

“I don’t need no white validation”: On Blackness, Belonging, and Community in the
Southeastern United States

By

Gabrielle Timbrook

Honors Thesis

Submitted to The Honors College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Bachelor of Science

August 2020

Approved by:

Diane Mines, Ph.D., Thesis Director

Dana Powell, Ph.D., Second Reader

Abstract

This project is an autoethnographic sharing of my embodied experiences as a black person in predominantly white spaces. Specifically, I choose to think through my (and some others whom I love) experiences in punk and DIY (do-it-yourself) spaces; these are spaces that are close to my heart, spaces that have, and can, feel like a home. Sometimes, these DIY spaces can feel like a home in which I am in a plastic hamster ball, meandering around, but feeling separated by some things, and someones, which can result in alienation. This project is concerned with working through this “weirdness” of the body and body-centered knowledges of anti-black violence in examining the contrasts between white experiences of reality and what Christina Sharpe (2016) calls “the wake,” an “afterlife” of slavery. By doing so, I hope to contribute to on-going conversations about knowledge production, black being, and ideas of community in spaces that both racialized and non-racialized (white) bodies occupy, where anti-racist liberation is valued, but nonetheless subject to the complications and intricacies of racism and the resulting hierarchization of oppression(s).

keywords: *blackness, being, knowledge production, community, anti-racism, autoethnography, black feminisms, intersectionality*

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Abstract | 1 |
| Table of Contents | 2 |
| Acknowledgements | 3 |
| Introduction | 5 |
| No one and everyone is an “expert”: DIY, punk, and the people I have met in the southeast | 8 |
| Black feminist frameworks: knowledge, power, and intersectionality | 14 |
| Autoethnography and intersectionality: methodologies to challenge the positivist | 21 |
| Briefly situating memory and body | 26 |
| “Everyone is white, of course”: hesitance, suspicion, doubt, and community | 31 |
| Always where you least expect it, foolishly: some take-aways about community and space-making at a distance | 47 |
| Bibliography | 55 |

Acknowledgements

How does one even begin with “acknowledgements?” There have been so many people who have been so consistent, rigorously invested in, helpful, gracious, giving, loving, eager, patient, and supportive of myself, my education, and this project since I started it over a year and some pocket change ago. I cannot express my gratitude enough, but I will try.

I would like to thank Dr. Diane Mines and Dr. Dana Powell, who acted as core faculty advisors for this thesis. I first met them during my first year when I crash-landed into the discipline of anthropology. I quite literally could not do this project if it were not for Dr. Mines. Dr. Mines joined the committee as my chair into the later stages of this project, but welcomed my ideas, my hopes, and my fears for this project with such openness, vital experiential and anthropological perspective and knowledge, and guidance. Thank you Dr. Mines, for helping me develop foundational, critical skills of writing and understanding in our discipline. Dr. Powell has also offered me what I would call a lifeline when it came to my studies in anthropology early on. Dr. Powell introduced me to feminist, indigenous, and some black scholarship in anthropology that heavily impacted my trajectory in my undergraduate studies. Thank you Dr. Powell, for being a powerful mentor since my entry into anthropological studies. Thank you for helping me prepare for academic and non-academic opportunities and accomplishments (like this one) that seemed so far away just two years ago. I am honored to have gotten the chance to learn from, and work with you both, Dr. Mines and Dr. Powell.

I would like to wholeheartedly thank Dr. Kumi Silva, who acted as my mentor during my time at the Moore Undergraduate Research Apprentice Program at University (MURAP) of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Dr. Silva quite literally helped me with the foundation of this

project, and for that, I am so thankful and appreciative. Dr. Silva, your mentorship was, and has been, so vital to this journey. I could not have gotten a better mentor in MURAP, truly.

I would like to thank the MURAP staff and cohort of 2019. Thank you for sharing yourselves, your work, and your influences with me. You helped me shape this too.

I would like to thank Dr. Bert Stabler for helping me think through potential accompanying components of this project in its later stages. Dr. Stabler, thank you for your artistic insight and sharing of artists who have come to influence how I might continue this project.

I would like to thank my chosen family: Abbey Huber, Lauren Stander, Reg Zehner, Lenny Dickey, Vannah Aldridge, Simone Levine, Dakota Armstrong, Oprah Whitfield, Axle Rickard, Courtney Nelson, Amanda Lago, Emma Strange, and Diallo Jones, for being some of the best support system in and out of the academy that I could have asked for. Thank you for listening to me rant in every stage of my research and writing. Thank you for feeding and watering me. Thank you for your endless love and encouragement. There is a bit of all of you in this project.

For those who I have not named and have been there along the way in many, many other facets (in the academy and in other places) I thank you as well, so deeply.

And of course, I thank all of the radical, feminist, black, indigenous, of color scholars, artists, writers, activists, storytellers, mothers, other mothers, lovers, fighters, and makers who I may or may not exist currently with, in this “moment.” It is y’all who remind me why I must write, why I must create, why I must try to do what I want to do.

Introduction

Growing up in predominantly white places in the southeast, I learned that it can feel weird to be black in the United States. And when I say that, I don't mean to imply that being black in and of itself is weird, but that oftentimes, being black entails weird experiences in predominantly white places: places where there are more white people than people of color. And really, I want to find a better way to say it other than "weird." I don't mean weird to be some sort of mysterious phenomenon: the experiences that come with being black are not ungrounded. It is not blackness itself which I find weird, but rather the *feeling of knowing* that you will have tense, weird, race-related experiences as a result of your blackness. Your blackness in such experiences acts as a sobering reminder of how you are grounded, as a black person (not that this ever really evades us). A gut punch, a gust of *knowing*. I mean weird more in the experience of the structural. Weird not as unexplained, but as being tied to displacement and disenfranchisement. Weird being a contrast in an extremely white world, a world in which the experiences and existences of black people are filled with violence, and these standards are the norm entangled in our deviation from the ideals of white supremacy.

I think about how it feels weird to be black in the United States, sometimes pinned onto the overwhelming white fillings of a room, feeling my own contrast, wondering why I am there, if I should be there, and what kinds of choices and ideas lead me to be there. Because sometimes, feeling out my blackness in a white place, no matter how "open" to my blackness it may seem, is a response to my experiences, and even my own reality that I constantly question. And this questioning is questioned. Am I being overly dramatic or cautious? Too cautious or maybe reading the room correctly? I have always been awkward. I used to try to make myself fit into

any crumb of space: not just for survival sake, but for white validation. Simply because it was a way to *feel* safer. But I know I cannot hide myself. I am too proud of confronting the belief and fear that I am damned in a white world, and that I should strive to paint by its numbers. Not that I should be trying to, but being black is nearly impossible to hide, anyway.

After years of self-loathing, I have realized that loving my blackness sometimes doesn't stop the persistent questioning, policing, and tricky riddles of racism that I encounter with white people in daily life. Are they acting out of intentional racism? Is it something else? Wait, what do I consider racist, or even overtly racist? Wait, wait, impact over intent. But how do I know any of these things *for sure*? Why am I questioning myself like this? Are they thinking about these same things? Especially when I am in white "leftist" or anarchist spaces which seek (and maybe even claim) to be *radical* and working towards anti-racist ways of being and resistance, these questions get all-the-more frequent and overwhelming for me. All of this is a never-ending mind-fuck that isolates me as a black person just trying to survive day-to-day, living life in joy, grief, anger, and hope.

This project is a sharing of my embodied experiences as someone who (not so simply) is charged with navigating white space-times that in turn affect my conceptions of place and belonging. From here on out, I choose to use this hyphenated term "space-time" to contextualize an experience of reality as emergent of complicatedly entangled (or maybe even meshed) temporal and spatial contexts. Since we live in the context of white supremacy, space-times are racialized; I use the concept of space-times to point specifically to the historically and affectively intertwined contrasts of being black in a white world, as an experience of reality in the "now" of everyday. This is in light of Christina Sharpe's (2016) framework of a black space-time as "the

wake,” an “afterlife” of slavery, which is/recognizes that “the past that is not past reappears, always, to rupture the present” (9). Space-time is distinct from place, as place is experienced through different perceptions and experiences of space-time. Place can be thought of as the location where I may be present in/as my body with others. Place is informed by space-time, especially when it comes to any form of community that may emerge in any given place.

Specifically, I choose to think through my experiences in punk DIY (do-it-yourself) places in a metropolitan area of the southeast United States. These places are close to my heart, have felt, and can feel, like a home. This project is a work-in-progress, one that is oriented by black feminist frameworks¹: it is a delve into reckoning with understandings of (dis)belonging, and moves/feelings of hesitance, suspicion, and doubt that can emerge out of embodied black experiences, such as mine. Yet, sometimes, these punk DIY places can feel like a home in which I am in a plastic hamster ball, meandering around, but feeling separated by some things, and sometimes, someones, which can result in social and emotional alienation. This project is concerned with working through this “weirdness” of the body and body-centered knowledges of violence, concerning emergences of different experiences of reality that come with being in a body that is racialized. It is a conversation concerned with centering experiences of “the wake”

¹ I wish to be critical of how I use theory in the performance of this project, because there is a “politics of citation” in the academy. Who gets cited, how, where, and why, are all factors that contribute to political hierarchies which are reproduced in the academy. These political hierarchies are that of race, ethnicity, class, gender, nationality, sexuality, and more. And as the academy is an institution operating in the histories and powers of white, cis-hetero, capitalist, imperialist patriarchy, the voices that are centered and celebrated are largely those of people who fall into positionalities of power such as whiteness, middle-upper class status, cisheteronormativity, citizen status in the west, etc. Part of the “performance” of this project is to actively “challenge” the conventions of citation in a white patriarchal academy. Therefore, I have made a very intentional effort to not cite any white men in this project. I do this in light of the academy being an institution of white patriarchy. Therefore, I will primarily refer to the various works of predominantly women of color (and at that, primarily black women) and queer people of color who have been a part of conversations of anti-racism, feminism, community, and more, in locations of both the academy, and outside the academy. I have referenced the ideas of Christina Sharpe, Osa Atoe, Mimi Nguyen, Faye Harrison, Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins, Sara Ahmed, and more. These are black feminist and other feminist of color folk who have been imperative to my feminist journey, and whose words and arts have empowered me beyond verbal explanation.

in contrast with white hegemony in white space-times. In doing so, I hope to contribute to on-going conversations about knowledge production and knowledge hierarchy/authority, black being, and ideas of community in places that both racialized and non-racialized (white) bodies occupy, where anti-racist liberation is ostensibly valued, but nonetheless subject to the complications and intricacies of racism and the resulting hierarchization of oppression(s).

