

UC Irvine

UC Irvine Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title

Freeing Los Angeles: Un/forgotten Spaces and Abolitionist Education in the Carceral-Education Landscape

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6v50b8z9>

Author

Goldman, Margaret

Publication Date

2024

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
IRVINE

Freeing Los Angeles: Un/forgotten Spaces and Abolitionist Education in the Carceral-Education
Landscape

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Criminology, Law and Society

by

Margaret Goldman

Dissertation Committee:
Professor Nancy Rodriguez, Co-Chair
Professor Susan Coutin, Co-Chair
Professor Sabina Vaught

2024

Chapter 4 © 2024 Radical Teacher
Photographs in Introduction, Chapter 1, Chapter 2 © Youth Justice Coalition, © 2024 Goldman
All other materials © 2024 Goldman

DEDICATION

To my grandmother and best friend, Dr. Vera Herman Goodkin,
who told me not long before she transitioned
on October 2, 2023:
life is beginning.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF FIGURES	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
VITA	vi
ABSTRACT	vii
INTRODUCTION	1
Part I: An Academic Introduction	2
Part II: A Different Type of Introduction: On Positionalities, Relationships, and “the Work”	32
CHAPTER 1	44
Schools, Prisons, and Un/forgotten Spaces in the Carceral-Education Landscape	
CHAPTER 2	87
To Split an Atom: Schooling, Carcerality, and Modernity	
CHAPTER 3	137
There’s Always a Way Out: Spatial Domination, Disappearance, and Free Movement in the Carceral-Education Landscape	
CHAPTER 4	175
Unconditional Care Beyond the Carceral-Education Landscape: Abolitionist Education as Everyday Praxis	
CHAPTER 5	204
Keeping It Human	
CONCLUSION	258
The Stories We Tell	
REFERENCES	267

LIST OF FIGURES

		Page
Figure 1	Street View of Chuco's Justice Center	2
Figure 2	Rebel Garden	2
Figure 3	Spatial Reclamation: From Kenyon to Chuco's	4
Figure 4	Rebel Garden from Three Views	7
Figure 5	"Original" Chuco's	9
Figure 1.1	Cracks in the Concrete	69
Figure 1.2	Warrior Week	79
Figure 2.1	Rebel Roots	94
Figure 5.1	Under (the) Belly of the Beast	214

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I extend my deepest gratitude to the students at FREE LA High School, whose wisdom, humor, honesty, compassion, and profoundly perceptive visions of how the world is and might be created the conditions of possibility for this story—among so many others—to unfold. You have all taught me far more than I could ever teach you, and far more than could fit in these pages.

Thank you to all the teachers and staff at FREE LA, all the organizers at YJC, and everyone else I've crossed paths with in the Chuco's space. Each of you has taught me, in so many ways over the years, what it means for abolition to become an everyday praxis.

Thank you to my committee members, Dr. Nancy Rodriguez, Dr. Susan Coutin, and Dr. Sabina Vaught, each of whom have shaped this project and my development as a thinker, scholar, and educator in so many, many ways. Dr. Rodriguez, thank you for pushing me to be rigorous and organized in my research, confident in myself as a scholar, and for so selflessly showing me the ropes of academia—the past six years as your advisee has been a transformative experience. Dr. Coutin, thank you for believing in this project so unconditionally (for always saying “when you write your book...”), and for encouraging me to be creative, to consider complexity, and to stretch theoretical, methodological, and disciplinary boundaries. Dr. Vaught, thank you for everything. Thank you for teaching me to ask questions and be curious, rather than find answers and seek expertise; for modeling what it means to be in deep conversation and good relationality; and for reminding me to slow down and really listen.

Thank you to the family, friends, and fellow graduate students who kept me grounded during my doctoral studies. You all know who you are.

Ashley, your wisdom, mentorship, and friendship have made grad school *almost* livable. Mom and grandma, your lessons, your stories, and our conversations are threaded through the pages of this dissertation. I am because you are.

Chapter 4 of this dissertation is a reprint of the material as it appears in Goldman, M. (2024). Unconditional Care Beyond the Carceral Education State: A Call for Abolitionist Departure, *Radical Teacher*, 128, 25-36 <http://dx.doi.org/10.5195/rt.2024.1106>, used with permission from Pitt Open Library Publishing. I also want to thank the Youth Justice Coalition for permission to include copyrighted photographs as part of my dissertation. Financial support was provided by the NSF Graduate Research Fellowship Program, Grant # DGE-1839285; and by the University of California, Irvine, Department of Criminology, Law & Society's internal quarterly fellowship.

VITA

Margaret Goldman

2018	B.A. in Psychology, University of Miami
2018-2020; 2024	Teaching Assistant, University of California, Irvine
2020-2025	Graduate Research Fellow, National Science Foundation (GRFP)
2020	M.A. in Social Ecology
2023	Graduate Student Researcher, University of California, Irvine
2024	Ph.D. in Criminology, Law & Society, University of California, Irvine

FIELD OF STUDY

Abolition, education, juvenile justice

PUBLICATIONS

- Goldman, M. (2024). Unconditional Care Beyond the Carceral Education State: A Call for Abolitionist Departure. *Radical Teacher*, 128, 25-36. <https://doi.org/10.5195/rt.2024.1106>
- Rodriguez, N. and **Goldman, M.** (2024). Family Systems, Inequality and Juvenile Justice. *Criminal Justice & Behavior* (accepted; forthcoming).
- Goldman, M. (2023). Care and the Quiet Self: Youth Sovereignty, Self-determination and Other Things That Glow. *Palimpsest: A Journal on Women, Gender and the Black International*, 12(2), 28-58. <https://doi.org/10.1353/pal.2023.a919606>
- Goldman, M. and Rodriguez, N. (2022). Juvenile Court in the School-Prison Nexus: Youth Punishment, Schooling and Structures of Inequality. *Journal of Crime & Justice*, 45(3), 270-284. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0735648X.2021.1950562>
- Goldman, M. and Rodriguez, N. (2022). “The State as the Ultimate Parent:” The Implications of Family for Racial and Ethnic Disparities in the Juvenile Justice System. *Race & Justice*, 12(4), 714-735. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2153368720924769>

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Freeing Los Angeles: Un/forgotten Spaces and Abolitionist Education in the Carceral-Education
Landscape

by

Margaret Goldman

Doctor of Philosophy in Criminology, Law and Society

University of California, Irvine, 2024

Professor Nancy Rodriguez, Co-Chair

Professor Susan Coutin, Co-Chair

This dissertation examines the relationships between schooling and carceral systems, and the ways system-impacted youth build abolitionist alternatives to punitive education, and criminalization more broadly. I conduct a two and a half-year ethnography of Fighting for the Revolution that will Educate and Empower Los Angeles (FREE LA) High School. FREE LA is a police-free, punishment-free alternative school in South LA, created for and by Black and Brown young people who were excluded from, or chose to leave, traditional schooling. FREE LA is rooted in abolition and transformative justice, each of which encompass a broad framework and set of everyday praxes for transforming the conditions, ideologies, and power relationships that make State and interpersonal violence continuous and inevitable. I also taught, substituted, and tutored at FREE LA for the past four years.

Through a critical geographic frame, I use FREE LA's model and students' insights as a lens to explore the deeper *entanglements* between schooling and carceral regimes, beyond the focus on harsh "zero tolerance" discipline (e.g., suspension and expulsion) used in much current literature on schools and prisons. Likewise, by examining the numerous processes, praxes, and relationships through which FREE LA participants build an educational space where punishment is nowhere on the spectrum, I explore the possibilities for abolitionist alternatives beyond the

“alternatives to discipline” (e.g., behavioral interventions and restorative practices) frequently proposed as solutions to the school-prison link.

By viewing schools and prisons not as static ‘things’ linked through isolated policies, but dynamic sets of relationships, I analyze how carceral ideologies, modes of relationality, and forms of social organization flow into, out of, and across “school” in ways that entrench and normalize carceral regimes. I demonstrate how schooling and carceral systems are constitutively produced across numerous scales, to create a complex *carceral-education landscape* in which young people are repeatedly partitioned into gendered-racial hierarchies of humanness, worth, and belonging. However, through ethnographic observations of FREE LA’s departures from this landscape, I consider the possibilities for forms of education and socio-spatial transformation that contend with the numerous entangled roots of the school-prison link. For example, FREE LA’s refusal to allow police in the space; their abolitionist legal clinic, which provides court support for students who get arrested; and their maintenance of safety and accountability through TJ, all radically disrupt the mundane terms and conditions of both schooling and carceral regimes. Rooted in the experiential insights of FREE LA students, I contribute to critical criminological and abolitionist studies by theorizing models of education and forms of social organization that render criminalization obsolete; and by extending methodological critiques of carceral systems to argue that abolitionist transformation must be epistemological and ontological in scale and scope.

INTRODUCTION

Part I: An Academic Introduction

Introduction

The large iron gate lugs and rattles its way open, sluggish under the weight of time and poorly greased tracks. To the right, pushing up against the face of the tall concrete building of what used to be Kenyon Juvenile Detention Center,¹ an incomplete row of cars flashes a smile like a toddler's—happy to be there, but missing a few teeth (Fig. 2). On the left, a pastel colored home stretches back along the perimeter of the parking lot, revealing surprising depth un-visible from the street (Fig. 1). A mother sits in a small, rectangular window in the pastel home, while her toddler peers over the edge of a tall staircase embracing the home's back wall. He flashes a crescent of piano keys: a model for the cars to mirror. The staircase and the window are at least a story taller than the large iron gate and I wondered if, in the years before her son was born, the mother had heard it rattle and ache under the weight of time and poorly greased tracks, as buses departed with adolescent cargo: children to be dis/placed hundreds of miles away from pastel homes. I wondered how much she tried not to remember, or how much she refused to forget. They say certain types of poison live for decades in the soil. They say memory lives forever in the bones.



Fig. 1 Street View of Chuco's Justice Center, formerly Kenyon Detention Center (*Google Maps*)

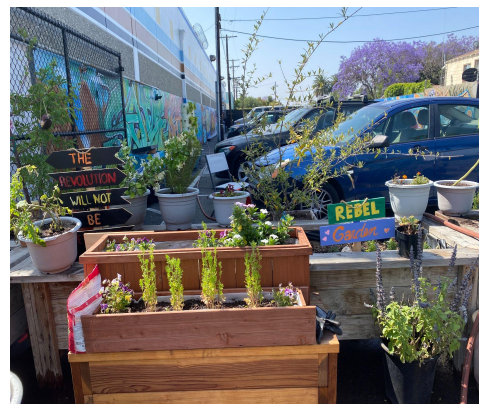


Fig. 2 Rebel Garden (*Author*)

¹ The official name of the former detention center is Kenyon Juvenile Justice Center. I've changed the name to reflect the purpose of the institution. Similarly, I refer to "carceral systems" and the "criminal punishment system" rather than the "criminal justice system" as an intentional disruption of the conflation of justice with punishment.

