The teacher began to talk about what happened after the emancipation proclamation was issued, specifically, that some, if not many, enslaved persons chose to remain on the plantations under their former masters' "care" despite being "granted" their freedom. Her explanation for why this occurred was that those enslaved peoples were happy with the condition of their lives in bondage.

As an adult, I now want to believe that in her fumbled attempt to explain why some folks remained on the plantation after emancipation, she, due to her own ignorance and prejudice, could only understand remaining on the plantation after being freed as a "choice" that formerly enslaved persons made because their "quality of life" was better on the plantation than what they would have to face out in the world on their own. Of course, a more sinister interpretation might attribute her version of events more to what Kwame Ture referred to as an "insidious subterfuge for the maintenance of white supremacy," for the moment however, I will not contemplate her intentions, only the implications of her chosen narrative (Carmichael, 1966). The most egregious assumption she made was in attempting to convince our young minds that, when given the true opportunity to choose freedom, if freedom could actually be attained, almost no person would choose bondage. What she chose not to convey was that the "decision" to remain on the plantation for some was not simply a matter the desire to be free or remain in bondage but resulted from a fear of the unknown, and in some cases known, dangers of

being a black person out in the world with no official ties to any white person, which was further exacerbated by a lack of resources to sustain themselves once "free." To be born and raised-up in bondage and to have no clear view of how to establish a free life in a world where black lives were constantly threatened if not accompanied or vouched for by a white person, and to decide to either pursue or accept one's freedom was a bold decision that for most, promised a life of precarity and uncertainty. Given a thorough knowledge of the history and conditions of bondage in this country, the degree to which an enslaved person's "happiness" informed their decision to leave or remain on a plantation was likely very limited. These newly emancipated peoples understood that "freedom ain't free" and they had not to figure out how to pay for their freedom. This was, perhaps, my earliest autonomous understanding of what it meant to use history to, as Abugre notes at the beginning of this chapter, to "learn lessons" and "define our own essence" (Mawere and Mubaya 2016, 162).

Now, perhaps this woman truly made these comments from a place of ignorance, but too often such comments stem from generations of attempts to downplay the horrors and atrocities of slavery and subsequently convince the descendants of the victimized that the "peculiar institution" wasn't quite so bad and therefore our present circumstances of life cannot be linked to the enslavement of our ancestors. This linguistic sleight of mouth allows the ruling classes, which in this country are both and economic AND racial categorical distinction, to reframe understandings of the past and present in their favor. This is the weapon of history. "History" is never simply what happened, but stories of what happened and the lessons learned therein. Every choice to write and recite a particular history in a given society, no matter its size, teaches us what came to be and in

turn, what we understand as possible. History is simply the events of a far off past and the ways we understand it shape our presents and our futures. Oppressed peoples, in the case of this dissertation, peoples of African descent in the United States and Venezuela, cannot afford to passively ingest the damning histories put before us. We must, and do, actively seek out histories that demonstrate the possibility of a better world from which we can decipher the necessary tools to construct our own freedoms. Oppressed peoples must always understand that every tool, if held properly can serve as a weapon.

I completed undergraduate studies at a Black Univeristy only five minutes away from my current doctoral institution, Duke University. As an undergraduate at an institution with limited financial resources, my options for undergraduate majors in the College of Arts and Sciences were limited to classic disciplines like History, English, Foreign Languages, Political Science etc. There was no Anthropology program to be found at my undergraduate institution. In reality, I knew little to nothing about the disciplinary boundaries of Anthropology upon entering my graduate program. As a Black woman undergrad interested in social phenomena, History was the most appropriate discipline at my disposal. I later added a double-major in Spanish Language and eventually fashioned an Afro-Latino History concentration in my department. When I decided to attend graduate school, I primarily applied to Black/African Diaspora studies programs. Duke's Cultural Anthropology program intrigued me however, because I was excited by the opportunity to continue to travel and study Spanish language. I was also relieved that archival research would not occupy the bulk of my time. So it was history, my personal history and the history of African Diasporic peoples that brought me to the discipline of Anthropology.

Curiously enough, even as I interviewed for the program and entered my first year graduate theories seminar, I was still unsure of what was encompassed in *Cultural Anthropology*. As I have come to learn more about the discipline over the past seven years, Anthropology has allowed me to take my interest in the historical liberation struggles of African and African Diasporic peoples into a present desire to track and articulate the societal and personal conditions that foster the development of radical/revolutionary consciousness. As I became more and more enthralled in the personal and narrative trajectories of Black/African revolutionary juggernauts like Kwame Nkrumah, Sekou Touré, Winnie Mandela, Ella Baker, Fannie Lou Hamer, Fidel Castro and Hugo Chávez, I began to wonder if all of these figures had extraordinary stories.

I began to wonder how they came to be radical, if one had to come from extraordinary beginnings to *become* extraordinarily radical or revolutionary. I wanted to know if there was a "method to the madness" of revolutionary spirits that are often "ahead of their time" and "out of their league." A flood of questions came to me like: How did a childlike Kwame Nkrumah from the Gold Coast, born and reared under colonialism, manage to travel abroad the Network of Afro-Venezuelans d to the US and study Philosophy, only to return and create the independent African nation of Ghana? Similarly, how, in a country where formal education was denied to the native populations, did a beer salesman, like Patrice Lumumba discover his oratory gift and use it to become the first Prime Minister of the Congo? How did a woman like Harriett Tubman, so small in stature, with no assurances of what her freedom might look like,

manage to envision an escape route that would facilitate the liberation of more than one-thousand enslaved people?

Around the same time, I was attempting to reflect on my own process of becoming radicalized. Despite being supported by a community of people conspiring to create confidence, intellectual curiosity and a revolutionary spirit in me, I never believed I was particularly remarkable. I was aware however, that many of my peers over the years saw something "extraordinary" about my rearing, something I would only truly come to grasp as I entered college. For me, these questions stemmed from being reared by parents with such distinct backgrounds. I was a little too outspoken and articulate for my girly counterparts; I was a little too militant and less-than-patriotic for my "proud-to-be-American" counterparts; a little too cynical and un-faithful for my religious counterparts; and way too black for my all-white swimming counter parts. Despite the anomalous experience of being a militantly Black girl swimmer in the South, I needed to believe that even if I was alone in my respective geographic location, there had to be others like me. This project simultaneously explores macro histories and narratives of national liberation/continental unity in conjunction with individual narratives of the people who made those macro histories possible as well as those shaping current realities. This is an exploration of how "the weapon of history" can be utilized as a tool to fashion generations of people not simply emotionally angry enough but also mentally and infra-structurally equipped to take on the exploitative capitalist, racist, sexist, super structure.

W.E.B. DuBois posited the color line would be the problem of the 20th century, a declaration he made at the First Pan-African Conference in 1900, based largely on his observations of international political and racial phenomena. After the turn of the 21st

century, the problem of the color line has yet to be resolved. Despite the legal termination of the trans-Atlantic slave trade by the end of the 20th century, the world remains plagued by racial, child, economic, and sex/gender based slavery, among other forms of trafficking. Continental Africans and diasporic kin, continue to be mired in struggles for survival and battles over the most basic of rights, wherever we are in the world. We find ourselves being stripped of our statehood in places like the Dominican Republic; daily victims of state violence/police brutality and mass incarceration in the United States; and our contributions to the founding of the "nation" continue to be diminished, if not erased completely, from popular narrative histories and public school textbooks in places like Venezuela and the US. We Africans and the descendants of Africans find ourselves in a struggle to politicize ourselves, to radicalize ourselves and our peoples in order to overcome generations of systemic degradation and disenfranchisement. This dissertation is an attempt to examine the multiple ways peoples of African descent observe, theorize, and organize to combat marginal status in our relative locations.

If freedom from physical bondage was a unifying and radicalizing force for Africa's children at home and abroad following the collapse of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and if post-colonial national liberation struggles, neocolonialism and the color line served to radicalize 20th century African Diasporic citizens, then what are the major socio-economic and political dilemmas serving as radicalizing forces for the current generation of African Diasporic youth? What do those dilemmas look like across national contexts? What form does the work to combat those issues take? What tools do the oppressed Black/African masses have at our disposal, that if held properly, can become a

weapon? And finally, what will our generation of freedom fighters "bear witness" to? These are some of the most fundamental questions undergirding this particular intellectual endeavor.

In 1969, at the *9th World Congress of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International* one of the key resolutions proclaimed the following:

> "The social group most affected by this process of radicalization up to now has been the student population, which, owing to its increasing social weight and its sensitivity to world politics, has taken on greater and greater importance. The student youth do not reflect in a direct way the interests of the class to which they belong, or to which they will belong, but reflect primarily the contradictions and class struggles of society as a whole. The student radicalization mirrors and announces the current crises of the world capitalist system—hence its characteristic strengths and weaknesses. The powerful student radicalization has shown its capacity to serve as a transmission belt speeding the development of a radical political consciousness among other social layers of the same generation." (XXX)

While I am not exclusively concerned, in this work, with students, the vast majority of the subjects in this dissertation, including myself, experienced major leaps in their processes of radicalization during their time as students and/or in that transient stage of life when their so-called "class-status" is at its most ambiguous due to the increasingly precarious nature of what it means to be gendered "female" and the be considered "youth." I am offering here some raw materials, narrative accounts of history making in order for us to explore together as reader and researcher, what tools have been laid before us that we might turn into weapons for our own liberation.

RE-CENTERING THE NARRATIVES OF RADICAL BLACK/AFRO WOMEN

I have already made mention of a conversation I witnessed, wherein Afro-Venezuelan scholars and activists were trying to make sense of the the ways their contributions as a community have been obscured from the national narrative. In particular, the ways they have taken it upon themselves to center the contributions of Hipólita Bolívar to the founding of Venezuela and the whole of what was Gran Colombia's liberation from Spain. A parallel can be found in the figure of Argelia Laya, for whom the university in Higuerote was recently renamed.

Figure 15: UPTBAL

Also known as Comandanta Jacinta, Argelia Laya was born in 1926, on a cocoa plantation in Rio Chico, one of the municipalities in the Barlovento region. In the 1940s she became a teacher and militantly defended the rights of women to education and political participation. She was a Black woman who led struggles for reproductive rights

long before many of her mainstream feminist activist contemporaries. Eventually she became a communist and joined the guerrilla struggle against the dictatorship of the time, and was a founder of the National Women's Union (Eisen, 2014). Laya is remembered extensively for her role as a guerilla fighter, a feminist, a leader organizer in the Socialist Movement (MAS) but the reality of her life as an AfroVenezuelan woman is often obscured from such accounts (Ciccariello-Maher 2013; Ellner 1988; Friedman 2000).

Both women were integral to foundational moments of the Bolivarian project, Hipólita as a kind of advisor to Bolívar and Argelia as critically important to setting a standard for feminism and socialism in the country. It is beyond my ability and capacity in this work to do justice to the lives of these two Afro-Venezuelan sheroes. What is important for our purposes is the impetus of the Afro-Venezuelans themselves to do so, as exemplified by the retelling of Hipólita's story and renaming important Afro-Venezuelan institutions in Argelia Laya's honor.

WE NEED NEW NAMES: SKETCHING A PAN-AFRICAN FEMINIST THEORY

In *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill Collins argues that 'Epistemological choices about who to trust, what to believe, and why something is true, are not benign academic issues. Instead, these concerns tap the fundamental question of which version of truth will prevail." (252) As a result of my up-bringing steeped in an awareness of external attempts to deny my/African peoples contributions to human development and sophistication, let alone our own humanity, I was taught to respect and desire the quest for knowledge and information but to also be wary of the sources of that information,

particularly as I traversed public school. It was always difficult however, even through my doctoral studies, to accept something as true and factual without having some type of dialogue with people who see the world as I do. During my first semester of doctoral studies at Duke while taking a graduate Anthropological theories course, the professor only assigned one Black author as if there are not handfuls of Black Anthropologists and other intellectuals who have contributed to the theoretical genealogy of the disciple from W.E.B. DuBois and St. Clair Drake to Katherine Dunham noted for her work on dance and ritual in Haiti, Manet Fowler, the first Black woman to earn a PhD in Anthropology from a U.S. University and Carolyn Bond Day who published anthropological studies about mixed-race U.S. families as early at the 1930s.

Over the course of the fifteen week semester, this professor only selected work from ONE Black Anthropologist who happened to be a woman over the course of the 15 week semester and subsequently revealed to the class that she didn't really know what to do with her, despite the fact that Zora Neale Hurston was a price student of Franz Boaz, the so-called father of American Anthropology and her work is seminal across disciplines, I at once believed that I had made the wrong decision to spend the next few years of my intellectual development at this institution. These types of intellectual violences are some of the least abrasive acts that make most U.S. Doctoral programs, in any field, hostile to students of color and Black students in particular. Despite the fact that I stuck it out, perhaps more out of pride than anything else, I am still not certain that the choice to remain in the program was completely healthy for me. I can think of very few instances where I did not have to create a bubble around myself in institutional academic settings from age 4 to present. I can only be thankful that I have made it most

of the way through with my original sense of self intact. As much as this is a study of the kinds of transnational political relationships African peoples develop in order to combat daily experiences of physical, economic, intellectual, emotional, racial and gender violence, this could just as easily explored trans-disciplinary struggles of Black students in doctoral programs, particularly those who are politically oriented away from the increased bureaucratization of institutions of higher education that remain laden with their histories of raced, classed and gendered institutional inequality, but perhaps I'll save that for another study.

Contemporary theorization of the African Diaspora tends to be overly concerned with a few specific characterizations including but not limited to the notion of Africa as an "imagined homeland, the various migrations, forced and otherwise, resulting in the displacement of generations of enslaved Africans, primarily as a result of the African holocaust as well as various cultural retentions of Africanisms. (Butler; Palmer 2000; Herskovitz 1958) While these are all essential elements for thinking about some of the ties that bind African Diasporic communities, I find that the deployment of the term Diaspora, often lacks political gravity, in that one can make up the Diasporic community without necessarily possessing a political consciousness that leads them to think about their interconnectedness with other African Diasporic people beyond their historical connectedness. Many Black Feminisms, Third World Feminisms, African Feminisms, Transnational Feminisms most often have overlapping concerns where questions of colonially, sexism, racism, imperialism and neocolonialism. In her study of the SOS Corpo and the Rural Women Workers' Movement (MMTR) of the Brazilian sertão, Millie Thayer argues that despite growing impoverishment and domination as a result of the

globalization of capital, political and cultural globalization has its' transformative potential as well. She suggests that the isolation of the local, for many of the rural women in the Brazilian sertao limited their freedoms and made opportunities for change seemed rather bleak. The global feminist movement however, allowed these women "contact" and the opportunity to dialogue with women from around the world, fighting for change while retaining some of their own sense of home as rural Brazilian agricultural and domestic workers (Thayer, 2010). The quandary many feminisms find themselves in, is their incomplete attention to a multitude of women's experiences as well as the multiple outwards iterations of feminism. In this chapter, I hope to make the case that while all of the above mentioned theoretical frameworks have been and remain critical and relevant at particular junctures in history, it is imperative, particularly for those who consider themselves to be Radical Black/African scholars, that we fashion and promote the use of very specific language when it comes to a liberatory praxis.

In 2013 as a Duke graduate student, I attended a Race Studies Workshop sponsored by Duke's Department of African and African American Studies and hosted by Duke's Franklin Humanities Institute. The workshop consisted of two consecutive panels the first of which consisted of presentations by John Jackson, Alondra Nelson and Deborah Thomas while the second panel featured Kamari Clarke, Jafari Allen, Jemima Pierre and Achille Mbembe. The presentations ranged from ethnographic explorations of Black Hebrew Israelite Communities, video documentary exploration of Jamaica's Rastafari community post-Coral Gardens Incident to larger more abstract theoretical conversations about theorizing race and the African Diaspora. At some point during the Q&A, I asked what folks on the panel thought about the utility of Pan-Africanism as a

point of entry for exploring and theorizing the experiences of Black, African and African descended peoples. I distinctly remember being all but dismissed by one of the panel members because of their refusal to see the efficacy of such a construct in the post-African Independence moment. In all fairness, not everyone on the panel agreed with them and there my question spurred a significant enough discussion, however this scholar's relegation of Pan-Africanism as an independence era, post-colonial essentializing politics helped me begin to think critically about what I saw as deficiencies in Black Studies/African American Studies and even to an extent African studies curricula in the United States. It was also in this moment that I began to ask myself questions about what deficiencies and/or utilities might or might not be present in contemporary constructions of Black Feminist Thought. Additionally, the political legacy of Pan-Africanism, particularly when it is limited to the post-colonial independence movements, is grossly overshadowed by the contributions and accomplishments of great men as ideologues. The contention here is that one cannot truly be a Pan-Africanist in the most robust sense of the term without being a feminist, whether they be male, female or other.

So what is Pan-African Feminism and is it necessary to name it as such? In order to delineate what I am calling Pan-African Feminism, I think it important to offer the specific definitions of Pan-Africanism and Feminism I draw upon. In its most basic sense it is an ideological position through which most if not all social phenomena are interpreted. Pan-Africanist in the genealogical tradition of Kwame Nkrumah, Sekou Touré and Kwame Ture affirm that their ultimate goal is the total liberation and unification of Africa under Scientific Socialism. For the sake of brevity and clarity, I

borrow from the definitions of Pan-Africanism put forth by Hakima Abbas and Amina Mama in their introduction to the 20th Issue of Feminist Africa (2015) and the explanation provided by the All African People's Revolutionary Party (GC) on their web page and describe Pan-Africanism as "an insurrectionary discourse that emerged in direct opposition to European capitalism, manifest in the worst forms of human exploitation and occupation" with the ultimate political objective "the total liberation and unification of Africa under scientific socialism."

One of the most foundational Black Feminist in the US American academic context Patricia Hill Collins offers a "definition" of Black Feminist Thought that suggests it must consist of specialized knowledge created by (in her case) African-American women and their theoretical interpretations of those experiences to which a legacy of struggle is a critical component. Offering a working definition of Black Feminism presents a challenge in that just as there are many feminisms, there are indeed many Black Feminisms. Collins ultimately suggests that the work of categorizing, classifying and defining Black Feminist thought must first and foremost be the labor of Black Women Intellectuals. However, she concludes that "full actualization of Black Feminist Thought requires a collaborative enterprise with Black Women at the center of a community based on coalitions among autonomous groups." In this sense, it has always been the work of Black Women Intellectuals committed to Black Feminism to continuously construct genealogical renderings of Black Feminist Thought. One particularly important woman on that genealogical tree for Collins is the late Pauli Murray and her perspective on the sexism of 1960s Black Nationalist Movements, echoing the sentiments of another Black Feminist Foremother Anna Julia Cooper:

“The lesson of history that all human rights are indivisible and that the failure to adhere to this principle jeopardizes the rights of all is particularly applicable here. A build-in hazard of an aggressive ethnocentric movement which disregards the interests of other disadvantaged groups is that it will become parochial and ultimately self-defeating in the face of hostile reactions, dwindling allies, and mounting frustrations… Only a broad Movement for human rights can prevent the Black Revolution from becoming isolated and can insure ultimate success” (Murray 1970, 102). For the sake of concision, I will use a combination of bell hooks analysis of feminism as "not simply a struggle to end male chauvinism or a movement to ensure that women will have equal rights with men; it is a commitment to eradicating the ideology of domination that permeates Western culture on various levels-sex, race, and class, to name a few-and a commitment to reorganizing U.S. society so that the self-development of people can take precedence over imperialism, economic expansion, and material desires" (hooks 1981, 194). Patricia Hill Collins offers the following as an earnest attempt to answer the questions "what is Black Feminism?": "a process of self-conscious struggle that empowers women and men to actualize a humanist vision of community" (Collins 1990, 40). The above definition of Pan-Africanism does not utilize explicit language to challenge patriarchal domination and the above definition of Black Feminism is primarily concerned with the western world, as such, I find them both useful but incomplete when attempting to articulate what I have observed in my fieldwork with radical Black/African descended women.

"We define ourselves publicly as feminists because we celebrate our feminist identities and politics. We recognize that the work of fighting for women's rights is deeply political and the process of naming is political too. Choosing to name ourselves

feminists places us in a clear ideological position. By naming ourselves as feminist we politicize the struggle for women's rights, we question the legitimacy of structures that keep women subjugated, and we develop tools for transformatory analysis and action. We have multiple and varied identities as African feminists. We are African women -- we live here in Africa and even when we live elsewhere, our focus is on the lives of African women on the continent. Our feminist identity is not qualified with "ifs", "buts" or "howevers". We are Feminists. Full Stop" (Preamble to The Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists, 2010).

It is from this point that I would like to extend and make a case for what I believe to be a Pan-African feminism developing in 21st Black/African Diaspora social movements. For the feminisms of Black/African Feminisms, Chicana Feminisms and African Feminism, theory in the flesh a la Cherri Moraga or the importance of the relation between thought and experiences a la Collins clearly center the experiences of women of color to developing this particular field of knowledge. However, I would like to argue here that despite the important contributions of each of these schools of thought in their own rights, they have not been in conversation nearly enough to begin to articulate what I argue is a Pan-African feminism, a necessary liberatory framework for Black/African women all over the world.

While there are certain specifies that must never be overlooked in each of these communities of women, the commonalities in experiences and thinking are the ones I am particularly interested in here. Pan-Africanism, among other things, recognizes the sexism, classism, racism etc. Experienced by Africa's daughters at home and abroad, are linked historically and in the present. Furthermore, Pan-African feminists see the

destruction of those isms in any part of the world necessary to the struggle for liberation of Black/African women all over the world. Pan-African Feminism is ultimately an assertion of Black/African women's right to self-definition and self-determination in both inter and intra community struggles. Pan-African Feminism is also decidedly, not just anti-capitalist but necessarily ideologically socialist and politically active in nature. Pan-African Feminism is necessarily, anti-racist, anti-colonial, anti-neocolonial, anti-capitalist, anti-neoliberal, but the work of determining what one is against is relatively uncomplicated to arrive at. The notion of what one would put in place of the systems they wish to destroy is an extensively more arduous endeavor. What must clearly be articulated is that Pan-African Feminism is a visionary transnational ideological framework that defies imperial patriarchal culture, actively works to dismantle exploitative global economic systems i.e. capitalism and neoliberalism with the ultimate aim of nothing less than the total liberation and unification of Africa and African peoples.

STORIES OF PAN-AFRICAN FEMINIST PRAXIS

Merlyn

"Soy mujer,afro,madre. Capaz de amar,de ser y hacer pasión,que respeta su derecho al erotismo, a la sensualidad, que desmonta ideas,imaginarios. Soy mujer,madre. Con afro,gracias al descubrimiento de mi hermosa identidad,y porque entendí que a nadie le debo belleza. Soy mujer,afro,madre que baila y es feliz, porque aunque suene extraño, la percusión es inherente a mi corazón,a mi cerebro,a mi alma,ah por que cabe destacar que tengo alma…"

I am a woman, Afro, mother.
Capable of loving, of being and making passion, that respects your right to eroticism, sensuality, to dismount imaginary ideas
I am a woman, a mother.
With Afro, thanks to the discovery of my beautiful identity, and because I understood I owe no one my beauty.

I am a woman, Afro, mother, who dances and it happy because
Although it sounds strange, the beat inherent in my heart, my brain, my soul, oh it must be declared I have a soul

~ Merlyn

During my second visit to Venezuela I found Merlyn had taken a new position as a social worker in the Vargas State Institute for Women (Instituto Estatal de la Mujer del Estado Vargas) whose mission is to guarantee the rights of women at the regional level through cooperative programs with men and women in a just, peace loving and socialist environment. After quite a few weeks of trying to catch up with Merlyn she finally agreed to allow me to accompany her to work.

Figure 16: Vargas State Institute for Women Logo
(Source: http://justiciamujer.tsj.gob.ve/insparticipantes.html)

Vargas is primarily a costal state north of the capital district of Caracas, which is located in the Miranda state and bordered on its west by the state of Aragua. Vargas is both historically and contemporarily significant to the country because it is home to the country's largest seaport and international airport. In 1999, the geographic center of the State of Vargas suffered major floods and landslides, known as *La Tragedia de Vargas* (the Vargas Tragedy), causing major losses of life and property, and resulting in forced population movements including the virtual disappearance of some small towns. Thousands died, and many more fled the area to other states. The Afrovenezuelan population is most heavily concentrated in 10 of the 23 Venezuelan states including Zulia, Mérida, Yaracuy, Carabobo, Aragua, Vargas, Miranda (which is home to the capital city of Caracas), Anzoátegui, Monagas and Sucre. While the 1999 floods harshly impacted most people living in the state of Vargas, the living conditions of many Afrovenezuelans prior to the floods were substandard and only deteriorated in their aftermath.

Merlyn had instructed me to take the metro from Ciudad Universitario to Plaza Sucre and wait for her above the metro. She told me to be there by 7:00am because we would then have to catch a camioneta from Plaze Sucre into downtown Maiquetia so that she could be on time to work. She said the commute wass about forty-five minutes to an hour but with Caracas traffic I was certain that it would take at least an hour. In order to ensure that I would not make Merlyn late and to make sure she understood that I valued and appreciated her time I woke at about 5am that morning bathed and traveled by metrobus and then the metro to meet her at Plaza Sucre. I waited almost two hours for her arrival, which was typical of my efforts to arrange meetings with people during my time in Venezuela. When she finally arrived she apologized and told me that it had been

raining near her home and for that reasons her ability to catch a bus to the metro was impeded. We then walked half-way around the block to wait for the next camioneta going to Vargas.

We had to wait approximately an additional twenty to thirty minutes for it to fill up. This partially explains why travel takes so long in Caracas. With the exception of the official Metro and the Metrobus, most public transportation in the city is made possible by a union of bus drivers who take old beat up fifteen to twenty passenger vans between cities and municipalities. These buses almost never depart from any given stop until every seat is full and even then, picks up the occasional fare that is willing to stand holding on to hand rails for some shorter distance.

After we paid our fares and were settled in our seats we began to chat more about my research and why it might or might not be useful for me to travel to work with her on this day. She explained to me that this office was relatively new, and part of the larger national project to bring attention and awareness to issues primarily pertaining to violence against women. She also told me that the office did not have a specific mission to serve Afro women but that she and another of her colleagues, Norma Romero, arranged programming for AfroVenezuelan women when possible. I began to tell her more about my personal interest in the relationship between motherhood and radical politics and she often nodded her head or gave verbal cues that she agreed with me. I asked her if she ever wanted to have children of her own and she replied:

"Yes, I definitely want children, but not now. I don't want to raise my child alone, I want the father to be present. I want to be in a situation where I can advocate for my child so that she does not have experiences like I did growing in school."