No one and everyone is an “expert”: DIY, punk, and the people I have met in the southeast

When thinking about writing this section, I felt sort of stunted. How do I write for academic readers about what punk and DIY can be without objectifying punk and DIY, and without suggesting that there are a specific set of “definitive” qualities about them? The reason why I do not want to necessarily “define” the concepts of punk and DIY, is because there is no ultimate authority on what punk and DIY are and could be...that would defeat the purpose of punk and DIY. If you were to ask me “what is punk?”, I would give you a bunch of still-empty, corny, broken descriptors. It can involve music, noise, poetry, prose, zines, and other forms of artistic expression of many kinds. It can involve collaborative organizing, mutual aid, harm reduction, and more ways of being and doing that seek to be subversive to, and reject, systems and ideologies of oppressive power, and oftentimes hierarchy itself.

One of my favorite (former) MAXIMUM ROCKNROLL contributors/zinemakers, Golnar Nikpour (2012), suggests that punk is “auto-archiving, self-aware, and interested in its own history— [punk] operates on the premise that *everyone* is an expert.” With this in mind, I see DIY (do-it-yourself) as an accompanying “praxis” to punk. For as long as punk has existed,

DIY has also been a response to the corporate and commodified, governmental and state powers, and especially any standard of “mastery.” You can make your own places: venues, bars, markets, dance parties, sets, etc. You can speak your piece and express if you want to, in many ways. Folks “in” punk make our own forms of media, and we “distribute” in a way that is typically subversive to a capitalist mode of production. We have seen this through things like bootleg cassettes and zines, fests that are held in old churches or community centers, and sometimes even someone’s house. What we create is not just about turning a profit, it’s about what’s being shared, because (especially before the internet) it can be a labor of love to co-independently produce and share something on your own terms. And of course, you can pick up an instrument and do whatever you want with it. Who is to say you shouldn’t?² I do not think that punk and DIY *have* to be put together in a phrase to express the places I will be talking about, because ultimately, I do not view them as separate (I will use different configurations of “punk DIY places” --and sometimes I might even just say “places”-- to talk about the places I am in.) What comes to mind when I think about punk and DIY, is an image of a weed. Weeds grow where they are not intended, they break through structure and concrete. They are warped in ways they need to be to sustain themselves, and where there is one, there are many. Punk and DIY could be thought of as spaces of weeds in a capitalist landscape, where anti-capitalist modes (and other modes which seek to resist and transform oppressive conditions) of being and thinking can emerge.

Many people tend to “date” punk back to the 1970s, as a “subculture” characterized by aesthetic, sonic, and social rebellion, that slithered out of England’s working class across to the

² I want to clarify that this is not to be understood as a blanket “perimeter” of possibility for all folks in daily life, but rather that the “ethos” of punk can entail some of these possibilities, attitudes, and actions of creativity and politicality.

United States (and if you really want an idea of what this could look/sound like, a quick Google search could suffice). You might hear the Sex Pistols, The Clash, and other white bands thrown out as main players. You might hear non-conformity as a principle of rebellion. There exists “west-to-the-rest” narratives that still (mostly) unintentionally do not center, and sometimes actively exclude, the involvement, creation, and presence of people who are racialized, colonized, and those who are not in the geo-political “west” (this being mainly the United Kingdom/western Europe and the United States). Punk happens globally, in coinciding bursts all over the world. In Japan, bands like Friction (who originally formed in 1971 as an “avant garde” group) and The Stalin (who came along in the late 1970s), were already on the scene solidifying the shocking music, aesthetics, and political attitudes in Tokyo and Fukushima. A quite popular band that gets thrown into the ranks of “where punk has started” is the Peruvian garage rock band Los Saicos, formed in 1964. Their twangy guitars and ferocious, almost guttural grunts and yells of lyrics mark them as one of the earliest proto-punk³ bands, around before even Iggy and the Stooges, of *Raw Power* fame (Arrieta 2020). One of my favorite early 1970s punk bands is actually Philadelphia’s underrated Pure Hell, an all-black glam punk band who formed at the “height” of the budding scenes in New York and London. Bad Brains, one of the most influential punk bands out of Washington D.C. (and a band that often gets tokenized as *the* foundational black punk band), cites Pure Hell as an influence (Sound Check 2017). Even the most popular 1970s-80s hardcore punk⁴ bands in the United States, that often act as “gateway” bands for

³ Proto-punk meaning as a “precursor” to punk sound. Proto-punk tends to be understood as riding off of the waves of musical stylings of the 1960s and early 1970s, from genres such as garage rock, acid rock, and hard rock.

⁴ Hardcore punk is an offshoot of punk music in which the music tends to be characterized by faster, darker, and a grainier sound. Nikpour (2012) writes that hardcore “exploded at the tail end of the 1970s—inarguably *simultaneously*—in tens of countries in the world. Hell, a favorite HC nurd pastime is arguing about whether the first HC band was the Middle Class from California or the SS from Japan or Lixomania from Brazil..”

punks, consisted of at least one musician/creative of color. These bands include, but are not limited to: Adolescents, Black Flag, Bad Brains, the Germs, Dead Kennedys, Crucifix, and Void. The aforementioned bands, among countless others, engage with a sonic affect that is fluid in punk communities, and which is part of what makes punk what it is, in the sonic sense. The plethora of sound -- from unpolished to abrasive, from “experimental” to confrontational-- that is found in the sonic register of punk can be understood as another way of deliverance and communication -- new ways of seeing, feeling, sensing, thinking -- which do not necessarily lend itself to a privileging of itself over the linguistic, texts, material forms, etc. (Weheliye 2003). Punk can be thought of not just as “antithetical” to the sounds of commodification that come out of the mainstream, corporatized music and art industries, but also as a space to envision art, music, and life “outside” of the industries that are sold to us. The texture of the sonic that can be found in punk is a channeling of affect that is intimately tied to the politics of anti-capitalist/anti-consumerist/anti-industry standards, which often are a part in how punk music emerges.

In the places I am writing about in the southeastern United States, people tend to know this “diversity” because they know the music. Nonetheless, I find that some punk places I am in can still *feel* and be very white-centric when it comes to interpretations of the place, its history, its politicality, and can be very informed and determined by a white-centric space-time. However, you may stop me and say “well you just said people know people of color exist and have always in punk, so what’s the deal?” Well, the deal is these places are still predominantly occupied and managed by white people. White-centric narratives and experiences with punk mean the predominant presence of white bodies becomes the standard. In addition, these white

people tend to be older than me, usually ranging from mid 20s on the younger end, to people in their 30s and 40s. What I suppose I am trying to point towards, is that there is a race (and sometimes age/generational) related interpretation of what the place is and who it (consciously or subconsciously) serves (which ends to be white, and for white people). And often, there are weird differences in experiences that are created when it comes to different facets of belonging: who is readily included and embraced in the community, and who may feel not-as-welcomed and excluded at best.

Let it not be mistaken, I do not wish to write off the people in the places I have/am in to be “ignorant” or “unaware” of racism as structural, as an experiential divide. The record stores, the DIY venues where gigs and other events take place, the collectives that do need-based community work, the places that these (white) people create can be very intentional in seeking to make these places “safe” for those who are subject to systemic violence, and for those who wish to challenge and live alternatively to these systems and ideologies of oppression. You could walk into most of the types of places I just described and find pride flags, circle A’s, resource flyers for anything ranging from food-needs to where-to-find-naloxone. I have never been side-eyed for walking into a “punk” place for wearing my t-shirt with Angela Davis’ image on it, like I have been at any ol’ predominantly white school or the grocery store in the bible belt. Anti-fascist, anti-establishment radicality is usually very welcome by the folks I have come to know in these places, because people have *lived* that life. “That life” means many different things. One of the “common denominators” for me, is that “that life” entails intentional and creative practice of living, being, and creating non-normatively, and not just for the sake of being “non-conforming.” I have met folks in these places who have hopped trains and lived houseless for years, some

people devoting their time to direct action. I also know folks who are from the suburbs, and who no longer speak to their families because they reject their beliefs and values (or vice versa). I have met folks who are artists, graduate students, teachers, garbage collectors, musicians, welders, dog-walkers, buskers, leatherworkers, screenprinters, grocery store clerks, and more. There are folks whose parents were part of the scene over 30 years ago. I have met folks who are not even originally from the southeast. People come from different walks of life; we come from different backgrounds and experiences of class, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, and more.

However, I still often find myself feeling “stuck” in the weirdness that is created in predominantly white places through white space-time; coming from an experience of racialization, I realize that my interpretation of reality, and what I experience socially, is not always “on the same page” as my white friends. Again, this seems to be what happens when you are surrounded by white people, punk doesn’t make it any different. While representation and acknowledgment of people who are racialized and our contributions are important, it is not enough to turn the tide of how deeply ingrained white supremacy is. My white peers do not have to move through space-time as someone who is racialized. Place, as a making of home and belonging, for them is not the same as place for me, no matter how many of them I may be friends with. Later, I will name some of these weird differences/moves I find in my racialized experience of space-time as hesitance, suspicion, and doubt.

Black feminist frameworks: knowledge, power, and intersectionality

Because this is a thesis, I find it useful to just “dish out” the theory straight away. Many of the ideas and conversations I wish to engage with (which concern embodied experience, “knowing” and knowledge production, and ideas of belonging and community) exist within black feminist frameworks and discourse. So, I find it appropriate to break down some of these ideas in order to lay out the complexities and prismatic nature of my embodied, social experiences. The ideas that come from histories and memories of black feminist frameworks readily address and generate discourse concerning social power, the politics of knowledge and knowledge production, and (deconstruction of) anti-blackness. These frameworks look at such violence, when it comes to the exclusionary circumstances (and consequences) of white-centric space-times, ways of knowing, and belonging. Part of working through the everyday violences of anti-blackness and the impacts it can have on someone such as myself, is the use of intersectional paradigms to navigate circumstances and ideas of knowledge production and power.