Over the past four or so years, both the large iron gate and the concrete building it surrounds have become home to insurgent memories: bright splashes of color telling stories etched in graffiti-style print; vibrant hues of pink and blue and green breathing life into life-sized murals: archives of worlds stolen by the State and remembered in the streets, painted by people who refuse to forget themselves (Gilmore, 2021). Since 2019, what used to be a juvenile detention center and courthouse smack dab in the middle of South Central LA has been transformed by local community members into Chuco’s Justice Center: or “Chuco’s” for short (Fig. 3). In addition to a “gathering place for organizers, artists, educators” and others across South LA, Chuco’s is the home-space of the Youth Justice Coalition (YJC), a youth-led abolitionist organization; and YJC’s alternative school, Fighting for the Liberation that will Educate and Empower Los Angeles (FREE LA) High School (YJC, 2024).

Over a decade prior to taking over Kenyon Detention Center, and as part of their broader movement to abolish youth criminalization in LA County, YJC created FREE LA in 2007 to serve the Black and Brown young people being systematically pushed-out of Los Angeles public schools (Sardo, 2014; Munoz, 2021) and into California’s massive prison apparatus (Gilmore, 2007). Specifically, in response to the links between exclusionary education and what YJC organizers recognized (and experienced) as a carceral “war” on Black and Brown youth, FREE LA was developed as a police-free, punishment-free alternative to *both* traditional schools and youth incarceration (YJC, 2023; E. Lacques-Zapién, personal communication, 2022). Nearly two decades later, FREE LA continues to serve system-impacted young people who have been removed from, or chose to leave, traditional schooling—some of whom were sentenced, or know loved ones who were sentenced, in the very courtrooms students now enter as classrooms. More than a metaphor for anti-carceral transformation, FREE LA’s new home-space is the very

juvenile detention center that YJC and FREE LA mobilized to shut down in 2013 (Estrin, 2022; YJC, 2020). In addition to two and a half years of ethnographic research, I taught, tutored, and substituted at FREE LA for about four.

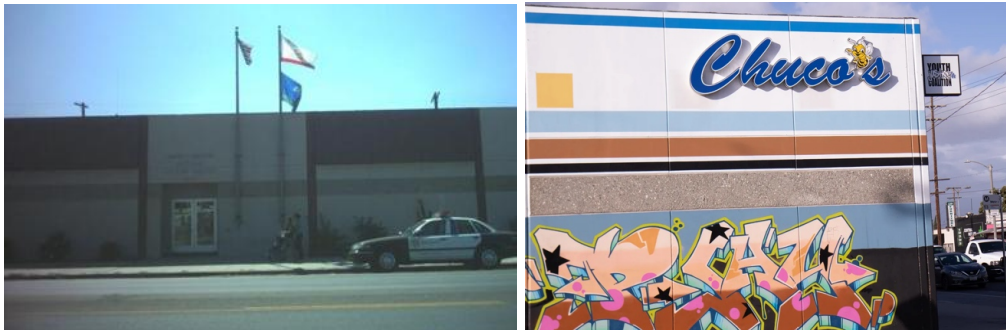


Fig. 3 Spatial Reclamation: From Kenyon to Chuco's (Right: Google Images; Left: YJC)

This ethnographic dissertation places the FREE LA space, and FREE LA students' stories and insights, in dialogue with interdisciplinary conversations around the relationships between schools and prisons, and the spectrum of alternatives we might develop to those relationships. FREE LA's deliberate development for and by system-impacted young people, and in refusal of carceral and exclusionary education, positions it alongside diverse and longstanding genealogies of student and community organizing against punitive discipline, militarized security, and racialized criminalization in and beyond schools. In Los Angeles, for example, these genealogies span from the 1968 student walk-outs in East LA (see e.g., Sahagún, 2018); to the "education not incarceration" campaigns spearheaded by high school and university student activists across California in the 1990s (Acey, 2000); to the ongoing youth-of-color-led movements for "cops off campus" (Students Deserve, 2022; Giamarino, 2021), which achieved both unprecedented visibility and intensified repression in the uprisings of Summer 2020.

While mobilizations against carceral and exclusionary schooling have adopted various frameworks and slogans over the past decades, the relationship between schools and prisons is

most often studied, in criminological and other social science scholarship, under the framework of the *school-to-prison pipeline* (STPP): a metaphor, and conceptual paradigm, referring to the process by which students are pushed out of schools and therefore become predisposed to contact with the criminal punishment system (Wald & Losen, 2003). In exploring and explaining the roots of the school-prison link,² STPP scholarship focuses primarily on harsh “zero tolerance” discipline—such as suspension, expulsion, and arrests by school police (Muñiz, 2021; Henry et al., 2022)—all of which systematically subject Black and other students of color to carceral system contact, in both direct and indirect ways (Sykes et al., 2015; Fabelo et al., 2011). The popular traction this conceptual framing has gained, and its influence on policy and public consciousness, is reflected in state-level and nation-wide mobilizations such as the American Psychological Association’s (APA) development of a national Zero Tolerance Task Force (APA, 2008), and the Obama administration’s implementation of federal guidelines to reduce racial bias in suspensions and expulsions with an explicit goal of ameliorating the STPP (Wiener-Bronner, 2014; US Department of Education, 2023).

Extending these efforts, scholars and policy makers aiming to dismantle the school-prison link have focused most recently, and increasingly, on proposing and evaluating alternatives to punitive school discipline—such as “positive behavioral interventions” (Mallet, 2016; Bornstein, 2017) and restorative justice practices (Morgan et al., 2020; Agudelo et al., 2021)—which aim to manage student (mis)behavior in “more inclusive” ways (e.g., Deakin & Kupchik, 2018; Hirschfield, 2018; Payne & Welch, 2022). While STPP scholarship exposes the consequences of harsh discipline for numerous forms of inequality, and while alternative disciplinary practices

² In this study, I use the terminology *school-prison link* to refer generally to the relationship(s) between schools and prisons; I use *STPP*, and other terminologies (see p. 6), to refer to the conceptual frameworks scholars have developed and employed to study this relationship.

have supported youth in meaningful ways (Samimi et al., 2023), the consistent and often exclusive focus on school discipline and its alternatives, in efforts to explain and address the school-prison link, ultimately reduces this link (conceptually, and however unintentionally) to a specific set of policies, measurable inputs and concrete outcomes, and student or teacher (mis)behavior. In entering the scholarly and activist conversations around schools and prisons, I build from a cross-disciplinary body of work that has theorized more complex linkages between schooling and carceral systems. Challenging the unidirectional and ahistorical (Sojoyner, 2013) logic of the STPP framing, this scholarship demonstrates the ways schools themselves are structured as spaces of gendered confinement (Wun, 2016) and anti-black enclosure (Sojoyner, 2016); and the ways US schooling, as a system, operates symbiotically within a wider multi-institutional *nexus* (Meiners, 2007) of carceral State power (Vaught, 2017; Vaught et al., 2022). Situated at a site of a generative tension between these diverse conceptualizations of the school-prison link, my aim in this study is less to leverage an academic critique of STPP scholarship (see Vaught, 2017; Meiners, 2011), than to think critically and curiously about how we frame our terrain(s) of struggle.

Conceptualizing FREE LA's simultaneous departure from both prisons and traditional schools as a blueprint for radical change, this dissertation probes a deeper set of relationships—or what I call *entanglements*—between schooling and carceral regimes,³ beyond the focus on harsh discipline used in much current and recent literature. Likewise, I explore the possibilities that FREE LA's abolitionist model, and FREE LA students' insights, present for more comprehensive alternatives to these entanglements, beyond “more inclusive” ways of managing student behavior, or other isolated policy reforms. FREE LA's genealogy as a police-free

³ Carceral regimes refers to a network of power relationships integral to nation-state building, where the prison is not an institution, but a multifaceted technology of domination and organizing logic of the State itself (Rodríguez, 2006; Haley, 2016).

punishment-free educational space, developed both within and in departure from carceral systems across numerous sites and at numerous scales, invites me to take a critical geographic approach to the study of schooling, carcerality, and (their) abolition. To expand on my research inquiry and approach, this Introduction builds from a story of FREE LA’s school “rebel” garden: a green space within a free space in what used to be a juvenile detention center, smack dab in the middle of South Central LA.

I first use the rebel garden as a point of departure to introduce the broader history of FREE LA, its mission and model, and its students. I specifically introduce the FREE LA space and history in ways that demonstrate the critical geographic approach of this study, and in order to develop necessary context for the research questions that follow. With this context in place, I then elaborate on the critical geographic lens and related core conceptual frameworks grounding this study; outline my research questions and methodologies; and briefly summarize the forthcoming chapters.

§

The Rebel Garden: A Point of Departure and Space of Return



Fig. 4 Rebel Garden From Three Views (Left: YJC; Other: Author)

There are two doors connecting the large concrete edifice/turned-canvas to the gate-enclosed parking lot. The first is a black door tucked away behind the row of cars (with a few missing teeth) and, after that, behind an iron door with a lock but no handle. The second is

another black door, on the adjacent wall, that opens up into a small area surrounded by a black mesh fence—similar to the fences that encircle school playgrounds, but much, much taller: almost as tall as the concrete building itself (Fig. 4).

Inside the fence are three lunch tables, also like the kind you might find on a school playground: the kind with the benches attached, with messages etched in sharpie and pencil and fingernails, with rounded diamond holes that leave patterned specters on your skin if you've been sitting there for too long. Where the concrete walls containing the two black doors converge, flush with the staircase and window of that pastel home, the part of the mesh-link fence that once opened, closed, and locked only from the outside has been knocked down, creating an artery that leads directly to the rebel garden.

Three handmade raised beds containing lettuce, strawberries, watermelon, squash, and other produce; ceramic pots with peach trees, flowers, and succulents; a large wooden composter radiating heat from microbes tilling the earth; and a small shed all loosely encircle a brass bird bath, some stacks of hay, and a small stretch of dirt where the concrete has been broken (see Fig. 1.1). Extending back along the wall towards the row of cars, food and other foliage drape leaves and vines from the sides of three tall water towers, like feet dangling from a lunch table that leaves disappearing ghosts on legs still too young to reach the ground.

FREE LA students learn about, care for, and eat from the rebel garden under the mentorship of two gardening teachers: Erica, an artist at an organization (IPR Artz) that shares the Chuco's space; and Zahra, a FREE LA graduate who was my student when this project began. Like other dimensions of FREE LA's mission and model, rebel garden classes depart from conventional metrics of academic achievement (for example, progression towards a

degree,⁴ matriculation to higher education, or mastery of skills and knowledge that facilitate upward mobility), and focus instead on reclaiming and transforming *relationships*: for example, between young people and the ancestral foodways that were erased through colonization, or carved away from memory through “assimilation”—in large part through US schools (Erica, personal communication, 2022; see Chapter 2). This focus on relationships reflects FREE LA’s broader foundations in abolition and transformative justice, each of which, as I explain below, encompass a broad framework and set of everyday praxes for transforming the institutional and ideological relationships, and terms of relationality, that make both State and interpersonal violence continuous and inevitable. However, the rebel garden is also entangled with FREE LA’s history, mission, and model in more complex ways—and across numerous sites and scales.

Entangled Histories: Reclaiming Space in the Landscape of Los Angeles

Indeed, throughout our hour-long interview (to which I return in Chapter 2), Erica and Zahra conceptualized the garden’s purpose, pedagogy, and praxis in ways that invited me to trace these sorts of entanglements across time and space. For example, Erica described how the “idea for the rebel garden” began, by tracing shared (hi)stories of spatial displacement and reclamation:

⁴ To clarify, graduates do receive a diploma; my point is that FREE LA’s mission and model exceed this metric of “success.”