I knew from previous conversations that Merlyn was not necessarily enamored with the idea of marriage because she told me she had a serious partner that she appreciated very much but that they were not thinking about marriage but had talked about the possibility of children one day. I asked her what she meant when she said that she did not want her children to have experiences like she had when she was in school. She reminded me of a story she previously told me when she was a young girl and her classmates did not choose her to be in their group because of the color of her skin. She then began to tell me a story about her niece who, she said, was "black like she was." As she said "negro como yo" she swept her hand over her arms and face to signal that her niece had either the same or a similar skin color as hers. This hand gesture is interesting because it is a gesture I have seen used by Afrovenezuelans as well as Blacks in the United States. A single hand sweeping one's arm or face is often used interchangeably with a single finger pointing to one's arm or face. Occasionally, the gesture is used to suggest parity of skin color but more frequently it is used to generally say a person is "of color" without directly saying one is Black.

Merlyn continued… "My niece, my sister's daughter, who is the same color as me and has hair like mine, [colloquially, Merlyn's hair would be understood as "bad hair" because it is kinky, coarse, moderately short and does not blow in the wind] she was told that she could not enter school with braids in her hair, [Merlyn also often wears her hair braided with extensions, or extra hair added on to both make the braid length longer and to make the style last longer] her hair could not be braided, it had to be straight and neat. It's important to call attention to the fact that course, kinky hair, the hair people most often associate with Black/African descended peoples is quite universally understood as

pelo malo or "bad hair." The designation of being bad is yet another of the global manifestations of anti-black sentiment forming the hostile environment Black/African descended peoples occupy on a daily basis. Of course she was very upset about this because she likes her hair and she also likes school very much." She went on to tell me that her sister did not know how to handle the situation because she was unwilling to involve herself in a direct confrontation with the teacher and/or the school, if necessary.

With the righteous indignation, otherwise read as "anger" or "attitude" that so many Black women are said to possess, she pointed her finger at herself, rolled her neck and said that she told her sister to call her if that ever happened again, that she would personally go to the school herself because this was illegal and that the teacher or the school had no business making her niece feel ashamed of her hair. She then slightly laughed her remarks off as if to acknowledge that retelling the story upset her and to signal that she was finished reliving the moment. I then asked Merlyn what she thought her sister could really do, more generally what role she thought a mother should play in these kinds of situations. She told me that sometimes people say that parenthood makes people more cautious but that she believed for women, for poor and Black women in particular, something about becoming a mother makes them more radical, makes them want to realize change in the world for their children, even as the responsibility of parenting weighs down on them. This is something that she and I agreed on despite the fact that we are not yet mothers, so some of our ideas about motherhood might be idealistic but it was also clear that Merlyn believed she played a "mother-like" role in her niece's life and, based on earlier conversations we had, she felt very influenced by her own mother to become involved in the work she does despite the fact that her own

mother has never belonged to any official political organization. Merlyn then pulled out a pamphlet and explained she had helped design it for the women's institute in Vargas. The pamphlet was a single sheet folded in half with basic information on the four blocks of paper. She handed it to me and instructed me to turn to the back and read. On the back page of the pamphlet was the following quote by Thomas Sankara, president of Burkina Faso and leader of the Burkinabe Revolution in the 1980s:

> "Women and men in our society are victims of oppression and imperialist domination. We fight the same battle; the revolution and the liberation of women go together. To speak of the emancipation of women is not an act of charity or a burst of humanism, it is a fundamental requirement for the success of the revolution."

I asked her where she had gotten that quote from and why she decided to use it for the brochure. She told me that she found the quote in a biography about him and that she thought he was a fascinating political figure. I am not certain if Merlyn was aware, but the very document in which she found this quote, Thomas Sankara's 1988 "The Revolution Cannot Triumph Without the Emancipation of Women," and Sekou Touré's 1983 "The Role of Women in the Revolution" provided the theoretical basis for the All African Women's Revolutionary Union, the women's wing of the All African Peoples Revolutionary Party, in the United States. Sankara's biography could easily be found in any government bookstore and was therefore both cheap and accessible. I can only speculate as to why a figure like Thomas Sankara would be promoted among the political left in Venezuela. I did not conduct any kind of formal survey but I do recall finding it quite interesting that I often came across a number of biographies about Thomas Sankara and Malcolm X translated into Spanish and I don't recall encountering nearly as many, if

any at all, of more prominent figures like Kwame Nkrumah and even Martin Luther King.

Merlyn's various positions of leadership both within the formal women's circles of the Network of Afro-Venezuelans as well as in the larger power structure of the Bolivarian government had equipped her with the education, skills and confidence that allowed her to feel affirmed in her ability to challenge gross racial, gender and class inequalities and subsequently allow her to question societal standards of beauty and access, as in the case of her niece. She understands that something that can seem benign and mundane, like demanding that a child be neat and presentable when attending school plays on a politics of respectability that is at once racialized, gendered and classed. When standards of neatness or grooming habits are derived from an aesthetic preference that is neither available to nor desired by all parties affected by those standards they have an overwhelmingly negative affect on those who cannot or choose not to conform to those standards. What does the way Merlyn's niece wears her hair have to do with her performance in the classroom? It should have nothing to do with it, but when she enters the classroom refusing to conform to those standards, her teacher's impression of her is negatively impacted and invariably her quality of education is impeded by her teacher's assumptions and her own level of comfort in the classroom or school environment as a student. Merlyn's own unequal treatment in school allows her to empathize with her niece but her radical education has allowed her to understand that these occurrences are products of larger societal problems that must be solved.

Merlyn's ability to understand these larger problems, coupled with her willingness to challenge such assumptions, is not necessarily commonplace. While many oppressed

peoples possess an awareness of their unequal status, few feel equipped to challenge such inequality beyond individual/personal isolated acts of rebellion. Despite the fact that this conversation arose while talking about the experiences of someone in her family, the work that Merlyn does with the National office on Afro-Venezuelan women and her constant attempts to educate herself about her own condition, the condition of her country and how they align with the rest of the world, are a testament to her commitment to larger social change. Merlyn has assumed the role of a woman of the revolutionary vanguard, she has taken it upon herself to educate herself and assist in the process of educating and empowering others, in particular, other Afro descended women.

Her evocation of Thomas Sankara, former president of Upper Volta/Burkina Faso, a revolutionary Pan-Africanist who was murdered for struggling for the freedom of his country and his people represents a publicly unapologetic linking of the liberation struggles of the Burkinabe people to the daily lives of Afro-Venezuelan women and furthermore is a a salient example of a Pan-African Feminist praxis and her attempt to create a world in which the women she works with are also exposed to such ways of being and understanding the world. It is also a testament to Pan-Africanism itself as a liberatory theory, that it would speak to someone far removed from its geo-spatial and temporal origins. While I was in Venezuela to better understand the developing political and cultural possibilities for people of African descent in the Bolivarian Revolution, I was beginning to understand Merlyn's, as well as other activists' combination of grassroots and state level activism as inspired by similar strands informing community building, consciousness-raising and radical nation building for Black/African descended peoples in the US. The quote represents the nexus between the experiences and theories upon which

my dissertation is founded, the epistemological linking of Pan-Africanism, feminism, and organization as a comparative and shared project between Venezuela and the US.

In my conversations with Merlyn Pirela, I observed her Pan-African feminist sensibilities in her work with the Women's Ministry. In a conversation in early July 2011 Merlyn told me the story of how she came to understand herself as Afro and what that meant:

> I was 11 years old and my parents put me in a theater group… a symphony. Everyone was told to pick a partner to practice with and no one wanted to be my partner. No one wanted to touch me, be near me, because my skin was black. It was a very traumatic experience because until then I never really thought of myself as different and I certainly wasn't ashamed of my color.

Fanon explains this experience as "The Fact of Blackness" in his seminal text The Wretched of the Earth. Merlyn's initial lack of awareness of her blackness or afrolatinidad is relatively "normal" according to Fanon's assertion that "As long as the black man is among his own, he will have no occasion, except in minor internal conflicts, to experience his being through others." The moment Merlyn describes as becoming aware of a difference and the potential to find shame in that difference is articulated by Fanon as well when he declares "All round me the white man, above the sky tears at its navel, the earth rasps under my feet, and there is a white song, a white song. All this whiteness that burns me. ... I sit down at the fire and I become aware of my uniform. I had not seen it. It is indeed ugly. I stop there, for who can tell me what beauty is?" What differentiates these experiences is what such an experience prompts one to do about it. Merlyn describes this experience as one that "politicized" her from a very young age, rather than crushed her, and continues to drive her work as the Coordinator of Afro-descended women for INAMUJER. When I asked her to describe the kinds of work she

did, she told me that one of the things she has found the most successful is hosting movie screenings and discussions with Afro women in various barrios in Caracas. Lee Daniel's movie "Precious" had come out not long ago and it was one of the films she chose to show to a group of women. She described the highly emotional reaction the women had to seeing the movie and how it spurred their interests in the experiences of Black women in the United States. From our conversation it was clear that the women both personally identified with the violence they witnessed on the screen and saw that violence as a link or a shared experience with black women in the United States who they had never met. She informed me that she really wanted to screen the film "For Colored Girls," (the Tyler Perry version of course) but she was having a difficult time finding a version that had Spanish sub-titles. Merlyn considers these discussions to be forming a foundation for women to understand and verbalize their experiences as Black/Afro women and she hopes that will spawn their desire to become more politically active in their communities. I think it is important to notes that of all the women I interacted with on a regular basis while in Venezuela, Meryln was perhaps the most "phenotypically black" with dark skin and (unaltered) kinky hair. Her dark skin and and a conscious decision not to straighten her hair obviously resulted in more frequent and egregious experiences with her black femaleness in public.

Nirva

Nirva Camacho, an Afro-Venezuelan scholar of psychology and activist and also a mentor to Merlyn, recalls her earliest awareness of her blackness occurring when she started attending school outside of her predominantly Afro community. People began to classify her according to her skin color and hair texture. Despite the acute discrimination

she experienced, she went on to earn a degree in Psychology from the Central University of Venezuela. However, her attempt to better understand racism and how to fight it were not met in college so she went on to join the *Unión de Mujeres Negras de Venezuela* (The Venezuelan Union of Black Women). Despite some of its issues, she recalls this being a place where she truly encountered herself as an Afro woman for the first time. In the 1990s with the Black Women's Union she helped provide support and capacity building to women in Afro-Venezuelan communities on issues of women's rights, family violence, and racial discrimination. In 1996 she recalls forming an alliance with Chucho's Afro-American Foundation and working together with a grant from the Inter-American Development Bank to conduct a study on race. By 1999, the year Chávez came to power,

> […] the Union of Black Women and the Afro-American Foundation were participating in the Afro-America XXI, an international Afro-descendant movement, which had been established in response to the IADB student mentioned above, and we jointly organized an international conference on the family. In 2000, we canned on other national organizations to form a network where we could combine forces and enhance the work we had been doing individually in our regions. Thus began the Red de Organizaciones Afrovenezolanas (ROA, Network of Afro-Venezuelan Organizations), of which I was a founding member. (2012, 8)

In 2004, she recalls, the National Cumbe of Afro-Venezuelan Women was formed in order to call direct attention to issues women faced specifically, even inside the organization. Her training in psychology has also led her to work specifically on issues of internal racism which she defines as "an auto-discriminatory attitude in which the person undervalues the physical and cultural aspects that identify him, in this case, as Afro-descendant. At the same time, he overvalues the characteristics that could be interpreted as European, this giving the person a false sense of superiority" (2012, 12). Camacho further offers an interesting take on why Afro-descendants themselves might

fall victim to the notion that race or racial discrimination does not exist in Venezuela or Latin America more broadly.

> My research on women and men in Afro-Venezuelan communities—particularly interviews with women who have not yet had the opportunity to overcome the racist messages they have internalized—reveals that lack of self-knowledge and self-esteem makes it more difficult to decipher the racist and discriminatory behaviors of others and the ways in which these behaviors affect the social, political and economic dynamics of justice (2012, 13).

Camacho suggests that the national government has a vested interest in their issues as afrodescendants and she finds the presidential decree entitled "Prevention and Elimination of Racial Discrimination and other Distinctions in the Venezuelan Educational System" and the subsequent formation of a presidential commission to enforce its contents, of which she is a part, to be hopeful.[30]

Roraima

When I first traveled to Venezuela, I was very interested in interacting specifically with the Women's Cumbes of the Network. That turned out to be nearly impossible for a variety of reasons, the most disheartening of which was shared with me by Roraima. During a conversation she had with me and Arielle she had she revealed to us that the state of Afro-Venezuelan women both in and outside of the movement was sad, even though the women most often outnumber the men. This is not a situation unique to Afro-Venezuelans, Black radical organizations or any organization that is not explicitly and intentionally feminist by design. Numerous Black feminist scholars from the US have documented both the unequal labor responsibilities and sexist attitudes with the Civil

[30] Nirva's story is reproduced from her own publication of a chapter entitled "Afro-Venezuelan Cimarronas Desde Adentro" in the edited volume Women Warriors of the Afro-Latina Diaspora.

Rights and Black Power Movement. The Black Church in the United States offers an example of the patriarchal nature of Black communities, par excellence. Roraima vented that she believed the sexist machismo of Afrovenezuelan men was even worse than white men. I do not think she meant this in absolute terms, rather I think she was referring to the disappointment and distrust one feels when a person they believed to be comrades in the struggle replicates the same oppressive tendencies within their own communities. Her discussion of the sexism extant in the political community of the network led her to talk about her own upbringing. Interestingly but certainly not uncommon, is her reflection that her mother and grandmother replicated those patriarchal structures within her own home by giving preferential treatment to the boys in the family and demanding far more responsibility for the home from the girls in the family, something she very adamantly admonishes.

She most attributes her radicalization to her father, who she says was a Marxist guerrilla who left her mother with three children to raise on her own. The sexism she witnessed led her to declare at twenty-six years old that she was uninterested in relationships and definitely did not want any children. When questioned about the potential of family/home life to be a site of radicalization she briefly relented saying it was possible but in her experience "most women were tied down with husbands, children and jobs which are major barriers to their politicization while men were basically free to do as they pleased." This critique also applied to men and women within the structure of the Network. She did however seem to see more potential for combating patriarchal structures within the youth cumbe than the larger organization. She said that many of the male members of the youth cumbes were artists which she believed led them to be more

open and willing to be challenged on patriarchy and sexism. Another issue she was quite critical of within the Network, as well as the larger Bolivarian Revolution, was the overemphasis on drums as synonymous with AfroVenezuelans. Her words exactly were that the disproportionate focus on "culture" was part of the "banalization of the movement and the people," despite being an important element of who they are as a community of people, she felt it was being used to pacify their communities.

Luisa

Luisa has a similar perspective and method for developing awareness among the women, children and college students in her rural community. In Curiepe, Luisa is known simply as “La Professora/La Maestra”. For our first interview I traveled to her “pueblo” (community) and in Venezuela people use cultural and geographic references to give directions because they do not use house numbers and street names. I called her cell phone when I arrived and asked where she lived, she told me “camina a la plaza y pregunta a alguien donde esta mi casa” (go to the center of town and ask someone where my house is). I was weary of doing so because I did not want to get lost wandering around town all day. When I arrived at the plaza I asked for Luisa Madríz and no one knew who I was talking about and then I mentioned that she taught at the university in Higuerote and they responded “AH LA MAESTRA!!” and from there I was pointed around the corner and down about five houses. When I arrived Luisa invited me in and offered me “dulces” the infamous baked sweets of Barlovento.

She began to tell me about her work with the Women’s Cumbe and revealed that participation in the organizational structure was dying but she declared “*Curiepe es mi*

Cumbe" (Curiepe is my community) implying that her work in her community would continue with or without the women's Cumbe. She described her methods for teaching Afro-Epistemology at UPTAL as self-discovery and said beginning with African history as ineffective. Her method was to get her students to understand themselves as Afro and the uniqueness that entailed and from there she could move to exploring the African disapora and the history of slavery. Luisa saw herself transforming her community for the better by nurturing pride in her students and the children in her community. She ultimately believed that this nurturing and education was a mother's responsibility but many of the mothers themselves had no sense of themselves as Afro-descendants and her charge is to change her country and community through reconstructing the identities of Afro-Venezuelan youth by encouraging them to accept their blackness.

As the narratives, experiences and political activity detailed here suggest, identity and self-perception are critical factors in the political activity of the Afro-Venezuelan movement in general and Afro-Venezuelan women's work in particular. Caldwell and Perry make compelling arguments for the continued salience of identity politics in the political practices of Black women in Brazil (2007, 2005). The Afro-Venezuelan women I encountered were generally supportive but critical of the Chávez's Venezuela and always admitted that life has generally improved since he came to power. As young women in their mid-twenties Merlyn, Roraima and Esther all came of age in the era of Chávez and makes no apologies about the sense of entitlement they feel in regards to the political openings of the Bolivarian Revolution. As a teacher, mother, wife and woman in her mid-fifties, Luisa is also supportive of the Revolution but sees her work as a personal obligation regardless of the status of the "Bolivarian Republic." It is ultimately the

personal commitment of these women and others like them in the country and the Americas shaped by similar experiences of oppression and marginalization that constitute a Pan-African feminist praxis and must be considered integral to the development of Pan-African feminist theory.

Each of these women are associated with the work of the Cumbe de Mujeres Afro-Venezolana in some respect yet offer somewhat different approaches to issues of gender within the Network of Afro-Venezuelans and the national imaginary. While they all agree that the marginal position of Afro-Venezuelan women is of particular importance and has been ignored, their locations, experiences and positions in life affect their methodologies. These women participate in governmental institutions, grassroots organizations, scholarly communities and community education in order to combat the gendered/racial oppression they face on a daily basis.

AN INTELLECTUAL LABOR OF LOVE

In 2016, the Movement for Black Lives in the United States, made up of various people and organizations including but not limited to Black Lives Matter, the Dream Defenders, Black Youth Project 100, among others, declared February "Black Futures Month" rather than Black history month as it has traditionally been identified. *Black Futures* draws on the logic and reasoning of *Sankofa*, a west African Adinkra symbol derived from Akan art, representing the need to reflect on the past in order to build a better future. This tension between past and present, old and new, runs throughout the work before you because it is a tension that animates processes of becoming radical. Even as the people whose stories are told throughout this dissertation may unknowingly find themselves at pivotal crossroads on their journeys of becoming in the present, the myriad choices they make to continue on, or deviate from, those paths are never uninformed by histories and legacies of struggle for liberation and self-determination.

I began this research interested in precisely what Janie Victoria Ward, in her article "Raising Resisters' calls "intergenerational transmissions of resistance," however, this terminology escaped me at the time (1996, 86). What did not escape me however, was that my parents made very intentional choices about rearing my siblings and I. Choices, I came to learn in adulthood, that resulted in socio-political constructions of ourselves distinct from those shared by many of our peers. Upon identifying those characteristics in my upbringing, I was certain others too had been intentional about cultivating radical Black consciousness in their children. Ward's special attention to the "homespace" as a primary site of resistance, was a phenomenon I was initially interested in exploring when I first embarked upon the research for this dissertation. I set out with

intentions of documenting strategies and practices of Black/Afrodescended mothers intent on raising people who would contribute to our shared liberation struggles. This proved difficult because the incredibly intimate and personal nature of parenting often prohibits candid conversations about intentions, difficulties and mistakes in parenting without cultivating deep trusting relationships with parents. Because I was a foreigner, with no children, these intimate relationships were hard to forge in Venezuela.

In her assertion that "parenting a black child is a political act," Ward (1996, 86) employs a Black Feminist standpoint to articulate a rather poignant example of the ways in which the seemingly mundane act of parenting becomes expressly and fundamentally political due to the external anti-Black vitriol permeating Western (and global) public life and its relentless attack on the Black child's sense of self. She further contends, "black mothers have learned to skillfully weave lessons of critical consciousness into moments of intimacy be-tween a parent and child and to cultivate resistance against beliefs, attitudes, and practices that can erode a black child's self-confidence and impair her positive identity development" (1996, 86). I was heartened to come across this work because it re-affirmed for me, despite my personal difficulties, that other scholars are interested in documenting radical Black parenting and living practices. I find her assertions to be true, particularly in the context of the post-colonial western world, given the overwhelming amount of anti-Black propaganda and genocidal agendas Black/African peoples face on a daily basis (86). Ward's article focuses on Black parents of Black adolescents in the United States. My experiences and those of my friends in Venezuela show her assertion remains salient across communities affected by colorist or pigmentocratic ideologies.

In his book *Children of the Movement*, John Blake profiles twenty-four children of parents who gained notoriety or were martyred during the Civil Rights/Black Power era, including the children of Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and Stokely Carmichael, among others. Living and working in "the cradle of the Civil Rights Movement" of Atlanta, Georgia, Blake felt inundated with commemorative events but often left them with no sense of how the work was actually continuing in the present. Eventually, Blake began to wonder what life was like for the children of these larger than life figures, to live in the shadow of their parent's accomplishments or failures. Blake's curiosity led him to pursue interviews with these "movement children." In his interviews he found that a large number of these "movement children" were "emotionally distant from their parents" who according to their children, were "more suited for protest than parenthood" (2004, xi). Due to their perceived neglect, many grew up uninterested in continuing the work and legacy of their parents, some were interested in milking the legacy of their parents for celebrity and monetary gains, while others still, were, in their own ways, carrying the torch passed to them, with an understanding of the work their parents were trying to do, even if that work was partially responsible for tearing their families apart.

One of the movement children Blake interviews is a close family friend of ours, Bokar Ture, son of the late Kwame Ture. Unlike many of his interviewees, Bokar's interview does not reveal such an antagonistic or pained relationship with his father. Perhaps because he spent a great deal of his childhood in Guinea, Conakry, he was relatively unaware of the magnitude of his father's political legacy until as a teenager in the early 1990s he moved to the United States. Only after the death of his father due to

cancer, did Bokar begin to earnestly concern himself with learning about his father's legacy and how he might continue to contribute to that legacy. When asked if his father would have wanted Bokar to become a revolutionary like Kwame, he replied "no, so long as he's doing something good for the people." My father always said give back. You don't have to be a revolutionary like him. You just have to understand your responsibility to give back" (2004, 165). Bokar recalls that on his death bed, his father requested one promise of him, to "fight for Africa! Don't you ever forget Africa. Remember your place in Africa" (2004, 161).

Blake's book was published in 2004, a little less than ten years after the death of Kwame Ture. At the time of the interview Bokar was in his early twenties, had recently finished a graduate degree at the London School of Economics and was trying to determine his path. Now in his mid-thirties, Bokar lives in Abuja, Nigeria and works for *Akon Lighting Africa*, an initiative working to provide more than 600 million Africans with a clean and affordable source of electricity. I cannot attest to whether Bokar remains concerned with the degree to which his present work remains true to his father's legacy. However, I do interpret his work with *Akon Lighting Africa* as driven by his desire to "give back" and "fight for Africa," two of his father's dying requests of him. The process of radicalization takes a different path for everyone according to the issues of their day and their understandings about the ways in which they are able to contribute. Bokar's story is not that different from my own in that as the offspring of a generation that came of age during a time of massive social upheaval, not only in the United States, but the world, he is both plagued and driven by questions about his role in the world wide struggle for African liberation.

This anthropological examination of the processes through which youth across the African Diaspora become the ones they have been waiting for, is as much a story about my personal journey as it is about the individuals whose stories are explored here. The dying wishes of Bokar's father are the living wishes my parents continue to hold for me. Growing up romanticizing what it must have been like to be young and militant in the 1960s and 70s, I truly never imagined a mass social movement, led by Black youth, in my lifetime. Despite fantasies of being an articulate and charismatic revolutionary, this dissertation is an exploration of the scope of my own, along with my peers', development and contribution to the social movement of our time. Because inequality has a history, and certain inequalities have particular histories, the world we live in can invariably be written about as a set of comparisons and/or in terms of historical reference points. The history from whence the forms of inequality plaguing Black/African descendants comes and the subsequent varied generational responses to that inequality undergird this dissertation. The tension between the intellectual and movement genealogies of Black/African liberation struggles and contemporary youth desires for recognition of the unique contributions of our era, alternately manifest as a productive and divisive tension. The liberation struggles of my generation, despite the unique qualities they possess, are inextricably linked to the struggles and work of our parents' generation and those before them. The stories presented in this dissertation document the contemporary struggles of African Diaspora youth to chart a path for themselves to freedom and the ways in which those struggles continue to be inspired by struggles elsewhere such as those documented above by Venezuelan youth and Afro-Venezuelan activists in general.

For this reason, this ethnographic account of radical becomings can only be understood in the context of the various histories that inform it, and those histories will be shared strategically throughout this story of stories. Growing up the child of politically active and astute parents who made conscious efforts to expose us to the stories of great freedom fighters like Harriett Tubman, Malcolm X, Kwame Nkrumah, Leila Khaled and so many more that I could go on naming, I have always been interested in how they came to be such forces in the world and how they came to matter to the people who matter to me. In many ways, these strong (Wo)Men occupy mystical, superhuman status in the minds of their admirers. There is a method to the madness, that I like to believe can be replicated to some degree, to create the coming generations of freedom fighters. However, in many ways, the processes by which they became freedom fighters were as haphazard as they were methodological. Throughout this dissertation I've set out to demystify the means of contributing to social change by examining the process of living, breathing, freedom fighters at various stages of development, and under different political regimes. This is my present contribution to the global struggle for African Liberation, the Movement for Black Lives, to my generation's freedom struggle, and in solidarity with sistren in Venezuela. If the stories presented here help inform one person's journey in the global freedom struggle, this particular labor of revolutionary love will have been worth it.

Kinship Connections: My Momma and Daddy's Civil Rights Movement

On August 24th, 1979 a seventeen-year-old girl from a Missionary Baptist, military family raised in Fayetteville, North Carolina, moved into a freshman dorm on the campus of North Carolina State University in Raleigh, North Carolina. That same day, she met a young man from Chicago, Illinois six years her senior who identified as a displaced African and claimed to be drawn to her because of her big afro. Though he was no longer a university student, his electrical trade kept him employed on the campus where he also served as president of the campus staff union. At the young age of twenty-three, that man was dedicated to labor organization in the United States as well as international revolutionary political movements. Six years earlier, in 1973 he left his Chicago home with several of his eight brothers to attend college at Shaw University, a very small historically Black liberal arts (HBCU) institution in Raleigh, North Carolina. Shaw University, established in 1865, was the first college in NC to offer a four-year medical school; the first institution of higher learning established for freedmen after the Civil War; and the first HBCU in the nation to admit women. More importantly for the twenty-three-year-old electrical worker, Shaw University was the birth place of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and continued to have a predominantly Black student body. These two would spend the next five years courting before they would get married and later give birth to me but the stories of their first encounters are also stories about their own processes of radicalization as two young people trying to figure out their own contributions to the world.