Much of the work done in a U.S. black feminist context entails use of intersectional paradigms to navigate these complexities. Many (academic) discussions of intersectionality are explicitly attributed to U.S. critical race theorist, scholar, and lawyer Kimberle Crewshaw. Per her 1989 paper, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics", intersectionality refers to a way to think about the multidimensional and varying experiences that can be created as a result of different forms of oppression, power, and identity. Intersectionality is a lens through which we can name and deconstruct systems of power, and also a concept we can use towards resisting oppressive means of knowledge production, as well as the systemic and institutional

violences that come with them (Crenshaw 1989). Patricia Hill Collins (1990) proposes that intersectional paradigms in Black feminist thought make two important contributions:

1. Intersectional paradigms allow new interpretations of the experiences of Black women to emerge.
2. Intersectional paradigms give insight as to how “domination” is organized.

Viewing oppression as intersecting and organized through “diverse local realities” is a facet of black feminist theory that allows for a (re)clamation of understanding the struggles and positionalities of black women, by black women (and non-men) (Collins 1990, 228). Black feminist theory through an intersectional paradigm centers black women (in their respective contexts, in both the U.S. and transnationally). It also decenters analyses of oppression that exclude black women and other black people, for these analyses to be challenged and further complicated, through the idea that oppressive systems/ideas of gender, race, class, and so on, are “mutually constructive.” This goes hand in hand with Audre Lorde’s famous proclamation that there is “no hierarchy of oppression.” Lorde (1983) writes:

“From my membership in all of these groups I have learned that oppression and the intolerance of difference come in all shapes and sexes and colors and sexualities; and that among those of us who share the goals of liberation and a workable future for our children, there can be no hierarchies of oppression. I have learned that sexism and heterosexism both arise from the same source as racism.”

Any experience or thought of identity as ascribed to our bodies does not exist in a vacuum. One cannot think about an embodied experience of a “blackness” in terms of only one factor of being, identity, or circumstance. My experience of blackness as a biracial, working class, U.S.-born,

queer person is not going to be the same as other black people's experience of blackness who have different experiences of class, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexuality, etc. I put this forward to underscore the fact that my project is only from one experience, my own, and that my experience is not to be taken as authoritative, blanketed knowledge or reality for other black people in the places and space-times that I can recognize myself as entangled in.

Black women's experiences globally have been "distorted within" or excluded from what counts as knowledge. Black feminist epistemology, or understandings of knowledge, is not a static response to white patriarchy; black women have several alternative ways of producing and validating knowledge. Collins (1990) writes that "[t]raditionally, the suppression of Black women's ideas within White-male-controlled social institutions led African American women to use music, literature, daily conversation, and everyday behavior as important locations for constructing a Black feminist consciousness" (251-252). This is nothing new to black communities across the diaspora and colonized world. Just thinking about the places and spaces in which consciousness-building takes place in the United States, black folks have had underground networks of everything ranging from that of survival to artistry and creativity. Counsel and aid come in church luncheons and beauty salons. These places may be filled with rapturous cheers or haunting wales. And with that, they become space-times of life: subversive to white supremacist and patriarchal underpinnings of the value of human life, what counts as valuable (and what counts as human and what should be treated as such), and the ways in which we *are* and *know* these things. I have personally witnessed, and been apart of, such a use of music, literature, conversation, and analysis of everyday behavior and experience of being, by

black people and other people of color, in DIY punk in many different places. This I will touch on later, in discussion about place-making.

Intersectionality, in a context of black feminist praxis, is not a static ideology of identity, but can be a phenomenological tool for working through the weirdness that emerges as a person in racialized body. Our bodies are one of the first ways we are taught to know ourselves, others, and those who are Othered. In the United States, where our governmental, and mainstream understandings of being lie in individualism and visualism, we are distinct and separate bodies. However not all bodies are read the same, seen the same, and valued the same. Different bodies have to navigate the world differently. And this is a bare knowing of being in a racialized body. You deviate from the baseline white norm in the visual of your form. And this has consequences. These consequences are intrinsically tied to your body not conforming, and the direction of your body not conforming (Ahmed 2017). In this case, being racialized means you are dehumanized in the face of whiteness. Implications and consequences of being black are naturalized, biologicalized, and become almost “innate.” To be black is to expect brutality, disparity, and death. This is why I find Christina Sharpe’s (2016) concept of “the wake” vital to expansion when it comes to using intersectionality as a phenomenological tool. Black people can experience “the wake” “...as a means of understanding how slavery’s violences emerge within the contemporary conditions of spatial, legal, psychic, material, and other dimensions of Black non/being as well as in Black modes of resistance” (Sharpe 2016, 14). We are living in an “afterlife” of slavery which is not defined by a distinct temporality or set of temporalities. We are living in the ripples of the constant tension of not being human, and yet existing fervently as such.

And this entails experiences of black being which are not, and cannot, be bounded by a Cartesian idea of the body itself. When we start to undo the body as atomized, and when we think about what is ascribed to (and perceived as) our bodies, we can begin to view intersectionality as a more fluid way to relate personal experience to systemic and structural power through autoethnography. Using intersectionality in this way, paired with the use of autoethnography, can inform a methodology of “checking” our ethnographic knowledge. There can be no authority of experience, no authority to think “outside” or “beyond” differently positioned racialized bodies when we come to understand blackness as dynamic in moving through a white space-time. Autoethnography is immensely valuable to me in this sense, because oftentimes (and historically), ethnography in the discipline of anthropology is centered around the white ethnographer, and thus white interpretations of the “subjective.” When it comes to the construction of my project, it is to center my experiences as a black person, ethnographer, scholar, and community member, because the “subjective” is material, consequential, and obscured in the white academy. In the next section, I will further discuss my intentions of utilizing autoethnography and intersectionality to disrupt the narratives of expertism in positivism.

In a discipline, such as anthropology, we emphasize interconnections of varying scales. Since the 1990s, when talk of globalization became a popular language in academic transnational discourse, the “local to global” connection has become a disciplinary hallmark of the way knowledge is valued and produced in ethnography (Ong 1999). Because of this, I would say that it is easy for scholars of many different disciplinary backgrounds, including anthropologists, to fall into the traps of thinking about intersectionality in the “post.” This “post” is typically tied to

critiques of identity politics that critique identity (and the oppression that can come along with certain identities) as static and simplified. As Sengupta (2006) points out, the “trouble with the deployment of identities as means of offense or defense is that, given a change in the equations of violence in any instance, which may have to do with anything from local politics to broader geopolitical crosscurrents, the victim very quickly becomes the oppressor” (631). While this is an important observation, we must acknowledge that some critiques of identity politics in this vein can also reflect the way that intersectionality has been extracted from black feminist theory, commodified, and categorized in the academy. It has led to a problematic critique of intersectionality as being too “limited” *because* it centers black women and non-men (King 2015). King (2015) suggests that this is done through a couple “neoliberal moves,” one of which is as follows:

“First, a neoliberal respatialization of intersectionality occurs that shrinks the terrain of analysis down to the scale of the individual. This process of spatialization also entails an intense corporealization of intersectionality that often coheres in the actual figure or body of Crenshaw, the widely acknowledged coiner of the term. Within post-intersectional scholarship the focus on Crenshaw reduces a larger area of study and an intellectual project down to the private space of the individual” (122).

The labor of black scholars like Kimberle Crenshaw and Patricia Hill Collins is often perceived as having opened up space for other black women (as well as other women of color) in academia. King (2015) proposes that the neoliberal academy understands their focus on access needs of black women as a politics of redistribution. Therefore, it is a threat, which may be neutralized through commodification. This commodification happens through institutionalization as a form of “diversity management” (King 2015, Ahmed 2012). The “intense corporealization” of intersectionality that occurs is not the needed understanding of fluidity as Sengupta (2006) describes, but rather is the result of intersectionality having “been racialized, gendered, and

nationalized as a domestic Black (African American) feminist project. Read as black women's thought, it becomes provincial, prosaic, identity-obsessed, and easily co-opted by the state/institution—something that post-intersectional scholars need to move beyond” (King 2015, 124). Crenshaw becomes a literal “stand-in” for a reading of intersectionality that poses knowledge production by black women as limited because of the conflation of individualism with an understanding of lived, embodied perception of identity.

Though the “traffic” metaphor of intersection that Crenshaw is credited with, and the literal word “intersectionality” may feel stringent (i.e. “bounded” by “lanes” that can only meet in perhaps a perpendicular manner), the theory that can emerge from lived experience as intersectionality is certainly not. I shudder when I hear the dismissal of embodied experiences as “just identity politics.” I shudder when I also witness the disinterest of utilizing analyses of intersectionality, and feminist understandings about how our bodies are organized and positioned in hierarchies of gender, race, class, and more, in the United States. There are critiques to be had about how identity politics are evoked, but we cannot deny the ways in which our bodies, our very (non)beings as black people, are entangled in the complicated constructions of race and identity in the United States, and how this translates materially and affectively. To deny the importance of the embodied in black feminist frameworks (and of the experience and the knowledges it affords), is to replicate white, patriarchal constructions and productions of knowledge. It is also systemic gaslighting to those of us who already have to find ways to stay afloat in a reality where the truths of our humanity are constantly denied and deemed null.

Autoethnography and intersectionality: methodologies to challenge the positivist

Something else that is key to understanding black feminist epistemology, is understanding the deconstruction of positivism. Positivism is a philosophical theory and methodology that considers “true” knowledge to be what can be accounted for by empiricism, the idea that knowledge comes from sensory experiences that can be “rationally” and “scientifically” justified as being “true.” The difference in how “sensory experiences” are handled when it comes to positivism and black feminist frameworks, must be explicitly understood. Often in black feminist frameworks, lived experience *is* a criterion of meaning and a form of *credibility* in knowledge claims and validations. The main difference between the two lies in positivism’s pillar of mastery towards truth. In positivist frameworks such as the scientific method, a result that is “factual” must be able to be replicated, and one must be able to demonstrate *how* it is replicated in order to be proven as “true.” However, when it comes to the affective experiences of someone in a racialized body, we cannot necessarily use positivism to even come close to touching what is “real” about the affective, including what can feel so “weird” about our experiences. Thus, black women’s knowledges, which are rooted in lived experience, are oftentimes invalid in white patriarchal spaces of knowledge production (like the academy). This comes back to the contrasts between “the wake” and a white, colonial space-time, in which positivism acts as a tool (and simultaneously a vital foundation) of what Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2015) calls “white possessive logics.” Possessive logics “denote a mode of rationalization...that is underpinned by an excessive desire to invest in reproducing and reaffirming the nation-state’s ownership, control, and domination. As such, white possessive logics are operationalized to circulate a set of meanings about ownership of the nation, as part of

commonsense knowledge, decision making, and socially produced conventions.”