It started back in like 2019, prior to being displaced. It started off with IPR Artz, which is one of the art rooms we have here [at Chuco's], and we were in an attic of a church. And we got displaced by the church. They were like, 'you guys got to get out.' That was around the same time Chuco's actually got displaced from Inglewood. And we just had all these ideas of what an art center, community center *could* be. So when we came here those ideas just kind of um...we wanted to expand everything we kind of were dreaming of having in that other very limited space.



Fig. 5 “Original” Chuco’s (*La Gente*, 2010)

As these words suggest, the history of the rebel garden and the history of FREE LA are entangled not only with one another, but with the broader interconnected geographies of South Los Angeles, and thus with the social, political, and ideological relationships that make and remake those geographies. In 2019, as Erica notes, FREE LA and YJC, along with IPR Artz and any other organizations sharing the Chuco’s space, were forced to relocate from their “original” Inglewood home. They were displaced by the Los Angeles Transportation Authority, who deployed eminent domain—a critical (extra)legal apparatus, and self-ordained “sovereign attribute” (DOJ, 2024), of the US State—to demolish that home so the city could build another parking garage. In this way, among numerous others, FREE LA’s (hi)story is inherently enmeshed with broader processes of carceral State formation across time, space, and the shifting landscape of Los Angeles: for example, the “slum clearing,” bulldozing, and gutting of East LA’s Black, Brown, and racially diverse communities to make way for (easy white suburban access to) LA’s infamous freeway system in the 1940s; and the seizing, stealing, and razing of the “homes of every [Black] property owner” in Manhattan Beach a few years prior (Fleischer, 2020)—each of which were State-sanctioned, legitimated, and facilitated by eminent domain.

This enmeshment, and these broader processes of carceral State formation, are also reflected in the name of FREE LA’s home-space. As YJC archives on their website: “Chuco’s Justice Center is dedicated to Jesse ‘Chuco’ Becerra and all the youth lost to the streets, prisons, police violence or deportation” (YJC, n.d.). Chuco was an original YJC organizer and beloved community member, who was “gunned down” as he was leaving a party, at the age of 24 (*ibid*). Like folks at FREE LA and in the Chuco’s space, and following the longstanding insights and interventions of scholar and activist women of color (e.g., Kaba, 2017; Ritchie, 2012; Thuma, 2019), I understand so-called “street violence” as inseparable from State violence. In this study, I conceptualize carceral State violence as encompassing not only the brutality of police, sheriffs, homeland security, immigration enforcement, and other “official” carceral agents—and exceptional forms of punishment such as incarceration, arrest, suspension, and expulsion—but (always) also the continuously rearticulated modes of organized abandonment (Gilmore, 2008; Medel, 2018), displacement (McKittrick, 2006), and enclosure (Sojoyner, 2016) that are foundational to the form and function of US carceral regimes within racial capitalist modernity (Rodríguez, 2006; 2021; Gilmore, 2007; 2022; Vaught et al., 2022; Sojoyner, 2016; Davis, 2003). These constant reformulations and reconfigurations of carceral State violence, as localized manifestations of global capitalist regimes (e.g., Gilmore, 2007; Rodríguez, 2006; Sudbury, 2005; Walia, 2013), create structural and socio-spatial conditions that figure centrally into the lives of the young people at FREE LA—for example, the deliberately uneven distribution of and access to medical care, housing security, fresh food, green space, community controlled education, and overall life chances across the landscape of Los Angeles—as well as to the various forms of interpersonal (or so-called “street”) violence that emerge, or become entrenched or exacerbated, as a consequence of these conditions.

However, FREE LA’s mission and model, both prior to their forced relocation and following their reclamation of the new Chuco’s space, also entangles them with longstanding genealogies of subaltern resistance to the numerous forms of geographic domination that sustain carceral-capitalist regimes (e.g., Gilmore, 2007, 2008; McKittrick, 2006; Medel, 2017; Ramírez, 2020). Mirroring this subaltern movement from below, and motivated by the State-sanctioned movement from above that informed the “idea” for the rebel garden, FREE LA was developed with the explicit intention of carving out (free) space for Black and Brown young people to learn, to receive support, and simply to be. The following quotes, shared by two YJC organizers (and dear friends) in two separate contexts, collectively demonstrate this movement of and for anti-carceral spatial reclamation:

YJC started out in front of a store. Literally at a storefront. And we looked around and realized: all these youth from our community keep getting kicked out. So, we said, ‘Damn. We should make our own school’ (T. Shakur, personal communication, 2021).

...Young Black, Brown [and] Indigenous youth, particularly from South Central, Inglewood, Watts, Compton areas, were being pushed out of schools and into lock ups, into the war on youth, into oppressive systems. So basically, we're like, ‘*Students need a place to go, young people need a place to go.* These schools aren't serving our young people, we need to have our own school.’ And that's basically why, how FREE LA started (E. Lacques-Zapién, personal communication, 2022, emphasis added).

FREE LA was created in 2007 for and by young people of color who have been pushed out of schools, barred from entire districts, or otherwise refused to participate in traditional schooling. Of FREE LA’s approximately 30 active students,⁵ all are students of color (primarily

⁵ Approximately 60 students were officially enrolled in classes each semester during my time at FREE LA; thirty is an approximation of the average number of students who regularly attended FREE LA in-person on a given semester (that is, about half of the students officially enrolled).

Black, Latinx, and/or Mexican); most if not all are impacted, directly or through loved ones, by overlapping State systems such as incarceration, probation, immigration enforcement, and child protective services (CPS); and all navigate overlapping landscapes of dispossession that are largely space-based. As the following sections and chapters will elaborate, and from a critical geographic lens, my use of “space” in this study refers to both body and place. Therefore, “space-based” refers to forms of dispossession structurally concentrated in racialized geographic places: for example, the food deserts, contaminated soil, ‘urban revitalization’ projects, and data-driven hotspots policing (Stop LAPD Spying, 2018) that systematically target Black and Brown “areas”—like South Central, Inglewood, Watts, and Compton; and to forms of dispossession that dictate which bodies are allowed to access, inhabit, and move freely through which spaces: for example, displacing young people from schools, trapping them between borders, or confining them in cages. In this way, and as I elaborate below, FREE LA was carved out from a complex *landscape* of racialized criminalization, displacement, and dispossession that is reproduced across time and space, not only by schools, prisons, and numerous other State institutions, but also by dynamic networks of carceral power that are local and global in scale and scope.

While some students are referred to FREE LA directly from traditional schools or other State agencies (e.g., CPS), a majority of students hear about the space from friends, family members, and neighbors. As Lupita, a FREE LA graduate and (for the duration of my study) the lead liaison between FREE LA and YJC, described: “It’s all by word of mouth. Because it’s like, ‘Hey, you don’t like that school? Fuck that school, come to FREE LA’... And that’s how *I* found out about the school.” Many students were moved, or moved themselves, between multiple schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), or other districts stretching across southern California and into the Inland Empire, before arriving at FREE LA (see Chapter 1 and

Chapter 3). Some attended other alternative schools (e.g., continuation or “opportunity” schools) along the way, which they often had to find on their own after leaving or being removed from traditional schooling. This symbiosis between students’ histories and the history of the FREE LA space (between body and place)—shared histories that include, but are irreducible to, overlapping forms of racial displacement and carceral enclosure—is a critical lens through which I analyze the complex entanglements between schools and prisons, and the possibilities FREE LA presents for abolitionist alternatives.

Indeed, these shared histories with (and of resistance to) criminalization and spatial domination create a shared understanding that is both central to and enabled by FREE LA’s foundations in abolitionist and transformative justice. Transformative justice (TJ) encompasses a broad framework and set of everyday praxes for building community safety and accountability in non-carceral ways; for analyzing the entanglements between systemic and interpersonal violence (Mingus & Kim, 2020; Kaba et al., 2021); for developing forms of social organization that exceed carceral State governance (Hassan, 2020); and for addressing the roots of harm in ways that do not partition people into hierarchies of worth, belonging, and humanness (brown, 2017). While restorative justice is increasingly used as an alternative to punishment in institutional settings, including schools and prisons, TJ seeks to unearth, uproot, and *transform* the institutions, ideologies, and structural conditions that fuel both State-sanctioned and interpersonal harm (Kaba et al., 2021; Mingus, 2018; see also Dixon & Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2020). Thus, as Chapter 4 elaborates in detail, FREE LA’s model is rooted in pedagogical and interpersonal practices that both respond to students’ basic needs (e.g., housing, employment, fresh food), and seek to transform the broader landscape(s) of criminalization and (educational) exclusion that students navigate.

For example, FREE LA's use of a credit system, similar to a community college, means that students are able to finish at their own pace, and take a semester (or multiple semesters) off and come back if they need to (see Chapter 3). FREE LA also works with and alongside YJC to support students who become ensnared by Los Angeles' massive prison economy (Gilmore, 2007). As Chapter 4 also details, this includes more immediate support through YJC's abolitionist legal clinic, which offers free legal services to FREE LA students (and the South Central community); and longer-term support through YJC's ongoing fight to "reclaim and redistribute" resources from youth incarceration to youth development (E. Lacques-Zapién, personal communication, 2022). FREE LA has typical core classes, but what makes their curriculum unique is that FREE LA is technically a trade school—and their "trade" is social justice movement building. Thus, their curriculum is rooted in various forms of political education (e.g., rebel gardening classes, "know-your- rights" legal training, and revolutionary history); and through FREE LA's connection to YJC, students are trained and participate in direct action organizing and other tactics mobilized in YJC's movement to abolish youth incarceration and "reimagine" youth justice in and beyond LA County (YJC, 2023). Finally, instead of exams students complete project-based assessments, many of which are community-oriented and also entangle the FREE LA space (people and place) with the broader landscape of South LA. For example, students recently prepared presentations for the local South Central community about how to respond to a fentanyl overdose (see Patino, 2023).

In sum, while FREE LA serves students who have been criminalized and displaced by both incarceration and education systems, their model attempts a wholesale departure from punitive and exclusionary models of schooling, and centers active organizing against numerous forms (and across numerous scales) of spatial domination and carceral State violence. This

mission and model offer a lens to understand how theorizing and abolishing the relationship between schools and prisons requires attending to the broader carceral landscapes, institutional and ideological relationships, and multi-scalar configurations of power within which both schools and prisons exist.

My ethnographic project looks to this space, and these young people's stories and insight, as blueprints for alternative forms of education—and social organization—that radically reimagine, rather than reform or reconfigure, the complex entanglements between schooling and carceral regimes. In particular, working from FREE LA's physical and ideological positioning of itself as neither an institution of confinement nor an institution of traditional education, I am interested in what it might tell us about abolitionist alternatives not only to “prison” and punishment, but to US schooling—as a key anchor of anti-black carceral regimes (Sojoyner, 2016; Shange, 2019) and a critical apparatus of carceral State power (Vaught, 2017; Vaught et al., 2022; Rodríguez, 2010; Meiners, 2007). The history, mission, and model of the FREE LA space, as well as—and as entangled with—the (hi)stories of the people who make and remake it, invites me to take a critical geographic approach to the study of schooling, carcerality, and abolition.