As a child growing up in a portion of the southern United States also referred to as “the bible belt," I was acutely aware of aspects of my upbringing that made me different from my peers. My siblings and I had African names, though no one in my nuclear family had ever been to the continent; my parents refused to allow me to straighten my hair, play with white dolls or generally spend much time looking at images that didn't affirm my Black/Africanness. We were raised to question, question, and question again religious understandings of the world, despite my mother’s own religious upbringing. And we were raised knowing that our parents expected us to have informed and articulate opinions about virtually any subject they might throw our way. I was quite aware of the things that made our family different, even as a young child, partially because my father made a point of having such conversations with us, but also because of the interesting conflicts those differences created among my peers. The conflicts and conversations I experienced during my childhood raised many questions for me that I’ve only recently begun to be able to answer. One of the questions I have spent the most time trying to understand is how my parents, who come from seemingly polar opposite ends of the social spectrum, were able to make their relationship work and to rear reasonably healthy and well-adjusted children. Many of the stories below are stories I heard over the course of my lifetime. They are, what I describe as, stories of intergenerational transmissions of resistance which I believe, are the foundation upon which this dissertation is built.

By the time my parents met, my father had fairly well developed political ideologies which made him 1) decidedly anti-United States military industrial complex; 2) opposed to the belief that oppressed peoples could find their salvation or liberation

through any kind of deity; and 3) aimed for a life that struggled for the total liberation and unification of Africa under scientific socialism as espoused by the All African People's Revolutionary Party.[31] Despite their varied backgrounds, the two found common ground in their desire for the freedom of African peoples, though each held distinct understandings of what that looked like at the time. Theirs was a relationship nurtured though international friendships and radical international solidarity. I begin here with my parent's story, more specifically my mother's story, not only because of what it reveals about my origins, but because their union informs two sides of the same coin, fueling this project. Their stories simultaneously help situate my research questions about how youth become radicalized and how those radicalized youth attempt to nurture and develop those political subjectivities over time.

When asked about her introduction to political activism, my mother responded with the details of her earliest encounters with my father and her receptiveness to his political aspirations, despite being all but foreign to her up to that point. In many ways, the story of my mother's radicalization is overwhelmingly shaped by with her encounters with my father, though I think it would be a mistake to attribute her entire process of radicalization to her relationship with him. For certain, my approach to interviewing her was informed by what I brought to the conversation by virtue of being their child and my personal interest in their first encounters. In my mother's repeated narrative of her

[31] In February 1966 while President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana was visiting President Ho Chi Minh of Vietnam, the Ghanaian army and police, financed by the governments of the United States, Britain, West Germany and Israel, organized a successful coup against President Nkrumah and the Convention Peoples Party. Once exiled, President Nkrumah took up residence in Guinea, Conakry at the invitation of President Ahmed Sekou Touré. During his time in Guinea, President Nkrumah authored the *Handbook of Revolutionary Warfare: A Guide to the Armed Phase of the African Revolution*. In this book Nkrumah called for a mass African socialist party which he named as the All-African People's Revolutionary Party. By 1972, Stokely Carmichael had lived with and studied under Presidents Nkrumah and Touré, legally changed his name to honor them and announced the existence of the A-APRP in the United States on the campus of Howard University in October of that year.

process, meeting my father marked a shift in her life that deviated radically from the path she was on by virtue of her upbringing. In addition to her physical attraction to my father, she responded:

> Well… your father would say this is light weight but, when I was a little girl, about twelve or so, the Black Panthers were a big thing and I was in love, I was so enamored with Angela Davis, I thought she was sooo beautiful. When I met your father on my very first day at NC State, he claimed he was attracted to me because I wore an afro. Plenty of women were wearing afros at the time but they were becoming less popular as jerry curls became the more popular hair style of the time. He liked what my afro symbolized, so our first conversations were about the movement.

To a limited extent, my mother's afro was a product of her infatuation with the beauty and power conveyed through images of Angela Davis and her larger than life Afro, however, she continued to wear her fro long after Angela's fro ceased to flash on the nightly news, in part, out of convenience, economics and a bit of personal rebellion. Most little black girls have hair stories that revive a series of mixed emotions including everything from a mother's tender love and care, to vivid memories of the pain caused by quick backhanded pops she might receive once her ability or will to sit still had been surpassed, or worse, being accused of the dreaded capital offense of "tender-headedness." I remember distinctly the frustration my so-called "tender-headedness" caused my mother, particularly, the endless resources she was forced to expend on new combs and blow-dryer pics because my rebellious kinks all but refused to be tamed. With the present proliferation of natural hair care tips and products for Black women, I know now that many of Black women's hair woes result from our victimization by white aesthetic standards and non-indigenous hair care methods. Kinky hair behaves differently and has needs unique from those of silky/straight hair. Many Black women don't wash our hair daily because our hair absorbs moisture in a way that "white people's hair" does not. Our

hair requires regular moisture replenishment in order to remain healthy as opposed to mainstream white aesthetic practices which promote daily "wash-and-gos" to help control unwanted oiliness, making daily hair care a personal racialized battle ground and, therefore, political. Similarly, kinky hair doesn't respond well to being combed from the root, it requires a methodical patience in order to avoid breakage and shrinks as it loses moisture. I am convinced that more indigenous grooming practices better suited to our aesthetic needs would have spared many a black girl from burned ears and comb pops so my mother's choice to continue to wear her afro is informed by these complicated realities and evidences her personal struggle against the cultural imperialism of white aesthetic norms.

I recently re-lived the trauma and tenderness of my own Black girl hair stories in 2014 when my mother and I went to a performance of an independent play in Durham, NC entitled: "*I Love my Hair when its Good and then again when it looks Defiant and Impressive."* Many, if not most, Black women can attest to the journey one must take in order to love their hair in all its defiance. Typically, Black mothers labor to tame the kinks and curls of their girl children's natural born hair and an afro is a very public disavowal of that taming, that taming that caused tears and burned ears in little girls also represented the epitome of love and pride for a black mother. For my father, the "defiant and impressive afro" my mother sported was what signaled to him that she might have a "certain kind of mind." So it is no surprise then that when I came along, my mother imposed her rejection of mainstream white beauty aesthetics on my kinks, a decision that was not easy for either of us. For years, my mother's lupus-ridden arthritic hands struggled to comb and braid my defiant kinks while I struggled to appreciate her labor as

I faced a world that berated my "nappy-hair," and all this was before the current iteration of the public celebration of kinky hair. Despite not necessarily always being an intentionally political act, the choice to wear and accept one's natural kinks is often a turning point in the process of radicalization for little Black girls. It certainly was for me.

Black men fight similar battles against the cultural imperialism of white aesthetic body hair norms. As a grown woman I continue to have a proclivity for men with facial hair, a preference I attribute partially to the fact I was reared and loved predominantly by men with a significant amount of facial hair. Both my father and maternal grandfather have been adamantly defiant about not shaving their various forms of facial hair for as long as I can remember. As a non-commissioned officer in the United States Army, my grandfather repeatedly refused to comply with army regulation demands to shave his mustache, which he allowed to grow fairly long and groomed to look like "handlebars". I am not certain why not cutting his mustache was so significant to my grandfather but it was one of the aesthetic requirements of the military to which he refused to adhere, a standard which for men with coarse hair, similar to the societal preference for long straight hair, is both difficult and often damaging to maintain. My father on the other had, is as clear about his reasons for not shaving his beard and mustache as he is about his desire that I not straighten my hair. He has repeatedly explained that the coarse nature of kinky facial hair (Black facial hair) make constant shaving a painful and unhealthy, conservative and white aesthetic standard.

Even the language of "clean-shaven," implies a value correlation with cleanliness and hairlessness, one that most certainly has had negative implication for men who choose to wear facial hair. Even more so among those for whom Blackness is already

correlated with dirtiness and negativity. In her work *Purity and Danger*, Mary Douglas examines different societal notions of dirtiness and cleanliness and ultimately concluded dirt is simply "matter out of place" (1966, 165). In the above cases of my father and maternal grandfather, to be "clean-shaven" in many parts of the United States is considered a societal norm informed by a particular white male aesthetic. Subsequently, their refusal to shave their facial hair and the otherwise kinkier texture of said facial hair is "out of place" in this society and consequently, read as dirty.

My mother, born in 1961, is the sixth of seven children (two girls and five boys) born to Louie and Rosa Wardlaw, a Sargent Major in the United States Army and a high school social studies teacher, respectively. She was also among the first class to integrate Brentwood Elementary School in 1966. She recalls during the first year de-segregation was implemented in her hometown, parents were allowed to choose whether they would have their children integrate schools or not, though the following year it would be mandatory for all citizens. While many parents of my mother's classmates didn't force their children to integrate during that first year, my grandmother believed integrated schools would provide more opportunities for her children, so they all participated in the integration of their local schools at the first opportunity. Despite being one of less than a dozen black students to integrate her elementary school, she could not recall anything particularly traumatizing about the process.

My mother's hometown of Fayetteville, NC, where Fort Bragg military base sits, is the subject of an anthropological study by Catherine Lutz published in 2001 titled *Homefront: A Military City and the American Twentieth Century*. In it, Lutz explains that through the 1960s the relationship between the city's Black high school, E.E. Smith and

its white high school Fayetteville High, provided an exemplar of race relations in the city writ large. One of her interviewees recalls, "The [old] books that were coming from Fayetteville High were coming to E.E. Smith with a new back on them. The [old] desks were transported from Fayetteville High to E.E. Smith ['] cause they still have names carved in them. But they were [supposedly] separate but equal. The parking lots [at the black schools] were dirt and someone made a complaint and the man suggested they put pine straw in them" (Lutz, 110). She goes on to explain that even though Fort Bragg was relatively formally integrated as U.S. Military bases were at the time, Black folks and white folks in the city of Fayetteville still tended to live in segregated neighborhoods. Despite not having particularly upsetting memories of the process of integration, my mother does not dispute that Fayetteville could be antagonistic, if not downright hostile to its Black denizens.

She recalls a sign on I-95 driving into Fayetteville that read, according to her, "Welcome to Klan Country." She said that sign existed for years, on into the 80s and possibly 90s. I assumed anything that significant had to be documented somewhere so I went to look for evidence and found the picture below, a red sign that reads: "You Are in the Heart of Klan Country, Welcome to North Carolina, Join the United Klans of America, Inc." When I showed it to my mother she was shocked that I was able to find a picture and declared that was indeed the sign. One of the most offensive things she remembers about the sign is that the city never actually took it down, they just let the paint fade over time. As a child growing up in North Carolina with paternal family residing throughout Georgia, Klan sightings were much too frequent for comfort. As a less than ten-year-old child, my mother recalls a family road trip to visit her grandmother

in Georgia where they drove past a Klan rally on a two lane highway. Though shaken up, that sighting was without incident for their family that day but it was certainly enough to raise questions in a child's head about racialized violence and danger in the world.

Figure 17: Klan Country (Source: http://thepriceofsilver.blogspot.com/2006/06/painted-white-welcome-to-klan-country.html)

Later, over the course of her tenure at Brentwood Elementary she remembers attempting to join a Brownie Troop of the Girl Scouts of America. She and a friend named MaryAnn filled out their applications and took them to school with the hopes of being accepted in the troop. For weeks, they kept checking the list to see if they had been admitted and they were repeatedly told that their applications had not been received. They were never officially rejected from membership but it was clear that the troop had no intentions of admitting them to membership. My mother believed she was not admitted because she was Black and even though MaryAnn was white, she was also poor, what many referred to as "PWT" or "poor white trash," so they were equally undesirable for membership. My mother also revealed that her disappointment over not being admitted to the Girl Scouts as a child is why she never let me join. I always believed it

was my father driving the anti-Girl Scouts campaign because of their American patriotic rhetoric but to discover that my mother shared my father's dislike for them, despite having a different reason, is something of which I was never actually aware.

When probed more about why she was so receptive to my father's political inclinations, which were different from the values her parents instilled in her, she reflected on her time as a middle school student. She recalls being hyperaware of the racial prejudice she faced in middle-school, much more so than in elementary school. She proudly recalled her willingness to repeatedly inform her teachers that they were prejudiced and didn't like Black people. Her indignation with her teachers did not only stem from her personal classroom experiences. My mother says she often overheard her parents discussing my grandmother's negative racial encounters with her fellow teachers at the high school where she taught social studies. A great deal however, came from her ability to recognize unequal disciplinary treatment of fellow Black classmates. According to my mother, one of her teachers, Mr. Faircloth, would always immediately blame, chastise or discipline the Black students in class anytime there was a disruption, he never even considered that one of the white students might be contributing. The constant disciplinary actions Black students faced is most certainly a pre-curser to the school-to-prison pipeline, one of the most detrimental ramifications of educational desegregation.

While all of my mother's siblings participated in the process of desegregating Fayetteville public schools, all but my mother and one of her brothers chose to pursue their undergraduate educations at historically black colleges and universities. One of my uncles chose to attend Appalachian State University in Boone, NC, after receiving a full

athletic scholarship to play quarterback on their football team and my mother chose to attend North Carolina State University, where she met my father. My mother was a fairly good student and despite having a school teacher for a mother, neither of her parents attended college after leaving high school. Her father actually never completed school beyond the eleventh grade and her mother attended college later in life, after having birthed seven children, thanks to a husband with a military compensation that allowed him to financially support her educational pursuits at the same time as her eldest child. In 1969, a local newspaper, the Fayetteville Observer, ran a feature story about my grandmother and aunt entering college as Freshmen at the same time.

Notwithstanding some of the educational, social and occupational opportunities afforded to my mother and her family, she explained that while some black people were being afforded many new opportunities she was able to recognize a significant amount of racial and other tensions bubbling immediately below the surface. She notes, "We were keenly aware of the existing prejudices around us. Our parents didn't deny those prejudices existed because they themselves had to face it all the time. At the very lowest level I just didn't believe white people could think we were equal to them." She continued, "I became introduced through Wesley and was receptive to the whole nationalist black power thing but the African thing was really new and I had to take it a step at a time. I had never thought of myself as an African growing up and it was something that was really introduced to me by your father and I was open to learning because I was interested in your father. I was raised as American as apple pie and my father was in the military, we were very Black American but not totally patriotic, we felt like we had a different row to hoe." It's not surprising that my mother could identify

Black nationalist inclinations in her childhood, particularly given that she came of age on the heels of segregation. In an anti-Black world, one's Blackness is, as Fanon would say, a social uniform intended to alienate and often the source of internal battles of self-worth (1967). This "fact of Blackness" results in a type of existence that forces a continual recognition of one's outsider status in mainstream society and to concern oneself with membership in the smaller, marginalized community. If, as Ward claims, the "psychological survival of a black child largely depends on the black family's ability to endure racial and economic discrimination," then it stands to reason that as a reasonably happy and cared for child, she would possess some positive or at least defiant understanding of her Blackness (1996, 86). The fact of my mother's Blackness, growing up in Fayetteville, NC allowed her to understand her fate as linked to the rest of the people who looked like her and shared similar life conditions but, she had not yet arrived at a place where she could see herself and her fate as linked with people in Africa.

When asked about some of the things that made it easier, other than my father, to help begin to conceptualize herself as African rather than simply Black she attributed it to "hearing Peter Tosh and Bob Marley's music at the time," reading *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and familiarizing herself with other speeches and writings of Malcolm X. In 1979, the same year my mother became a freshman at NCSU, Bob Marley was arguably at the height of his global career and making more and more daring politically charged music. This same year Bob Marley performed his second-to-last world tour with the Wailers entitled the Survival Tour which included hits like *Africa Unite*, *Survival*, *Zimbabwe* and many more.

In *Africa Unite* Marley mused about "*how good and how pleasant it would be, before God and Man, to see the unification of all Africans*." In *Survival*, he reminded his listeners of the resilience of Black people, the children of Africa, all over, despite often having nothing when he said "*We're the survivors, yes: the Black survivors! I tell you what: some people got everything; Some people got nothing; Some people got hopes and dreams; Some people got ways and means.*" He even declared that most of us will indeed be mistreated and undervalued in what we understand to be our own homes "*Yes, the Black survivors! We're the survivors: A good man is never honoured (survivors) in his own country (Black survival). Nothing change, nothing strange (survivors)*," above all though, we black people must survive. Finally, in *Zimbabwe* he created an anthem to celebrate the victory of Robert Mugabe and the guerrilla struggles for liberation against the Rhodesian government declaring "*Every man gotta right to decide his own destiny, And in this judgment there is no partiality. So arm in arms, with arms, we'll fight this little struggle, 'Cause that's the only way we can overcome our little trouble*."

In addition to Bob Marley fostering a global awareness about African liberation, my mother notes that the wisdom and experiences of Malcolm X's story also had a profound impact on her. One of Malcolm's many sayings that continues to resonate with my mother today and one that she often shared with us as children is the kitten-biscuit metaphor he posed in a debate about the politics of naming ourselves as Black people. In the debate he posed the following question "*If a cat has kittens in an oven does that make them biscuits?"* This particular question posed in this way allowed my mother to rethink her understanding of her own Americanness. Asked another way, if an African, who was forcibly displaced from their homeland gives birth in their captive land of America, does

that make their babies American?" According to Malcom X, the answer to that question was emphatically no. In fact, in his 1964 *Ballot or the Bullet* Speech he declared, "We're not Americans, we're Africans who happen to be in America. We were kidnapped and brought here against our will." That some of us were brought here hundreds of years ago is, for Malcolm and for my parents, relatively inconsequential when making assertions about identity. We are only here today because we were kidnapped and forcibly displaced years ago, as such, we did not make the decision to be Americans all those years ago, it in fact was not even an option. This question and his subsequent assertion directly challenge the notion that Black people in the United States, or anywhere we were transported to as slaves, should identify with the land of their captivity, simply because they were born there. Being exposed to the logic of these two figures served as a primer for my mother in what was to come as she entered college and became more and more politically exposed to people who identified as Pan-Africanists.

Over time as she revisited Malcolm's work, another of his iconic quotes came to resonate. In 1965 Malcolm declared, "you can't hate the roots of a tree, and not hate the tree. You can't hate your origin and not end up hating yourself. You can't hate Africa and not hate yourself." The "hate" in this quote can be understood to exist in varying degrees for some, but this hate can also be interpreted as an unwillingness to know and accept our connection to the continent as displaced Africans. In an attempt to deconstruct some of this hatred, one of the daily practices of some party members, including my parents, was to refer to one another as Africans. In greeting one another, it was not uncommon to hear someone say "what's up African" or "how you doing African." The practice of calling out to one another in a manner that affirms an otherwise stigmatized identity is, in effect,

an attempt to disrupt what Althusser refers to as the process of *interpellation* which describes being called out to and subsequently responding to that calling out, in a manner that creates us as subjects of a particular ideology. According to Althusser, "all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects" with the most commonplace form of hailing occurring when the state (a police officer) calls out to a citizen by yelling "Hey, you there!" (2001, 117) He offers the following as further explanation:

> There are individuals walking along. Somewhere (usually behind them) the hail rings out: 'Hey, you there!' One individual (nine times out of ten it is the right one) turns round, believing/suspecting/knowing that it is for him, i.e. recognizing that 'it really is he' who is meant by the hailing. But in reality these things happen without any succession. The existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellation of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing. (2001, 118)

In the case of displaced Africans in the Americas, most of us are interpellated as poor, lazy, second-class citizens. W.E.B. Dubois and Frantz Fanon have famously shown the very different experience of being interpellated as Black under racism, and the double consciousness of knowing and yet refusing that name that can develop in its wake. In response to regularly being referred to as everything other than what they prefer to answer to, the African Diasporic proverb "it's not what you call me, but what I answer to," serves as a prescription for combating racial inequality with self-love. For my parents and members of the party, to be called out as an African and to respond to that calling out in recognition of that identity is to circumvent the ways in which peoples of African descent are constructed as a people without history. It is a rejection of the notion that our histories and stories begin with our enslavement and subsequent displacement in the Americas. To identify and be identified as African is, in fact, the reason many of my

parents' friends changed their names to African names during this time. Though my parents chose not to change their own names, they did choose to give all of their children African names, a story which I explore below

In some respects, his evolution from Malcolm Little to Malcom X and ultimately El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz or more specifically his trajectory through the Black Nationalist philosophies of the Nation of Islam to a more Pan-African ideology evidenced through his creation of the Organization of Afro-American Unity is similar to my mother's political development. As she continued to reflect on her own political development she revealed that "especially with me being born in Germany, it made sense after listening to the rationale, why I would be an African and I always bought into the notion that we didn't have first class status in this county and there had to be a reason… so I became very much convinced that it was tied to our Africaness. Then the vastness of Africa's wealth was explained to me, specifically the need to harvest and dominate that wealth and why it was important to make us think of ourselves differently. That is what allowed me to accept the fact that I am an African. I had always experienced racism in my life so as I put it together, it began to make sense for me. Then I got to hear Kwame Ture (Stokely Carmichael) speak while in college and working with the A-APRP… he always made it so simple and easy to understand, he was very charismatic and always very nice to me."

Despite the fact that my mother credits my father for her involvement in the radical international political movement, as well as introducing her to understanding herself as "African" rather than just "Black," it is clear that she believed there was already something about her experiences as a black girl growing up in the south that

made her defiant in her own right and receptive to radical politics, even if she couldn't readily remember the details of every incident. Ultimately, my mother concludes that her racial awareness as a child sparked a defiant nature in her but she wasn't always clear about how to best direct or utilize that defiance. The communities of "radical" or "revolutionary" peoples she encountered in college were jarring because they were different from what she had been exposed to growing up in a Christian-military family in Fayetteville. Yet, she was excited and intrigued.

When asked about her earliest encounters with campus politics or events centered around a political theme in college she remembers being overwhelmed. By virtue of her personal relationship with my father she began spending time with various political organizations on campus very early in her college career and became a member of the A-APRP almost immediately. As a member, she had to participate in and contribute to the work of the organization which she confesses overwhelmed her a bit at times. She said "I feel like I got thrown into the fire. I mean I guess that was their way of doing things but I would never do that to anyone. They were recruiting for the A-APRP on either NCSU, Shaw or St. Augustine's campus. I was often asked to stand up and speak publicly about my role in the organization. I was on the administration committee and I was like, I have no idea what this is and you got me up here explaining what I do. I was about 18 years old not even really knowing what I was getting into at all." The feeling of being thrown into the fire will recur frequently in the stories told here. While people often feel tremendous pressure when they are forced to experience the fire, it appears to be one of the pivotal rites of passage for youth organizers that allows them to decide if they want to continue with their political activism or if they want to take another route. For this

reason, my mother's feelings about her trial by fire really resonated with me on a personal level.

For my mother, like other young people before and after her fortunate enough to have access to higher education, college was the foundation of her political education, it was the moment in her life where she was introduced to people from different countries, who spoke different languages and possessed different spiritual understandings of the world. It was the context in which her own political consciousness was raised and her point of entry into organization building. As she continued to reflect on her political exposure and development in college she shared that what she remembers as most gratifying and impactful from very early on was the opportunity to meet different people from all over the continent of Africa and elsewhere in the world. For my mother, college truly was a "different world from where she came from," a world inhabited by "other kinds of Black people", people she had never encountered before and of whose existence, quite frankly, she was totally unaware. One of the day-to-day actives of the A-APRP was the work-study circle which existed in order to familiarize members with the ideological stance of the organization. These work-study circles exposed members to reading material they could debate, discuss and ask questions about in order to think about practical situations.

In recalling a source of tension in her thoughts about the political work as time moved forward she said, "I think my comfort always waxed and waned with the party, sometimes because of the demands they put on your life, doing seminars, having to pass out leaflets, knock on doors, etc., I wasn't always comfortable but I was forced out there to do it. Larger events, like when Kwame would come to town were easy. African

Liberation Day was OK but I always hated being required to speak. I always had this push and pull ambivalence about the political work and my daily life, that was always nerve-wracking." This push and pull is often present in the lives of folks who live and work in national or local environments that are hostile to them and their survival for any number of reasons. It is often one of the primary things that can end up pushing people out, especially women, because when faced with the short term consequences (unemployment which can ultimately result in not being able to feed, house and clothe their children) without a properly effective and supportive community, the day-to-day needs often win out, even if they might be detrimental to the long term goals of liberation.

Equally significant in her intellectual development was being exposed to "other kinds of Black people" from the continent, and forging deep friendships and connections with Middle-Eastern students. "In 1979 there was the so-called hostage crisis where Iranian students held Americans hostage at the US Embassy in Tehran. As a result of the media coverage of the crisis, Iranian students on campus were catching hell from ignorant students on campus. Despite the difficulties they were experiencing with the majority of students on the campus they took so much time to explain things to us and to give their understanding of what their lives were like in Iran under the Ayatollahs. The other big thing for me was meeting the Palestinian people. It was very impactful for me, to understand the history and the establishment of the state of Israel. As I learned what the Palestinian people had been fighting for, I had a deep amount of respect for Yasser Arafat and how he led the Palestinian people. Being embraced by the Palestinian students had a profound impact on me as a college student." Although I have no recollection of my

parents' college comrades, they have managed to have a lasting impression in my parents' lives as well as my own.

According to my mother, some of their closest Palestinian friends were the Quaddumi brothers (Lutuf & Romi), Nasser and Khalud (a married couple) who, all, at that time, identified with the Fatah political wing of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and Fawzi Arafat who identified with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) wing of the PLO. They were also the ones who suggested my parents name me Leila and Dalal. My mother ultimately chose a Swahili iteration of the Palestinian name Leila, spelled Layla, but the shared linguistic Arabic origins make the meaning of the name relatively consistent in Arabic and Swahili. Fawzi Arafat suggested the name Leila in homage to Leila Khaled, member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). She is credited as the first woman to highjack an airliner and was later released in a prisoner exchange for civilian hostages kidnapped by her fellow PFLP members. Currently, she serves as a member of the Palestinian National Council. Khaled became popularly known for her role in a 1969 hijacking and one of four simultaneous hijackings the following year as part of the Black September events. Leila in Arabic literally means "night" but is also understood as meaning "Born at Night," "the essence of Night,"" Dark-haired Beauty," or "Dark Beauty." The name Dalal was suggested in homage to Dalal Mughrabi, a Palestinian militant and freedom fighter who was a member of the Fatah faction of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). The literal Arabic meaning of the name is coquettish or flirtatious, however, the names were chosen with the idea that something about those women after whom I was named, would manifest in my own radical becoming. My mother told me, "when I was a new mother, I

believed that giving my children African names, names from significant places in our history with meanings they were aware of, would make my children stronger… I thought it would make them prouder to be African and I always thought it was necessary for them to be surrounded with positive images of black people through black books and black dolls and black centered things, to go to black museums and to know about the civil rights movement and to teach you all freedom songs. It was important to me to teach you all things I thought were important for your self-esteem and development."