(Moreton-Robinson 2015, *xii*). When thinking about knowledge production and power with Moreton-Robinson’s (2015) frameworks, we see how in that institutions uphold white supremacy (like the academy, positivism *is* a mode of rationalization which is informed by racial, hierarchical power. Positivist ideas of what knowledge is, how it is understood, who is “qualified” to collect it, who is “qualified” to “verify” it, how to “collect” it, then present/portray it, are weaponized in the name of intertwined, white supremacist, colonial pursuits of material and hegemonic power. “Written documents are limited in what they can teach about life and survival in the world” because positivist frameworks do not allow for the lived, everyday of black people and black women (Collins 1990, 257). Positivism as a white, colonial construction is made to be antithetical to black experience and knowledge production in a way that is hierarchical. Whiteness and proximity to whiteness are constant mediators of validating knowledge and “truth.”

Written documents of institutional and hierarchical knowledge sources, such as academic texts, in their form and composition, can/do adhere to the power structures of imperial, colonial, white, cis-heteronormative capitalist patriarchy. There are explicit, ideological limitations of referring to texts as a “prime” or authoritative source of knowledge; this is of course part of a long tradition of western/eurocentric epistemology, which takes the text as the authoritative way of expressing and generating knowledge. This is especially the case when it comes to experiences of people who oftentimes are excluded from textual, positivist processes of knowledge production in institutional settings (Collins 1990). We must consider who creates text, the power of the person who creates the text, what they are speaking *about* and why, and

whose experiences are being taken for granted or whose are not even present. Black people, especially Black women and non-men, have generally been excluded from academic and other institutional practices of text and accompanying forms of discourse.

One could say these considerations of power and knowledge production are more regularly applied now by anthropologists since anthropology's "crisis of representation" in the 1980s and the related postmodern turn⁵. A core part of this critical turn was a concern with writing, and the production of texts. Texts were political, it turned out! However, I would say that since the norm of anthropology is to still do ethnography concerning communities that anthropologists do not belong to, it is necessary to further challenge the conventions by which we write about other people and communities, and thus where we are writing from. This is a large part of why I choose to write autoethnographically. Autoethnography, in the discipline of anthropology, can be understood as ethnography that utilizes personal narrative which is situated within an ethnographic context (Reed-Danahay 2017). I find it important to utilize autoethnography as a method, as well as a lens, to challenge ethnographic authority which is rooted in a modernist, positivist anthropology (Mannik and McGarry 2017). Autoethnography in this context, goes hand-in-hand with the use of embodied experience. This, is not "navel gazing." Autoethnography acts as a way to critically work through social and textual paradigms of power. Social reality is an entanglement of gradients and positionalities that are in a continuous temporal and spatial overlap of the wake, rather than something that can simply be "observed" and "recalled" as an *object* through ethnography; I am no "neutral" or "natural" witness, while I am

⁵ The "postmodern turn" can be understood as a shift in disciplinary views and insights for largely white, western anthropologists. At the most basic level, the "turn" entailed a much-needed critique of anthropological methods and theorization, which have been instruments of coloniality and oppression, especially towards indigenous people (Mannik and McGarry 2017).

also no “authentic” participant. While writing about my experiences, I must attempt to convey how my perception is informed by white space-times that I am aware of, but am not separate from being influenced by, especially when it comes to how I feel in white places, how I can feel towards my white peers, my resulting moves, as well as how I perceive white responses to me. Therefore, autoethnography and intersectionality can become methodological and theoretical tools for me to work through the complications and contrasts of being black and being stuck in white space-times.

In the urgency of not designating intersectionality to the “post,” I also implore the use of intersectionality as a methodology of *accountability* in autoethnography through active reflexivity of my social positionalities and embodied experience. This is because a “post-identitarian” posture is simply not realistic in a world where our bodies are still perceived, directed, punished or rewarded, and more, on the basis of racialized identity. I see this work done in anthropology, by black feminist, and other feminist anthropologists, such as Faye Harrison. Harrison’s 2008 work, *Outsider Within: Reworking Anthropology in the Global Age* is a twenty-first century continuation from the mood and urgency of globalization in the 1990s. Discourse of “local-to-global” in the backdrop of solidly-militarized neoliberalism was center stage in the discipline. In this work, Harrison (2008) builds off these emergent conversations of power, knowledge production, exclusivity, and more, within the discipline. Harrison (2008) suggests that in these conversations, anthropology is not just about generating theory, but also about thinking how anthropology can be “reworked,” specifically as a *political project*, from a black feminist perspective. The title of this work is borrowed from the work of Patricia Hill Collins, the renowned sociologist and influential scholar, writer, and thinker in the studies of

race, gender, class, and nationality across the social sciences and humanities that I mentioned earlier. Harrison (2008) utilizes this intentional choice of theoretical framework and language to tie in “...ideas of marginality and the sort of betwixt and between, sort of being at the crossroads of these sort of entities and whatever...Collins fashioned this notion ‘outsider within.’ Using the domestic analogy is perfect, because you have help that’s really not part of the family, but you sort of mask the relationship of exploitation by saying: she’s like part of the family, auntie Josephine. And so they’re outsiders but they are within...” (Anthrodendum 2016).

Harrison notes that being an “outsider within” can sometimes mean being in a privileged position of knowledge production, and she directly brings to the table dynamics that actively arise, affect, and can damage relationships between different people of different positionalities in our own academic and activist communities as anthropologists working for social change and impact. As Harrison states in an interview about the decolonization of anthropology, “[w]e have to be very vigilant and careful that the progressive projects that we do are not appropriated and then refashioned in forms that really undermine the very epistemological and political agendas from which our projects have actually emerged” (Anthrodendum 2016).

As I begin to talk about the punk DIY places I am, I find these frameworks of intersectionality, and use of autoethnography, extremely valuable to discuss my experiences, especially in an academic setting. In order to try to read where I am coming from in these particular places, you must be ready to let go of any preconceived notions about me having a “punk card” or being a spokesperson for black people who happen to like punk. You must be ready to take to heart the understanding that my embodied experiences as a black person are real, and are part of “the wake,” which permeates daily life in ways that are sometimes hard to

articulate to white people; and it's not hard because I can't just name it all in one concise word or phrase, or say it, but it can be hard to navigate through the contrast of being in a racialized space-time that is so hooked into our subconscious in the United States.

Briefly situating memory and body

Keeping in mind that knowledge comes in many forms, vital to black feminist theory is the acknowledgement of bodily knowledges as necessary to discussing our varied experiences (and vice versa). To even begin with the experiences I want to share about the punk DIY spaces I float around in, I must begin with a bit of what I have experienced in my racialized body. I must share with you some of my history. I read Sarah Ahmed (2017, 23) saying, "to share a memory is to put a body into words" and I find myself a foot shorter and over a decade younger, scabby knee-d and swamped in Eastern North Carolina. I lived there from the time I was 5 years old until I was 11 years old, moving in and out of predominantly white places: schools, community centers, church groups, you name it. When I was a child, the kids were really mean. They knew my family I lived with was white, and I was not. And I was ugly and weird because of it. I felt like a trash can, literally; I would get fruit scraps from our afternoon snack thrown at me if I was lucky (rather than rocks). While walking home from school in second grade, trying to keep distance and ignore the kids taunting me, it happened. The first time I heard it directed towards me by a white kid. Just when I thought they would leave me alone, or that I could physically get away from them, I heard it: *NIGGER*. It was kind of silly hearing it at first, like fuzzy, a distortion. But then it was all at once. Blunt, sharp, hard, ripping, *a punch to the gut*. All at once. And then, more times later, I am 12. I hear it again. It is prefaced by an occupied lunch table.

The air around me a force field. Two people sized gaps form around me. Elbows pointed towards me. I am turned away on purpose. I hear it, again. I hate it here, again. I return to the classroom after a lonely lunch, thankfully next class I won't be the only black kid.

Recounting this as an adult, I still feel the tension, the humiliation, the looming fear of being black and daring to just be in a predominantly white space that is hostile towards black being, all through the conception of a black body. Of course, it did not stop at childhood, because being black is a lifelong engagement with anti-black violence. Countless other incidents have happened since then. My memory is quite literally stored in my body, my body is part of my memory and memory guides my body. My memory and my body are intertwined explicitly as the knowledges that emerge from these very entanglements. Are they really such a separate thing? They are the same. Being harrassed for being black while I was growing up, and coming home to a white family, I felt I could never be understood. They were my family, and they loved me, but they could never truly understand my experience. And among my white classmates, passersby and bullies, my white teachers, the white principal, the white school counselor, my white theater friends, my white artist friends, my white coworkers, I only continued to feel shuffled around; what to do with me? And these problems that arise from me being in my body? It used to feel like a burden.

The embodied experience of being black in a predominantly white place is an inherent disruption to white space-time. And this is one of many reasons why an embodied perspective is necessary and central to this project. The moves and responses that I make towards white people in the places I am in, are the result of a lifetime of being black in a white world. Those of us in racialized bodies navigate the world through the instructions and implications placed on us based

on our bodies. As Ahmed (2017) writes, our experiences can easily be felt through as a “fatalism”: these violences will happen to our bodies, because we are in our bodies. “You are learning, too, to accept that potential for violence as imminent, and to manage yourself as a way of managing the consequences. You are taught to care for yourself by being careful about others.” (Ahmed 2017, 24). Ahmed’s (2017) words emphasize violence as a process that constantly works on, re-works, and is in constant dialogue with those of us whose bodies are racialized.

Our experiences are permeable. Our bodies are permeable. And quite literally as well. Our skin is an organ, and absorbs what is in its surrounding environment. And the violences and consequences of violences which we absorb may not always be explicitly material or physical, but they can and do affect us in ways that manifest physically and materially. The way that our bodies are perceived, acted upon, the ways in which we respond, are all shaped by hierarchies that our bodies are assigned to. Our bodies are situated in reality through our relationships (of power) with each other, from the “micro,” to the “macro.”

For me, my body is a heightened place of sensitivity. At 19 years old, I developed fibromyalgia: a complex, chronic condition characterized by musculoskeletal and neural pain, fatigue, nausea, memory problems, mood problems, and more. Another symptom that I experience is a heightened sensitivity to pain; my experience and consequences of feeling pain play out differently and sometimes “more” intensely than some other people’s. Fibromyalgia is like an amp jacked all the way up. What I receive, what seeps into me, can be harsh static. Part of what this entails, is that when I feel negative emotions, like sadness, frustration, anger, panic, anxiety, it is not a separate event from the sensations that my muscles and nerves feel.