In the following sections, I briefly situate this study within a critical geographic lens, and introduce three related core conceptual frameworks that I develop and employ throughout: the *carceral-education landscape*, *un/forgotten spaces*, and *entanglements*. Before proceeding, a quick clarification provides important context. As I will discuss in various ways throughout the forthcoming chapters, my critical geographic approach is neither a claim to expertise as a critical geographer, nor an attempt to engage deeply with the rich scholarly dialogues being developed within and across transdisciplinary critical geographic knowledges. Rather, with an interest in

telling new stories or old stories in new ways, I engage with a small set of (critical) critical geographic texts that have meaningfully shaped, informed, or transformed my thinking in and through this project. Guided by these texts, and the critical geographic blueprints forged by FREE LA and FREE LA's students, my primary approach in this dissertation is to think through social problems and their solutions *spatially*—which is always also to say racially (McKittrick, 2006; Gilmore, 2022; Hawthorne, 2019). A critical geographic exploration of schools and prisons, as I argue below and elaborate in Chapter 1, allows for a re-spatialization of frame of the inquiry and therefore the terrain of struggle.

Re-Spatializing the Inquiry: Critical Geographies of Schooling and Carcerality

As noted, I aimed in the opening sections to introduce FREE LA and FREE LA's students in a way that demonstrates both the dynamic nature and history of the space (including people and place), and the critical geographic approach informing this study as a whole. In particular, both FREE LA's history, and the way I revisit and retell that history, demonstrates a (critical) critical geographic insight shaping this dissertation: that *space* is not a “thing,” but rather a set of relationships made and remade over time.

Critical geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore contends that, “taking race as a given,” deterministic geographic frameworks “described territorialized objects (people and places as if they were *things*), rather than *socio-spatial processes* (how people and places came to be organized as they are)” (2022, p. 111, emphasis added). In turn, Gilmore proposes that “inquiry into processes shapes a prevalent critical geographical framework” (*ibid*). This theoretical and analytical focus on socio-spatial processes reflects an epistemological intervention, one which destabilizes the carceral/commonsense ideology that “space *‘just is’*”—in other words, “that space and place are merely containers for human complexities and social relations” (McKittrick,

2006, p. xi, emphasis added)—and therefore that the terribly uneven distribution of resources and life chances across the local-global landscapes of modernity is somehow natural, inevitable, or the result of individual choices. This critical geographic insight—that space is a set of relationships—informs my focus in this study on the multiple and seemingly mundane processes through which schooling and carceral systems are constitutively made and remade across space; across institutional, ideological, and interpersonal scales; and in ways that simultaneously fuel and obscure the seemingly natural dis/placement of young people across the shifting landscapes of South LA.

However, while critical geographic inquiry asks and explores how power moves, it does so specifically through the lens of power's slippages, and by exploring processes through which alternative forms of socio-spatial organization are forged in and *beyond* the margins of seemingly totalizing landscapes of domination—like rebel gardens carved out from concrete. “The point” of critical geographies, in other words, “is not only to identify central contradictions...in regimes of dispossession, but also, urgently, to show how radical consciousness in action resolves into liberated life-ways, however provisional, present and past” (Gilmore, 2022, p. 474-75). Importantly, as Gilmore (2008) contends, it is the act of being abandoned or “forgotten” by State infrastructures that cultivates a unique socio-spatial context for liberatory struggle. Similarly, but in distinct ways, Black feminist geographies foreground how, despite their inseparable enmeshment with carceral-colonial landscapes, Black/subaltern spaces, spatial praxes, and imaginaries are irreducible to relations of domination (McKittrick, 2014; Hawthorne & Lewis, 2023; McKittrick & Woods, 2007; Reese, 2019). This point—about the entanglement between domination and the forms of transformation that exceed it—is another (critical) critical geographic insight shaping this study as a whole.

This insight registered with me in a particular way when reading Katherine McKittrick’s (2006) seminal study of Black women’s geographies, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*. McKittrick beautifully and painstakingly illustrates the ways Black women carve out and chart the blueprints for “more humanly workable geographies” (p. xii) from within overlapping geographies of racial-sexual domination “such as the slave ship, the slave auction block, slave coffles, and the plantation” (p. 44). Drawing on Sylvia Wynter (1990), McKittrick conceptualizes the *demonic*, as an alternative epistemological and metaphysical plane, to explore and explain how Black women’s geographic practices and imaginaries not only disrupt, but *move outside* eurocentric epistemologies and socio-spatial arrangements (see also McKittrick, 2021). In taking McKittrick’s text as another critical geographic blueprint, I am not suggesting that Black (women’s) geographies are generalizable blueprints that can be exported or imported to other contexts. Rather, it is McKittrick’s (like Gilmore’s) *way* of thinking through and about subaltern geographies—and their simultaneous entanglement with, and ability to materially and conceptually “exceed” (Gilmore, 2008) landscapes of gendered-racial domination—that serve as a blueprint in my study.

Inspired and informed by these critical geographic insights, this dissertation heeds recent and ongoing calls for abolitionist alternatives to the nexus between schools and prisons, by exploring how people at the intersections of overlapping carceral-educational geographies organize themselves against the organized abandonment (Gilmore, 2007), displacement (McKittrick, 2006), and gendered-racial criminalization that are endemic to schooling in/and the US carceral State. To frame my exploration of FREE LA, and to place my study in conversation with school-prison scholarship, I turn at a broad theoretical level to and towards alternative education. As Chapter 1 will flesh out in greater detail, I consider alternative schools—which are

sometimes used in practice, but frequently subsumed in both scholarly and public discourse as “invisible,”⁶ “second-class,” or carceral spaces (e.g., Crawford, 2020; Dunbar, 2001)—as an understudied or forgotten (Gilmore, 2008) lens into complex configurations of carceral-educational enclosure; and, more importantly, as spaces uniquely positioned to develop alternative forms of education and social organization that exceed the school-prison link.

Within this broader context, I analyze the entanglements between schooling and regimes, and the possibilities for abolitionist alternatives, by exploring FREE LA as an *un/forgotten space* that departs from, even as it is enmeshed within, a complex and dynamic *carceral-education landscape*.

The Carceral-Education Landscape

[FREE LA] is different, because for instance, when you get into a fight at a LAUSD school, they basically got two options: kick you out or give you another chance—and that last chance really be your last chance. Like anything you do to where they gotta suspend you, they just gone kick you out, because they told you that’s yo last chance. [FREE LA]—how I’m a say it...FREE LA, you have a fight here, you’ll basically have to sit down and talk it out with that person, and see what’s the reason behind the...animosity, or the commotion. At LAUSD schools, when you fight somebody, either both of y’all gone get kicked out, or one of y’all gonna be kicked out. And I seen how that right there may [make] either both of the kids mad, or that [one] person mad, to where *alright now that just made my mindset worse for the next school I go to* (emphasis added).

—BabySD⁷, FREE LA student

⁶ The language of invisibility comes directly from a report referring to alternative schools as “invisible schools.” The article is titled “Stanford Researchers Usher in a New Era for California’s ‘Invisible’ Schools” and is subtitled “An Initiative To Improve Alternative Schools, Led By The GSE’s John W. Gardner Center For Youth And Their Communities, Reaches A Major Milestone” (Crawford, 2020). While invisibility has numerous meanings, which might apply in different ways across various contexts, this language reflects an ideological position that has implications for the (re)production of social space and material conditions. In other words, the discursive/ideological practice of referring to alternative schools as “invisible schools” that need to be “improved” (inevitably in ways that reflect the interests of the State) becomes especially important when we recognize that “to describe is also to produce” (Gilmore, 2022).

⁷ Students chose the names by which they are referred in this study. While some students chose a random pseudonym, many chose their real names, nicknames, or artist names.

BabySD's reflections on the differences between FREE LA and the (numerous) other LAUSD schools he'd been pushed out of or into, offer a meaningful lens into the carceral-education landscape. Like his peers who shared similar or related sentiments, BabySD explained these differences during his "education history:" education-based oral histories in which students recollected and reflected (Creswell, 1998) on their experiences in, and being pushed (or pulled) out of, traditional schooling; and how these experiences compared to their experiences at FREE LA (see Chapter 1). The very nature of students' shared histories of displacement from numerous traditional (and other alternative) schools within and beyond LAUSD, and their likewise shared histories of criminalization by numerous State institutions including and exceeding schools and prisons, invited my sustained and critical (geographic) focus on the forced and autonomous movement of people, ideas, emotions, relationships, and resources within and between spaces.

In addition to, and as inherently entangled with, the physical movement of young people between and across schools and other places, the framing of a *carceral-education landscape* was informed iteratively by students' own theorizations of the ways carceral logics and habits travel with people as they are moved, or move themselves, across space. As BabySD's notes, for example, when you remove a young person from school—say, because of a fight between two students—you may separate those specific people, but the conflict itself doesn't go away; and, more importantly, the *ways* we learn to resolve conflict (or not) also doesn't go away. Through a critical geographic lens, I take students' insights—such as BabySD's focus on "mindsets" that travel with people as they move and are moved across space—as invitations and points of departure to explore how carceral ideologies and practices of disposability and ex-communication seep into, structure, and are in turn structured by, interpersonal relationships and

everyday interactions. By conceptualizing schools and prisons not as static "things" linked through isolated policies, but as sets of relationships that are continually reconfigured with and through each other, the carceral-education landscape guides my analysis of the ways carceral ideologies, terms of relationality, and forms of socio-spatial organization flow into, out of, and across "school" in ways that reproduce and normalize carceral regimes.

This critical geographic conceptualization of schools and prisons as sets of relationships also informs the ways I explore FREE LA's model and the blueprints for transformation it presents. Rather than investigating whether FREE LA "succeeds" in abolishing the school-prison link, I explore the ways and means through which FREE LA *departs* from the various relationships that make and remake the carceral-education landscape. In analyzing these departures, I am guided by and build from Ruth Wilson Gilmore's (2008) theorization of *forgotten places*.

Un/forgotten Spaces in the Carceral-Education Landscape

In another key text grounding this dissertation, "Forgotten Places and the Seeds of Grassroots Planning," Gilmore critiques her own concept of the gulag (2007) to capture California's massive prison economy, and reflexively asks: "what concept might get at the kinds of forgotten places that have been *absorbed into the gulag yet exceed them?*" (2008, p. 34). In turn, she conceptualizes forgotten places as those beyond the margins of the carceral State, where organized abandonment and the critical consciousness that accompanies it cultivate unique capacities for collective organizing. As Chapter 1 will elaborate, Gilmore's conceptualizations help me think through alternative schools generally, and FREE LA in particular, as critical sites of meaning-making positioned slightly beyond or outside the traditional school system, and as

spaces inhabited by young people and educators with distinct experiential knowledge of spatial displacement *and* transformation.

I suggest that the processes and conditions surrounding alternative schools converge to position them as spaces that are rendered forgotten, or “un-geographic” (McKittrick, 2006), yet in fact exist at the very center of things. Indeed, as I have noted, alternative schools have been described by policymakers now seeking their “improvement” as “invisible spaces” (Crawford 2020). The apparent use of and scholarly and public narrative around—alongside the differential accountability standards for (de Velasco & Gonzales, 2017; Fresques et al., 2017)—alternative schools position them as operating slightly outside the traditional school system. However, rather than subsuming them as sites of despair, or marginal spaces to be “included” or “improved”, thinking through alternative schools as *un/forgotten* spaces helps both to map State power (Vaught, 2017) and identify slippages in that power.