I actually remember two distinct instances in which I saw this in practice. Before the proliferation of Hallmark's Mahogany greeting cards that were specifically marketed toward African Americans, I remember my mother searching high and low for Black greeting cards for things like holidays and birthdays. When she was unable to find such cards, she actually colored them in with crayons or colored pencils. On a separate occasion, I remember someone decided to gift me a white baby doll which infuriated my mother. I do not remember who actually gave me the doll but I recall my mother asserting that she was going to give the doll back and she was highly insulted that I was given the white doll. I think it important to mention here that in my mother's day job, she teaches workshops on diversity and inclusion in the workplace and she regularly shows footage from both Jane Elliot's brown eye/blue eye classroom experiment and the Clark and Clark Doll Test in order to facilitate discussions about racial stereotyping and discrimination. I don't doubt that her constant reckoning with these experiments made the gift of the white doll even more contentious than it already was for my parents. That doll experiment reveals the ways in which Black children are negatively impacted by the constant bombardment with images that promote white beauty and portray blackness as

ugly. My parents made a decision before we were born to do their best to mitigate the messages we receive from the world that attempt to make us believe we are less intelligent, less attractive, or less worthy. Hence my mother's refusal to allow me to play with white dolls at home. I do not doubt that I played with white dolls at friends' houses but my parents decided that their home would be filled with affirming images of our Africanness.

To this day my parents' home is decorated with framed portraits of Harriett Tubman, Paul Robeson, Malcolm X and a Black version of the Last Supper, in addition to art sculptures from various African communities in the Americas and on the continent of Africa. My parents also believed, as was popular at the time among their peers, that it was important to give their children African names, but not just any African name, names that evoked history, carried political messages and evoked pride and a sense of self in their children. In addition to Layla and Dalal, my parents' South African friends suggested the Zulu name Zanele meaning "that's enough." Each of my three siblings and I share the name Sekou which my parents understood to mean "warrior," but I have also seen translated as "wise" or "educators." The name was given to us in remembrance of Sekou Touré, the first president of independent Guinea. Each of my brothers was named after Kwame Nkrumah and Patrice Lumumba, the first president and prime minister of independent Ghana and Congo, respectively. As I've explored above, the politics of naming are important on an individual as well as community level. For my parents, however, it represented an early form of a pan-African parental praxis that continues to shape my interactions with my parents and their expectations of me to this day.

When I asked about some of the specific organizing campaigns they were involved with in addition to their annual African Liberation day commemorations and their regular work-study circles my mother replied that they "were not as involved with the divestment movement, we were much more connected to the South African students living on the campus and their political struggles for self-determination in relation to their homeland. We were more interested in their liberation struggle rather than the divestment movement which we saw as something more of interest to outsiders. We felt like the divestment movement was for white kids, or even Black kids who couldn't so much identify with being African but were in search of a way to be involved. We supported the divestment movement but we took the lead from our South African comrades which led us to be more interested in South African organizations more so than the international divestment movement." That my mother considered the South African divestment movement in the United States to be sort of light weight speaks volumes about her political development up to that point. Participation in the divestment campaigns of the late 1970s and 80s is an activist badge of honor for the youth of my mother's generation, much like having "marched with Dr. King" was a badge of honor for the generation before her. To proudly proclaim a different level of involvement in the international politics of her youth must be understood as another layer in her process of radicalization.

bell hooks' critique of the deployment of the term "ally" in racial, political, economic and sexuality struggles offers some insight for understanding the impetus behind my mothers' critique of the divestment movement as an outsider movement. In "Black Female Voices: Who Is Listening, A Public Dialogue" between bell hooks and Melissa Harris Perry hosted by the New School in November 2013, bell hooks questioned

the use of the word "ally." She argued that "people who are standing on their own anti-patriarchal or anti-sexist beliefs are not allies, they are on their own front line in the same way I am on my own front line." While the divestment movement certainly constitutes the "front lines" for certain groups of people, as a member of the A-APRP, my mother, father and their political comrades did not understand divestment as their front line. Through her work with the A-APRP up to that point informed by Pan-Africanist ideology, she came to believe that as a displaced African, hers was a fate linked to that of the continent of Africa and its peoples. Consequently, she understood herself to be more intimately connected to the struggles of the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania at the time, an understanding that led her to choose to remain close to the South African students and community she had become acquainted with while in college rather than to focus her energies on divestment initiatives.

In 1980, the All African Women's Revolutionary Union formed inside of the A-APRP[32] in an attempt to address issues of women's oppression and liberation inside the Pan-African movement. The AAWRU "was formed to address the oppression of women from a gendered Pan-Africanist perspective. The race/class/gender analysis emphasized the 'triple burden' carried by women of African descent." The irony, according to Bahati Kuumba, is "that AAWRU work often became a fourth burden and a form of oppression as a result of the breakdowns in the implementation of the race/class/gender informed praxis" (1999, 181) Additionally, Kuumba argues, "the very structure of the AAWRU created tasks for women in the A-APRP over and above their regular A-APRP duties,

[32] A detailed history of the development of the AAWRU can be found in the 10th chapter of Kimberly Springer's edited collection *Still Lifting, Still Climbing: African American Women's Contemporary Activism*, "Engendering the Pan-African Movement: Field Notes from the All African Women's Revolutionary Union" authored by Bahati Kuumba.

which included AAWRU meetings, organizing and attending programs on women, and coordinating the Young Pioneers Institute" (YPI, the youth wing of the party) (181). In recalling the formation of the AAWRU, my mother says they "had several meetings over the years leading up to the big meeting in Ohio. I didn't tell my parents about the meeting because I knew they wouldn't want me to go. I also traveled to New York for another Women's Union meeting and stayed with one of my father's relatives. I remember a lot of plenary sessions. I remember I had to write a paper on democratic centralism for which I cut and pasted most of the information," another of the trial-by-fire moments that created such anxiety in my mother as she continued to work with the A-APRP.

She recalls that "In the party, there was still a lot of the carryover from the 60s and 70s about the position of women inside of the movement." By which I think she meant to imply that there was a general resistance to "feminist rhetoric" because it was seen as a white woman's issue and often viewed as divisive, by male leadership and to a lesser extent some female members, when brought up inside of Black political organizations. "The fact that women still generally lacked power and political influence in addition to child care being a big issue. A lot of the women in the party were young with young children so we felt like we needed to organize over those issues in order to be properly represented in leadership, in order to not have the burden of childcare heaped upon women." According to a survey conducted by Bahati Kuumba in 1990 of AAWRU members, 53 percent were still attending college, 73 percent had children, 66 percent were working full time, and 63 percent were the primary or sole care-givers for their children (Kuumba 2001, 180).

My mother continued, "in order to keep women from being relegated to roles of secretaries, not just secretaries in the big S sense (in the official structure of the party) but also in the little s sense (being required to run errands and be primarily responsible for the reproductive labor of the organization) that women needed to be organized and united in order to be able to address these issues and needed to be united on how we would approach addressing these issues and it was part of the basis. Also, the All African Women's Revolutionary Union was formed on the basis of internal struggles inside of the party but also understanding what other revolutionary movements were going through across the world. Our Palestinian, Eritrean, South African comrades' struggles to organize their women and to some an extent, Zimbabwean women's struggles inside of their government informed our own attempts to organize ourselves as women. Just recognizing that women had contributions to make and were in fact already making them made us realize that if we wanted to stay ahead that we were going to have to organize as well. We needed to recognize our own strengths and weaknesses and have some frank discussions about those things."

Without going into a lot of detail, my mother recalled the AAWRU of the A-APRP in North Carolina had fewer tensions around issues of gender and childcare than some of the chapters in larger cities. This can be attributed to the very close-knit, largely familial ties of the North Carolina chapter and the non-party affiliated provisions for childcare, like extended family members. I personally remember spending a great deal of time with my maternal grandparents and extended family, including aunts, uncles, cousins, etc. during my childhood. Unlike many of the "movement children," who in Blake's work are depicted as resentful of their parents' political lives, I do not remember

ever feeling neglected or resentful of my parents' political work at any point in my life. That is not to say that I always understood everything they were doing, nor that I wanted to participate in everything they required we participate in. I am fully aware, however, of my parents' attempts to always explain to us, and involve us as much as possible in their work. I am equally grateful for the balance they attempted to provide which prevented us from being jaded movement children.

Given the religious and military background of my mother's family, I inquired about their response to her new found political identity upon going off to college. Somewhat surprisingly, my grandparents attempted to allow my mother to make her own decisions despite some of the issues it raised for them. "I have to give it to my parents," my mother replied, "my mom especially, I'm sure she was horrified but she was receptive, she was willing to listen… I think my dad was equally or more horrified but they did a good job not interfering. They never made me feel like I couldn't come and tell them something. I was really fortunate to have a mother who was in the position to care for you all which allowed me to be free to both work and be politically involved. She would come stay with you in our home or let me drop you at her house." Unfortunately, my grandmother passed away very early in my graduate studies so I didn't have the opportunity to inquire about her own feelings during this period in my mother's life. Without her own account, I cannot make any definitive declarations about her intentions, however, whether she would admit it or not, my grandmother's willingness to take care of my younger brother and me when my parents participated in political activities that they did not feel comfortable or did not desire to take us to, and my grandparents' willingness to, on occasion, financially support some of their political

endeavors certainly helped facilitate my mother's continued participation in party work even after she became a mother.

I have been keenly aware of my mother's health issues since I was a small child, but only during the course of these interviews did I realize that my mother's Lupus diagnosis at 28 years old (my brother and I were only two and three years-old respectively) had almost taken her life. In reflecting on the assistance my grandparents provided them in caring for us as children, my mother revealed the doctor's difficulty in diagnosing her illness in the beginning. In fact, they had such difficulty that they called the family in to get her affairs in order because they believed she would not make it. Of course during this time my mother's political activity halted, my grandmother came to live with and care for us, and my father spent the majority of his time between work and the hospital with my mother, continuing his political work in whatever ways he could at the time. Despite the stress of a potentially life threatening illness, my mother believes that the work life balance she had then was much better than it is now, even as all of her children are adults. She says she will always be grateful to my grandparents for their unconditional support during that time.

When asked to what she attributed the decline in her involvement with party politics, my mother responded, "Part of it is being older, also some of the things that were easier to organize around in the 70s and 80s have been resolved to an extent. One of our major focal points at one time was to make people understand themselves as an African people along with the need to have some sort of allegiance to Africa, specifically that part of what explained our largely miserable state of existence in the world had to do with the fact that Africa as a continent was being exploited." "This" she explained, "is really a

fight against the idea of rampant individualism that so characterizes the American experiences. The nature of struggle for black folks in the US has really changed; people have really bought into the idea of meritocracy and don't think of black people as a collectivity in the same way they did in previous moments of social upheaval." In some respects, I take this reflection to mean that the same work they were doing then must be reinvigorated. More significantly though, I read this quote as a declaration of fatigue, a very specific kind of fatigue. I have often heard both my parents express exhausted disdain at the fact that Black/African peoples my age and younger still grapple with what it means to wear our natural kinks, and see beauty in our physical selves regardless of how deeply melaninated our skin might be. That some of my peers still won't play in the sun too long for fear of becoming darker, or won't play near the water for fear of their kinks reverting to their natural state, and/or covet light skinned partners with green eyes so they will have "pretty babies" are some of the more superficial struggles we should have overcome by now. I'm not sure the word "resolved" fully conveys her sentiments but when she says that to me, what I hear is her telling me is that she's tired and it's our generation's turn to wage those struggles.

When asked if she would do anything differently, my mother seemed to momentarily experience a period of deep reflection and replied, "I think I would probably… I might encourage a little more fantasy in your life; I think it might make you more creative. I think fantasy spawns creativity. I think being so brutally honest with you all about things we thought were apolitical like the Easter bunny and santa claus, could have waited. I think, I would... I don't think you had to be confronted with the truth about everything at such a young age. Like not letting you all celebrate Christmas

in a big way… I just think I would have allowed you to indulge in that a little more. I think conversations about slavery were very necessary but, in some ways, I feel like you were sobered so quickly to life, you became far too cynical too soon." This reflection did not come as a surprise to me because I vaguely remember some of those disputes between my parents from my childhood. My mother only mentioned things like Christmas and the Easter Bunny here but I know that she was referring to something much more significant than holidays.

My brother and I both have a tendency to approach life with a kind of cynicism that can, at times, be counter-productive for creative thinking, or even taking certain kinds of risks. I do not disagree with her that we likely became too cynical too soon, however I don't fully share my mother's regret, and I know that they did for us what most parents attempt to do for their children, love and prepare them for the world in the best way they know how at the moment. Ultimately, I appreciate the work they did to foster the kind of righteous indignation that allows me to be vocal about how the world should be rather than passively accept the way it is. It can be lonely at times but, I find it results more often in more meaningful relationships when the barriers of cynicism can be broken through.

A LITTLE ON MY FATHER'S STORY

Born in the middle of thirteen children to a city sanitation workers and a domestic worker on the south side of Chicago, my father's childhood was full of life changing turning points. He recalls that in 1962 the family moved into a house on the far south side of Chicago in the Morgan Park neighborhood area. In terms of racial demographics

Chicago then was much like it is now, extremely diverse as a city but one of the most residentially segregated areas in the country. Most of my dad's neighbors growing up came up from Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia, so he really grew up around mostly southern Black folks or folks like his family who had roots down south. However, unlike most of his neighbors, my father's family did not have the experience of growing up going down south like many of his neighbors because he was actually the third generation in his family to be born in Chicago.

Because his father (my paternal grandfather) was killed when my dad was about eight years old, my father was raised primarily by his mother and mother dear (his grandmother) with most of his male influences being his brothers. It is no surprise then that their political or movement activities would be very influential in his own political development, particularly his older brothers Bob and Roy who were about 7 and 3 years his senior respectively. He says he remembers a strong aversion to the church, thinking the church was a really conservative force and it bred docility in the community, in fact their house was across from a church but he has no recollection of that church having any relationship to the community beyond their church members.

One of the earliest pivotal movements in my father's life, other than the death of his own father, occurred when he was around eight-years-old. My father remembers my grandmother's militancy in her willingness to fight for whatever she had chosen to fight for, she didn't do social organizing or anything but what she cared about she was willing to fight for. By age eight, my father remembers having been in plenty of formerly integrated spaces but that he didn't really have many—if any—developed relationships with non-Black folks outside of school. He recalls sitting in his Morgan Park home as an

eight-year-old in August of 1963 doing homework as the March on Washington played on the television. In telling the story of watching the march he noted that it was kind of an all-day affair. At times he was paying attention and at other times not so much but he remembered it playing on the television all day, almost as a backdrop to the day. Much like the broadcasting of the 20th anniversary of the Million Man March in 2015, anyone who might have been unable to attend the march could tune in throughout the day to find out what was going on in the comfort of their own homes.

At such a young age it is difficult to recall such occurrences in detail, however, that the march played in the background for the majority of that day left a significant impression on him as a young child, even if he may not have been fully aware of its significance at the time. In addition to the March on Washington, 1963 was a significant year across various communities and interest groups in the United States. In September of 1963, four little girls were forever immortalized after the 16th Street Baptist Church terrorist bombing in Birmingham, Alabama. Again in November of that year, my father remembers watching broadcasts after U.S. President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas while riding in a presidential motorcade, an assassination many saw as a major blow to the civil rights movement. Perhaps more significantly in my father's imagination is that 1963 was also the year of the *Children's Crusade* when hundreds of school children in Birmingham, Alabama walked out of public schools protesting segregation, among other social issues. Chicago too saw its own wave of mass demonstrations, many of which were also led by public school children, some of whom were my uncles Bob and Roy.

Around Christmas of 1964, although his memory is a little fuzzy on the details, my father recalls seeing gifts under the Christmas Tree for the family only to watch them disappear a few days later. His mother had taken the gifts she purchased for her children and sent them down south (Mississippi), likely through CORE & Dick Gregory because it was the organization my uncle was most actively involved with at the time, for the children in rural areas who were struggling with both the poverty and the reality of living in the US South during the height of the Civil Rights movement. He recalls being upset about not getting Christmas gifts that year but in retrospect he remembers it as an important but over often overlooked way that the Civil Rights movement affected the masses of people all over the country, not just in the rural south. Perhaps even more significantly, it was also indicative of the way his other brother's political involvement as a teenager was shifting the political perspectives of members of his household.

A LITTLE MORE ON MY UNCLE BOB

My Uncle Bob is about seven years older than my father. Thus, he was old enough to have experienced the murder and subsequent handling of Emmitt Till's lynching in 1955, much like my generation experienced and was galvanized by Trayvon Martin's murder and subsequent media trial. My father credits much of his own early consciousness development to my Uncle Bob and believes that Emmitt Till's death was an early catalyst for the political force that he would become.

I briefly rehearse my Uncle's political affiliations because his political trajectory is important to understanding my father's path and thus my own, including my work in Venezuela, as I've mentioned. While my father recalls vicariously witnessing the March

on Washington, the assassination of John F. Kennedy in 1963, the Birmingham Church bombing and subsequent rebellions as well as nation-wide school walkouts, something else happened that he attributes to the early stirrings of his own political awareness. It was the year that my Uncle joined the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE).

After graduating high school, despite the urgings of teachers, family and friends, my uncle opted to attend the Loop Junior College in lieu of the more prestigious University of Chicago. Although he dropped out after 2 semesters to work full-time for the movement, during his brief enrollment, he managed to win an elected position in student government. By 1972, he enrolled in Shaw's University Without Walls Program, where he earned a Bachelor of Arts degree and played an instrumental role in getting Dr. J. Archie Hargraves appointed as President of the School. Incidentally, Shaw is the oldest Historically Black University in the south and the birthplace of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). During his time at Shaw he was able to find funding to bring five of his brothers to study there (my father included).

In addition to his membership in the Chicago Chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality from 1963-1968, Uncle Bob also served as director of the Midwest Office of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee from1967-1968 and co-founder of the Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party (1968-1969). He has worked with and supported hundreds of progressive and revolutionary movements, organizations and governments in every corner of Africa, the African Diaspora and the World. He is currently an organizer for the All-African People's Revolutionary Party (GC) (1972 to present), a member of the Pan-Africanist Congress of Azania, and co-director of the Kwame Ture Institute.

He has authored a book entitled *Slavery and the Slave Trade Were and Are Crimes Against Humanity*; edited the new edition of *Stokely Speaks: From Black Power to Pan-Africanism;* and contributed an interview to *We Have Not Been Moved: Resisting Racism and Militarism in 21st Century America*. He has logged in over 53 years of work, study and struggle in the student and youth; human and civil rights; African liberation, Black Power and Pan-African; socialist; anti-war and anti-draft; anti-Zionist and anti-repression movements. My family's lives and work serve as a foundation for this work, this was my momma and daddy's (and uncle's) civil rights/Black Power movement and I know for a fact that it is on their shoulders, theirs and their comrades, that politically active youth of my day stand.

A BRIEF MEDITATION ON BEING OUR FATHER'S DAUGHTERS

My sister gave birth to a baby girl last year, the first to be born in our nuclear family since me. She recently sent us a video of my niece sitting in a toy car, leaning back, drinking a juice bag and lazily pretending to steer the car as my sister pushed. At less than 18 months old, my nice has a permanently content yet slightly furrowed brow. The standard look on her face is somehow both satisfied and unimpressed, unless she is moved to give us more, which takes a lot. As we exchanged pleasantries about "how cool" she always is, my dad commented "she is just too cool, almost like she's been here before. She reminds me of myself, or perhaps even Layla." He then proceeded to tell my sister to watch out because we have a tendency to be "quiet about the small stuff, and explosive about the stuff that matters, laid back but also very serious."

I began this section thinking about what it means to be a child of the movement through a brief exploration of Bokar Ture's attempts to learn about and carry the torch of his father's legacy. Many of the other subjects in Blake's Children of the Movement have very complicated and bitter relationships with their parents, who were leaders in various organizations during the Civil Rights Era. One could only imagine the stress and uncertainty of such a life. Though none of our fathers ever rose to the level of prominence of the parents covered by Blake, myself and two other young women, around my age, are the product of fathers in particular with a stronger than average commitment to various brands of left-leaning politics. I have already shared a great deal of my story and to a lesser extent, Roraima's. I would like here to think briefly about an observation that I never really explicitly explored over the course of my research but keeps seeming to bubble to the surface.

Three twenty-something Black women, Roraima, Desmera and myself, were all raised in different locations, with different, yet related political ideologies, but all with largely healthy, yet still complicated relationships to their fathers. As a child, I was constantly made aware of my Africanness/Blackness and the meaning it carried. It was not until I went off to college however, that I realized I was a woman and understood that was supposed to mean something different in the world. My mother did, probably 99% of the cooking in our home, except when she traveled for work. We never knew if we should be excited or bummed when she would leave because my father had exactly three dishes in his cooking repertoire, most of which were tomato based, spaghetti, chili and hamburger helper. On great weeks, he'd treat us to fast food, but most of the time we would knew exactly what the menu would be. I never associated this with any gendered

expectation because most of the men in my family could cook and could do so well, so I just assumed my father was bad at it, not that he expected my mother to cook *because* she was a woman.

Cleaning responsibilities were always shared, both inside and outside the house. Saturday mornings were replete with music blasting from the stereo as we cleaned house and then all migrated to yard work. My father's mother was a domestic worker who cleaned others' houses so often that thought of cleaning her own exhausted her so all thirteen of her children were experts in the cleaning department. My mother always helped with my language arts and social studies homework growing up and my dad helped with science and math. My mother had majored in communications in college and my father had been studying the electrical trade since he was 15-years-old, so again I attributed their division of labor to what they were good at. I remember them both taking part in our bedtime rituals when I was small. Because my father was neither a church-goer, nor a stickler for military-brand discipline and his ideological beliefs raised doubts in him about the effectiveness of corporal punishment, I never really experienced fearing my father in any significant way. Additionally, because he believed in the merits of spirited debate, I was always encouraged to speak my mind. I know now that both my parents went through a great deal of trouble to shield me from sexist and ageist expectations most people had of girl children.

So when I began college and started to notice interesting gender dynamics I was a little caught off guard. I remember the first time I witnessed a man in one of my classes say exactly what I said, just after I said, and everyone appeared to hear him so clearly and agree with him. I was incensed, because like I said, I had honestly NEVER experienced

this before. In high school I just knew all boys I didn't think were cute had to be stupid so I never paid them much attention. My mentor and now close friend Baiyina Muhammad was the first person who actually offered me a kind of language to articulate what I was experiencing as sexism and the specific ways it manifested in Black communities. Unfortunately, during my years in undergrad no one was actually offering entire course curriculum aimed at deconstructing sexism so when I began graduate school I immediately sought out women's studies courses. I came to learn about gender oppression and intersectionality, despite the ways it has revolutionized feminist movements and intellectual spaces, seemed, quite frankly, as obvious as the sunset to me, as I reflected on my own experiences.

Desmera is the daughter of Reverend Curtis Gatewood of the North Carolina NAACP. A native of Durham, NC, as a little girl she witnessed her father give his trial sermon to become a minister at Few Gardens Public Housing Complex as 1000 people demonstrated and subsequently attempted to organize in the wake of the death of 2-year-old Shaquana Atwater after she was struck by a stray bullet. She marched and canvassed with her father and witnessed him float in and out of the NAACP due to his more radical stances on a number of issues. Today, Desmera is a gifted orator and a community organizer with Ignite NC who, like me, attributes a significant portion of her early political consciousness to her father. Her parents are together but her mother tends to stay on the periphery of the political work she and her father share, though Desmera attests she has always been supportive.

Roraima's sense of herself as a radicalized woman is also rooted in her relationship with her father with some other interesting tensions. She is both proud of

and grateful to her father for sharing his experiences as a Marxist guerilla with her, very early on. She attributes her ideological stances on most things to the information he introduced her to as a child. However, unlike Desmera and I, her sense of gendered inequality is very much rooted in her home life experience. She is thoroughly committed to squashing sexism and machismo in the Afro-Venezuelan community. She noted her observation that both her grandmother and mother always "served" their men, and gave preferential treatment to the boy children in their families while demanding more and more responsibility of the girl children. Her father's political work kept him away from the family when she was young and her parents ultimately split leaving her mother with the responsibility to care for the children they had together. For Roraima, the relationship with her father helped develop her political consciousness in both affirming and negative ways, so much so that she revealed at the time that she had no interest in men or families anytime soon, and was unsure if she ever would.

As my father's daughter, I find myself constantly looking to him for guidance on most political matters because I value his experiences and intellect. I am almost certain that my father's relationship to feminism has evolved because of me, but in his own ways, he is also responsible for my feminist development, even as he continues to struggle with and work through his own sexist and misogynistic prejudices. In passing, I've had conversations with both of these women, where we have discussed the ways our fathers reared us to be intelligent, outspoken fighters in ways that would hopefully lessen the likelihood we would find ourselves in situations that forced us to rely on men who may or may not have the best intentions.

I find it ironic, the ways so many men have the wherewithall to produce a type of woman in the world that they could likely not engage in romantic partnerships with. I'm always torn when people attempt to appeal to men's humanism by asking them things like, "what if that were your daughter?" In a perfect world, we would not need daughters to know how to treat women, or for people we love to "come out" in order for us to begin interrogating our own homo and/or transphobia. However, the world we live in is far from perfect. Men who do not force themselves to endure predicaments where their sexism and misogyny are challenged, be that in intellectual or activists' spaces, often tend to experience the most growth in the direction of a feminist consciousness by virtue of their proximity to women, often daughters, nieces, etc. they care about. What are we to make of this?