This is a more vivid layer of memory and recalling that I experience. Feeling upset is painful. I can feel my muscles and nerves get upset, I know triggers very well. And so, when I feel something “off” about being in a place, whether it be stares, dismissals, side comments, I *feel* it. Fibromyalgia is less understood, but one thing that is pronounced in its presence, is that those with emotional trauma and anxiety are more likely to develop it. I do have a history of emotional trauma and anxiety, and some of it has definitely been race-related. And this has led me to question the body as an object, as well as a bounded one. We must view the experience of the body as one that is affective, fluid, and complicated; an experience that cannot always be observed and quantified. The body is us, me, you, we. We are our own closest, most intimate and immediate sources of knowledge. In this way, the body is shared. We are an assemblage of shared knowledges, histories, and futures.

We know that the memory is intertwined with the body. The body is entangled in memory. Memory is a part of the body. They are each other. However you want to put it, this is especially so, because memory and the body can feel like a place of precarity. This is especially so in situations that are not as clear as hearing someone calling you the n-word. Having experienced race-related trauma and fibromyalgia at such a young age, I sometimes “feel” the anxiety of disrupting white space-time in my aches before my conscious thoughts catch up and dare try to articulate the “weirdness” that I am experiencing. And this leads me to wonder, *what else makes being black as a “factor” in seemingly ambiguous, yet still very real, social situations of the anxieties of race? How are we brought into being and non-being in our paradoxical relationships to a white world?*

As Sharpe (2016) puts it: “Living in/the wake of slavery is living “the afterlife of property” and living the afterlife of “*partus sequitur ventrem* (that which is brought forth follows the womb), in which the Black child inherits the non/status, the non/being of the mother” (15). Part of this inheritance is rooted in this memory-body, that is inflicted on to us and enforced by white supremacy. It is directional; we learn we are not the same as white people, and must act accordingly. Most of the time, black people in the United States must learn from birth that there are certain parameters that we must form ourselves into, in order to *potentially* disarm white suspicion or fear and thus the consequences of being “too” black. I say *potentially* because attempting to conform to standards of respectability never guarantees that we will not be subject to the consequences of white suspicion or fear.

Speaking about this in an academic context is honestly very awkward for me. We do not need theory to understand that violence shapes black people as marked flesh and distinct bodies. However, I find it important to also situate the memory-body, for me, as not necessarily something that is innate: the sufferings and obstacles that black people are faced with in a white world are not definitive of our existence. Rather, my experience of memory-body is a result of having to navigate white space-time, which inherently not only excludes our sense of being, but invokes an existential danger which is real. What is innate is the *knowing* from the experience of alienation, dehumanization, and violence that is white supremacy. The moves that people such as I must make are rooted in this understanding of how blackness is a position in white supremacy that is marked through flesh, and that, we often cannot hide.

“Everyone is white, of course”: hesitation, suspicion, and doubt

It was a strangely hot, humid night. It had been raining on and off, and the air was still heavy and sticky. As I got out of the car, my glasses fogged up. My skin felt encapsulated in some sort of soup that was supposed to be the air surrounding us. Tye and I looked both ways before crossing the street crowded with parallel parked cars and the droops of tree branches which made the yellow streetlights feel like moonlight.

“I’m excited,” I say to Tye, who had graciously drove us there.

“Oh, me too!” Tye responded, and I felt reassured by their enthusiasm.

I had been to this house for shows before, as my partner and I sometimes travel three and a half hours from the mountains just to do so. Because I had been there several times before, I had met a few people enough to know where I was going and what I was getting myself into. So, I knew that this place, while anarchist, leftist, and LGBT+ friendly, was still very, very white. I felt the need to rehash this with Tye several times beforehand, as they are also black too. I told them because I know we are not always welcomed in some spaces with open arms, though we may not be directly and consciously discounted. But they told me it was okay, they were used to white music scenes. So we got our five bucks and went anyway.

It was dark as we crossed into the lawn, and past a big, old tree whose roots I almost tripped on. It was close to 9:30 PM, the show was supposed to start earlier, but it hadn’t. That was expected, it was punk time, and Tye and I ran on black time, anyway. I saw four or five black-clad, distressed, patched, and fuzzy figures up on the porch. The dedicated punks had definitely showed up on this Monday night. As we climbed the stairs I felt relieved to see at least

one familiar face, someone who lived there. Steven and I had only become acquainted in the past year, but his face lit up like an old friend's as we hugged.

“Hey Gab! How are you doing?”

“Alright! I am in Chapel Hill for the summer, as you know, so here I am. This is my friend, Tye!”

While they exchanged greetings, I cut through the group of three other white punks that Steven had been standing with in order to sit on a bench five or six feet away. I was feeling anxious and my body was beginning to ache. Fibromyalgia never stops, not even for punk shows.

Tye sat next to me as I stretched. We made light chatter, they specifically began making note of the few people who were there at that point.

“Almost everyone is white, of course. And we seem to be the youngest people here.” And they were right. Many (but not all by any means) of the 15 to 20 people who were there at the time, including my friend Steven, looked like they'd been able to purchase alcohol before Tye and I were out of high school, but maybe the oldest person there was in their early 30s. Oftentimes people assume I am older, so I try not to be bothered by it. I try my best to feel like I could “blend in.” I want to look like I feel like this is all casual business, like I know how to relax and just “be” in this social situation. Not knowing what else to contribute to the observation Tye had made, I made a comment about how I was glad I opted for my cut-off shorts so I could stretch more easily.

“You look like you belong here around these white people,” Tye said.

I had on an obligatory band shirt and my favorite jean jacket, complete with patches shittily sewn onto it. Tye was wearing a flannel and jeans that were so torn, they might as well have been cut-offs.

“You too,” I laughed, because we both knew we didn’t feel that way.

After loosening my muscles up a bit, I insisted we go back to Steven and his group. I inserted myself and made standing room for Tye.

“Hey y’all, I am just going to insert myself. My name is Gab. This is Tye. Also hi again, Steven.”

The group, except for Steven (who was already integrating us into conversation), were extremely quiet. I looked at Tye. Then I looked at the three strangers standing with us. They were indeed covered in tattoos and ratty clothing, nothing out of the ordinary. Of course, they were all white. One person I stood next to had a mullet, and something that was supposed to be a white dread. I tried a poker face, I wanted to show that nothing fazed me about them: their whiteness, their silence, their dreads. I wanted to be there, I felt like I had a right to be there. And Tye did too.

A second stranger across from me spoke meekly, “Hi, I’m DJ. Would y’all like a PBR?” Tye and I exchanged greetings with them immediately. We graciously accepted the beer. The third balding stranger, the eldest one, remained quiet and looked at their phone. I looked back to the mullet person, “Hi I’m Gab.” They looked at me in a way that felt like a passing glance, “I’m Taylor.” And with that, Taylor left down the stairs. DJ grabbed the 24 pack of PBR and left too. The balding person had stepped out of the circle at that point. And I stood there, still trying to make small catch-up chat with Steven and Tye. We talked about trains and Washington D.C., but I was sidetracked by the friendly bumbling of chatter that immediately began below the staircase.

Both Tye and I left the show in a mostly-positive daze: the music was enthralling, my few friends there were kind, and it was good to get out of the overbearing, artificial quirks of college nightlife in the town I was staying in, 20 minutes away. However, it was hard not to come back to the unfortunately familiar feeling of rejection and disinterest that we so regularly encounter in white do-it-yourself (DIY) punk spaces, as a result of whiteness.

Tye gave off the appearance of it being just water rolling off of their back.

“I knew that they weren’t going to talk to me. And at this point I don’t really give a fuck.

I just do what I want.”

Throughout the night we found ourselves drifting around, but in an oddly assertive way. Tye was right: it was clear that white punks did not want to go out of their way to talk to us. Even more so, it was though they did not know how to talk to us. And so we shuffled and scanned the yard for a place to retreat, where we could chill after each band without feeling like our bodies were the repelling ends of magnets; we tried for nooks and crannies where we could temporarily ignore the tensions of “Who are these people? They don’t come around here like that, how’d they get here?”

And we weren’t the only ones. There were only two other people of color, besides one of the touring bands and their posse. They were two black folks. The first person I noticed was (who I think to be) a black man who came with (who I think to be) several white women. This person seemed to enjoy the bands, moving to the music melodically and more smoothly than the erratic jerks and snaps of the bobbing white punks around us. They went straight to the middle of the pit, and no one seemed to touch them.

The second person I noticed was a very feminine black person, maybe a black woman, maybe not. I did not notice them until partway into the beginning of the show. They stood at the back of the basement, near where Tye and I were at first (until I had forced our way up a little bit). They were dressed more like me, in all black, and I felt like I might have seen them before. They leaned against the wall, arms crossed at the chest, while the crowd started to get more rowdy. They had no visible expression on their face.

Tye saw them too, “I feel like they were in a similar position as us and didn’t know how to interact with others, or maybe didn’t even want to.”

I wish I could have spoken to them, they left before the show was over.

The first person left early too. Tye and I remained, the only black people left at the punk show. And the white punks around us probably did not find it weird that we were the only specks of color in the crowd as the brown people in the touring band played.

--

Of all of the shows I had been to during my time in the southeastern U.S., this fragment that I recall (and one that Tye and I have continuously discussed since) is unique. It was the *only* show where I was not accompanied by a white person, and was accompanied by another black person. On the car ride to this particular show, I had no idea that how I would be received would be that much more *different*, or that much more *weird*, than other times I had attended gigs with my white friends. Specifically, there was a more stark sense of isolation that I felt. Outside of Steven and a couple of other folks briefly chatting with us, no one really wanted to engage with us at all. I thought I had done everything right: showed up being my interested self, briefed Tye on the conditions, prepared myself to be “extroverted” for a night. It didn’t matter if we “looked”

like we belonged, who we knew, the fact that we came almost an hour away and paid the same five bucks. This has not been the first time I have been “cool guy-ed,” “cold-shouldered,” “brushed off,” or whatever you want to call it, by white punks at shows. I am also not the only person of color to have experienced the strain of existing in a pool of whiteness, either.