In my reading and use, forgottenness signifies not a pathologization of criminalized/ racialized spaces—where space is both body and place—but rather a spatial relationship, and therefore a set of possibilities. Forgottenness, in other words, is not reducible to abandonment or displacement from above, but refers as well to the ways individuals and groups of individuals *remove themselves* from spaces in which their lives are devalued—as captured, for example, in Lupita’s explanation of the word-of-mouth process through which many students arrive at FREE LA. As Chapter 1 explains, my framing of *un/forgotten* spaces builds from Gilmore’s insights to capture this entanglement between domination from above and departure from below, while also resisting static descriptors of racialized spaces (like alternative schools and the people who inhabit them) as marginal, invisible, un-geographic or forgotten.

This brings me to the third and final core concept anchoring this study. Before transitioning to my research questions and chapter summaries, I briefly trace the genealogy and development of my engagement with *entanglements*, as both subject and critical geographic method.

Tracing Entanglements

It was atoms that first sparked my interest in entanglements. Having read about the social implications of quantum physics in a book by Margaret Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science* (2006), and about the quantum properties of consciousness in my personal readings on neuro/psychology (e.g., Zohar, 1990; Torday, 2023), I followed threads and rabbit holes that led me both to the (less than overwhelming portion of) primary literature on quantum physics that I could understand (e.g., Dyson, 2004; Deutsch & Lockwood, 1994); and to transdisciplinary scholarship that has explored the material and metaphorical implications of quantum and astrophysics for gender-racial liberation (e.g., Barad, 2007, 2010, 2012; Prescod-Weinstein, 2021; Holmes, 2020). Collectively, this scholarship overturns core epistemological assumptions of western/eurocentric knowledge systems and their attendant regimes of human differentiation: for example, the cartesian body/mind/nature split underlying hierarchies of humanness (Machado de Oliveira, 2021; Zohar, 1990; see Chapter 2), and the fallacy of “linear time” that structures carceral-colonial cartographies, geographies, and historiography (Barad, 2017; Prescod-Weinstein, 2021).

For the purposes of focus and clarity, I want to explain the relevance of this seemingly disconnected scholarship to the study (and specifically my study) of schools and prisons, by building from one example that captures a broader set of insights from my non-expert dive into quantum entanglements. I purposefully share an example from public science scholarship, both

because it is written pedagogically and accessibly, and (therefore) also because it demonstrates the curious and intentionally experimental nature of a method of entanglements.

Entanglement is at the heart of quantum physics...Like other aspects of quantum science, the phenomenon of entanglement reveals itself at very tiny, subatomic scales. When two particles, such as a pair of photons or electrons, become entangled, *they remain connected even when separated by vast distances*. In the same way that a ballet or tango emerges from individual dancers, entanglement arises from the connection between particles (CalTech Science Exchange, n.d., emphasis added).

Quantum entanglements reveal (and make real) an *interconnectedness* of all things and between all beings—human, other-than-human, and inanimate (Zohar, 1990)—that radically disrupts eurocentric/so-called ‘commonsense’ notions of causality, spatiality, and temporality. In the pluriverse of the quantum realm, things move other things without touching them; things are not really things because everything is in flux and therefore in relation (Barad, 2012); and the mechanistic, pre/deterministic laws of modernity’s singular linear universe (Wheatley, 2006; Prescod-Weinstein, 2021) unravel into “a vast porridge of being where nothing is fixed or measurable, where everything remains indeterminate, somewhat ghostly and just beyond our grasp” (Zohar, 1990, p. 11⁸).

In my non-expert interpretation, the fascinating world of subatomic particles, with their ungovernable behaviors, entangled relationalities, and ghostly endeavors, opens up space to explore space—and to explore space *as* a set of entangled relationships that “remain connected even when separated by vast distances.” Reading curiously across seemingly disconnected literatures, this insight—these quantum entanglements—aligns in generative and meaningful ways with Katherine McKittrick’s (2006) theoretical and analytical focus in *Demonic Grounds*

⁸ An abbreviated version of this quote was also mentioned by Wheatley (2006, p. 33).

on “the connections, across the seeable and unseeable, the geographic and the seemingly un-geographic, and the struggles that indicate that the material world is assessed and produced by subaltern communities” (p. xii).

Therefore, building from a few critical (geographic) texts, and drawing on my experimental dive into the quantum realm, *entanglements*—as both subject and method—invites and informs my focus in this study on the unlikely, un-visible, and seemingly unexceptional connections between schooling and carceral regimes. This means a few things, which I will elaborate and expand on in Chapter 1. First, in shaping my exploration of the school-prison link generally and my ethnographic engagement with(in) the FREE LA space specifically, *entanglements* guides my methodological, analytical, and theoretical focus away from harsh discipline, cause-and-effect processes, or linear trajectories that begin and end at measurable, identifiable points; and towards the ‘less visible,’ but no less visceral, ways in which schooling and carcerality are constitutively produced across an inherently uneven and dynamically interconnected landscape.

Second, and relatedly, a critical geographic method of *entanglements* invites a focus on the ways landscapes of domination are always entangled with alternative possibilities—in particular in spaces (by people in places) deemed illegible, ‘invisible,’ or un-geographic. Like (and as part of) a quantum pluriverse of possibilities, the *entanglements* between carceral landscapes and the sorts of un/forgotten spaces that might exceed them draws my attention to the everyday, multi-scalar, and also perhaps seemingly mundane ways FREE LA’s people remake (and remake) place within, and carve out space in departure from, the carceral-education landscape.

The third and final implication of entanglements I want to discuss here is a broader methodological one. Like the ungovernable, un-measurable (Zohar, 1990), and ultimately unknowable (Barad, 2007) relationalities of quantum particles, entanglements is/invites an experimental methodology that allows for uncertainty, and refuses claims of expertise. I began with a genealogy of my thinking around entanglements in part because it demonstrates this approach of experimenting with ideas, following rabbit holes, being curious, and tracing “seeable and unseeable” connections between seemingly distant or dissimilar things—like quantum physics and abolition, or schools and carceral regimes. If entanglements frames and invites tracing the connections across seemingly disconnected things, then as method it also invited me to explore seemingly disconnected literatures. Reflecting this method of curiosity, in the following chapters, while I remain grounded in critical geographic knowledges, I also pull from and experiment with the material and metaphorical implications of an array of scholarships, across an array of subjects, topics, disciplines, and theoretical traditions—without making claims to expertise about any of them.

In sum, I engage entanglements in this study as both a critical subject of observation, and a critical geographic method: of tracing the relationships and socio-spatial processes through which schools and prisons are made and remade across a fractured yet interconnected carceral-education landscape; and of exploring the blueprints for transformation forged in and as un/forgotten spaces (where space is both people and place). With this dynamic landscape in place, the rest of this chapter provides a brief roadmap of the dissertation.

Roadmaps: Research Questions and Chapter Outlines

Informed by the histories and insights, and in pursuit of the interests discussed thus far, the overarching theoretical question guiding this study is: What are the deeper entanglements

between schooling and carceral regimes, and what possibilities does FREE LA present for abolitionist alternatives that exceed these entanglements? To operationalize this inquiry I investigate the following related research questions, discussed further in Chapter 1:

(RQ1) How do FREE LA students experience and reflect on their experiences in, and being removed from (or choosing to leave), traditional schooling? How do students compare their experiences at FREE LA to their experiences in other schools?

(RQ2) How and in what ways does FREE LA *depart* interpersonally, ideologically, pedagogically, and epistemologically from the carceral-education landscape? What praxes, knowledge traditions, relationships, terms of relationality, and forms of social-spatial organization do FREE LA participants create and/or use to do so?

To explore the deeper entanglements between schooling and carceral regimes, and the ways these entanglements are navigated and contested by young people of color, I gather the education histories (education-based oral histories) of FREE LA students who have been excluded from, or chose to leave, traditional schooling. To investigate FREE LA's departures from the carceral-education landscape, and the implications for abolitionist alternatives to the school-prison link, I conduct ethnographic fieldwork at FREE LA, focusing on how the space is constructed interpersonally, pedagogically, ideologically, and epistemologically; and how it is experienced, envisioned, embodied, and explained by FREE LA participants. This study is grounded, in particular, in the experiences, perspectives, and space-making practices of FREE LA students, who I see as expert navigators of the carceral-education landscape, and as visionaries whose theories of care (Chapter 4), free movement (Chapter 3), and what it means to be human (Chapter 5) offer radical blueprints for more liberatory forms of education, social organization, and anti-carceral transformation.

The following is an outline of this dissertation, which I will briefly revisit at the end of Chapter 1. In Part II of the current chapter, I offer a different type of introduction to this study: one which traces its development through my dynamic and shifting relationships to this research, to abolition and education, and to the FREE LA space (both people and place). Chapter 1 then begins by placing my study in conversation with criminological and cross-disciplinary scholarship on the relationship between schools and prisons, focusing on the generative tensions between the diverse conceptual paradigms used to do so. After discussing how my study builds from this space of tension through a critical geographic lens, I expand on my research questions and methodologies, and conclude with another brief roadmap of the dissertation.

Chapter 2 begins to flesh out this study's overarching interest in exploring the deeper entanglements between schooling and carceral regimes, and in thinking critically and carefully about the terrains on which we (might) fight for freedom. To do so, I build from the insights of FREE LA's two gardening teachers, Erica and Zahra. By tracing the threads that emerge from how the garden is conceptualized and cared for by Erica and Zahra, I theorize both FREE LA and the carceral-education landscape as enmeshed within a broader set of (hi)stories and ongoing processes of spatial domination, racial displacement, and carceral State violence, the effects (and affects) of which are *radioactive*: haunting and lingering across time, space, and seemingly disconnected struggles. By subsequently theorizing a process/praxis of abolitionist transformation through the rebel garden, I lay a foundation in Chapter 2 for an ongoing story of multiple roots and routes. Chapter 2 also serves to illustrate and further flesh out a critical geographic method of entanglements.

The remaining chapters unfold around a series of juxtapositions students have drawn, in interviews and over years of conversations, between FREE LA and the surrounding landscape(s).

Specifically, I work through students' theorizations of the core differences between FREE LA and the schools they attended prior, using these juxtapositions as sets of directions and points of departure to analyze the myriad and multi-scalar (including interpersonal, institutional, ideological, and epistemological) entanglements between schooling and carceral regimes; and to explore the specific processes, praxes, ideologies, epistemologies, relationships, and forms of social organization through which those entanglements are unraveled, disrupted, or transformed at FREE LA. Chapter 3 extends the previous chapter's theorizations of the form, function, and locomotion of the carceral-education landscape, by focusing on the mundane terms and conditions through which schooling and carceral regimes are constitutively produced and continuously reconfigured. Drawing on the traditions and interventions of Black Feminist geographies (e.g., McKittrick, 2006; Wynter, 2003; Purifoy, 2023), I argue that *spatial domination* is endemic to US schooling, and that this spatial domination functions not (primarily) as a mechanism of criminalizing so-called deviant behavior, but rather as a counterinsurgent response to young people's persistence in and insistence on moving freely. Focusing on FREE LA students' insurgent movements within and away from carceral spaces, and the ways those movements are honored at and by FREE LA, I consider the possibilities for educational liberation beyond schooling.