WE ARE THE ONES WE HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR: INTERGENERATINAL CONCERNS

Our own shadows disappear as the feet of thousands
by the tens of thousands pound the fallow land
into new dust that
rising like a marvelous pollen will be
fertile
even as the first woman whispering
imagination to the trees around her made
for righteous fruit
from such deliberate defense of life
as no other still
will claim inferior to any other safety
in the world

The whispers too they
intimate to the inmost ear of every spirit
now aroused they
carousing in ferocious affirmation
of all peaceable and loving amplitude
sound a certainly unbounded heat
from a baptismal smoke where yes
there will be fire

And the babies cease alarm as mothers
raising arms
and heart high as the stars so far unseen
nevertheless hurl into the universe
a moving force
irreversible as light years
traveling to the open
eye

And who will join this standing up
and the ones who stood without sweet company
will sing and sing
back into the mountains and
if necessary
even under the sea

we are the ones we have been waiting for

~June Jordan

I am, according to generational distinctions, a millennial. Generational distinction charts are interesting because they can be drawn along different lines depending on who is doing the delineating, what they are attempting to account for and to what they are attributing generational distinctions. Generational science is tricky because for some, they are most concerned with numerical continuity in terms of years, for others it may be major technological and social advances, for some tragedies or music and still for others generations are determined by the major social movements they were impacted by. I was fortunate enough to grow up very close to members of the "traditionalist" generation who were for the most part shaped by WWII, The Korean War, The Great Depression and the New Deal. My maternal grandfather, currently in his mid-late 80s was born in Columbus, Georgia in extreme poverty, and enlisted in the military—some would say he was taken advantage of by the poverty draft—at the age of 17. With the help of the G.I. Bill (incidentally one of the primary factors in the creation of the American middle class, along with expanded public education and Pell grants) served thirty years in the U.S. Military through both the Korean and Vietnam Wars, retired from the military, opened his own transmission shop, purchased a home, sent seven children and a wife who was born to sharecroppers in North Carolina, to college. My paternal grandmother, of the same generation, was born and raised in Chicago, IL to southern migrants from the Alabama/Mississippi/Louisiana migratory paths. She was a domestic worker most of her life, married to a city sanitation worker living on the South Side of Chicago.

Some argue that millennials, Black millennials in particular, live immensely more financially precarious lifestyles than our grandparents as adults and than our parents as children. Our parents, the baby boomers, came of age during a time of mass social

upheaval. Their world views and perspectives were shaped by the Civil Rights Movement (arguably one of the most important social movements in the history of this country), the Black power movement, the anti-war and feminist movements and initiated the South African divestment campaigns. Generation Xers are perhaps most noted for being the first generation to generally do worse than their parents financially, otherwise known as the first generation of white Americans to be faced with the harsh reality of the farce of the American Dream. This generation is more characterized by public scandal like Watergate and increased divorce rates. Which brings me to the millennials, the generation most noted for coming of age during a technological boom and often referred to as the "me generation", that is until Ferguson became "our Civil Rights Movement," "our Black Power Moment" and more. On the heels of the Occupy Movement and faced with the increasingly visible state sanctioned genocide of Black bodies in the wake of the murders of Trayvon Martin, Jordan Davis, Renisha McBride, Mike Brown, Tamir Rice and Sandra Bland, only to name some of the most visible cases; on the heels of massive upheavals across North Africa and the middle east like Tahrir Square and the ramping up of the Palestinian Genocide by the state of Israel, this generation decided to take to the streets and demand change. We have come of age socially and politically at a time when we are are more connected in some ways yet more disconnected in others. Most of my peers who cared about social change came of age "waiting for Malcolm."

Figure 18: This Aint Yo Daddy's Civil Rights Movement (Source: www.handsupunited.org)

After Ferguson gained momentum, so too did the declaration that "This ain't yo daddy's Civil Rights Movement." I remember the first time I heard this particular war cry. I was in Ferguson, local rapper Tef Poe was closing his speech and getting the crowd hyped when he made the proclamation. I had so many emotions when I heard it. I was excited because I had become exhausted by what I considered the liberal white donor chasing and often apologist rhetoric of organizations like the NAACP. I was aware of the ways the declaration alluded to the reality that the non-violent demonstrations our predecessors showed up to in their Sunday best, weren't going to suit my tatted-up, natty-dread wearing, profanity using, unapologetically Black and Queer peers vanguarding our movement for Black Lives.

But the movement baby in me, the one that was nurtured by that generation of activists, who encouraged me to travel to occupy the Florida capitol with the Dream Defenders, protest outside the Ferguson Police department with HandsUpUnited, bailed me out of jail and encouraged me to start my own youth organization in North Carolina after Moral Mondays, knew that *my Daddy's* Civil Rights Movement had a lot to offer. My daddy's Civil Rights Movement encouraged us to chart our own paths without reinventing the wheel, sound advice for anyone in it for the long haul. I also knew that my generation had grown up idolizing our parents' Civil Rights Movement. One would

be hard pressed to find a young Black activist in the United States who had not, at least once in their lifetimes, daydreamed about being a Black Panther, meeting Malcolm, Martin or Assata. In fact, my generation continues to flock to Angela Davis speaking engagements because of her Civil Rights Era persona.

In the wake of the murders of Mike Brown, Eric Garner, Vonderitt Myers and so many more unnamed victims of police terrorism, the United States became engulfed in a firestorm. For nearly six months young people in Ferguson, MO remained committed to maintaining a public presence in their streets. Every night for months the people of Ferguson and supporters from all over the country marched, protested, and confronted police and other local and national state forces. In Durham, NC we had our own series of youth led protests, demonstrations and run-ins with the police. In an effort to respond to the nationwide unrest directed toward police terrorism and in a more concerted effort to begin to put some kind of radical, non-electoral-focused, black-led organization together in Durham, I and a group of about ten other folks organized three separate community demonstrations and meetings and formed an organization called Black International Solidarity. The first action was an answer to a call for a National Moment of Silence. In August of 2014 as the news surrounding Mike Brown's murder in Ferguson, MO was going viral, a few young people in Durham wanted to figure out a way to participate in the national response to his brutal murder by a Ferguson police officer. This group consists of a group of Black/Africans, recent college graduates to people in their early 30s. We hurriedly came together to organize the national moment of silence on the steps of the Durham court house. The demonstration was far more successful than we could

have imagined, there were hundreds of people from the community that showed up to voice their discontent over the raging state violence in the US and around the world.

One of the ways in which my generation has mobilized the weapon of history is the reinvigoration of the tradition of Black August in Durham, NC. In commemoration of the one-year anniversary of the death of Mike Brown and our growing youth movement I attended a rally that used the historic occasion of Black August to continue bringing attention to the work that still needed to be done. Black August originated in the San Quentin State Prison after Jonathan Jackson, along with other freedom fighting comrades, were gunned down outside of a Marin County California Courthouse and his brother George Jackson, Soledad Brother, was assassinated by prison guards during a Black prison rebellion at San Quentin. Inside of the San Quentin State Prison, Jackson supporters and sympathizers began to observe Black August as a sort of a revolutionary secular Black Ramadan. They fasted from sun-up to sun-down, abstained from loud music, drugs and alcohol, exercised daily, studied revolutionary texts, boycotted prison products and shared their version of Iftar or daily community meals and a People's Feast on August 31st to break the monthly fast in community. Black August serves as a constant reminder of the historic as well as present conditions our people face in both physical and mental bondage.

Black August has, over the years, come to commemorate a number of radical/revolutionary occurrences that have taken place during the month of August, such as: When the first enslaved Africans arrived in Jamestown in 1619; Gabriel Prosser's rebellion of 1800, Nat Turner's rebellion of 1831; Henry Highland Garnett's slave strike, also of 1831; the 1850 establishment of the Underground Railroad; the March on

Washington in 1963; the Watts Rebellion of 1965; the 1971 the Mississippi Police and FBI raid of the Provisional Government of the Republic of New Afrika; the MOVE bombings of 1978; the births of Matulu Shakur of the Republic of New Afrika, Pan-Africanist Visionary Marcus Garvey and Chicago Black Panther Party Leader Fred Hampton; and the passing of W.E.B. DuBois. The original 1970 Black August also resulted in a 2 month long police hunt for sister-scholar Angela Davis. She appeared on the FBI's most wanted list as a direct result of the events that transpired in California in 1970 because one of the guns Jonathan Jackson used in the Marin County courthouse incident was allegedly registered in her name. It is from this moment that she rose to acclaimed global notoriety as a Black Woman freedom fighter.

As a generation who grew up "waiting for Malcolm," what does it mean to declare "this ain't yo daddy's civil rights movement"? I think perhaps most importantly, declarations such as these suffer from a-historicity. There is certainly a need for us to understand our unique contribution to the centuries long struggles for liberation and freedom, especially for African peoples. Certainly, the emphasis on queer and trans lives, our struggles against mass incarceration in the wake of the so-called "crack epidemic" in Black communities and our refusal to adhere to stringent respectability politics color this moment to levels that it did not in the past. But our struggle against police brutality and genocidal state practices is part and parcel of the anti-lynching campaigns that began on the eve of our emancipation. The Afros, Dashikis and African names proliferating in the 1970s were the very antithesis of the respectability politics of their day. Political concerns around desegregation look very different in our moment but the roots of these trees are tethered deep in earlier struggles. The school-to-prison-pipeline is a part of the

devastating legacy of desegregation. School suspensions and expulsions are the product of our being bussed to schools where teachers no longer care about our well-being and see us as a threat.

In the wake of high profile cases like those of Trayvon Martin, Mike Brown, Jordan Davis, perhaps inadvertently, or perhaps not, the endless names of Black women who have been the victims of police brutality and state violence found themselves invisibilized by structures of American racism, sexism and classism. Much like the women of SNCC and the Black Panther Party, Black women found and continue to find ourselves at the forefront of the battles for self-determination of Black men and ourselves but often at the expense of ourselves.

#BLACKLIVESMATTER[33]

According to the about us page on their website, #BlackLivesMatter:

> was created in 2012 after Trayvon Martin's murderer, George Zimmerman, was acquitted for his crime, and dead 17-year old Trayvon was posthumously placed on trial for his own murder. Rooted in the experiences of Black people in this country who actively resist our de-humanization, #BlackLivesMatter is a call to action and a response to the virulent anti-Black racism that permeates our society. Black Lives Matter is a unique contribution that goes beyond extrajudicial killings of Black people by police and vigilantes. It goes beyond the narrow nationalism that can be prevalent within Black communities, which merely call on Black people to love Black, live Black and buy Black, keeping straight cis Black men in the front of the movement while our sisters, queer and trans and disabled folk take up roles in the background or not at all. Black Lives Matter affirms the lives of Black queer and trans folks, disabled folks, black-undocumented folks, folks with records, women and all Black lives along the gender spectrum. It centers those that have been marginalized within Black liberation movements. It is a tactic to (re)build the Black liberation movement. When we say Black Lives Matter, we are broadening the conversation around state violence to include all of the

[33] http://blacklivesmatter.com/about/

> ways in which Black people are intentionally left powerless at the hands of the state. We are talking about the ways in which Black lives are deprived of our basic human rights and dignity. How Black poverty and genocide is state violence. How 2.8 million Black people are locked in cages in this country is state violence. How Black women bearing the burden of a relentless assault on our children and our families is state violence. How Black queer and trans folks bear a unique burden from a hetero-patriarchal society that disposes of us like garbage and simultaneously fetishizes us and profits off of us, and that is state violence. How 500,000 Black people in the US are undocumented immigrants and relegated to the shadows. How Black girls are used as negotiating chips during times of conflict and war. How Black folks living with disabilities and different abilities bear the burden of state sponsored Darwinian experiments that attempt to squeeze us into boxes of normality defined by white supremacy, and that is state violence. #BlackLivesMatter is working for a world where Black lives are no longer systematically and intentionally targeted for demise. We affirm our contributions to this society, our humanity, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression. We have put our sweat equity and love for Black people into creating a political project–taking the hashtag off of social media and into the streets. The call for Black lives to matter is a rallying cry for ALL Black lives striving for liberation.

My feelings about #BlackLivesMatter often vacillate because I do have those questions about who we are declaring our lives matter to, and where the action is in the declaration. I wonder if we are falling into the same trap of the Civil Rights Movement whose narrative became coopted to tell the story of our respectability rather than white America's inability to see us as human. However, as I sit and reflect on the video of teenage children being harassed by ignorant, racist, fearful pigs with the power of the state behind them I am reminded that #BlackLivesMatter is not an empty declaration, despite its troubling funding sources, but it's also a means of documenting our dehumanization, hopefully for our selves and not so much for the state. I hope that with each horrific story that gets shared with the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter we are reminded that they #neverlovedus and assimilationist goals are a waste of our time.

#SayHerName isn't just about recognizing that Black women are often the invisible victims of state violence but a reminder that we live in a era, 150 years after the so-called end of the peculiar institutions of American slavery and decades since Jim Crow, where the powers that be/institutional whiteness are so threatened by our fierceness, beauty, bravery, intelligence, our physical and intellectual acumen that it would call Serena Williams a gorilla for her magnificent domination of the elite sport of tennis, and it would call Michelle Obama's advice to "ignore the haters and open your ears and hearts for what god has in store for you" some anti-American/terrorist statement, that refuses to give black patients pain medication because they don't believe our bodies physically suffer like theirs, that imprisons and abuses and murders our children because of their own insidious fear of retaliation for their generations of evil... I hope that we know and believe, because it has been shown and proven to us, that we were #nevermeanttosurvive and let #BlackLivesMatter and #SayHerName not only reflect the horrors of state violence but our resilience and be a reminded that we need to stop looking to this country as some sort of refuge in a world of chaos. I am not an American and I have no desire to claim or reclaim that title for myself just like I don't want to claim or reclaim nigger. I want to be a part of building something that values my worth, contribution and very existence. I don't give a damn about a black president because the past 7 years have been an almost daily reminder of our "place" in this country. My life and my peoples' lives matter and we need to accept once and for all that some of this shit just ain't meant for us.

At this point in human history after bearing witness to the generational trauma of racial, gendered and economic dehumanization at the hands of global economically exploitative systems and the recent upswing in the visibility of that repression, decisions

to self-segregate must be read as more than reactionary or counter-American multi-cultural rhetoric. At this point self-segregation is a radical declaration of self-love and a means for self-preservation.

Women have always done the work of organizing Black Radical Movement, so the impetus within BlackLivesMatter to center women at the forefront of leadership during this wave of Black Radical activism in the United States, is to continue in the tradition of their Black Radical Foremothers, to center the values of radical Black queer women in a mass Black movement, is perhaps a more uniquely charged goal for this generation of radical Black activists. Angela Davis told a St. Louis crowd in June of 2015 that "when Black women stand—up as they did during the Montgomery Bus Boycott era—as they did during the Black liberation era, earth shaking change occurs." She went on to say that "new organizations such as Black Lives Matter, Dream Defenders, Black Youth Project 100, Justice League NYC, and We Charge Genocide are just a few of the new-generation organizations that have developed new models of leadership and that acknowledge how important Black feminist insights are the the development of viable twenty-first-century radical Black Movements" (Davis 2016, 85). It is in acknowledgement of this truth that I turn to the story of Bree Newsome, perhaps one of the most recently visible Black woman personas of this wave of Black Radical Activism.

I DID IT BECAUSE I'M FREE: BREE'S STORY

Bree grew up in a very solidly middle class family and lived in a fairly racially mixed community in Columbia, Maryland. Both of her parents were educators, her father

at the collegiate level and her mother in the public schools. Her mother was both a classroom teacher and a school board member. Her father has served as dean of both Howard and Duke's Divinity schools as well as the president of Shaw University. One of the earliest battles she recalls is when some teachers in her school tried to block her participation in the Gifted and Talented program, which she now says she understands was an attempt to block her path to college. Despite always being a decent student, her passion was really in the arts. Her grandmother enrolled her in an African American Children's Theater Camp at Johnson C. Smith University in Charlotte, NC when she was young and she discovered filmmaking as an avenue for her creativity.

When it was time to go to college she was relatively uninterested and just wanted to take some time off, however, she was aware that her family required a college degree so she wound up at NYU's film school in 2003. Because most of her family attend HBCUs her point of reference for college was HBCUs so NYU, both the city of New York and the campus were total culture shocks. The pace of city life and the elitism of the university in addition to the fact that the undergraduate film program at NYU was predominantly white and male made college extremely difficult. Like so many others she grappled with the death of family members, depressions and intimate partner abuse as a college student. Though she managed to leave NYU in one piece and with a degree, college was not the site of Bree's radicalization.

After college amid trying to recuperate from that trauma, she remembers feeling quite hollow and searching for things to fill that void. She no longer had the resources at her disposal to make films like she had while at NYU so she decided to attempt to reconnect with her own spirituality which lead her to move in with her Godmother in

Raleigh, NC and began volunteering at a Children's Advocacy center. Her responsibility there was to create an environment where children who had been victims of abuse could feel comfortable when caseworkers, lawyers, etc. came to document their stories. This center aimed to create a situation where child abuse victims only had to undergo one interrogation about their abuse and other interested parties could watch from behind a two-way mirror. Because she had also been a victim of abuse in college this work was extremely rewarding for her and also resulted in her presence in Raleigh, NC when the Moral Mondays demonstrations kicked off.

Her interests in the arts allowed her to connect with Jonah, my husband's twin brother. They were recording a few songs in the studio when he invited her to come out to a Moral Monday demonstration, where she ran into my husband Josh who had already been an active participant. Similar to my own story, Moral Mondays was Bree's first brush with an autonomous decision to get involved in political activities. She and I quickly bonded as age mates who were arrested together. My husband Joshua and Bree were the only two who were recorded making statements to the press when we were arrested, so this threw Bree into the media spotlight a few years before she was arrested for scaling that flagpole in South Carolina. In retrospect, she recalled that it allowed any apprehension she had about being arrested for civil disobedience to dissipate when the Confederate Flag demonstration took place.

When asked what was it about Moral Mondays that called out to her, given that she had not participated in any acts of civil disobedience before, she said it was really the attack on voting rights. She had participated in voter registration drives before and at the point really believed in the electoral process. To see the regressive legislation of House

Bill 589 and not do anything about it, she felt, was obscene. After we were arrested, the artistic mind in her went into over drive. Within a week she had stenciled T-shirts that read FWD-NC which was modeled after the Run-DMC logo; "People over Money" t-shirts, which local North Carolina youth organizations still use today. She even created an enormous poster board with our mug shots next to the mug shots of freedom riders, which cause a great deal of controversy with the NC NAACP:

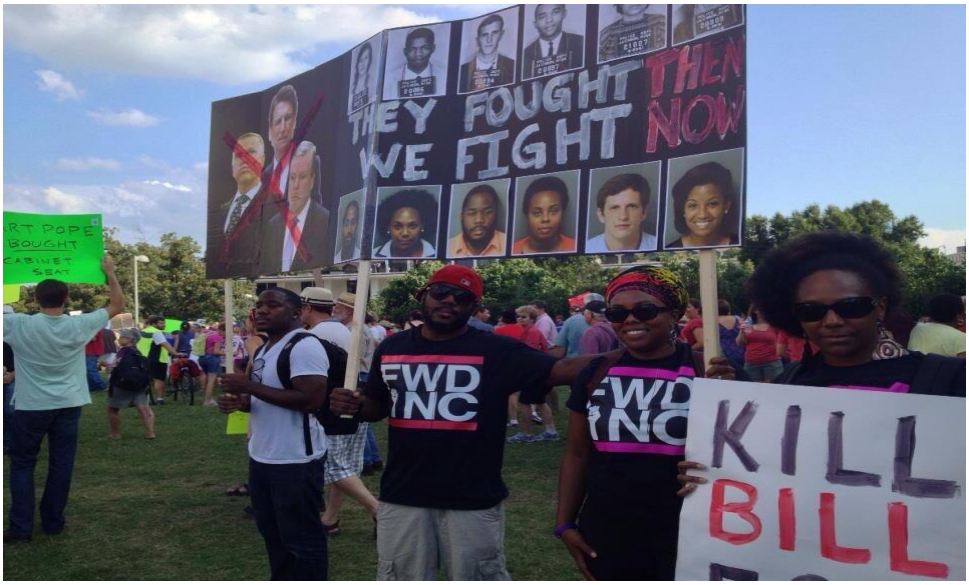

Figure 19: MM Rally Poster (Source: Author's Collection)

These tensions are a great portion of what drove our connection to the Dream Defenders early on, because they too were dealing with their own local NAACP drama.

For the next year we continued to grow our relationships, and to read and study together. Bree actually spent a lot of time sitting around my parents' kitchen table discussing the merits of civil disobedience, civil rights, and voting, and because my father is who he is, he often challenged her on whether voting could really do for us. I remember he shared a 1988 interview Kwame gave to Breakthrough: Political Journal of

Prairie Fire Organizing Committee. Upon being asked about the relevance of Black Power today (in 1988), Kwame responded:

> We're no closer to Black Power today than we were in the 60s, in terms of material reality. In terms of consciousness, we are much closer than ever before. Black Power very simply means that Africans must get together, organize themselves for power. If we're speaking just in terms of bourgeois politics, electoral politics, then it means they must have proportionate power. If we look in the country today, we have 303 mayors, 23 congress peoples, some 6,850 state and county elected officials. And while all of these have elected positions of power, these positions are completely and totally powerless. When an African becomes mayor, the position becomes powerless. The insidious subterfuge that is capitalism has played on the people between the 60s and the 80s—giving all these positions of power and taking the power away from the positions—will, because of its cynicism, cause its own destruction when the masses of people direct their wrath against it. […] As a matter of fact, in the 60s, if you had told me that if I stopped fighting they would give us the 303 mayors in the biggest cities in the county, I might have signed my life away. It was beyond my wildest imagination. And yet we have less power today than before. Consequently, people see that this is not the avenue through which their problems can be solved. If not this way, how then will we arrive at Black Power? Consequently, they will see the only way to arrive at it is through revolution, through the destruction of the capitalist system (Breakthrough, 1988).

I remember that gave her significant cause for pause at the time. I am not totally certain of how she processed that information, but I witnessed a shift in her political focus as time continued. She became more and more disenchanted with the possibility of working within the laws, which likely ultimately led her to choose to break the law once again when she scaled the flagpole in South Carolina to remove the Confederate Flag. In the process of interviewing Bree, given her hectic speaking schedule and the toll it was taking on her I decided not to ask her to re-hash taking the flag down because she had done so, so many times and I had witnessed the toll it had taken on her body and her health. I hope to be able to use most if not all of this abbreviated statement she released right after she took the flag down.

On Taking down the confederate flag:

I realized it was time for true courage the morning after the Charleston Massacre shook me to the core of my being. I couldn't sleep. I sat awake in the dead of night. I had recently watched the beginning of Selma, the reenactment of the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing and had shuddered at the horrors of history. But the Charleston Massacre was neither a scene from a movie nor was it the past. A white man had just entered a black church and massacred people, including a civil rights leader as they prayed. This was—this is—still happening.

Not long after the Charleston Massacre there were arson attacks against 5 black churches in the South over the course of one week. The Confederate Flag, the emblem of the confederacy, the stars and bars, in all its manifestations is one of the most recognizable banner of white supremacy. It's the banner of racial intimidation and fear whose popularity experiences an uptick whenever black Americans appear to be making gains economically and politically in this country. It exists to remind us of the oppressive status quo has been undergirded by white supremacist violence with the tacit approval of too many political leaders.

The day after the massacre I was asked what the next step was and I said I didn't know. We've been here before and here we are again: black people slain simply for being black; an attack on the black church as a place of spiritual refuge and community organization.

I refuse to be ruled by fear. How can America be free and be ruled by fear? How can anyone be? So, a small group of concerned citizens, black and white, representing various walks of life, spiritual beliefs, gender identities and sexual orientations agree the flag had to come down. Civil rights groups in South Carolina and nationwide have been calling for the flag's removal since the moment it was raised, via the legislative process, to no successful end.

We discussed it and decided to remove the flag immediately, both as an act of civil disobedience and as a demonstration of the power people have when we work together. We decided a black woman should physically scale the pole to remove the flag and that a white man should be the one to help her over the fence as a sign that our alliance transcended both racial and gender divides. For us, it was not simply about a flag, but abolishing the spirit of hatred and oppression in all its forms.

I removed the flag not only in defiance of those who enslaved my ancestors in the southern United States, but also in defiance of the oppression that continues against black people globally in 2015, including the ongoing ethnic cleansing in the Dominican Republic. I did it in solidarity with the South African students who toppled a statue of the white supremacist, colonialist Cecil Rhodes. I did it for all the fierce black women on the front lines of the movement and for all the little black girls who are watching us. I did it because I am free. If this act of disobedience can also serve as a symbol to other peoples' struggles against oppression

or as a symbol of victory over fear and hate, then I know all the more that I did the right thing.

Even if there were borders to my empathy, those borders would most certainly extend into South Carolina. Several of my African ancestors entered this continent through the slave market in Charleston. Their unpaid toil brought wealth to America via Carolina plantations. I am descended from those who survived racial oppression as they built this nation: My 4th great grandfather, who stood on an auction block in South Carolina refusing to be sold without his wife and newborn baby; that newborn baby, my 3rd great grandmother, enslaved for 27 years on a plantation in Rembert, SC where she prayed daily for her children to see freedom; her husband, my 3rd great grandfather, an enslaved plowboy on the same plantation who founded a church on the eve of the Civil War that stands to this day; their son, my great-great grandfather, the one they called "Free Baby" because he was their first child born free, all in South Carolina.

You see, I know my history and my heritage. The Confederacy is neither the only legacy of the south nor an admirable one. The southern heritage I embrace is the legacy of a people unbowed by racial oppression. It includes towering figures of the Civil Rights Movement like Ida B. Wells, Martin Luther King, Jr., Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks, Medgar Evers and Ella Baker. It includes the many people who rarely make the history books but without whom there is no movement. It includes pillars of the community like Rev. Clementa Pinckney and Emmanuel AME Church.

As you are admiring my courage in that moment, please remember that this is not, never has been and never should be just about one woman. This action required collective courage just as this movement requires collective courage. Not everyone who participated in the strategizing for this non-violent direct action volunteered to have their names in the news so I will respect their privacy. Nonetheless, I'm honored to be counted among the many freedom fighters, both living and dead.

It is important to remember that our struggle doesn't end when the flag comes down. The Confederacy is a southern thing, but white supremacy is not. Our generation has taken up the banner to fight battles many thought were won long ago. We must fight with all vigor now so that our grandchildren aren't still fighting these battles in another 50 years. Black Lives Matter. This is non-negotiable. I encourage everyone to understand the history, recognize the problems of the present and take action to show the world that the status quo is not acceptable.