Even when I am at shows with white friends, I notice that I am still socially “handled” differently. Oftentimes, I notice that people of color must make the first introductions to white people we do not know, or our white friends must introduce us. The behavior of these strangers could be understood as a move of *hesitance*, whether or not they mean to convey it. Hesitance is awkward: slow and unsure, and can feel aloof or even cold. When I see someone hesitating in the midst of my presence, it brings back memories throughout my life that involve other white people not quite knowing what to do with me, or how to interact with me. Hesitance is a move that many punks of color are wary of talking about in white punk places, or talking about to white punks, especially when they (like most white people in the United States) tip-toe around (or don’t even consider) the elephant in the room: race.

So where does this hesitance, which seems so blatant to me, stem from, if it is not exactly an instance of white punks being intentionally racist? Why is it so hard to bring up, even when you really, really feel like you’re being subjected to it? I like to begin with Mimi Nguyen’s ideas of whiteness in punk. Mimi Nguyen is a writer, and scholar, known for her many contributions and creations of zines and columns throughout the 1990s. While she tends to be hesitant to do “academic” work concerning punk (as I *usually* am, ironically), Nguyen’s 1998 essay “It’s Not a White World: Looking for Race in Punk” is a response in which we can begin to think through the effects of punk being seen as “white” in academic spaces and non-academic spaces. In this

essay Nguyen (1998) immediately points out there is this prevalent view of punk as being a “progressive” force (think in terms of resistance against oppressive systems and states), writing that “somehow punk is a quality that’s understood as transcending race, gender, sexuality, or whatever.” Punk is seen as a space separate from “mainstream” and normative values and structures, including understandings of identity and power.

However, this comes at the cost of punks of color, because our differences are seen as potentially divisive. The reality is, we cannot transcend our bodies, and more precisely, the conventions that have been placed upon them. It’s comparable to a trap of silence. According to Nguyen (1998), in order for people of color “[t]o get our official membership card, we’re supposed to give up or put certain parts of ourselves aside — or at least assign them to a secondary rung.” This is done in the name of what Nguyen (1998) calls a “common culture” of punk, where “racist, sexist or homophobic individuals are usually denounced as detractors from ‘real’ punk principles, as if punk were *inherently* anti-racist, -sexist, or -homophobic.” Ironically (or not), this idea of inherently-anti-racist “common culture” of punk, is often framed as an assemblage of marginalization in itself, and can be used against punks of color who literally have to exist in, and navigate with, different experiences of oppression in the face of white supremacy. When the differences that come with racialized experience are not on the radar, and whiteness is/becomes the default, any sort of contradiction and violence that emerges from structures of race and power are not on the radar as well.

So what does it mean when people (punks and non-punks alike) think punk is a uniform, utopian commune of misfits, looking to destroy oppressive “systems?” It means that the violences of these systems, which permeate punk, are left unchecked. This “unchecking” is part

of the air of hesitance. These violences permeate into everyday encounters and interactions between ourselves in our bodies, and are left unexamined, unless one is at the receiving end of the acts. And then you have a whole group of white punks weirdly avoiding you, while making light conversation with your white partner or white friends standing beside you. When punk is believed to be made by, and for, white people (and this is thought by white people themselves) punk becomes a “phenomenon primarily of/by/for disaffected white kids who either consciously or subconsciously (in the form of their anti-establishment posture) believe themselves to have transcended their own racial privilege” (Nikpour 2012).

Hesitance acts as a fog of ambiguity, and sometimes brings me guilt and anxiety for even fixating on it. The ambiguity is a barrier that makes it hard to talk about. You can feel it, you can name it, but can you convey how real it is, without sounding “crazy?” Can you make your experience of body a “case?” We are directly confronted with the facts that embodied experiences of whiteness (as a space-time, as an experience of reality) do not require conscious awareness of the wake, and therefore require an empirical “proving.” Most white people in the United States do not have anything comparable to a wake, because most of them are not actively racialized. This is because white space-time, that is the context of reality for white people in a predominantly white place, is an accepted “neutrality.”

When it comes to the situation Tye and I were in together, we share this understanding of our blackness as disruptive very intensely, intuitively, and in a way that kind of felt telepathic. Ever since this particular show, I think about the tension I felt in my and Tye’s hamster ball; we, two “separate” “individuals” knew something immediately, together, through some of our shared embodied experiences of our blackness, entangled in the historical, temporal, and spatial

elements that direct our experience. The internality of this knowing is not shared by white people, white punks.

Sitting with the tension that Tye and I experienced, I notice that one of the most prominent processes that I can understand to be playing out, with hesitance, is *suspicion*. It is not the same “forwardness” that I feel when someone watches me around a gas station store, but rather is a general, “subtle” undertone effect of the disruption of whiteness. I view hesitance as a signaling of suspicion, recognition of something that is not to be expected, and something that shouldn’t be there at all. In cases like the turn of events that Tye and I experienced, the “something” would be our blackness. People expect white people to be predominantly occupying the space. And more so, in the spaces I am in, white people are used to seeing fellow white locals. I recall one time when my partner and I stopped at a record store before a show. I went to look at the hardcore punk 7 inches near the register.

“Are you from out of town?” the person at the register asked.

I replied, “Yeah, I’m from Boone. We’re here for a show tonight --”

I tried to continue, but he interrupted, “I didn’t know there were ...uh punks in Boone, haha, see you tonight!”

I got it from there that he knew about the show, but I had no idea who he was, until I saw him playing later. As someone who can feel overwhelmed in social situations sometimes, I do not know how to take comments that seem to be of surprise. It can make me feel so “paranoid.” But being black in predominantly white places, I constantly have to assess the different dynamics of my literal existence and introduction to any given place. Any perceived hint of suspicion sometimes leads me to jump to frantic conclusions, I fixate on the “uh” and “...in Boone.” Could

it be because I am not a familiar local? Could it be because I am in my early 20s? Could it be because I am “from” a small Appalachian town? Could it be because I am a little reserved? Could it be because I look like I don’t belong? Could it be because I am black? I learned months later that an acquaintance’s black boyfriend had been accused of stealing records that he had tried to sell to that record store, by the same person I had interacted with. I haven’t really shown my face there since.

A lot of places I frequent where you can find punk and DIY, are occupied and run by the same groups of people. I’ve found that the suspicion of some folks has lessened with exposure and time, and more of the same people have started to recognize me. But that never guarantees that I feel “at home,” or that I/my presence are recognized as the same in a place, because episodes similar to what happened to Tye and I still occur periodically. Especially since suspicion marks alienation for me in the first place. It almost feels like a quota sometimes. Just when I feel I might be less anxious, I have new material to overanalyze and stress over. *I must expect to be uncomfortable. I must expect the ambiguous, and for the ambiguous to always potentially be hurtful, harmful, or dangerous.* Being caught in the ambiguity of hesitance and suspicion lends itself to *doubt* in a couple of ways: 1) doubt of my analysis and intuition pertaining to how I am being perceived by white people. Sometimes, I feel gaslit by white reactions whenever I do bring up instances of feeling like I am being “treated differently,” or being perceived differently which leads to 2) my questioning my belonging, my sense of community, my safety, and the “anti-racist” political foundations of predominantly white communities I am apart of in punk DIY places.

While I realize that it is not my fault, nor my duty, to try to “fix” the alienating and sometimes awkward encounters that I feel stem from white space-time (especially as one of few black people who occupies the places that I do), I must remember that it is not reasonable to ask myself to be on guard 24/7. This is difficult, because oftentimes, it is not a choice. But ultimately, it is very exhausting. The pain that I take away from the isolation and alienation of being black in a place full of mainly white people, pain that pads my ingrained, learned, precious, defense mechanism can live in *doubt*. Doubt as a response to the alienation and danger of white supremacy. *I must expect to feel that I do not “belong,” and this I must reckon with. I must expect to be moving through a different reality than my white loved ones.* But just because doubt can be a defense mechanism, doesn’t mean that cannot further harm me, especially concerning people I love and care about. The “psychological” effects of racism are very real, the emotional burden of being black is very real. I find that pain as existential anxiety (and sometimes death) when being black, is the substance that permeates throughout my navigation in white space-times, as I am positioned in the wake. The directionality of doubt that I have acquired as a black person is a bittersweet (if you could even call it that) form of self preservation, and I ask: how do I work through the need to protect myself when confronted with casual, everyday anti-blackness while reckoning with my love for the places and people who I have come to meet, who do not experience the wake?

When it comes to feeling stranded among a bunch of white people who supposedly want to “unlearn” racism: What does it mean to be made unfamiliar? How are we made familiar? And why, why is it so painful, even when I feel that I know “what to expect?” The answers may seem/are obvious (“because white supremacy”), but being in a community with people you could

identify with so much, while also feeling so distanced from, it makes you wonder if this even could qualify as a community for you, as a home. How does this even happen? One thing is for sure, people like me have to care for ourselves (because we cannot depend on those who benefit from whiteness to do so), and part of that is the requirement that we must be working through these entanglements. But who ends up being “we”?

When I think of the necessary foundations of what makes a community, I automatically think of care. More readily available for me in the places I am in, I encounter care in the exchange of “Hey can I have a cig/food/a beer?” or “Hey do you need a cig/food/a beer?” I have experienced it in the listenings and sharings of things we all need. Usually, it does reward a casual “sure.” I think of when I got hurt at a show in Washington D.C. I was crying outside the venue, in a full fibromyalgic episode because someone stage dived on me. I was waiting for stares, for side comments, the works. Admittedly, I was not my coolest at the moment, I was definitely pissed off. At 19 years old, I was afraid I would be perceived as not being able to “hang.” But I was only met with crusty dudes who wanted to help. They offered me water, cigarettes, and one even offered me a joint “for the pain.” I even got a friends/family pass for my troubles. At that moment, it was humbling to let go of my doubt. Lil’ black rural queer ol’ me was fully prepared to have to have to “save face,” because of how I feared they may perceive me. Instead, I had to re-evaluate my own perceptions of what others’ perceptions of me were as who I seemed to be. Because they knew nothing else of me, besides recognizing my blackness and the fact that I was in obvious pain. I believe that it was the experience of sharing that “we’ve all been there” (i.e. hurt at a show) that played a big part in the space that I felt was made for me.