In Chapter 4, I grapple with students' consistent emphasis on "care." Students' repeated juxtapositions between the type of care they experienced in traditional (and other alternative) schools, and a different type of care they experience at FREE LA, leads me to consider both the violent genealogies of *conditional care*, as a structuring logic of State schooling and core anchor entangling it with carceral regimes; and the possibilities for reclaiming old-new genealogies of *unconditional care* that map radically reimagined educational space(s). Placed in conversation

with Black Feminist and abolitionist epistemologies, the juxtaposition between these two types of care opens broader questions about the scope and scale(s) of transformation necessary to abolish the school-prison nexus, and about the limitations of educational reform and possibilities for abolitionist departure from the carceral-education landscape. Chapters 3 and 4 each analyze how US schooling reconfigures a perpetually uneven carceral-education landscape, and performs critical and indispensable work for carceral regimes, by repeatedly partitioning young people of color into gendered-racial hierarchies of humanness.

Chapter 5, then, turns specifically and more explicitly to this question of humanness. I build from another repeated juxtaposition that students generally, but Black girls in particular, make between FREE LA and the other schools they've attended: that at FREE LA, they are able to "be themselves", "show their real sides", and "live their truths." I take as a critical geographic text and point of departure one student, Emani's, articulations of this juxtaposition in the following way: "At FREE LA, *we keep it human.*" By thinking through and alongside students, and specifically Black girls' educational experiences and reflections, I ask what it means and what it might take to "keep it human" in and beyond the carceral-education landscape. I first extend this study's interests in the deeper (ontological and epistemological) entanglements between schooling and carceral regimes, by arguing that US schooling is indispensable to the creation, reproduction, and naturalization of modernity's ways of "knowing" who counts as human. Reflecting the study's broader focus on the transformative blueprints that emerge in and as un/forgotten spaces (Gilmore, 2008), however, Part II I turn to Black girls' reflections on what it means, what is at stake, and what it might take to "keep it human" otherwise. Interpreting this question and its potential answers broadly, I focus on the girls' reflections on *listening*. Thinking through and alongside these reflections, I speculatively theorize listening as a praxis that might

move outside our present ways of knowing and making sense, to make space for new terms of relationality, new forms of social organization, and new possibilities for realizing (and thus *realizing*) our inter-human entanglements (Wynter & McKittrick, 2015; Barad, 2010; 2012).

The Conclusion, finally, reflects on the story told in the preceding chapters and, more broadly, on the stories we tell and how we tell them. By telling a brief story of FREE LA students' Black History Month play, I invite the reader to engage with this story as a moving image of the various concepts and contentions that have been threaded across and developed throughout this dissertation. I suggest, as many others have, that telling our stories, our personal and collective stories, is how we (as researchers, as educators, as humans being) can be accountable to history, scratch at a different set of truths, and realize the expansive set of possibilities that are always there, even and sometimes especially when we can't see them.

Across all of these chapters, I do not contend or attempt to theorize or “capture” the entirety, or even the entire essence, of the FREE LA space, FREE LA students, and the potentialities they present for liberation. To try or claim do so would be an impossible and irresponsible endeavor. Rather, to pull from Cedric Robinson: “as a scholar, it was never my purpose to exhaust a subject, only to suggest that it was there” (2000, p. xxxii).

§

PART II

A Different Type of Introduction: On Positionalities, Relationships, and “the Work”

I am pacing back and forth across the front of a dimly lit lecture hall, my body momentarily vanishing behind a podium each time I pass it. A large projector, hanging and

humming from the tall ceiling like a dystopian chandelier, illuminates a single string of words on the screen behind me:

Why are you doing this work?

§

What began as a question about racial “disparities” in the “school-to-prison pipeline,” and about resisting or reforming some-‘*thing*’ pushing that pipeline along, quickly proved itself to fall short.

Actually, let me back track.

I entered graduate school, right out of undergrad, eagerly wanting to “ameliorate” racial inequalities in the juvenile justice system. In my final two years of bachelor’s studies, I had the transformative experience of conducting research with recently incarcerated young people in a Miami-based music education program. In addition to being moved by the young people’s stories, I was never particularly fond of prisons or police and had every inclination to say *fuck ‘em*. My grandma is a Holocaust survivor (she still is, though she transitioned in the fall of 2023), author and educator, and I grew up hearing about the violent entanglements of genocides across time and space, and about concentration camps and ghettos and gas filled chambers that started to make more sense when I grew up and began to realize that they are everywhere. But, like many other Americans, and white Americans in particular, my imagination was stripped and thinned by a carceral common sense, and a deeply ingrained and deplorably unquestioned investment in the inevitability of things as they are now. I thought the “justice” system was terribly unjust. But abolition was not in my immediate vocabulary, and the distance that whiteness afforded me from the various entanglements of genocide across time and space obstructed, violently, the urgency of learning the word.

So, the inquiry began with ameliorating the so-called disparities in this so-called school-to-prison pipeline, which I figured might ameliorate disparities in an unjust justice system.

But it felt like something was missing. Or maybe I just wanted something to be missing so I could make some profound contribution **spoken satirically, my hands shimmy in front of me, palms facing outward to emphasize satirical effect** to “justice”—or to the literature, at least. Well-meaning, sure. But with god-awful aim. Just missing the mark entirely.

I rode the easy policy implications wave for a while. “Best practices.” Culturally relevant curriculum. “Reducing racial disparities.” Think Reform. Think comfortable solutions that only work for you when you’re not the one dying.

Still, there was this friction. This irritation. The irritation, at least at first, pertained more to the idea of “fixing” youth prisons than it did to making schools better. Cages suck, but I had invested 22 years’ worth of ideological stock in the benevolence, or at least salvageability, of American education, and the idea that pipelines and one-way streets are good, just not when they lead to jail. After all, “school,” relatively speaking, hadn’t turned out so bad for me.

About halfway into my first year of graduate school I attended a talk by Black Studies scholar and anthropologist, Dr. Damien Sojoyner, who was discussing the ideological and infrastructural intersection of schools and prisons, and their inextricable linkages to anti-blackness. Something clicked. *Like that friction finally climaxed and, unable to withstand the discordance of its own making, exploded into a tiny burning flame.* I was already becoming discouraged and restless, flipping pages and downloading articles and doing that thing where you know you’re wrong and so you’re less so looking for answers than you are grasping for some final thread of justification for the argument you really already gave up on because in order to

make it work you'd just have to lie and erase and find sick twisted comfort in smoke and mirrors. Think white supremacy. Think modernity. Think America.

I'm getting somewhere here. Bear with me.

Notepad as cluttered as my thoughts, I approached Dr. Sojoyner after the talk and asked, *Did he ever feel hopeless?*

He told me, to paraphrase, that he only feels hopeless when people start counting things as victories that aren't really victories.

Think Cabral.⁹

I walked home, feeling disoriented. *Think mad graduate student in a dimly lit room with only a desk lamp shining hauntingly on piles of paper and reams of thought and lists of so-called victories, as said student pushes everything off the desk in a huff and rips up something that, more than likely, no one is going to miss anyway. Dramatic, yes. But at the time, that's what it felt like.* So I sat there for what felt like a few days, in a dimly lit room with my good intentions and the same furniture from my undergrad dorm, realizing how many things I had counted as victories that aren't really victories. Realizing that solutions can be as deadly as the problems they are trying to solve.

I started reading more widely. Listening more deeply. Taking or auditing classes and seminars about scholarships and taught by scholars who move outside the terribly seductive (McKittrick, 2006) and profoundly destructive frameworks of State-sanctioned solutions, and western epistemologies more broadly. The stories I had grown up hearing about gas chambers and entangled genocides deepened, and registered in a different way—as did my understanding of the positionalities I inhabit within, and therefore my specific accountabilities to, these

⁹ See Cabral (1965) *Tell No Lies, Claim No Easy Victories*. It was only in recent conversation with Dr. Sabina Vaught that this connection registered.

entanglements, both past and present. I began pivoting, over time and necessarily imperfectly, towards an orientation of understanding that there are some things I have to understand, and many things I will never be able to.¹⁰

Around the same time, I met Kruti at an art show in a mom-and-pop coffee shop somewhere in South Central LA. She was giving a speech, which sounded more like spoken word, on transformative justice. That means a lot more to me now than it did then, but the sentiment still registered, planted some seed, and I asked her how I could know more. Graciously, she pulled me into the Chuco's Justice Center space (Chuco's, for short): a community hub for South Central Los Angeles and home of the Youth Justice Coalition (YJC), a grassroots organization led by system-impacted young people and their families. YJC carries on the historical and heterogenous lineage of movement building against the State-sanctioned enclosure, abandonment, and displacement of Black and brown spaces in and beyond southern California, where space refers to both body and place. YJC and the Chuco's space also house an alternative high school—a police-free, punishment-free alternative school—called Fighting for the Revolution that will Educate and Empower LA (FREE LA) High. FREE LA also means a lot more now than it did to me then. But for the time being, I guess, it planted another seed.

For a few months I made the hour long drive from Orange County to Inglewood—*moving freely, easily accessing the YJC space by way of the Freeway that really becomes a lot less free when you understand the houses and homes and people that were gutted, that are still being gutted, in order for it to be built*—and attended the South Central community transformative justice circles, held the first Wednesday of every month at Chuco's. The four weeks in between

¹⁰ I don't say this to recount a self-righteous journey from ignorant to imperfectly informed, nor to present a sort of transparent ignorance that eclipses the need for a constant praxis of accountability, but rather to briefly and partially trace the genealogy of my relationships—to knowledge(s), to change, and to "the work."

each circle meant nothing; each time I returned to the space I was greeted with the warmth and welcome one might give a family member returning from vacation, as though they had known me forever, or at least for a very long time. But time tends to collapse in spaces, by people in places that occupy spaces, grounded in radically different ways of being in the world—spaces that refuse those notions of time that go forward or upward or from one end of a pipeline to another, singular, inevitable end. Think Progress and development. Think enlightenment and racial capitalism. Think modernity. That type of time. *Sound of explosion.*

At first through the transformative justice circles, and then through other avenues, I slowly formed personal relationships with individuals I met at the YJC space, many of whom have now become lifelong friends. Tauheedah, Anthony, Zahria, Jaybo, and others. I extended support at interpersonal levels for projects of varying scale and scope. I treaded lightly, as a white person and academic and non-Angelino in a space constructed precisely for none of those things. But as I became more comfortable with more people, and I would hope as more people became more comfortable with me, I learned about (what was, at the time) YJC's "RealSearch" committee, which disrupts the exploitative relationship between the university and those communities it renders rich for extraction. No "participatory action research," no empowerment, university-savior bullshit, no **profound contributions** to the literature. Just them conducting research that is useful to them.

I asked to get involved, but carefully. I was upfront from the beginning about my position as a graduate student, but consciously entered the space as a non-researcher. YJC had multiple projects going on related to racial oppression in schools, the juvenile *in*justice system, as they rightfully call it, and the intersection between the two. One of their current projects was on push-

out into continuation schools, and I learned again about their own alternative high school, FREE LA. The seed was being watered, but it wasn't, or I wasn't, ready yet to grow.

I dove into research on alternative education, recognized its under-researched (but theoretically likely) connections to the “pipeline” and decided, still with the unjustified confidence of an eager and energized academic, the gaps I might fill and their policy implications. You know, the type that NSF eats up. *“We need to create pathways from alternative schools to institutions of higher education! Not prisons—No prisons! Save the youth! Diversify the workforce!”*

No prisons, but still pathways. Still this idea of pathways that go one way. Pathways that go only up and get narrower and narrower as they do. Think hierarchy.