Figure 20: "Bree Capture's the Flag" (Source http://thebriggsreport.tumblr.com/post/123272797835/one-more-for-bree-newsome-on-the-5thbecause)

Since her removal of the flag Bree has been on a nation-wide speaking tour that has rarely afforded her a moment to herself. The death threats she received immediately following her act of civil disobedience initially prompted her to keep a low profile and the trauma of such threats no doubt wore on her as she lost sleep and weight. I remember seeing her a couple months after the removal of the flag and commenting on how skinny she appeared in relation to how I had remembered her the last time I saw her. She told me she didn't have much of an appetite and she hadn't been sleeping much. Though she eventually decided to proceed with the speaking tour, the toll such visibility and courage takes on one's body should not be underestimated. The need for self-care is yet another feminist intervention into the realm of radical activism that should not be taken lightly.

IN THE BELLY OF THE BEAST: MAKING "YO PARENT'S CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT" OURS

By and by, when the morning comes,
when the saints of God are gathered home,
we'll tell the story how we've overcome,
for we'll understand it better by and by

~ United Methodist Hymn

I remember the first time I saw his young brown smiling face, against a white backdrop, floating above a deep red Hollister t-shirt, flash across the television in my parents living room. That face could not have seen much more than 14 years of life. He had been murdered almost a month before his name became a nightly-news sound-bite. We had no way of knowing then, that hoodies, Skittles and Arizona Tea, would take on a whole new meaning for a generation of Black youth. His murder had not even been questioned before the local police chief declared there was no reason to believe Zimmerman had acted inappropriately. In the days that followed, the ensuing public outcry over the refusal to arrest murderer set the stage for a defiant opposition that would lead an entire community of youth to occupy the streets of Ferguson, Missouri for nearly a year, declaring they had had enough after the brutal slaying of Mike Brown. The names of the men, women and children who have become martyrs of a movement are too numerous to name. This ever-growing list of names, tragic and senseless as it is, serves as a catalyst for one of the most wide-spread and longest sustained periods of visibly organized Black resistance/rebellion in the belly of the imperial beast since the 1960s and 70s.

Frantz Fanon declared that "Each generation must, out of relative obscurity, discover its mission, fulfill it, or betray it" (Fanon 1969, 206). Every generation creates new movements, organizations, associations in order to address the specificities of the problems they confront. Movements that speak their language, express their style, and articulate their analysis of the path forward. The NAACP in the early 20th century, the National Negro Congress during the Great Depression, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in the 1950s, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, the Black Panther Party and the All African People's Revolutionary Party of the 1960s and more. Our generation, in this moment, is no different than "our Daddy's Civil Rights Movement" in that regard. In an era that compels us to virtually witness the snuffing out of Black lives, over and over again, in real time, on individualized, portable devices, until the next one, Black youth today, just as our predecessors did, are struggling daily to mitigate, respond to and ultimately terminate that trauma.

I remember the significance of the trial verdict for myself and a small community of folks in Durham, NC. Myself, my husband, Rev. Curtis Gatewood of the Durham NAACP and a few local organizers in the Durham area were gathered at Professor Timothy Tyson's house for dinner and drinks but the house fell still as the verdict was announced. The murder of Trayvon Martin and the subsequent acquittal of George Zimmerman marked a significant turning point in the lives of many American millennials. The aftermath of the murders of Mike Brown and Eric Garner and Tamir Rice and countless others represents a tipping point in the consciousness and anger of American youth. So many of us knew that the verdict would not turn out in favor of the people, yet and still so many of us wanted to hold on to the hope that we might just be

wrong, just this once. The relatively peaceful and unassuming anger that grew out of the acquittal of George Zimmerman just barely kept the flame going, but the death and subsequent non-indictment of Darren Wilson would blow up like a bomb, a bomb that would smolder and reignite for months following Mike Brown's murder.

In Florida, where Trayvon Martin was murdered, one group of young people decided to respond to the trauma they faced. In April of 2012, friends and students at Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University, a Florida HBCU, including Chicago native, Umi Selah (then known as Phillip Agnew and who became executive director) and East Jerusalem, Palestine native Ahmad Abuznaid (the current legal and policy director), and a host of other Florida students created a Facebook invitation for a conference call to organize against the racially motivated murder of Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman. More than 150 people participated in the call and threw out ideas for how best to organize in the wake of Martin's death. The call resulted in the organization of a 40-mile, three-day protest march from Daytona Beach to Sanford and ultimately marked the birth of a group of Black and Brown youth that would come to be known as the Dream Defenders.

Figure 21: DD 2010 March 4 Trayvon
(Source:http://www.baynews9.com/content/news/baynews9/news/article.html/content/news/articles/cfn/2012/4/6/trayvon_martin_march.html)

When asked about the march, Ahmad reflected on what they were thinking at the time, "we thought we'd like to start a movement reminiscent of the civil rights movement of the past, but in our generation," he said. He recalled a young woman on the call that spoke up and said, "You all are defending the dream. You should call yourselves the dream defenders." And so it was. For the better part of a year and a half, they organized, grew and prepared for their next major move. By August 2012, they were a formal organization with funders, a logo, T-shirts, a website and a social media presence, however public attention waned in the months leading up to Zimmerman's trial. His acquittal in July 2013 brought the Dream Defenders back into the media limelight.

Umi remembers hearing reports on the news claiming Black folks "were going to destroy our communities in the wake of the verdict." Having successfully organized the 2012 march, Umi believed, at the time, they had proven they could be disciplined, smart, energetic, real, strategic and ultimately help present a way forward. In the national uproar following the trial verdict the group took a different tactic. From all over the state, Black and Brown youth flocked to the Tallahassee Capitol building in July 2013 to push for an alternative to Florida's" stand your ground" law. During a 31-day sit-in of Gov. Rick Scott's office, they demanded a review of stand your ground and presented their version, "Trayvon's law," which would effectively repeal it. They asked for an end to racial profiling and the school-to-prison pipeline. For days, they slept on the Capitol's marble floor under the Florida Civil Rights Hall of Fame wall. Nearby churches provided them with places to shower, local friends offered their homes during the day, and at 5:45 a.m. every day, the Dream Defenders would wake up, move their things from the lobby floor to the third floor and occupy the capitol.

The summer of 2013 was significant for North Carolina for its own reasons. Despite having been raised in and around various political communities, I was twenty-six years old the first time I made an autonomous decision to participate in a political action, one that my parents supported morally but for which they would not be present. In 2013, during the same summer we watched as Black youth rallied all over the country to have George Zimmerman arrested, charged and tried for Trayvon Martin's murder, North Carolina was gaining national attention for a weekly series of grassroots led demonstrations that would come to be known as Moral Mondays. Moral Mondays was a response to the NC Republican party's 2012 rise to power in the form of majority control of both state houses and the election of Republican Governor Pat McCrory. For the first time since 1870, fiscal and social conservatives had enough control to begin enacting legislation that threatened voting rights, educational access, employment and housing opportunities, environmental justice, tax reform, along with myriad other concerns. In an effort to combat the draconian changes being implemented by the republican legislature, the NC-NAACP declared the citizens' right to claim their "moral majority" and stop the regressive legislation before it was too late. In a statement titled "Why We Are Here Today," Reverend William J. Barber II of the NC-NAACP declared the following:

> (W)e have no other choice but to assemble in the people's house where these bills are being presented, argued, and voted upon, in hopes that God will move in the hearts of our legislators, as he moved in the heart of Pharaoh to let His people go. Some ask the question; why don't they be quiet? Well, I must remind you, that it has been our collective silence that has quietly opened the city gates to these undemocratic violators of our rights.

The first Moral Monday's demonstration took place towards the end of April in 2013 with a total of seventeen people being arrested. By the end of the summer nearly one-

thousand people had been arrested in weekly protests at the North Carolina legislature. After the first few weeks of demonstrations and arrests, a North Carolina based conservative policy think tank called the Civitas Institute began compiling and publishing a database of the Moral Monday's arrestees with important demographic data like each protester's name, city and county of residence, sex, race, age, arrest date, occupation, employer (and whether it's in the public, private or nonprofit sector), interest group affiliations, and mug shot. The database has since been deactivated, but it was created in an attempt to create a climate of fear for those being arrested and for many, it also meant the possibility of workplace hostility or worse, unemployment. Each week thousands of diverse supporters turned up to the demonstrations to support those being arrested, however, a look through the Civitas database revealed the people being arrested were primarily older, retirement age, politically liberal white citizens. At the time my husband Joshua had recently stopped working for the NC-NAACP but still had many close ties to the organization so he had been supporting the demonstrations as well. I was working an awful summer job for the city that paid $8.50/hour so my work schedule had prevented me from attending demonstrations. However, when I saw the movement gaining momentum I decided I wanted to go see what it was about.

The week I decided to go also happened to be the week they were going to vote on House Bill 589 in the NC legislature. HB 589 was essentially a voter suppression bill which we are only seeing the true effects of for the first time during the 2016 presidential primary season where hundreds of people were turned away from the polls for failure to have a "proper" form of identification. The bill effectively shortened the early voting period by a full week, eliminated same-day registration, required strict forms of voter ID,

prevented out-of-precinct ballots from being counted, expanded the ability to challenge voters at the polls, and terminated a pre-registration program for 16- and 17-year olds, all changes which disproportionately affected Black, Brown and young voters. This bill presented a prime opportunity to increase the participation of Black and Brown youth in the Moral Mondays movement. On July 24th, 2013 more than twenty young people, including myself, showed up to observe and protest HB 589 in the legislature, which they essentially filibustered on the floor in anticipation of a protest demonstration. As a result of the filibuster, several of us decided to stage a demonstration in the office of Rep. Thom Tillis to demand they kill bill 589.

During our occupation of the representative's office, my husband Joshua Vincent and Bree Newsome (the young woman who would later scale the flag pole outside of the South Carolina legislature to take down the confederate flag) read statements of our demands and within less than five minutes we were arrested. We had only discussed the possibility of being arrested the day before as this particular demonstration was not the typical Monday demonstration with thousands of supporters. We were actually arrested on what the movement had termed "Witness Wednesdays," referring to the process of sitting in and witnessing the Wednesday legislative sessions. Ultimately six of us were arrested, though in our discussion the day before Joshua and Rob Stephens, who at the time was a field organizer for the NC-NAACP, were not supposed to be arrested because they had already been arrested during a prior Witness Wednesday and the legal advisors were unsure of the ramifications of multiple arrests during the Moral Monday process. The decision the day before had been that we would all occupy the representative's office, fully aware that the legislative staff was required to give a series of warnings to

disperse before they began arrests. Once the final warning to disperse was issued, those who were unwilling to be arrested would leave and the rest would stay. On that Wednesday when the final warning to disperse came, most people in the room left so Joshua and Rob made the last minute decision to stay and be arrested along with myself, Bree, and two other young people, leaving a total of six.

I cannot say that I was particularly fearful of being arrested because I knew I had the support of the NAACP as well as my parents in the process but I was nervous because I had no idea what to expect. One by one they began cuffing us with plastic zip-ties and escorting us to the cafeteria in the basement of the legislative building were they did preliminary searches of our persons and belongings before they loaded us in the police van and drove us to the Wake County detention center. Most of the arresting officers were white men though I do remember one female officer being present to perform the body search on the women arrestees. We all remained together for those initial hours, so the mood was relatively light and we were able to talk and debrief a little as we waited. When we arrived at the detention center our handlers transitioned from white men with buzz cuts to predominantly Black and Latino corrections officers. By this time in the summer they had been processing Moral Movement arrestees for several weeks now, so when they discovered what we had been arrested for they were actually quite talkative and friendly and some even expressed their support for what we were doing. After the second round of body searches, finger printing and mug shots we sat in a common area where the men were required to sit on one side of the room and women on the other, waiting to be assigned to cells. This common area had TVs displaying live news so footage of our arrests were flashing before us. Many of the other people who had been

arrested and were also waiting to be assigned to cells recognized us from the TV and asked who we were and what the demonstrations were about. This lead to all of us being treated relatively well by both the corrections staff and the people being booked that night. I have to admit that I was impressed that so many people not only cared but, seemed to be supportive of our decisions to be arrested for such a cause even as they were upset and questioning their own present circumstances.

The bail-bond process was probably the most stressful portion of the process. I knew we had the support of the NAACP but I wasn't exactly sure what the bail process would be. So when we were allowed to make our phone-calls, I did what most people do, I tried to call my parents. It was at this moment I became painfully aware of the fact that my cell phone had made me lazy about remembering things. At this point, all of my belongings including my cell phone had been confiscated so when I started trying to make phone calls I realized the only numbers I had memorized were my parent's house phone, both their cell numbers, Joshua's cell and my sister's cell number. Joshua was in jail with me so his number would do me no good, my sister lives in Washington DC so she was only of limited use. My mother was out of town and I couldn't get through to my father for well over an hour. I would later discover that his cell phone was dead but he was actually already waiting for me at the jail in the release area. None of the women had any prior arrests or incidents on our records so our bonds had been set at $1,000 and we were each required to pay $100 to be released. Of the three men, Joshua and Rob still had pending charges from an earlier Moral Movement arrest and the other young man had prior unaffiliated charges, so their bonds were set at $10,000 and they were each required to pay $1000 to be released. Most of us were released before midnight but Josh

was not released until after almost 1:00am. We were worried that they would require him to spend the night in jail and later found out that they actually required him to strip and they performed a cavity search and forced him to change into the orange jump-suit. We are still unsure to this day exactly what happened in his process but we were all eventually released on the same night.

Figure 22: They Fought Then (Source: Author's Collection, Bree Newsome Design)

Even though I knew that arrest was highly likely, I still don't think I was entirely prepared for what I was about to undertake as the arrest took place. I certainly did not anticipate that I would still be dealing with the charges more than a year later. This arrest however, marks for me, a turning point in my own radicalization process. Being arrested for civil disobedience, like the trial by fire my mother experienced is yet another of those rites of passage for political organizers. Presently, I question the utility of arrests as a general practice, however, one of the strategies of the Moral Monday's demonstrations was to overwhelm the state with the arrests in order to highlight the amount of money the state spends on such practices, so I am happy to have been a part of that movement but I don't have plans of being intentionally arrested in the near future. I realize now though,

that my involvement in Moral Mondays and my subsequent arrest opened doors to communities of political activists that I did not personally have before that moment. From the summer of 2013 on, my husband Joshua, Bree and I developed a friendship based on our shared interest in social justice and radical change. In our quests to find causes and organizations we could commit to, we three developed strong relationships with the Dream Defenders in Florida, various chapters of the NAACP and later Black Lives Matter contingencies, the Ohio Student Association, the Youth Organizing Institute and Ignite NC, both based in Durham, NC. In that regard, my arrest and how it was interpreted by my peers made me a person of interest in my own right, rather than simply because of my familial affiliations. My desire to interrogate the haphazardness of the process helped develop the very questions that fueled this research project, i.e. how did I end up getting arrested? Why did I decide to do it? Is it always this haphazard? Where do I go from here? Ultimately, what and how can I learn from my own process of political development that will help us better understand how to generate more contribution to and participation in mass movements for social change?

As the Dream Defenders occupied the Florida Capitol, they invited youth from all over the county to come and spend a day or two in the Capitol with them, to see what they were about, learn from the work they were doing and ultimately to build connected youth movements across the country. Joshua reached out to the people responsible for coordinating visitors to the occupation and when they learned we had been arrested in a Moral Monday demonstration we were warmly invited and they even asked if we would be willing to take some time to talk about our experiences with the Moral Mondays

Movement in North Carolina. It turns out we were equally inspired by one another so we were eager to get on the road.

When we first put out the call to other NC youth to take the ride to Florida, we were met with some opposition by the local NAACP because of political territory jockeying and the competing attentions for the Moral Monday's actions in North Carolina and the Dream Defenders Capitol takeover in Florida. I will not dig too deeply into this tension, but one can saw its more of a tension that emerges from the constraints of formal 501-c3s and liberal white funding challenges. We were too excited to be deterred because not long after we accepted the invitation to help occupy the Capitol with the Dream Defenders their communications team put out a social media blast announcing our coming. It just so happened that we were originally slated to arrive in Florida on the 23rd day of their occupation and their genius communications team found a picture of Michael Jordan, in a Carolina Jersey with the number 23.

Figure 23: DD Takeover Day 23 (Source: Author's Collection via DD Communications Team)

Needless to say, when the blast went out, we were awed by their creativity and even more excited to make the trip a reality. Due to competing pressures from home and finances,

we did not actually arrive at the Florida Capitol until day 25 of their occupation. Day 25 of the occupation was slated to feature celebrity emcee Talib Kweli who's presence, along with his teenage son, was quite unassuming, barring the times when the press has lights and cameras in their faces asking questions. In response to a question about the responsibility of other celebrities and artists to support the burgeoning youth moved, he replied that while he was in the capitol, he was a man first, before he was an emcee. As a man, he continued, he cared about the brutal killings of our children and he understood his responsibility, as a man, to lend his celebrity and voice as an artist to the work the Dream Defenders were trying to accomplish in Florida. Most people appreciated his sentiment but felt, in some ways, that he kind of eluded the question so as to not step on anyone's toes.

Figure 24: DDs & Talib Kweli (Source: Author's Collection)

By the end of the weekend, Joshua, Bree and I were Dream Defenders and our relationship with the Florida organization would keep us active and excited about the growing youth movement.

One of the most memorable instances in our relationship with the Dream Defenders came when we were invited to participate in a retreat they were hosting at the Highlander Folk Training School in Tennessee. The Highlander is an institution that has served multiple types of organizations over various generations. Prior to the Montgomery Bus Boycott, Rosa Parks was trained there along with a host of other icons of the Civil Rights Era including Septima Clark, Martin Luther King Jr., James Bevel, Bayard Rustin and various SNCC members. We spent the weekend in Non-Violence training sessions, which, I learned during the de-briefs, many of the training participants weren't exactly fully on board with non-violence as a way of life; we did power mapping exercises and role played community canvassing. Perhaps most importantly, we engaged in team building exercises that facilitated our sense of community with one-another. We have remained close over the years.

Umi, like my father, is from a relatively large family, raised on the south side of Chicago. His father collected and sold books which resulted, from a young age, in his ability to consume books voraciously. He is also a church boy, of the Pentecostal ilk to be precise, so his knack for public speaking has been cultivated since his childhood. He recalls the one thing he knew he didn't want to be was poor, which is why he went to college. There was no specific reason why he chose to attend Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University other than his desire to leave Chicago and attend a Black school. It was there that he was introduced to the intricacies of capitalist investment in prison infrastructure and the disparate ways that impacted Black youth in this country.

THE DREAM DEFENDER'S CONGRESS

In December of 2014, Umi sent Josh and I a message that read: "Hey family, I hope you are well through these times. I'm extending an invitation to our Congress this year. I want you there… It will be an opportunity for Dream Defenders around the country to discuss and build towards collective revolutionary aims…" We took the proposition to a small group of young Black folks in North Carolina and asked them if they were interested in attending. After a brief conversation, which included a discussion about the need to expand our political networks, we concluded that whatever political work we as a budding organization in North Carolina could not just be isolated to endogamous group activities, we decided collectively that it was important to exist and work in collective spaces where people shared our political aims and objectives. Furthermore, we considered the road trip to be a perfect opportunity for uninterrupted bonding time. Some group members raised questions about what it means to be invited to a national congress for an organization of which we were not actually members, certainly a valid question. However, given that several of us had prior relationship with the Dream Defenders we concluded that it would be a fruitful endeavor to attend the congress, it was also later conceded that it was a rather standard practice of political solidarity to invite non-members to attend national meetings without the ability to vote on decisions affecting the organization.

After more than 10 hours of driving through the night we (myself, Joshua, Bree, Mazuba and DeeDee) finally arrived at the congress. We arrived to learn that representatives from other organizations such as Students for Justice in Palestine, Black Alliance for Just Immigration, Florida Immigrant Coalition, United We Dream, Malcolm

X Grassroots Movement, #itsbiggerthanyou, Coalition of Immokalee Workers, USSA (United States Student Association), Homestead Equal Rights for All, The California Afrikan Black Coalition, Friends of the Congo, Hands Up United, MST (Brazil's Landless Workers Movement) and NUMSA (National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa) had also been invited. The national congress occurs annually allowing Dream Defenders from all over Florida the chance to congregate, discuss the successes and failures of the year and decide on organizational direction for the following year. In the wake of a surge in national and global activism among youth of 2014 and in an attempt to connect them, the Dream Defenders invited people from all of the organizations to be in the same room with one another and "build".[34]

The congress took place in central Florida in a city called Fruit Land Park. This city caters to Florida's relatively wealthy retired community. According to the 2010 census this city is almost 90% white. The Dream Defenders were able to secure a retreat center called the Life Enrichment Center, a Christian retreat center. The congress was a three-day long event packed full of seminars on Mass Incarceration, Capitalism, Patriarchy, White Supremacy, Imperialism, Movement Ecology, Cop Watch, Cooperative Economics, Movement Strategy and Campaign Building, Storytelling. Some of these seminars were more fruitful than others and other were quite problematic. Grappling with what it means to try to be involved in a level of organizing beyond mainstream politics but simultaneously being reliant upon your proverbial enemies for funding and meeting space is a major issue that I don't think young Black organizers in the US have

[34] A part of the lexicon made popular by the Nation of Gods and Earth, more popularly known as Five Percenters. A way of describing the process of productive dialogue among urban youth and many youth of color, building also refers to the building of physical bodies, financial status, or institutions, among much more that the principle of building can represent.

thought through enough, which could possibly be a testament to our lack of understanding of the way money or funding operates as a mechanism for control. Additionally, it just speaks to a level of political underdevelopment and a general lack of resources and infrastructure in our communities.

When we arrived at the retreat center we were a few hours late because we drove through the night and the first program on the agenda was already underway. The congress was structured such that there were three concurrent sessions that attendees were randomly assigned to attend as they checked into the congress. All of these sessions were in the same building which consisted of a big sanctuary like room in the middle with red pews and a series of smaller breakout rooms, all of which were adjacent to the sanctuary. We arrived very tired but ready to see what the conference was about. As we walked up we saw a smattering of people outside talking, taking smoke breaks, listening to music etc. When we walked into the check-in area we were given our nametags and congress packets with two sets of colored sticker dots. The colors represented the sessions we were supposed to attend and that we would rotate with our group for the duration of the day. My first impression of the conference was that it felt like a space led by young people, there were no elders hovering in different spaces giving their input or directing us or lecturing us with rhetoric. Often invisible and/or hovering elders heavily direct these spaces for "young people". I'm not sure who the invisible elders might have been but it certainly felt like a space that was at least on the surface, controlled by my peers.

The first session I walked into was called "Watch the Throne" a power point presentation led by the Dream Defender's Political Director Curtis. (Each of the sessions

were titled with popular Hip Hop References, “Watch the Throne” is a collaborate album put out by Jay Z and Kanye West in 2011. Other sessions were titled “The Firm” (a New York based super group featuring Nas, Foxy Brown and AZ among others back in the mid-90s) “The Miseducation” (Lauryn Hill’s 1998 Grammy award winning album and also a likely reference to Carter G. Woodson’s The Miseducation of the Negro) “If I Ruled the World” (a hit collaboration between Nas and Lauryn Hill from 1996) “IDFWU” (I Don’t Fuck With You a 2014 collaboration between Big Sean and E-40) and “The Blueprint” (A Jay-Z classic). I’m guessing the original goal was for these songs to provide some kind of guide for the content of the sessions but I am no sure that was successfully executed.) Curtis grew up with a rather precarious life in Miami. His mother was a poor white woman who worked as a sex worker and his dad had come to the US from Cuba in the 1980s on the Mariel Boatlift and spent the majority of his life in the US in and out of prisons. This entire story was told in his introduction to the session, which I though was great to know but also a bit odd that he went into so much detail given the context of the session.

In this particular session we were supposed to be learning about power structures but the session was quite poorly organized so I was in and out of the session. The problem with the session was that Curtis did not interrogate his own power in the room and refused to relinquish any of it to create a collective thinking space. The session turned into more of a lecture than anything else and it failed to be generative of any new or collective information. As Mazuba and I reflected on this session we discussed some of the ways the session could have been better, which took us to Adrienne Maree Brown’s latest writings on emergent strategy.

Emergent strategy is something I was utterly unfamiliar with prior to the upsurge in youth activism following the death of Mike Brown. I have seen attempts to use it in People of Color Meeting held in Durham, NC as local community members tried to create outlets where are the various organizing factions that had formed in Durham could meet on common ground. I cannot say I found that experience with emergent strategy/theory one that allowed me to experience its efficacy for myself, however I do think there is something important that needs to be grappled with when trying to bring many intelligent passionate people into a room, when trying to uncover everyone's strengths and major issues of concern and attempting to building working teams around those major issues of concerns.

The second session I attended was called "The Art of Storytelling" (a famous Outkast track released back in 1998). This session was particularly jarring because the session began with the session leader telling her life story and kind of emotionlessly relaying her childhood experiences of being molested by her older brother and not being able to deal with it because her Jamaican family didn't talk about things like that and then jumped to how she came to be involved with the Dream Defenders. The point of the session was to tell us that everyone has a story, which is true but I wonder what is at stake when a political decision is made to employ such stories as a methodology for organizing? We are a deeply scarred people and we are often silent about our traumas because we don't have healthy and safe avenues to voice them but I think it can be equally problematic to share such trauma with a group or person that may or may not treat that information with care. It can also come off as an opportunistic organizing model and I am not sure I agree or see its utility as an organizing practice without critical

engagement. As I listened to her story I was reminded about how I felt when we (Black I.S.) attended to Organization for Black Struggle's organizing meeting during the October Weekend of resistance in Ferguson. As we were discussing issues in the larger collective, trauma and healing came up and a decision was made to have break out groups, one of which was dedicated to talking about dealing with trauma. We did some brief introductions and wet straight into a breathing exercise without actually having a generative discussion around trauma and why breathing exercises may or may not help. Also the space felt forced, as did the call to tell your story at the dream defenders congress.

As is usually the case at big conferences, some of the most meaningful interactions take place during the "in-between" times of the conference. The format of this particular conference offered a significant amount of budgeted unstructured time. One of those times is always lunch, lunch allows for honest reflection and making new contacts without worrying about being rude or disruptive in a session. During our first full day at lunch we began a discussion about religious beliefs which was sparked by a mention of Halie Selassi and a response that he was an incredibly problematic leader despite the fact that Rastafarians celebrate him as the Black messiah, for Ethiopians of his era he was a tyrant and a terrorizer, he fed people to lions. This conversation segued into a conversation about Black Americans religious beliefs and the oppressive roots of African's exposure to Christianity. The primary gist of this conversation was that no matter the ways some people tried to appropriate a liberatory theory of Christianity, the vast majority, if not all of us came to Christianity through white supremacy and to not practice the white supremacy of Christianity has to be a constant active fight. A

conversation to this effect always seems to surface among young Black organizers grappling with what it means to be radical in a southern Black Christian context. The feelings of discomfort when one has to interrogate a line of thought that they never have before, how for some its unnerving and for others they retreat entirely and for others still they jump in head first.