But there is more to care than just that one example. Many of the punk spaces and places I have been in, in North Carolina, do seek to make the environment safe, and exclusive of those whose ideologies and actions are harmful. A basic example of this, is that on fliers for shows and events, you may see “NO XENOPHOBES, TRANSPHOBES, OR NATIONALISTS” and or “RESPECT THE SPACE/EACH OTHER.” There is an explicit naming of structural oppressions and violences that are not welcomed in these spaces/places. This naming is important, as it communicates that maybe the place could be safer for me, as a racialized (non)subject of an imperialist state power. However, thinking with intersectionality as accountability for the places I am in (and not just a method for this thesis), I wonder how the absence of the explicit “no white supremacists” could be problematic. Why is it missing? It could be because the spaces *are* predominantly white. There *seems to be* (for the most part) an understanding that white people are really, really racist sometimes and benefit from racist systems of power. But this understanding is not explicitly named, and it is not always acted upon. Sometimes, there are moves made by white people to avoid this acknowledgement. What comes to mind as an example, is when I attended an anarchist book fair, held primarily at an (predominantly white-ran and white-occupied) anarchist bookstore, two summers ago, where I ran into one of my very good friends, Ronny. Ronny wrapped me into a hug immediately, but then immediately met my eyes with distress.

“These white people here want to talk over us.”

Ronny explained to me that only minutes before I arrived, the short talk that Ronny had attended in the screening room completely fell apart and ended up in what I would call “caucacity.”⁶

⁶ Caucacity is a word combination of the words “caucasian” (a historically problematic term rooted in 19th century race science that is even today still used to refer to white people, in the United States) and “audacity.” Caucacity is

Ronny was one of three or four black folks attending the talk. Sometime in the middle, one of the folks spoke up and asked why no one at the event was addressing the amount of cultural appropriation being done by white people (primarily through aesthetics). I did not have to see the room, or be there to know: the anarchist book fair is usually always at least 75% white faces, white dreads, white adoption of indigenous practices, and then ultimately, white moves to settler innocence (Tuck and Yang 2012).

Settler moves of innocence refers to the “strategies or positionings that attempt to relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege, without having to change much at all. In fact, settler scholars may gain professional kudos or a boost in their reputations for being so sensitive or self-aware. Yet settler moves to innocence are hollow, they only serve the settler” (Tuck and Yang, 10). In this case, the person Ronny was referring to was specifically pointing out the number of white people with dreads. The white participants in the room with dreads (and some without) soon became very defensive and dismissive of the conversation this person was trying to bring into the space.

Thinking about Tuck and Yang’s (2012) ideas of settler adoption fantasies⁷ as a settler move to innocence sparks a noticing in my encounters with the appropriation of black and native cultural customs and practices by white people in anarchist punk spaces that seek to be anti-racist like the bookstore. Returning back to Nguyen’s (1998) identification of punk as a “progressive” force for white punks, we can see again how white space-time is reified by ideas of time and

honestly a quirky reference to “white people, white people-ing.” In this instance, it would be white people having the audacity to speak over black people about topics and issues that affect black people because of white supremacy.
⁷ Settler adoption fantasies can “mean the adoption of Indigenous practices and knowledge, but more, refer to those narratives in the settler colonial imagination in which the Native (understanding that he is becoming extinct) hands over his land, his claim to the land, his very Indian-ness to the settler for safe-keeping. This is a fantasy that is invested in a settler futurity and dependent on the foreclosure of an Indigenous futurity” (Tuck and Yang 2012, 14).

space as still linear, and centered around industrialization of imperial, settler-colonial bodies. The racialization of black and native peoples is part of what positions us with the enduring violence of social evolutionism. What is “progress” for some white punk settlers who violently adopt black and native cultural customs and practices is to become the Other, to “become without becoming” (Tuck and Yang 2012). White punks, aware or not, use their perceptions of black and native cultural aesthetics as a way to try to distance themselves from their own power that comes with their whiteness, and the resulting benefits of white supremacy. As Nikpour (2012) writes, being a “race traitor doesn’t change one’s ability to access racial privilege.” Yet, these moves are still constantly enacted when punk is believed to be made by, and for, white people and again, becomes a “phenomenon primarily of/by/for disaffected white kids who either consciously or subconsciously (in the form of their anti-establishment posture) believe themselves to have transcended their own racial privilege” (Nikpour 2012).

Our understandings are not always enacted in our praxis, and that can be especially so for white people who wish to be “allies” with black people. While I do not have perfect answers, I feel it is important to ask what an intersectional (black feminist) praxis of accountability could look like in entanglements of power concerning suspicion, hesitation, and doubt, because it is desperately needed. To come back to Audre Lorde’s assertion that there is no hierarchy of oppression, I have also learned in my experiences that the binary of oppressor and oppressed, and therefore the binary of harm and banishment, is not so simple, and not reflective of the complexities that come with racialization and striving for “allyship.” This is not to say that there should be “gray area” when harm is pointed out by someone who is systematically oppressed.

What I do wish to point towards, is that if there is going to be any semblance of “community” between white people and people of color, we further center our understandings and questions of communal care with racialization and white supremacy in full mind. Though I feel black people in the United States have been saying this for a while, I will say it again: there is no room for “colorblindness,” especially in the problematics of a white space-time of “progress.” I bring up the example of the book fair not to just say “this is wrong,” but to also point to the urgent and explicit need for a specific kind of mutual (though not the same) vulnerability between folks who want to work together when the circumstances are complicated (or even harmful sometimes), in order for those sharing space to begin to sort through these knots. We come to these spaces, many of us seek to live and be in a way that is subversive to the white supremacist, cis-hetero, imperialist, patriarchal, and capitalist state we are located in. And white punks must always remember that just because they didn’t directly and/or consciously buy into settler futurity at the expense of native and black people, doesn’t mean they still don’t benefit from white supremacy and settler-colonialism existing.

The need for community vulnerability brings me to the work of adrienne maree brown (2017), who talks through some of the complications that can happen in community settings through her ideas of interdependence and “liberated relationships,” which can be understood as practices that seek to evoke transformative justice in our daily lives and relationships to each other. We cannot erase or ignore the legacies and impacts of white supremacy, and how it permeates into personal relationships between racialized people and non-racialized people. However, we can acknowledge, assess, and work through dynamics of where and how it permeates in daily life. The weirdness that comes with being black and trying to navigate the

violences of white supremacy with my white peers can begin to be addressed through what brown (2017) calls “radical honesty:” “No omissions, no white lies, no projections.” Radical honesty as a tool for liberated relationships can be an exercise where compassion can be built through mutual (again, but not the same) vulnerability. While brown (2017) encourages us to “ask the questions you really want answered,” I want to make it clear that this should not be confused as expecting black people to be on-call educators, period. In fact, to me, radical honesty goes hand-in-hand with boundaries that allow for us (people who are racialized) to take care of ourselves. Radical honesty allows us to express our concerns, to further engage or not engage where we decide, and to also hold ourselves responsible and accountable for how we are honest, and why. This, in turn, requires not just listening, but constant engagement and reflexivity, and conscious evaluation of power dynamics in any exchange of communication. White people who wish to be in community with people of color in punk places must decenter their truths and realities of white space-time as an act of radical honesty.

Always where you least expect it, foolishly: some take-aways about community and space-making at a distance

Growing up, and still even into the today of my early adulthood, I am restricted in my rural surroundings. Getting around where I currently live in rural western North Carolina is no easy feat, leaving is even more bothersome. There are only highways, backroads, sidewalk-less streets. And when you are a queer who can’t (legally) drive with no car, you have to make do with where you can go, make do with what is in front of you. And this is how DIY principle is born. This is how any hunger or search through DIY is born. DIY itself is a place of emergence. There is no overriding authority, no rules, no standard of what you ought to create.

The DIY/punk spaces I am in now are not perfect. The people who make up the communities are not perfect. Yet punk remains a space that is a part of me, that I feel home-fully entangled in. And the problematic paradoxes that arise when it comes to confronting and working through racism and tensions of race in these spaces striving to be anti-racist, are ones that people in color in any predominantly white space are likely to face. They feel inevitable. I have often struggled with being black in predominantly (punk) white spaces *that do not know me as I know it them*. An “outsider within” dynamic, like the experiences that Tye and I had together. I could walk into a predominantly white punk space that I frequent, and start a conversation about Discharge’s discography, and chances are the white person I am talking to will know what I am talking about. I know not to “assume” someone is a fascist just because they have a Motorhead pin (Lemmy really like to collect World War II memorabilia, especially the Nazi stuff). But what would they know blackness? What would they know about us being punk as fuck?

My mind wanders cruelly over every detail, I am plagued with the question of “When is the last time these white people interacted with someone like me?” Is it really only the common ground that matters? (Obviously not). Who is to say that understandings of what that common ground is and means, isn’t impacted by their not-knowing of you *because* you’re black, but then again, also by their limited knowing of you *as* black. But then I feel it is silly to feel such a way. Because sometimes I also think: maybe they don’t view me too differently, sometimes they say hi. I got a free poster from the record store last time, a “how’s Boone?” last time. But that tightness in your chest remains. I feel that when I am standing alone in predominantly white punk spaces, I am not the same. But I still want to reach out, to engage, to be embraced. I don’t

want to have desperate looking eyes, but it'd be really nice to not be left smoking a cigarette alone in the dark while you're waiting for the next set.

In these situations, I find myself looking at the ground, into space, hoping to receive, hoping to be received. Sometimes, it never comes. So, how do you create belonging for yourself, within yourself, knowing you are not an atomized individual, but feeling the weight of experiencing racialized reality, around your white friends? How do you belong in a collectively/communally constructed space of DIY that you feel you are not seen intertwined in, even though it may physically be local to you? This is why I feel it is important to discuss how DIY has emerged for me, from being isolated both geographically and socially. I have learned to create space for myself, transforming the geographic and social isolation that I experienced. For me, one of the first ways that I practiced this, was through a world of zines. Zines are usually small, self-published or just self-made works that are often centered around particular topics or themes of the author(s) choosings. Zines can be made of text and images that can be either “original” or taken from other sources.

I remember making my first zine when I was 14. One copy of it existed (unfortunately lost in a couple big moves), and it was put together by hand, by me. It was a zine about what I knew about punk and feminism at the time. I heard about, and first came across, punk zines primarily through the internet. It was an experience that was liberating, even in a “private” way. I had autonomy over how and what I wanted to discuss, celebrate, critique, and create, and no standards or judges to go through for approval. I could make myself a nest with all of the black punk music, art, and history that I really cherish(ed), that really gave me hope as an awkward, confused black kid who was into punk. After a taste, I wanted more, and I fully sought out the

world of punk zines as a place where I could not be physically present, I could still be aware, I could still know and learn. I could still have community. The first zine that inspired me was *Shotgun Seamstress*, created by Osa Atoe, a zine made for and about black punks, released in 2006.