Sometime within this first year, as Tauheedah and I grabbed our food from the takeout window at Fred's Burgers, our go-to spot at the time, I verbally sketched out my ideas for a dissertation project, volunteering her as my sounding board. She pushed a braid out of her face and took a bite of the best burger I know of that you can get for \$3. In no rush to finish it, she swallowed and, still looking at her burger in anticipation for the next bite, said plainly: “That sounds interesting, but be careful. We don't need more research on how schools in the hood are fucked up. We have enough of that.”

Friction.

I kept reading. Kept organizing in other ways. Kept taking classes and auditing seminars and listening to Tauheedah and Anthony and Jaybo and folks who've been doing the work, doing *this* work, investing in other worlds and refusing the inevitability of this one. By the time I suggested an ethnography at FREE LA to Anthony—the details of which developed over many conversations, many months, and immense patience and generosity on his behalf—I had come to

understand a bit more about the things I needed to understand, and with a bit more clarity that there were many things I couldn't. I had also come to understand abolition not as a theory, but a vision for and praxis of moving through the world. One that was irreducible to policing and prisons; one that, at its best, takes to task the whole world and all its so-called victories. I was shedding, sloughing off each day like dead skin, my investment in pipelines and pathways and the benevolence of American education, and gaining a deeper understanding of the State, of carceral regimes, of modernity and entangled genocides, and of the many things that exist despite, in spite, “beyond and beneath—before and before—enclosure” (Moten & Harney, 2013, p. 17).

With Anthony's introduction and the support of FREE LA's lead teacher at the time, Jesus Trigo (or “Trigo” as the students and staff called him), FREE LA graciously accepted my support as a teaching assistant and student resource, and welcomed me into classes, staff meetings, email chains, and text threads. This was during the pandemic. Despite my initial introductions and interactions with the students being confined to virtual platforms, I came to form deep relationships with these young people I had never met in person—some of whom I had only ever “seen” as a collection of white letters displayed on a black box on my computer screen. This is when I met Zahra, whose wisdom, friendship, humor, honesty and tireless, tireless care for those around her began to forge one of the many anchors radically uprooting and re-routing my understanding of what “this work” really is. During this time, in addition to supporting and learning from the brilliant pedagogical praxis of Sir Bailey, FREE LA's then-Humanities teacher, I checked in with students via text and phone calls, set up Zoom and FaceTime meetings to assist them with projects and schoolwork, and did my best to support them with anything else they needed, any way I could. I was, and will always be, humbled by the trust

they extended to me. I began to understand their requests for support as radical invitations to be in community, and I began to constantly question the questions I was asking, how and why I was asking them, and for whom. My scholarly work began morphing into an appendage (Costa Vargas, 2008) to a deeper set of relationships and obligations.

In August of 2021, after a year of (virtual and partially preliminary) ethnographic research and student support—and as we transitioned, per the State’s instruction, out of online learning—Trigo asked me on behalf of the FREE LA team if I would teach English. In this invitation, another extension to be in and of community, it was my evident “patience” and “care” for the students that, according to FREE LA staff, qualified my readiness for the position. This, despite and in spite of my technical lack of (State-sanctioned) ‘credentials.’ In hindsight, this invitation was one of the first of many that would trouble the foundation of what I was taught education is, cannot, and ought to be. For the remainder of my data collection, I inhabited this dual role. And ultimately, gratefully, my relationship with the space and especially the students has exceeded the timeline of this project altogether.

This dual role—of educator/ethnographer—and the relationships I was able to form with FREE LA students as a result, completely untethered, rerouted, and rerooted my understanding of ethics, obligation, education, and liberation. I don’t think the impact these young people have had on me is the type of thing one should try to put into words—impact not only or even primarily on my research, but on the ways I trust, the ways I relate to others and myself, the ways I teach and learn and listen, and the ways I understand the breadth of things I should always try to understand, and the boundaries around the things I shouldn’t. If that initial friction had already exploded, these relationships, and my embeddedness in the FREE LA space generally, nourished that tiny burning flame into a deep and magnificently destructive fire—one that incinerated the

very foundation of those sorts of questions that lead to victories that are only victories if you're not the one dying. I was still interested in the processes of young people being pushed out of schools, but the blueprints laid by the young people at FREE LA—and their entanglements with longstanding bodies of knowledge that destabilize the benevolence and inevitability of schooling, the carceral State, and the inevitability of things as they are now—made increasingly legible and ultimately unavoidable the idea that the *'thing'* doing the pushing might not be so harmless;

That the people and places being “pushed” are always, also, already the driving force beyond, beneath, and before enclosure (Moten & Harney, 2013, p. 17);

That *departure* might be a better word;

And that focusing on push-out leaves no room for the type of movement that doesn't have a particular direction, only a particular commitment and a shifting outline of a shape—loom, a tapestry, an ecology, a web of dynamic relations.

It made increasingly legible and ultimately unavoidable that the reason schools are similar to prisons includes but vastly exceeds surveillance technology and school police and other spectacular forms of punishment;

That the margins are really the center (Gilmore, 2007; Smith, 2012);

Or, better yet, that the very notion of margins belies the sacred-scientific reality of a cosmically, quantumly entangled pluriverse of subjectivities, epistemologies, and possibilities (Holmes, 2020; Barad, 2012; 2017; Prescod-Weinstein, 2021; Zohar, 1990). It made increasingly legible and ultimately unavoidable that if we are intent on solutions that, for example, filter young people back into some-*'thing'* inherently insistent on doing the pushing—if we are intent on classifying one State institution as antithetical to another, or on classifying any of them as

“things” when in fact everything is a relationship—then we will endlessly ask the types of questions that that cause no friction;

Propose solutions that are just as deadly as the problems they aim to fix;

Count things as victories that aren’t really victories;

And do that thing where you know you’re wrong, and so you’re less so looking for answers than you are grasping for some final thread of justification for the argument you really already gave up on because in order to make it work you’d just have to lie and erase and find sick twisted comfort in smoke and mirrors. Or an ivory tower. Think white supremacy. Think America.

And so the questions driving this project became less about the pathways and pipelines and policies that connect schools and prisons, and more about the spaces and people and places that *exceed* even as they are necessarily “absorbed into” (Gilmore, 2008) a *carceral-education landscape*. The question became about *un/forgotten spaces*—where space is both body and place—that possess and create the magnificently destructive, transformative capacity for different ways of knowing and educating and being in the world: ways that irritate, incinerate, disrupt, depart, untether, unweave, uproot, reroute, and reimagine. It became about margins that aren’t really margins—or even only-actually the center of things—but rather other worlds that are, have been, and might radically be entangled with this one.

The question became about the implications of these types of spaces, and of FREE LA in particular, for prefiguring alternatives forms of education, and social organization, untethered to the regimes of racial displacement, organized abandonment, and enclosure with which schools and prisons are constitutively and inextricably intertwined. It became, more broadly, about the possibilities for a world, or many worlds, in which young people can live lives undetermined by

the demands of carceral and compulsory State institutions; and about the many ways in which young people of color already do. And as I formed relationships with, trusted, and earned the trust of FREE LA students, both the questions and their answers pivoted towards the deep wells of wisdom that these young people possess: the riveting and promising and magnificent plot lines towards freedom they map, chart, and point us towards, if we just *listen*.

Among other things, this is very much a story about space and spatial relationships. It is a story about the utilization of space to confine, to remove and displace, to entrench and naturalize and obscure—but also, and perhaps more importantly, it is a story about the reclamation of space, ideologically and epistemologically, physically and metaphysically, cosmically and quantumly, in broad sweeps, ebbs and flows, and as an ongoing/unfinished process. It is also about the things that cannot be reclaimed, and the things that have never been forgotten.

Most of all, it is a story of, dedicated, and indebted to, FREE LA High School, the Youth Justice Coalition, and the young people who I have had the honor of knowing, learning from, and listening to—as a student, as a teacher, as a friend, and in community. It is a story of spaces, of people and places, who breathe life and poke holes into seemingly inevitable, impenetrable landscapes of domination. This, over time, became both the “work” and the “why.”

CHAPTER 1

Schools, Prisons, and Un/forgotten Spaces in the Carceral-Education Landscape

INTRODUCTION

Jimmy's Story: School is still School

“Alright, last part,” I promised Jimmy.

We were sitting across from each other in my English classroom at FREE LA, about fifty minutes into Jimmy's education history. Over the course of those fifty minutes, he had traced with incredible detail a multifaceted process of racialized criminalization and displacement, within and between numerous schools, beginning in elementary school, where Jimmy spent a majority of his time in the office because, in his words: “I knew everything already. I was bored, so I did something that would bring me joy.” In tracing this multifaceted and multidirectional process—which culminated in him attending FREE LA because “it was the only school I *could* come to”—Jimmy had much ground to cover. So as we approached not only the hour but also the end of the school day, I tried to squeeze in my last set of questions.

“Okay, the last part is this: tell me about your experiences here at FREE LA, and whether you feel like—”

“Still boring.” Jimmy cut me off so matter-of-factly, I had to silently chuckle at both his unembellished delivery, and the anticlimactic finish to my (evidently) overzealous interviewing. Jimmy was indeed brilliant, and that brilliance manifested in part in his impeccably evasive hover somewhere between satire, sarcasm, and sincerity—like he was always one step ahead, like it was meant to be just the slightest bit uncertain whether or not he was being 100% serious.

“Okay, still boring,” I repeated, taking his bluntness as an invitation to think from a different angle. “Then let's start with this: in what ways is FREE LA the same as other high schools?”

“It's still students, it's still teachers, it's still work, it's still *school*.” Jimmy was ready.

“Okay,” I said, waiting for more.

“It *still* feel like prison,” he concluded, reiterating. “We still locked up. There's still a, whatever, a little court room.”

“Okay,” I said, silently mulling over the im/possibilities of school without prison. Looking around my classroom—an oddly shaped rectangle which was each day looking a bit more lived in and a bit less like the sheriff's or judge's office it likely once was—I decided to give another shot at my original angle. “Well, do you feel that there any ways that it's different?”

Despite his adamance that FREE LA is still school and therefore still prison, Jimmy did indeed feel, and noted numerous meaningful ways, that FREE LA differed from the other schools he'd attended. But rather than a final “but” or neat addendum to his critique, for the remaining ten minutes of his hour-long interview, Jimmy moved nimbly back and forth between the ways FREE LA was both fundamentally different from other schools and still “school;” and between the ways school will always be school and therefore always be prison, and the possibilities and necessity of educating in alternative ways. This back and forth, of course, neither makes Jimmy unreliable, nor FREE LA a failure (or success), but rather reflects the nuance and complexity of people and the places they make.

But I didn't begin with Jimmy's history because it captures the contradictions of being human or the complexities of transforming carceral space (though both are relevant), nor because his experiences in school and reflections on FREE LA are necessarily representative of other students.' Rather, I opened with and will return to Jimmy's (hi)story, because it incisively illustrates a key tension within—and therefore offers a generative point of departure to discuss—the diverse scholarship on schools and prisons from which this dissertation builds.