(Beginning after dinner with Trent bringing up Rastafarianism and issues with Haile Selassie) The conversation with Bree about how no matter what she believes she came to Christianity through white supremacist imperialism (she stormed away at the end of the convo) - the follow-up conversation with Bree, when she felt that Mazuba was telling her. Needing to find your people in a moment especially when you feel alienated in a particular political space.

The session after lunch was on the "rules" of major oppressive systems like Capitalism, Imperialism, Sexism, and Racism etc. This particular breakout was a lot more generative in that it allowed the participants to share and develop their own understanding of each of the concepts however the story telling methodology was once again strangely deployed. One of the facilitators of this session was a young woman named Sherika. As an introductory exercise she began to tell a story about her grandmother being an immigrant from Jamaica and working as a caregiver all of her life and in the end of her life not being taken care of and almost dying because of the way she was precariously being cared for in the home because she didn't have insurance. In some ways the story was relevant because we were discussing the multitude of ways these oppressive systems devalue our lives and I found myself being overwhelmed with my own emotions and feelings about my grandmother's death and some of the poor care she

received in hospitals over the years. As one point I found it so overwhelming I had to leave. Again, this organizing method can be extremely helpful in developing relationships if deployed properly but in other instances its feels voyeuristic and emotionally manipulative. Such traumatic stories should be shared in authentic moments with sufficient build up, it seems shady to deploy it as a relational organizing methodology because it evokes all kinds of trauma for the storyteller as well as the listener and neither party may be prepared or equipped to deal with the fallout of picking at emotional wounds.

Another interesting, pivotal and emotional moment was when all of the conference attendees were asked to take a picture in solidarity with the group of students from Ayotzinapa, Mexico fighting to find out what happened to the 43 disappeared Mexican students. During the taking of the picture one of the women from the delegation read a statement of solidarity from the students in Mexico, in Spanish and then translated. They then asked to record us chanting a slogan in Spanish in solidarity with the young people and their families in Ayotzinapa. The slogan was "Ni Perdon, ni olvido! Castigo a los asesinos!" Apparently someone in the group was complaining about saying the slogan in Spanish without knowing what it meant. As the picture was wrapping, a young Dream Defender named Daniella, who is originally from Margarita Island, Venezuela with tears in her eyes and her voice asks for the attention of everyone in the crowd. She proceeded to reprimand the group for their impatience and insensitivity and reminded them that we were supposed to be in a collaborative political space and that folks were being imperialist about the languages being spoken and used. She then asked them to think for a minute about the endless number of immigrants who have to navigate

American terrain being treated as less than and struggling with having no one willing or able to translate things into Spanish for them. The group seemed to receive her criticism without much opposition.

For the final sessions of the second day congress participants were asked to propose and then pitch their unplugged sessions and other attendees would be allowed to pick and choose two that they would like to attend. There were over 20 unplugged sessions proposed, one of which was a session on Pan-Africanism that a primarily drew an international group of participants and facilitators. The session was facilitated by a young woman with a Black American Mother and Nigerian father who was based in Arizona. Other participants were: a Congolese organizer with Friend of the Congo who had been based in NC but recently moved to Ferguson, MO to work with Hands up United. There was also an Eritrean student who was based in Oakland but had also studies in Cape Town South Africa who's father had fought in Eritrean liberation struggles. There was a young Ugandan man who had been raised primarily in the Bahamas but was now based in Florida, a young Haitian man based in Miami, one of the women from the Ayotzinapa delegation, a Peruvian immigrant woman Sofia Campos who is a lead organizer with United We Dream, a white Brazilian American citizen, a self-identified Hebrew Israelite from Atlanta, Mazuba a Zambian immigrant by way of South Africa and myself.

In the Pan Africanism unplugged session, as we were discussing ways of moving discussions and understandings of Pan-Africanism into the present rather than something that peaked with African Independence and died with Kwame Nkrumah and how to effectively live Pan-Africanism in our daily lives and to move discussions Kambale

begins to weave this magnificent story that is essentially a parable for both the necessity and inevitability of Pan-Africanism. He says to us:

Do you know how the Congo is connected to the very issue of state sanctioned violence and terrorism that has brought us all together here at this conference? He tells us that the city of Sanford, FL, the city where Trayvon Martin was murdered in cold blood by George Zimmerman in February of 2012 is named after Henry Shelton Sanford. In 1861 President Abraham Lincoln appointed Sanford as the ambassador to Belgium. In 1876 he was named acting Delegate of the American Geographical Society to a conference called by King Leopold II of Belgium to organize the International African Association with the purpose of opening up equatorial Africa to "civilizing" influences. Leopold II used Sanford to convince Henry Morton Stanley to explore the Congo basin for Belgium in 1878. He then hired Sanford in 1883 as his envoy to the United States to try to gain American recognition for his colony in the Congo Basin, which became known as the Congo Free State.

In 1886, Sanford organized in Brussels and dispatched to the Congo and its tributaries the Sanford Exploring Expedition for the purpose of scientific and commercial discovery and for the opening up of an interior trade. His steamboats "Florida" and "New York" were the first commercial steamers to penetrate the waters of the upper Congo. From September 1886 to February 1888 Sanford worked for the Expedition on river transports. King Leopold II of Belgium led one of the most ruthless genocidal campaigns against the people of the Congo in his endeavors to control the landmass that would come to be known as the Congo and recognized as the sole possession of King Leopold by the United States of America.

When thinking of state violence and how these issues are connected globally, the Congo is perhaps one of the more pertinent historical examples. As laid out earlier, the Congo and the United States of America are intricately linked from their births, births which both required significant amounts of bloodshed. Just as the United States is a country founded on the blood of Native Americans and the backs of enslaved Africans, the slaughter lead by King Leopold of Belgium that brought the Congo Free State into existence is perhaps one of the largest African genocides to take place in the 19th century.

It is in understanding connections like this that we can begin to articulate a living breathing Pan-Africanism of the 21st century. If, as Henry Sylvester Williams argued, "Pan-Africanism is something we must define in struggle" we must keep our eyes and ears out for wherever revolutionary struggle is taking place. In the US, protests, demonstrations and full-scale uprisings have taken place in direct response to the increasing visibility of genocidal tendencies on the part of the US government. If we had a camera that could take a panorama of the worlds uprising by dispossessed peoples, we would also have to pay attention to the generations long struggles of Palestinians.

It was this session that prompted Mazuba and I to begin to discuss how useful it would be to have this conversation about Pan-Africanism with the folks we had been working and organizing with over the past 6 months. We decided that we would figure out a way to invite some of these people to Durham, NC for a few days of brainstorming, sharing etc. At the time we had no idea what bringing these people to North Carolina would entail and we had no vision of what exactly we would do once they arrived, what we did know was that it was incredibly important to continue the work of building community amongst like-minded people who are trying to do good work. We floated the

suggestion to they group and everyone was excited about the possibility. It would only be in mid-February that we would really begin to have a fleshed out vision for the visit and that we started making the weekend actually happen.

It is important to note that Moral Mondays was largely a faith based movement that attempted to address a broad swath of legislative and policy issues across the state of North Carolina, that was also for the most part, unsuccessful in gaining a significant amount of youth participation. When we six were arrested it was part of an attempt to put a youth face on the Moral Monday's movement. In the summer of 2014, in an effort to continue the momentum of the past summer's moral Mondays demonstrations with an explicit focus on youth engagement and in commemoration of the 1964 Freedom Summer, the North Carolina NAACP launched what they called "Moral Freedom Summer." Just like the first "Freedom Summer," Moral Freedom summer was a voter registration push, however, unlike in 1964 when the youth of the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) were still heavily tied to the Black Church and believed in the hope and promise of enfranchisement, the youth of the Moral Freedom Summer had a very different relationship to politics.

JOSHUA'S STORY

Thanks to the ever growing non-profit industrial complex, many college aged youth with an interest in civic engagement had opportunities to do voter registration work for pay and many have grown leery of the process of soliciting new voters with nothing to really promise or offer. This was something my husband Joshua was particularly

resistant to given his experience working in leadership on the 2008 North Carolina Barack Obama Campaign. One of Joshua's biggest regrets was doing so much work to gain the trust, support, and ultimately the vote of his community members in 2008 only to have the office shut down two days after the election with no future prospects. This wasn't as much a concern for himself self as it was for the people he felt responsible to in his own community. While most of the hired help for the 2008 presidential campaign were flown in from elsewhere, Joshua was organizing the base for Barack Obama in his own neighborhood. All of the work he'd done recruiting volunteers and the people he had gotten "fired up and ready to go" in order to get Obama elected, were excited about their new found political involvement with nowhere to direct their energies. This was apparently a largely unspoken yet shared sentiment of the more than thousands of volunteers and paid employees after the 2008 fervor. Many believed that they were really working for a true change and to wake up on November 5th to what appeared to be business as usual, was a serious disappointment. Moral Freedom summer came on the heels of two Obama elections and a growing discontent among America's youth for both electoral and respectability politics.

Joshua completed his undergraduate studies at North Carolina Central in December 2007, just as one of the most anticipated political primary seasons in history was gearing up. He recalls lots of talk about Hillary Clinton becoming the first woman president and how obvious it was that she would win. Barack Obama was also in the race, but it wasn't the first time a black man had run for president in his lifetime, Al Sharpton had run in 2004.

After Obama won the Iowa primary in January of 2008 I began to pay closer attention to him as a candidate. I was intrigued by his message of hope, and change, which meant a lot to me because of my strong opposition to the war in Iraq. It also began to sink in that I could have been looking at the first African American president of the United States. As the South Carolina Primary approached, the conversations around race and the general sentiment that Bill Clinton was the first black president seemed so foolish to me that it motivated some of my friends and I to go down to South Carolina to volunteer for Obama for America. We got to Orangeburg the night before the primary, slept in a cheap hotel room, and rallied at the campaign headquarters the next morning. My friends and I knocked on doors all day and in the process, met some of the most amazing people. When I think back on it, it was actually meeting those people that gave me hope that the world could change. Our efforts paid off, Barack Obama won the South Carolina primary and we went home.

I was still jobless about a month later when one of the women from my college who coordinated our trip to South Carolina called me and told me that the North Carolina campaign, based in my hometown of Raleigh, was hiring. She gave me the contact information for Khalil Thompson, a Black man working for Barack Obama at the time. After just one conversation I was no longer jobless. I started as a field organizer. Because I was the only black man and the only Raleigh native working as a field organizer at the time, I ended up organizing in southeast Raleigh, the predominantly Black section of town. I became close with students and administrators at Shaw University and St. Augustine's College, two small private HBCUs in Raleigh. Through organizing canvasses in primarily Black sections of town I became aware of the

particular economic hardships Black folks faced in southeast Raleigh and Orangeburg SC. Raleigh was bigger than Orangeburg but the problems were eerily the same. Most phone numbers and addresses for Black folks on our call sheets were wrong, mainly because it is not uncommon for poor Black folks move some time two or three times a year. I witnessed racial profiling, drug raids, homelessness and abject poverty. I often ran into people who just wanted help; for many of them, it was the first time anyone from any political campaign had ever come to their doors. Though many were experiencing significant crises, I found my community to be one rooted in love and compassion for the people who lived there. That feeling was addictive, and affirmed my love for my people.

I had a lot of great times working on the Obama campaign but when the Democratic National Convention took over the campaign after he won the nomination, things quickly shifted. Many of the faces on the campaign changed, our front office assistant, a Black woman, was removed, and replaced with a white woman. The emphasis on numbers as deliverables replaced the care and compassion that existed in the office during the primary season. I gradually grew ill with eczema that consumed my entire body. I had four biopsies just to figure out what was happening to me. Through that trying process, I had the opportunity to reflect, and by the time the Get Out the Vote (GOTV) initiatives began in late October, the writing was on the wall, I decided that I would never work for another presidential campaign.

We received talking points explaining that the office of the presidency was a job, and that while Barack Obama might be a great person, he had a job description to uphold. On election day in 2008, I remember the state office telling us to shut down our field offices by 7 pm and head to a staff only watch party. The announcement came, and I can

remember being overwhelmed with emotion, watching the US name its first Black president. I cried, and celebrated with my team. The very next day, volunteers stopped by the office, eager to know what was next. We had no idea. I was the only person working on the campaign that was from Raleigh, so the responsibility of answering that question rested solely with me, everyone else packed up their cars and drove back to their home states. I was left holding the bag. When I realized how I had been used, and per campaign suggestions to go back to school because the economy was about to tank, I decided to go to graduate school.

Two years later, as I was working to complete a master's degree in history at NCCU, I received an email from Erin Byrd, a woman with ties to the grassroots, non-profit community in NC about a job as State Coordinator with the NAACP. I thought this would be a more fitting role if I was to continue working in politics. It was local, non-partisan, and not for profit. My work with the NAACP put me back into the community that I loved, this time in all 100 counties of the state of North Carolina. I was working directly with Rev. Dr. William J Barber II, a man who was revered around the country as a modern day civil rights icon. His passion, and drive were honorable, and his commitment to the people was enough to inspire anyone to jump on board. During my time with the NAACP, I became a part of a movement family. That family had the kind of care and compassion that I was longing for during the end of the Obama campaign. Rev. Barber had a moral compass, something that I could jump on board with.

One of my first experiences while working for the NAACP was the state wide poverty tour. That tour exposed me to a kind of poverty that I'd never seen before. There were neighborhoods in some eastern North Carolina towns that had no running water, and

missing floors in their homes. It was a kind of poverty I was aware of, but had never witnessed first-hand. I was this experience that allowed my theoretical political critiques to meet my actual experiences. During the Obama campaign, I saw the poverty daily, but it wasn't our job to help, it was our job to turn them out to vote. In the case of the NAACP, I felt that we had some resources to actually help, even if they were limited. Believe that I could help gave me a sense of purpose. There was still a history to the NAACP that I understood to be bourgeois, a kind of southern class politics heavily associated with church but one that felt familiar nonetheless. My own religious convictions were complicated because I didn't grow up in a traditional Black southern Baptist church, but the community was still familiar. The NC NAACP seemed to be a reasonable tool begin creating solutions with, especially since Rev. Barbers politics were much more radical than the tradition of the actual organization.

Over time, I realized that the Obama administration was failing to address the needs of the Black community. It also began to click to me, how to apply the theory of liberation to actual work. Many of the articles and books I was reading at the time were socio-political, psycho-social analyses of the work that needed to take place in order to obtain liberation. That information began to make since once I began to see tangible examples in the communities. Even though the work we were doing with the NAACP was centered on voting, I often found myself engaged in community building that extended far beyond the voting booth. Barber's radical, moral based platform gave allowed us to extend our focus beyond voting to what was fundamentally right. It lent enough radical ideology to be able to see its utility, but was increasingly not radical enough to house my growing desire to see real change. There was too much willingness

to compromise on what was established as morally right. But baby steps were better than no steps. By the time I walked away from the NAACP in February 2013, I was ready to try something more than marches and rallies.

In late April 2013, the very first Moral Monday took place. I was among the 17 original arrestees. I remember Rev. Barber being there along with Dr. Tim Tyson, author of Blood Done Signed My Name, and Radio Free Dixie; former SNCC organizer Al McSurely, Wilmington 10-member Rev. Kojo Nantambu and other members of local chapters of the NAACP. There was a prayer for the state of North Carolina, and a brief press conference explaining the reason for the convening and the civil disobedience. The seventeen people went into the building, got arrested, and Moral Mondays began. There was political outrage across the state at how regressive the politics of the GOP were. You have to remember that the state went to Barack Obama in 2008 and to Mitt Romney in 2012 which represented a dramatic shift in statewide politics. There was no doubt that race was at the center of the reaction, especially when one of the first laws to be repealed when the GOP took over was the Racial Justice Act, a law that allowed minorities convicted of the same crimes as whites but got harsher sentences, to appeal their sentence on the basis of racial discrimination. So for the NAACP and the HKonJ coalition (Hundred Thousand on Jones Street) to take up the fight head on was symbolic and more.

In June 2013, three months into Moral Mondays, a coalition of youth members including myself started "Witness Wednesday", where youth assembled, much like Moral Monday, to bring their political grievances to the governor's office in the state capital. I was arrested at the first meeting at the capital. We were demanding a meeting with the governor to protest the draconian voter id bill that was set to go to the legislature.

Because of the optics, they immediately released us and gave us citations instead of taking us downtown.

Moral Mondays continued to grow by leaps and bounds. One month later, after my first arrest, five thousand people showed up to the General Assembly. There had been at least 500 arrests made for civil disobedience by then. Opposition to house bill 589 was growing and national coverage was significant. Moral Monday became a well-recognized southern fried phenomenon. I met up with an old friend Bree, who came out with me to a Moral Monday demonstration near the middle of the summer, that was being covered by MSNBC and other news outlets. We witnessed at least 100 folks getting arrested for civil disobedience in opposition to the North Carolina GOP. As the next Witness Wednesday was approaching a fellow NC NAACP employee and friend Rob Stephens and I started thinking about how to get more youth involved with the growing momentum of Moral Mondays. The votes on HB 589 in the NCGA were coming up that Wednesday, so it seemed the perfect time to escalate our action. We decided on staging a sit-in in Thom Tillis' office. He was the President of the State Senate at the time and had the power to refuse to introduce the bill for a vote. After Moral Monday, Rob and I sat with Laurel Ashton, another local organizer for the NAACP, Layla, Bree, to talk out our strategy. Everyone agreed that getting arrested was a risk worth taking to bring attention to the racist law the state was attempting to pass.

There were two more strategic meetings before our planned sit in. The day before we staged the sit in, there was a public hearing on the voter id bill that myself Allison Riggs from the Southern Coalition for Social Justice spoke at, along with a few others protesting the bill. We knew then that the bill was going to pass. The night before our

arrest, my brother Jonah, my best friend Wes, Layla, and Bree went to the jail to help with Jail support for folks who got arrested on Monday. There we had a Skype conversation with Umi Selah f.k.a. as Phillip Agnew, Executive Director of the Dream Defenders. It was then that I was absolutely convinced that while all politics were local, we needed to connect our struggles as youth. I felt it was a strategy of the ruling class to keep us from communicating. During that call, we made tentative plans to go to Florida to stand in solidarity with the Dream Defenders, who had recently begun what would become a month long occupation of the Florida Capitol.

The next morning, we met at Pullen Memorial Baptist church to go over our plan and prep for the press conference. We sat through the senate vote at the general assembly, and once the bill passed we went to sit in at Tillis' office. I remember thinking to myself, after our statements were made when we sat down, that it wasn't going to be enough. We needed to do something more after this. We were arrested without real incident, however the bond for the men in the group was set at $10,000, while the women's' were set at $1,000. I'm sure it was a scare tactic from the GOP magistrate.

Afterward there was a series of interviews and press coverage that took place. Most of it was focused on me, because I was still a graduate student at NCCU and part of the bill that we were protesting was aim at disenfranchising students. There was also a group of about 15 of us that were going to ride down to Florida sponsored by the NAACP. The day before we were supposed to leave we had a conference call with Rev. Barber suggesting that we shouldn't go to the Florida state Capitol. Apparently there were rumors of Federal charges for the students and young people occupying the State Capitol. Myself, Layla, Bree and good friend Michael Hannah decided to raise the gas

money ourselves and go down to Florida anyway. After our trip to Florida our relationship with the Dream Defenders continued to grow over the years and we worked closely with them as we were trying to develop a youth organization in our home state. It was during that time that Bryan Perlmutter and I began to talk regularly. He was part of an organization that was a spinoff of the Workers World Party called NC Student Power Network. As Layla, Bree and I hung out regularly, we began to think about what it meant to build an organization that could really reflect the desires of millennials. As life would have it, I moved away to pursue another degree in my first love, trombone performance, Bree started spending more time in Charlotte with her ailing grandmother, though we know she stayed active. We all have remained close friends but have pursued our own paths in life.

A NOTE ON THE TERM "RADICAL"

Radicalization of youth has almost become exclusively associated by definition and association with extremism and/or zealotry, both domestic and international. Western propaganda in its war on "terror" has villainized the term and its processes as an unacceptable form or alternative for youth development. Radicalization in western propaganda is the equivalent of abnormal, anti-social, illogical and unjustifiable behavior. Oppression, exploitation, poverty and suffering are normalized, inevitable, and immutable. In contrast, in *Black Marxism*, Cedric Robinson situates "the Black Radical Tradition" within the realm of a particular class critique informed by a Marxist perspective. Robin D.G. Kelley picks up the torch from Robinson in his work *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* beginning with the following questions: "What are today's young activists dreaming about? We know what they are fighting against, but what are they fighting for?" (2002, 7). Kelley contends "Revolutionary dreams erupt out of political engagement; collective social movements are incubators of new knowledge." But he expresses concerns about his students who mistakenly situate activism and intellectual work at opposite ends of the spectrum of necessary work to be done in the name of freedom. He finds that many are "unwitting advocates of a kind of 'talented tenth' ideology of racial uplift, trying to 'reach the people' with more 'accessible' knowledge, to carry back to the 'hood the information folks need to liberate themselves" (2002, 8).

I am convinced, as is Kelley, "that Social movements" such as the ones we are presently witnessing, "generate new knowledge, new theories, new questions," and that "the most *radical* ideas often grow out of a concrete intellectual engagement with the

problems of aggrieved populations confronting systems of oppression." Radicalization here should be understood a process/agency for progress and revolutionary change. The radicalization of Black/African youth explored here does not necessarily all fit in one neat ideological category, however, their quest for a specific kind of freedom for Black/African descended peoples put them on paths moving them progressively toward more radical and hopefully revolutionary change.

SOME CONCLUSIONS ON THE WILL TO LOVE AND DREAM

It is our duty to fight for our freedom
It is our duty to win
We must love and support one another
We have nothing to lose but our chains
~Assata Shakur

At the risk of seeming ridiculous, let me say that the true revolutionary is guided by a great feeling of love. It is impossible to think of a genuine revolutionary lacking this quality. […] he/she must combine a passionate spirit with a cold intelligence and painful decisions without flinching. […] one must have a great deal of humanity and a strong sense of justice and truth in order to not fall into extreme dogmatism and cold scholasticism, into isolation from the masses. We must strive everyday so that this love of living humanity will be transformed into actual deeds, into acts of service as examples, as a moving force.
~Che Guevara

Who taught you to love the color of your skin?
BLACK POWER
Who taught you to love the texture of your hair?
BLACK POWER
Who taught you to love the shape of your nose and the shape of your lips?
BLACK POWER
Who taught you to love yourself from the top of your head to the soles of your feet?
BLACK POWER
Who taught you to love yourself?
BLACK POWER
~ Malcolm X

THE WILL TO LOVE AND DREAM

What precisely is it that disallows some to conceive of love and revolution in the same thought stream? Is it because revolution brings to mind guns, war, turmoil and political unrest while love, seemingly the opposite of revolution, brings to mind sex, flowers and romance? In this chapter, I will outline what I believe is perhaps a more productive way of thinking about love, at least for the billions of oppressed and

marginalized peoples of the world. I present here an effort at "theorizing" Revolutionary Love through and epistemological examination of Revolutionary Black love. Much has been written about utopian notions of romantic love and its association with the rise of capitalism and bourgeois aspirations. Here I will only rehearse some of the basic claims briefly in order to offer what I believe is a need to love for revolutionary potential at times of extreme hatred and denied humanity. In some ways love can be evoked as a sort of respectable/Christian way of dealing with ones adversaries/foes but this chapter will focus on the more insular evocations of love among Black/African/African descended activists in the US and to a lesser extent in Venezuela.

I don't really remember the first time I heard it but I do remember that by October of 2014, I had begun to hear this refrain at meetings and demonstrations, people were whispering it like a mantra and yelling it to the top of their lungs in affirmation. This mantra, this affirmation is my generation's version of a freedom song, a freedom dream. On a frigid early spring night in 2014 about twenty-five people under the age of 30 sat around a camp fire at the Highlander Research and Education Center in the foothills of the Tennessee mountains attempting to decompress from the day's work of self-exploration and non-violence trainings. The bulk of the day had been comprised of trainings designed to help us understand what the trainers were calling "Kingian Non-Violence" and how to construct Dr. King's notion of the Beloved Community. Myself, my husband Joshua and our friend Bree Newsome had been invited to participate in this weekend long training by the Dream Defenders. The day was replete with training literature, role playing and heated discussion. We began the day with discussions what kind if values we shared, defining violence and exploring our own feelings about the

philosophy of non-violence. Interestingly many of the young people in the room were silently battling with the viability of non-violent philosophy, particularly in the wake of ever rising awareness of the brutal deaths of Black and Brown bodies at the hands of the police.

About half-way through the training, a young brother named Jeremy raised his hand, and after being recognized offered up a quote from Kwame Ture/Stokely Carmichael about Dr. King's noting of non-violence that he had written down. He read "Dr. King's policy was that nonviolence would achieve gains for black people in the United States. His Major assumption was that if you are nonviolent, if you suffer, your opponent will see your suffering and will be moved to change his heart. But he made one fallacious assumption: In order for nonviolence to work, your opponent must have a conscience. The United States has none." This quote essentially opened the floodgates for other people in the room to begin questioning the efficacy of nonviolence as a principle. Many suggested that they could get with the idea of nonviolence as a strategy or tactic but to be principally committed to it under any and all circumstances was beyond the scope of what they imagined to be reasonable. Kanu, the trainer, then stated that "non-violence is about recognizing what we all have in common, about never losing faith that all of humanity possess a moral conscious." Though it was not explicitly stated during the conversation above, I have observed that my generation's discomfort with the principle of nonviolence is wrapped up in our aversion to respectability politics and the fact that nonviolent protests are inextricability linked with the respectability politics of the Civil Rights movement. The initial acts of civil disobedience led by the Dream Defenders were indeed nonviolent, but after 30 days of capitol building occupation they

discovered that without force, the status quo would remain. After all, many of the cases of police shootings of black and brown people in the streets of the United States were most often committed against unarmed and non-violent citizens as in the cases of Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, Jordan Davis, etc. A commitment to move beyond principled nonviolence and be verbally supportive of the rebellions that took place in Ferguson and Baltimore during 2014 and 2015 can and should be read as a move of radical self-love by young black and brown millennials.

> To the slave, revolution [wa]s an imperative, a love-inspired, conscious act of desperation. It [wa]s aggressive. It [wa]sn't 'cool' or cautious. It [was] bold, audacious, violent, an expression of icy, disdainful hatred! (Jackson 1972, 9-10).