Shotgun Seamstress was an attempt to create community but in a non-geographical kind of way. Black punks will never have the numbers to form a tangible real-life scene ... I'm not sure if I find a "duality" or "doubleness" in being black and punk. I find a wholeness in it. The Shotgun Seamstress zine shows how the identities black and punk flow seamlessly within a number of different individuals. The point of my zine is to show that these identities co-exist naturally and effortlessly within the bodies of artists like Vaginal Creme Davis, HR of Bad Brains, Brontez Purnell of Gravy Train & The Younger Lovers, and many more. (Interview with Osa Atoe 2013, 269-271).

Osa Atoe's words have stuck with me throughout the years, because what I have realized through the emotional pain of feeling isolated and alienated, is that there is still power and hope that lies in *knowing* and *being* myself in my way of life, as a queer, black creative who loves me some punk. There is power and hope in knowing that there have been others like me, for generations, though white-washed representations and narratives of punk community and being are centered. When talking about punk, we need to acknowledge marginalized presence and actively historicize it. What I mean by that is, it is necessary to historicize the tensions of erasure and space-making that punks of color (specifically black punks) have had to endure in punk places and movements of political resistance. Punk is not separate from blackness. Blackness is not some sort of miraculous, exceptional, rare presence in punk.

This call to historicizing is something I feel heavily in the work of Osa Atoe, who is a black musician, writer, potter and zinester from the Southern United States. In a 2009 article, titled 'a race riot did happen' (in response to Nguyen's call for a "race riot" in punk during the late 90s) Atoe reflects on the zines that brought her into a sense of community of punks of color

growing up. These zines include *Evolution of a Race Riot* (which Mimi Nguyen compiled), *How to Stage a Coup*, *Slander*, *Quantify*, and *Mala*, and were made by women of color who were writers, musicians, and participants (who were racial minorities but mostly not black). Their body of work was an important documentation of how punks of color experienced racism, frustration, and anger with white punks, while also celebrating ourselves and our work as independent of whiteness. Atoe writes that these zines did much for her, putting her into conversation with other punks of color, as well as inspiring her and a new generation of black and brown punks to create their own zines, and to start their own bands.

Being “picky” about semantics, I would not say that a race riot happened—as it is always an on-going struggle for people of color in punk and overall in our world. Right now, in June 2020, I am watching major U.S. cities burn, because enough is enough. The tide has been turning. I am watching my black siblings risk their lives for life on the street. We have long overflowed past the brim that white supremacy seeks to submerge us under. In this moment I can especially agree with Atoe, that there exists a legacy, a lineage of art, by punks of color in the United States that comes from sweat, anger, and celebrations of our “brown punk foremothers,” and one that is rooted in the exclusion of racism and racial hierarchies. I am feeling the weight of centuries of struggle: loss, despair, darkness, and also hope. Because of this, it is important to acknowledge that it was specifically the labor of space-making that was carried out by punks of color. This labor impacted the punk as a whole, which Atoe agrees. She writes that “white people really benefited from those earlier POC punk zines, too—at least those white people who were truly interested in educating themselves about racism. They realized they were being stupid and pissing us off and they toned it down some” (Shotgun Seamstress 2010).

The understanding of punk as political resistance, has maintained its place through the labor and social justice work done by punks of color, who are ironically still erased in the name of “unified resistance.” But this notion of a unified resistance and the idea of a “punk rock norm” is itself counter-intuitive to understandings of punk as emergent through and in several contexts, especially since such a unification obscures punks of color and their labor in creating the resistive history of punk. And while I find it very important to acknowledge that things have changed since the 1990s, and even early 2000s, I still, and my friends of color in punk, oftentimes still struggle with the hurt that results from white-washing of music, art, and experiences of violence. I constantly ask, “What do I do if these white people are not actually listening, and acting accordingly?” and “*How do I feel about it, about the space, about my ‘community’?*” I again, find myself looping around these words of Osa Atoe:

Subsequently, many of these POC punks left the scene. They were bitter and fed up with their experiences. Now this is where my mind starts manufacturing millions of questions. 1. Where exactly did these “ex-punks” end up that was an anti-racist utopia? Where do you go if you’re a person of color where you don’t have to experience racism? 2. How did these people suddenly turn un-punk? I mean, they’re all making a totally diy zine together. That’s punk, right? Some of those people continued making zines and participating in punk after that, although maybe to a lesser degree. If you found a home in punk because yr a super weird queer kid, if punk is something useful to you, if it’s the way you make art and the way you were politicized, how do you just leave? Where do you go? (Shotgun Seamstress 2010).

In this framing, I see an explicit understanding that creating space for myself is not an individual project, nor is it ever an individual project. As a “super weird queer” black person, Atoe speaks to me in pointing out that if punk is useful for people like us, we should claim it, and we should allow ourselves to understand punk and our own use of it as not dependent on whiteness as a space-time foundation of punk, as well as not dependent on the presence of white people who may be making places unwelcoming or unsafe to us. But also it is the understanding that punk as

a space for the racialized “super weird queer kid” is one that must be seen as communal for that reason, as an on-going political project that is imperfect, as human beings are. This is not to say that I think people of color who are struggling in predominantly spaces should “suck it up” for the “greater good.” On the contrary, I think people of color, especially black people, should trust their gut, and should not compromise their well-being and safety. What I am trying to point towards, is that this communal creating of space is necessary for a community to be more inclusive, healthier, safer, etc. and must be *intentional*.

Going hand-in-hand with communal creating: one of the biggest takeaways I have from being physically isolated away from other black people, and from the possibilities that zines have opened up for me, is that self-care is a vital part of the equation when it comes to surviving in a white world. Like Atoe says, there is no anti-racist utopia, anywhere. Self-care must be understood as part of communal care; just as our intimate knowledge of power and systemic oppressions exists in our daily lives through our bodies, we must understand self-care as located in the struggle for liberation from these oppressions. Audre Lorde’s famous quote from *A Burst Of Light* (1988) sums up my understanding of self-care: “Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.” As black people, our societal designation of death informs our struggles of, and for, black life. To be black, and to not only survive, but to emerge from struggle in joy, in fierce hope and knowing that we are alive, and we should treat ourselves as such to be alive, is political warfare. Reading this quote strikes my heart, hard. As I am watching uprising in the United States, and working and hoping for revolution, I must admit it can be easy to cast off the work I may be doing. It can be easy to feel that what I am not doing feels more urgent. As I see my people die on the front lines, as I see

my people mourn endlessly, as I see my people hungry and without clean water, as I see my people suffer. It can feel so helpless. I do what I can for others: sending food, money, supplies, and offering any space I can offer. Yet I often feel sick to myself: what is the point of writing a thesis? What is the point of making a zine?

But I still create. I still make. I still am putting my energy, my pain, my love, my hope, into something that is my truth. And in a white world, in a white academy, in a white whatever which seeks to gaslight black people, extract from us, and silence us, being able to share my truth is a form of self-care. Self-care is not limited to the so-called “individual.” I love myself and my truth as an extension of what I share with others. Coming back to the question of “why?”, when I share a zine that I (or someone else) made, or when I insist space for myself in an academic setting, I am contributing to what Sarah Ahmed (2017) calls “desire lines.” Desire lines are paths “created by not following the official paths laid out by disciplines. These paths might have become fainter from not being traveled upon; so we might work harder to find them; we might be willful just to keep them going by not going the way we have been directed” (Ahmed 2017, 15). Desire lines are what I can grasp, what I can hold onto, in the wake. I am bobbing in the paths of black feminist and other feminist of color artists, thinkers, writers, workers, activists, and more. To be me, my body, in both radical places (like in places where I find punk) and institutional spaces (like the academy) is a disruption that always is connected to black feminist visions, futurisms, and histories. This is so in that my (and other black people’s) truth of resistance as hopeful and demanding of life, and the racialization of my body as inherent in a white supremacist world, are at the center of transforming our understandings of community, being, and belonging. They must be.

Bibliography

- Ahmed, Sara. 2017. *Living a Feminist Life*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Ahmed, Sara. 2012. *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Arrieta, Anthony. "Los Saicos: Was the First Punk Band from Peru?" CultureSonar, March 1, 2020. <https://www.culturesonar.com/los-saicos-was-the-first-punk-band-from-peru/>.
- Atoe, Osa. "A race riot did happen." Shotgun Seamstress, February 22, 2010. <http://shotgunseamstress.blogspot.com/2010/02/race-riot-did-happen.html>.
- brown, adrienne maree. 2017. *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*. Chico: AK Press
- Collins, Patricia Hill. 1990. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Crenshaw, Kimberle. 1989. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics."
- hooks, bell. 1992. "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance." In *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, 21-39. Boston, MA: South End Press.
- Lorde, Audre. 1988. *A Burst of Light: Essays*. Ithaca: Firebrand Books.
- Mannik, Lynda and McGarry, Karen (eds.) 2017. *Practicing Ethnography: a Student Guide to Method and Methodology*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Moreton-Robinson, Aileen. 2015. *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Nguyen, Mimi. 1998. "It's (Not) a White World: Looking for Race in Punk." *White Riot: Punk Rock and the Politics of Race*.
- Nikpour, Golnar. 2012. "White Riot: Another Failure..." MAXIMUM ROCKNROLL. <http://maximumrocknroll.com/white-riot-another-failure/>
- "Pure Hell: How Four Black Kids Changed The Face of Punk in The 70's." AFROPUNK, January 3, 2017. <https://afropunk.com/2017/01/pure-hell-how-four-black-kids-changed-the-face-of-punk-in-the-70s/>.

- Reed-Danahay, Deborah. "Autoethnography." Oxford University Press, February 28, 2017.
<https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199766567/obo-9780199766567-0162.xml>.
- Sharpe, Christina. 2016. *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Shotgun Seamstress and Golnar Nikpour. 2013. "Interview with Golnar Nikpour." *FIX MY HEAD*.
- Stinson, Elizabeth. "Writing Zines, Playing Music, and Being a Black Punk Feminist: An Interview with Osa Atoe." *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory* Vol. 22, Nos. 2–3, July–November 2012, 261–274
- Tuck, Eve, and K. Wayne Yang. "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1-40.
- Weheliye, Alexander G. "'I Am I Be': The Subject of Sonic Afro-modernity." *boundary 2* 30, no. 2 (2003): 97-114. <https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/44482>.