In a video I came across on Facebook via the For Harriet page, a young black woman whose twitter handle is @EVEEEEEZY offered a commentary on the psychological difficulties of being a Black Millennial in the age of omnipresent social media. The question she poses to the audience is "Have you ever just wanted to call in Black to work?" Specifically, she addresses the phenomenon of waking up daily to alerts via one's twitter/Facebook or other social media feed about yet another murder of an unarmed Black person. She calls attention to the daily barrage of emotions from sadness, hysteria, sometimes reckless anger and most fundamentally, grief. It is not only the murders of unarmed Black folks but the constant harassment, sexual abuse and constant fear of state violence. At the climax of the short clip she ultimately declares SOMETIMES I NEED A MINUTE, shortly after which a clip of her lying in bed calling her place of employment to tell them that her condition is not contagious but she just needs a solid day to reaffirm her humanity before she can face the world again and another of her saying she has a slight fever from boiling with the rage of police killing

my people!! In mainstream white feminist speak this might be classified as a "mental health day," which to be fair, most people need, not just from time to time but regularly. However, the particular phenomena of the mass consumption of the brutalization of black bodies on a nearly daily basis is positively more sinister. The production and consumption of such images serve to re-instill fear in a population of non-black folks who may or may not be moving to more politically liberal and or radical stances on state violence but it is also to remind the underclass/caste, in this case Black Americans, that the fight for our humanity is a futile one. The very decision to way up and continue to consume such images and speak truth to power, is for many millennial black activists a daily act of radical self love. To assert that those people will not die quietly, nameless with unmarked graves but their wrongful executions as a result of American genocidal practices will and must serve as a impetus to constantly radicalize ourselves and our political work, leading only to revolution. This, in its most basic, uncomplicated essence is the practice of revolutionary love.

Around the end of graduate studies, I began to look into other things that I could possibly do with the "skills" I had developed over the past 5-6 years sitting in a classroom talking about ideas. One of the opportunities that presented itself was the chance to work as a field researcher on a developing documentary about the Mondowmin Mall incident that had occurred in early spring of 2015 in Baltimore City. The film was to be published through Fusion Films which had, only a few months before, produced a documentary on Ferguson, MO and the racialized municipal traps that have been used for generations to maintain a permanent racialized underclass, for which my husband helped compose the film score. I traveled with the documentary crew to Baltimore to begin

preliminary research to determine whether the documentary was even feasible. We spent about one week in various parts of Baltimore, MD trying to gather information from multiple sources on what transpired over the days and weeks following the murder of Freddie Gray in the back of a Baltimore City Police transport vehicle.

One of the meetings we happened upon while gathering initial research was a non-violent direct action training on the campus of the University of Maryland Baltimore County in the wake of Freddie Gray's murder and the Mondowmin mall incident where the city police and a number of other state police forces had corralled high school students on the false premise that the student had plans to reenact a "Purge" a 2013 horror/thriller film that received relatively low box office ratings and eventually turned into a violent clash between citizen/children and the state. This training was co-facilitated by Reverend Osagyafo Uhuru Sekou, through the Deep Abiding Love Project, who gained national recognition for being a leading clergy member supporting the youth on the streets in Ferguson. The training had been taking place for most of the day and we arrived a few hours in. Much of what we observed were activities meant to help participants understand their own positions on non-violence through a number of scenarios so that they could be better equipped in the event of an actual direct action scenario. The training was held in a dorm multipurpose room with a few white boards and enough room to seat the 20 or so people present in a large circle. Reverend Sekou, myself and the rest of the documentary crew (which composed of the primary field researcher/producer, a camera man and my husband) sat on the outer edge of the circle, primarily observing with a few comments here and there. I was struggling internally being present at the training for a number of reasons, the least of which was that I had

been to many of these types of trainings before and I never felt particularly empowered or equipped when I left. I also found myself wondering how this particular gathering would prove fruitful for the purposes of the documentary.

The most profound issue I was struggling with internally however, was that I always found problematic the number of "activists", scholars and lay persons in the black community who elevate "non-violence" to the status of a principle to live by, rather than a strategic necessity. In my relatively informed opinion, the fallout of such respectability politics has been that the non-conventional political reactions of youth who refuse to appeal to such civil rights era politics get read and re-read as thuggish and worst of all as "counter-productive" or hindering political progress by playing into the already poor conceptions of Black people held by the general American public, which could not be farther from the truth. About half-way through our time at the training Rev. Sekou popped up from his corner seat to respond to some sentiments that had been raised questioning the effectiveness of non-violent direct actions. He proceeded to tell a story about when he was in Ferguson and was being arrested and essentially physically accosted by local police. He assured everyone in the room that he too struggles with the "practice" of non-violence during direct actions and in his daily life. He went on to reveal that there were times when he wanted to "haul off and hit someone" but he understood that in that moment, it would be counter-productive to the pre agreed upon desired outcomes of the action. He finally reminded us that all revolutionary acts must come from a place of "deep abiding love." Perhaps because we missed the introduction to the training and perhaps because my mind was elsewhere, his repetition of the phrase "deep abiding love" really struck a chord with me. It struck me because usually clergy and

Black clergy in particular, rely upon biblical parables of love to drive out hate through directives such as "love thy enemy". I was struck by his alternative use of the notion love as something that one needs and must use in the fight for justice, equality and freedom from oppression. This was a love that was not first and foremost concerned with the enemy, but with truth, justice and a love of one's own marginalized peoples. He said that it was his love for his people, which in his personal and theological view were ALL oppressed people, that kept his visceral emotions at bay.

This training was in fact a product of an organization that grew out of the unrest in Ferguson, MO. The Deep Abiding Love Project was formed in Ferguson, MO in November of 2014. According to their website the Deep Abiding Love Project (DALP) is:

> dedicated to providing training and resources for activists, organizers, rabble rousers, and trouble makers of all kinds. Towards liberation, DALP engages a prefigurative process in building community and organizing from the 5th dimension (love) while amplifying the voices of Black and non-Black people of color. It is based on our observations that strong community connections and access to training and education make people more centered, calmer and better able to make safe decisions in crisis situations, especially those created by a violent, white supremacist state.

The DALP project is one of the numerous organizations that were created as a direct result of the overwhelming public reaction to the rising awareness of racialized state violence (police brutality). In the wake of the tragic murders of Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, Mike Brown, and Freddie Gray (I list these names not because they are more important than the countless other named and unnamed victims but because they are the names that rose to prominence in this particular historical moment to galvanize a relatively dormant people) various affirmations of that deep abiding love proliferated all across the country and indeed the world. In Florida, the Dream Defenders proclaimed

their love for themselves as black and brown youths who were not interested in "replicating your daddy's civil rights movement". In the Bay Area of California, three black queer women declared that #BlackLivesMatter. In Ferguson black queer women reminded us that Assata taught us that it was our duty to fight for our freedom and to love and support one another. The Ohio Student Association declared that "we must love each other as if our hearts depend on it." And after months of black women fighting on the front lines to combat state violence some of those same Black Women and more told us to #sayhername because #blackwomenmatter as they bared their breasts in the freedom cry and protest tradition of their Black/African foremothers. There are certainly numerous organizations that were formed and operating long before the above mentioned high profile police brutality cases, however the proliferation of these organizations in this particular moment is indicative of a few things, one of which is perhaps a deep sanguine knowledge that community organization is necessary for poor, marginalized, Black and brown Folks to overcome the many obstacles in their way to freedom and liberation which can only be achieved by a social, economic and structural revolution.

When I think of these tragic losses followed by the multitudinous responses I can't help but think of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr's call for Black folks to love justice above all else, to love justice so much so that we would be willing to give up the minor comforts of ignorance and complacency and perhaps even give our lives in order to be free. As a theologian, a Black Baptist Preacher and a freedom fighter Dr. King demanded that we take our politics to a transcendent spiritual place of meaningful sacrifice. This sacrificial love can be seen in many places throughout Black communities like churches, schools, family structures and many more. Black Feminist scholars like Patricia Hill Collins, bell

hooks, and many others have been trying to offer an intellectual rubric for thinking about the revolutionary potential of radical Black love for more than two decades now.

Patricia Hill Collins argues that Black women rely on alternative epistemological forms such as personal expressiveness, emotions and empathy or an ethic of care and personal accountability as central to the knowledge validation process in addition to concrete experience and dialogue as critical ways of knowing in the world. We see a particular kind of practice of this as the mothers of slain Black boys are used to generate a narrative beyond the specifics of their child to one that enable a critique of a larger system that devalues Black Lives. Black women have further been able to make the leap and charge that the silences around similar deaths and brutality experienced by Black Women can and should be read as equally damning and significant to our struggles for liberation. In what ways do oppressed peoples in general and Black women in particular create knowledge that fosters resistance?

The emotional appeal of that could have been my "anybody" as John Metta put it "Black people think in terms of *Black people*. We don't see a shooting of an innocent Black child in another state as something separate from us because we know viscerally that it could be our child, our parent, or us, that is shot." Mauro Koury contends, "the anthropology of emotion assumes that natural emotional experiences, felt and experienced by a specific social actor, are relational products between individuals and culture and society" (Koury 1999, 73). Racism is, and always will be, a disease of white people. No amount of living in their communities, going to their schools, marrying them, or 'extending a hand in love' will change or convince white people to see us as anything but subhuman. Black people must begin to do for self and rebuild our own communities.

The tears of that moment were tears had been welling up inside of me since I first saw the movie Deadly Voyage as a 10 or 11-year-old child. A movie based on the true story of Kingsley Ofasa, a Ghanaian dockworker, his brother and seven other African immigrants who stow away on a Ukrainian ship bound for New York in search of a better life. Upon being discovered by the crew the men are taken one by one, murdered and thrown overboard in order to avoid the fines the shipping company would incur for transporting "illegal immigrants." Kinglsey is the only survivor who lives the tell the story. This movie is a reminder a testament to, a documentation of the ways in which non-white, wealthy, heteronormative male bodies carry no currency other than their labor in the fabric of a global neoliberal economy. Those African immigrants were put to death because it would have been too expensive to keep them alive. The so-called wins of New-Deal era policies like social welfare are being eroded because its too cheap to maintain a "free" black population, instead that money has been redirected into a prison system that corrals these poor black able bodies and uses them for free labor, or just 21st century state sponsored slavery. As much as I struggle with the writing of this dissertation it is and must be a labor of revolutionary love. Rosemary Hennessy suggests that love in a materialist sense, can be conceptualized as the passionate reason that accompanies the conversion of unmet need and living labor into organized resistance for a common cause (2014, 265).

In a 2014 article "Black Twitter Uses Social Media to Power 21st Century Civil Rights Movement," the author Terrell Starr cites scholar Jelani Cobb saying the following:

> In the 1960s, the television was the new form of media, so the civil rights movement was able to take what was a regional problem and turn it into a

> national concern, now people can see this in their living room. They could see the images of what was happening in Montgomery, what was happening in Selma in their homes. So I think that what we see now, in terms of hashtags starting conversations and Twitter being able to help people mobilize, is the next step in the evolution in that now people can use that medium in order to register their opinions. So when people are talking about Black Twitter, it's an example of a long-standing tradition of Black people having this running dialogue about public affairs that the mainstream aren't aware of and consider themselves unaffected by, so I think it's part of that same tradition.

As the internet and social media outlets like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tumbler etc become more and more ubiquitous and offer platforms for both entry into and continued dialogue with an online "activist" community that one might not otherwise physically have access to. The utility of social media as a tool for "radical" forces to organize probably gained the most exposure during the so-called Arab Spring. In the wake of the Arab spring and the rumor that people knew to congregate in Tahir Square because of a largely anonymous Facebook network. The truth of the role of Facebook in the Arab Spring is certainly debatable but not what I find of interest here. What I am interested in is the ways in which the lore of the utility of social media in the Arab Spring sparked worldwide debate and interest about the utility of social media in political projects aimed is dismantling oppressive regimes and political organizing. In response to the hope of the possibility of using social media as a form of spreading radical consciousness criticisms were launched at the idea. The term "slacktivism" or "slacktivist" was coined to refer to the growing phenomenon of people who want to appear to be doing something for a particular cause without actually having to do anything and who were able to successfully achieve this aim through the 'overuse" of social media tools like hashtags. (Also the possible connection to why the #purge

hashtag has been used in so many instances to justify police presence, even when there was no real threat, like Baltimore Mondowmin mall incident.

Meredith Clark's 2014 dissertation "To Tweet Our Own Cause: A Mixed-Method Study of the Online Phenomenon of 'Black Twitter'" raises some interesting points for thinking about Black Online communities but also political online communities. Earlier studies on Black Online Communities (Banks, 2006; Florini, 2013) focused on things like cultural performance and racial signifiers like African American Vernacular English (AAVE). Florini argued that hashtags colored with signifiers like AAVE were used as a tool of social critique. In her dissertation, Clarke differentiates the types of hashtags that are used by Black Twitter, she offers three categories of hashtags usages. The first category she describes is hashtags that provide "digital evidence of collective identity social maintenance work" which she exemplifies through the examination of #PaulasBestDishes. Clark describes this hashtag and the ensuing conversational use of it was more of a social commentary on an issue rather than a "movement" designed to effect any particular outcome. The second category of hashtags she describes are designed for a specific outcome or hashtags that "get things done", here she uses the example of JurorB37, a juror in the George Zimmerman trial decided to capitalize on the momentum of the trial and tried to publish a book about her experience as juror on the trial to which Black twitter responded by finding the publisher and demanding to stop the publication of the book, which they did successfully. The third category and the one I am most interested in is the use of hashtags as symbolic resistance. Arguably the three categories work together to create desired outcomes but given that the desired outcome of many of the social media campaigns related to police brutality is an end to state

repression, the "getting things done" category seems less applicable though not totally irrelevant. What I find most useful in her analysis is that she characterizes this particular category of hashtag as a "cultural artifact gathering meaning as it is suspended between virtual and physical worlds (P.130) social/digital life of some of the most popular hashtags used by Black Youth to create community, share information and organize on social media:

MUSICAL EPISTEMOLOGIES IN THE MOVEMENT FOR BLACK LIVES

We Gone Be Alright - Kendrick

Some of the cool stuff the Dream Defenders have done, in terms of the role of art in the movement wasn't just random but was actually a source of analysis. For instance, the chants "Whose World is this?" … "The World is Ours" come from arguably one of the greatest hip hop albums of all time, *Illmatic* by Nas. They were in the Florida Capitol discussing and negotiating whether the actual space of the Capitol was theirs. Did the state belong to them? If so, did the capitol belong to them? It was an empower reclamation of space that informed their campaign to take over the Florida Capitol in order to demand change because the world is indeed ours.

In the wake of the Michael Dunn or so-called "loud music" trial for the murder of Jordan Davis, Sandra Khalifa, co-communications director of Dream Defenders, was in her Tallahassee apartment coordinating a Twitter strategy, and within an hour, she and a few other staff members created graphics capturing the team's emotions and tweeted

them. #NeverLovedUs was trending a few hours later. *#NeverLovedUs* is a hashtag that summarizes the experience of black and brown young people.

Figure 25: "Neverloved us... Remember?" (Source: Author's Collection, produced by DDs communications team)

> "It really kind of signifies the way it feels to be a youth of color today," the hashtag also drew from Drake's hit song *Worst Behavior*. I think, especially after the Jordan Davis and Trayvon Martin verdicts, that it just feels dangerous to be a youth of color today, especially in Florida. With laws like Stand Your Ground, with huge amounts of school-based arrests in schools disproportionately affecting youth of color, these are the kinds of issues we face on a day-to-day basis. For a person to see a youth of color as dangerous and feel compelled and justified in killing him or her and then walk away free tells us that legislators and the laws that are in place in Florida perpetuate a system that says 'we don't care about youth of color,' so I think that's where #NeverLovedUs came from."

Umi recalls the way certain people were talking about the murders of Black youth by police as if it was something new. Their response at the time was that this country "never loved us," it was never made for us. So when in 2013 a young rapper from Canada named Drake released his song entitled "Worst Behavior" with the the following refrain:

"On my worst behavior, no?
They used to never want to hear us, remember?
Mufucka never loved us, remember?
Mufucka, remember?
Mufucka never loved us

I'm on my worst behavior
Don't you ever get it fucked up
Mufuckas never loved us
Man, mufuckas never loved us
Worst behavior
Mufuckas never loved us
Fucka never loved us
Worst behavior"

Coinciding with the acquittal of George Zimmerman, the Dream Defenders launched a digital campaign declaring "America Never Loved us… remember?" This country never loved black and brown young people, never valued their lives, presumed that they were a menace to society -- criminal. As though there an uncountable surplus of them that could be wasted or misused.

This campaign aided in their many efforts to bring attention to the issues of police/vigilante brutality along with the prison industrial complex, as Florida is the state with the largest number of private prisons in the country and consequently holds the record for funneling juveniles to prison facilities via the "school-to-prison pipeline."

It is hard to imagine the institutionalization of love as a social norm. It is hard to imagine a social order where *#neverlovedus* would be a meaningless phrase. But surely, it would start with a legal system that values the lives of all of its people, that is not indifferent to some. That's not a mushy sentimentality. Legally, it is the principle that all are entitled to the equal protection of the law. But "equality" is an abstraction, an ideal with which we have little concrete experience. Nothing, after all, is ever equal to anything else in life. But we do know love, what it is to be loved at some level; at least, most of us do. That is why *#neverlovedus* is so challenging, so poignant, so sad, and so true. One cannot respond to "*#neverlovedus*" with a declaration in favor of "equality" or fair law enforcement or a more nuanced doctrine of justifiable self-defense. You have to

go deeper, down to the emotional level, to that battle between love and indifference that rages in all of us, and try there to take your place on the side of love.

#IFIDIEINPOLICECUSTODY

In mid-July 28-year-old Sandra Bland was pulled over for a signal violation, police allege that she became irate and arrested her for assault on a police officer. On Monday July 13th she was found dead, hanging in a Texas cell, authorities declared her death a suicide. Her family suspected foul play as Bland had just secured a new job at her alma matter which she called to excitedly tell her sisters about just days before. That same week 18-year-old Kindra Chapman was found dead, allegedly from suicide by hanging in an Alabama jail cell. In less than four days, Twitter (Black Twitter Specifically) exploded with advanced directives for their friends, family and community members in the event of their entirely possible premature death at the hands of state authorities. While discussion of a topic as morbid as advanced directives in the case of murder might seem like the opposite of what one would think of when theorizing revolutionary love, I read this response as an outpouring of love from a community that is constantly forced to come to grips of the genocidal state in which they live. The choice to live, like the choice to fight is an act of revolutionary love. Let me be clear, though I am declaring the choice to live in a society that would gladly have you dead or in prison because of one's race/class a revolutionary one, I am not implying that the inverse is true. I do not read the decision to commit suicide as an act of cowardice, much to the contrary, suicide is often indicative of larger societal ills that for a variety of reasons some handle "better" than others".

What I read in the trending of the hashtag #IfIDieInPoliceCustody is a generation of young people reaching out to one another in love, speaking truth to power, naming and shaming the atrocities they witnessed in their lives. In any number of tweets, if one is aware of the world they live in and is able to read between the restrictions of a 125 character tweet so much can be gleaned.

I read warnings with love, a revolutionary love that is trying to keep "fighting the good fight" We are telling, warning and screaming to ourselves to know that the police lie and cover up their own dirty work which why police misconduct reviews are almost always conducted by an internal body and just like in the countless police murder cases, they will attack my/your character and do/say whatever they deem necessary to make their version minimally plausible despite evidence to the contrary as we witnessed in countless cases like Eric Garner, Freddie Gray, Walter Scott etc.

> **ShordeeDooWhop** @Nettaaaaaaaa
> #IfIDieInPoliceCustody question everything. Don't believe a word they say. Demand the truth by any means necessary.
> 10:18 PM - 16 Jul 2015

Some of us are declaring that we have loved ones to come home to and to continue to fight for so the idea that we would leave them to weather this storm alone is preposterous.

> **Jamilah** @JamilahLemieux
> #IfIDieInPoliceCustody don't trust any report of me being aggressive, I put my humanity aside in interactions w/ cops to come home to my kid
> 12:37 AM - 17 Jul 2015

We are casting aside whatever stigmas might be present in our communities about mental illness and laying ourselves bare, letting our vulnerabilities be seen in an effort to mark a

connection with the senseless slayings of others who look like us who might have similar class backgrounds like us.

> **Terrell J. Starr** @Russian_Starr
> #IfIDieInPoliceCustody know I did not commit suicide. I have been in therapy for a year and a half fighting depression and I want to live.
> 8:08 PM - 16 Jul 2015

Some of us are declaring that our guilt nor innocence, our outward appearance nor our recreational activities should not be the determining factor as to whether we are permitted to live or die

> **Captain Africa** @See_Say_92
> #IfIDieInPoliceCustody tell them I sagged my pants, smoked weed, and wore hoodies. Ask them if those things warranted my execution.
> 7:57 PM - 16 Jul 2015

Some of us are demanding that our deaths not be in vain and that they be catalysts for massive social transformations

> **Broderick Greer** @BroderickGreer
> #**IfIDieInPoliceCustody**, grieve my premature death by taking to the streets and bringing attention to anti-black state-sanctioned violence.
> 3:16 PM - 17 Jul 2015

Some of us are recalling the outrage we felt when, in the wake of the Charleston massacre, once again we were required to demonstrate our respectable humanity by forgiving the slaughter of innocent lives by nothing but racist vitriol even as the assassin had no remorse in his being.

> **Charlene Carruthers** @CharleneCac
> #**Ifidieinpolicecustody** Do not make calls for peace or forgiveness. Do not speculate about my mental state. I'm Black and constantly enraged.
> 9:44 AM - 17 Jul 2015

> **Charlene Carruthers** @CharleneCac
> #**IfIDieinPoliceCustody** Protest and throw out all notions of respectability. Have the courage of a rioter.
> 9:43 AM - 17 Jul 2015

> **Broderick Greer** @BroderickGreer
> #**IfIDieInPoliceCustody**, my family will not be issuing a statement of "forgiveness". They've already been told.
> 7:48 AM - 17 Jul 2015

So *If I Die In Police Custody* know that my struggles with depression were not the result of a chemical imbalance in my brain but of a society that, for centuries has forced people of color, poor people, women and immigrants to develop a social schizophrenia that necessitates a double consciousness and/or a white mask as a mechanism for survival. Know that my depression came from the smoldering rage of being undervalued and overworked on a daily basis as a result of white supremacists capitalist patriarchy. DO NOT ask for peace in my name, demand outrage! DO NOT, under any circumstance, issue a statement of forgiveness. You cannot be forgiven if you and your aggressor are not on equal footing. Tell the looters and the rioters that they may yell my name as they burn cities to the ground and take for themselves those items they could not otherwise afford despite their constant toil. But DO NOT allow them to stop there, tell them to make a plan to build after they have destroyed.

> **The New Negro** @thesdotpalmer
> #**IfIDieInPoliceCustody** i don't want y'all just to pray...I want you to fight and create a new world!
> 10:21 PM - 16 Jul 2015

DO NOT let my death be in vain.

USING ANGER IN THE NAME OF LOVE

In 1981, Audre Lorde[35], speaking to a room of white women intellectuals said,

> My response to racism is anger. I have lived with that anger, ignoring it, feeding upon it, learning to use it before it laid my visions to waste, for most of my life. Once I did it in silence, afraid of the weight. My fear of anger taught me nothing. Your fear of that anger will teach you nothing, also.

She went on to say,

> Every woman has a well-stocked arsenal of anger potentially useful against those oppressions, personal and institutional, which brought that anger into being. Focused with precision it can become a powerful source of energy serving progress and change. And when I speak of change, I do not mean a simple switch of positions or a temporary lessening of tensions, nor the ability to smile or feel good. I am speaking of a basic and radical alteration in those assumptions underlining our lives.

She concluded by saying

> We use whatever strengths we have fought for, including anger, to help define and fashion a world where all our sisters can grow, where our children can love, and where the power of touching and meeting another woman's difference and wonder will eventually transcend the need for destruction.

In a 1991 documentary entitled *A Place of Rage*, the black feminist poet June Jordan called upon young black activists to reclaim "rage" as a tool for social justice. Nearly a quarter of a century later, it is precisely this notion of collective, unapologetic black rage, coupled with the equally unapologetic love of ourselves and freedom that has been the catalyst for the new movement condemning police violence against black people and more importantly that declares Black Lives Matter.

Central to the Pan-Africanist project of the AAPRP as personified by Kwame Ture was a deep and enduring commitment to African peoples. This commitment is

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[35] All excerpts are taken from Lorde's 1981 speech entitled "The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism" at the National Women's Studies Association Conference in Storrs, Connecticut.

based, in the most fundamental sense, is a revolutionary love of the people which is concretely expressed through work and struggle for and with the people. Kwame had an "an undying love for our people" (2003, 632) and called us as African peoples to share in that love for ourselves and one another as a part of what it means to be African, to be human and ultimately, to be revolutionary. Revolutionary love for Kwame was at the same time a call to struggle to clear free space and empower ourselves to do so. Therefore, he says, "The society we seek to build among Black people, then, is not a capitalist one, but a society in which the spirit of community and humanistic love prevail." But he cautioned, "We can build a community of love only where we have the ability and power to do so among Blacks" (2000, 613). In our love of the people, Kwame maintained, we are compelled to be revolutionary and struggle for total liberation on every level. And this, he argues, can only be done by organizing them around their own emancipatory interests. Thus, he says, "the job of the revolutionary is, of course, to overthrow unjust systems and replace them with just systems (and) a revolutionary understands this can only be done by the masses of the people. So, the task of the revolutionary is to organize the masses of the people." For through this process of organization and struggle, they become self-conscious agents of their own life and liberation.

Fundamentally, the feminist, the Pan-Africanist, the Internationalist Social movements, at the grassroots levels and in the case of Venezuela, at the level of the state, are grounded in a deep abiding revolutionary love of self and of the masses of people on this planet fueled by a righteous discontent for the current state of our lives. The specificities of analysis and method provided by the above mentioned schools of thought

are keenly aware that all liberation is intimately linked. The ultimate goal of course is freedom and liberation for all. The need to have a mode of analysis and everyday praxis that explores the specificity of poor peoples, women, African peoples' exploitation and domination speaks more to the specificity of our time rather than to the ultimate aims and objectives of those struggles. What is mundane about this project is also that which is extraordinary, the nature of daily struggle for liberation among peoples who experience oppressions based on their nationality, race, gender and economic status. I hope that I have conveyed to you the reader, by some compelling means, that this daily struggle is both necessary and ongoing.

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