Pulling at just a few threads of an expansive and decades-long dialogue, my study places criminological and related research on the school-to-prison pipeline (STPP) in conversation with cross-disciplinary research on the complex and symbiotic linkages between schooling and carceral systems (e.g., Meiners, 2007; Sojoyner, 2016; Vaught, 2017). In Part I of this chapter, I return to and build from Jimmy’s story to review these literatures, and to discuss how my study engages the tensions between them through a critical geographic lens. Grounded in these foundations, in Part II I elaborate on the critical geographic approach and core conceptual frameworks guiding this study; expand on my research questions and interests; and outline my ethnographic methodology and methods. Finally, I expand briefly on the roadmap presented in this dissertation’s Introduction to discuss the layout of the forthcoming chapters, and to draw out in advance some of the entanglements between them.

§

PART I: SCHOOLS AND PRISONS

New Look, Same Taste

“So what type of things do you like that you can do at FREE LA? Is it like moving around, or—?”

Having revisited my original angle, I was half-probing half-clarifying Jimmy’s reflections on the various dimensions of FREE LA that made it “way better,” in his words, than the numerous other schools he’d attended. Despite (or maybe alongside) his insistence that any school is still school and therefore still prison, Jimmy emphasized the importance of FREE LA’s less excessive and less systematic rules, their use of transformative justice and “talking” instead of punishing and suspending, and—in particular—that at FREE LA, “they don’t kick you out for

not coming to school.” And despite my less than eloquent summary of these points as the ability to ‘move around,’ Jimmy answered my clarifying probe affirmatively.

“Yeah,” he said. “You got freedom.” He paused for a moment before adding, “And there ain’t no *bells*. ‘Cause man those bells used to be irritating.”

“Bails!?” I clarified again, anxious to see what story Jimmy had in store this time.

“Like the little ringers to go to class?” Kimora—Jimmy’s cousin, and another student at FREE LA—had lingered around quietly for most of Jimmy’s interview, rotating every so often between her perch on top of one of the long student tables, and her brief wanders around the oddly shaped room to get a pen, or charge her phone, or maybe just to move around. As Jimmy’s interview pushed on an hour and the school day rolled to a close, she decided to chime in—kind of like one of those little ringers to go to class.

“Ohhh,” I silently chuckled again, this time in amusement at my ironic mishearing, “Bells.”

“You see,” Jimmy continued, unbothered by my adlibs, “that’s another thing with the teachers talking crazy. Talkin ‘bout ‘*the bell don’t dismiss you*’”—Jimmy shifted nimbly into a dramatic tone, pulling his head back and tucking his chin under his neck to mimic a teacher, before shifting just as quickly back into his own voice—“Well, why the fuck they got it then!?”

As Kimora and I erupted into a chorus of laughter at Jimmy’s accurate dramatizations, he concluded confidently, “The bell don’t dismiss—well Jimmy does, *goodbye!*”

I let out another full-hearted laugh at Jimmy’s witty delivery and took a breath, realizing we were all probably about ready to end the interview. “Okay, alright. So, how would you run a school that you’d be down to go to?”

“How would *I* run the school?”

Kimora giggled again, probably at the thought of Principal Jimmy, but I pressed on gently. “Like a school you would want your kids to go to.”

Jimmy thought for a few moments, apparently resonating with that framing, before answering earnestly, “Well, school would start later.” Pausing again, just long enough for his voice to settle back into its impeccably evasive hover between satire, sarcasm, and sincerity, he added, “Cause *boy*, getting up that early in the morning? They must be drunk!”

“Okay,” I said, stifling another smile at Jimmy’s bluntness, while digesting the insight of his point.

“Umm,” Jimmy ruminated a bit longer on a school he’d send his kids to before arriving at another unexpected, yet evidently central point. It wasn’t the discipline or the police or the security guards that would make school a little less like school and therefore a little less like prison (though Jimmy both experienced and incisively critiqued numerous forms of criminalization in and beyond school). Rather, like the school bells and start time and the way teachers talk, Jimmy’s suggestion focused on something (seemingly) much more mundane:

“The school *lunch* needs to get way better. Whatever they were serving us in elementary, they need to go back to that.”

Instantly resonating with both me and Kimora, our collective response merged into a barely audible combination of her *On god!* and my *Yoo, I remember elementary school food!*

“The shit they got now?” Jimmy brought us back to the discussion at hand. “Prison food.”

“It’s all watered down,” Kimora agreed.

“Prison food,” Jimmy repeated. “So, I’m telling you: we locked up. They giving us the *same* thing they giving to prisoners. I’m telling you. Just with the prisoner food, it look like they blended it and turned it into mush. Look like throw up.”

“Ours come in a package though,” Kimora added, mirroring Jimmy’s ability to transition between satire, sarcasm, and sincerity so swiftly you might miss it if you’re not really listening.

Jimmy, of course, did not miss it. “Yeah, ours come in *packages*,” he half-whispered with sarcastic pizzazz, in feigned amazement at the thought of plastic-encased mush.

“All bougie” Kimora continued the bit, which was by then unfolding like an improvised infomercial for the limited-edition School-Prison Lunches.TM

“Yeah, we gettin’ bougie prison food. But that’s what school is.” Jimmy was half smiling, but definitely serious.

Kimora giggled.

“Naw, that’s really school is!” Jimmy’s tone got slightly higher as he doubled down, again, on his point. “A bougie prison!”

“Okay,” I said, bringing us back and wrapping us up with one final inquiry. “You think there’s a difference between school and education, though? Like do you think it’s important to learn?”

“Yeah,” Jimmy answered certainly and sincerely, as a matter of fact. “But you don’t need school to learn.”

§

Bookended with a blueprint, the final ten minutes of Jimmy’s education history advance a powerful analysis of the relationship(s) between schools and prisons, and offer a generative point of departure to explore that relationship through a critical geographic lens. In particular, Jimmy’s

focus on the mundane—on the school bells and start time and school lunch and the way teachers talk—provides a foundation and invitation to explore the sets of relationships, series of movements and everyday interactions, and seemingly unexceptional terms and conditions that make school “school;” that allow FREE LA to be both still school and different from other schools; and that make both schools and “school in general”—from Jimmy, Kimora, and various other students’ perspectives—prison.

Or bougie prison.

Alongside and as part of his focus on the mundane, Jimmy’s specific theorization of school *as* prison (and prison no matter what) speaks to what I understand as a primary point of tension between the diverse scholarships from which my study builds: the *spatial* relationship between schools and prisons. Whereas STPP scholarship has generally conceptualized this relationship as one of two distinct State institutions separated by a proverbial (presumably linear) pipeline, a body of transdisciplinary scholarship has theorized this relationship, alternatively, as a complex *nexus* (Meiners, 2007) of symbiotically linked institutions, practices, and ideologies operating within a wider network of carceral State power (Sojoyner, 2013, 2016; Vaught, 2017). In my reading, and through a critical geographic lens, the tensions between these two bodies of work allow for a re-spatialization of the frame of inquiry as it relates to schools and prisons, and the possibilities for abolitionist alternatives to each. In the following sections, I review these sets of literature not in a way that moves from wrong to right paradigms, but rather in a way that reflects these differing theorizations, and conceptual spatializations, of the school-prison link.

Criminological Perspectives: The School-to-Prison Pipeline

Among the various frameworks and paradigms employed to explore and address the school-prison link, the most common and widely known in and beyond academia is the *school-*

to-prison pipeline (STPP), as is the case in criminological scholarship. The STPP is a metaphor and conceptual paradigm referring to the process by which young people are pushed out of schools and thus become predisposed to contact with the criminal punishment system (Wald & Losen, 2003). According to criminological research on the STPP, this process occurs in both direct and indirect ways: for example, youth may be referred directly to juvenile court by school officials or arrested by school police; or may experience heightened risk for arrest and incarceration as an “indirect” result of their exclusion from the supervision and social bonds (Agnew, 1992) that schooling is meant to provide (e.g., Novak, 2019; Mittleman, 2018; Gottfredson et al., 2005; Payne et al., 2003).

Racial inequalities in this (so-called) pipeline have been well-documented by scholars across disciplines for decades (e.g., Bejarano, 2014; Bradshaw et al., 2010; Fabelo et al., 2011; Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Skiba, 1997; Shollenberger, 2015; Sykes et al., 2015; Wallace et al., 2008). Given the ubiquity and pervasiveness of these inequalities, there is a comprehensive and growing body of criminological and related social science research attempting to explain the racialized nature of the STPP. Many scholars attribute the genesis and expansion of the STPP in general, and the persistence of its racial inequalities in particular, to the rise of exclusionary “zero tolerance” school discipline policies—such as suspension, expulsion, and school-based arrest (e.g., Boyd, 2009; Cobb, 2009; Curtis, 2014; Giroux, 2003; Heitzeg, 2014; Mallett, 2016; Nance, 2016; Skiba et al., 2014)—which have targeted Black and other students of color since (but also far before) their codification into federal law with the 1994 Guns Free School Act.

Collectively, these studies reveal that exclusionary school punishment has both short and long-term consequences for carceral system contact generally (Mowen & Brent, 2016; Mowen et al 2020; Cuellar & Markowitz, 2015; Novak, 2019; Mittleman, 2018; Wolf & Kupchik, 2017;

Rosenbaum, 2018; Hemez et al., 2020; Monahan, 2014; Bacher-Hicks et al., 2019), and for racial inequalities in school and legal punishment specifically (Rocque, 2010; Rocque & Paternoster, 2011; Pesta, 2018; Curran, 2016; Hoffman, 2014; Marchbanks et al., 2018; Sykes et al., 2015; Nicholson-Crotty et al., 2009; Welch & Payne, 2010; 2012; 2018; Ramey, 2016). For example, many criminological studies conduct micro or multi-level analyses, and employ labeling, life course, routine activity, and cumulative disadvantage theories, to investigate the direct and longitudinal effects of school discipline on outcomes such as arrest and incarceration rates, “offending” patterns, and a range of “adverse” adult experiences (Monahan et al., 2014; Cuellar & Markowitz, 2015; Mowen & Brent, 2016; Mowen et al., 2020; Novak, 2019; Novak & Fagan, 2022; Pesta, 2023). These studies conceptualize exclusionary school discipline as a negative “turning point” (see Laub & Sampson, 1993) in youths’ lives that initiates a “downward spiral” (Mittleman, 2018) into the legal system, through both internal (e.g., secondary deviance) and external (e.g., heightened surveillance) effects (Hemez et al., 2020; Monahan, 2014; Mowen et al., 2020; Novak, 2019).

In this way, criminological and related research on the STPP has contributed meaningfully to scholarly and public understandings of the lingering and life-long effects of criminalizing young people in, and excluding young people from, educational spaces. Despite the importance of elucidating the racist structure and outcomes of exclusionary discipline, however—and as Jimmy’s theorizations provide a foundation and invitation to consider—harsh punishment is just one of the terms, conditions, and dimensions entangling school(s) with prison. This is not to say that developing alternatives to school punishment and police should not be fundamental steps on the way to abolishing the school-prison link, or integral to critical investigations of it. Rather, my interest is less in replacing one focus with another than with

exploring the numerous entangled roots of social problems, and (thus) the scopes and scales of transformation necessary to exceed them.

This interest is informed by, and has been explored and developed in various ways within, a cross-disciplinary body of scholarship theorizing more complex linkages between schooling and carceral regimes. In my reading, this scholarship helps to expand the terrain of struggle, by re-spatializing the frame of inquiry.

More a Nexus than a Pipeline

Whereas the STPP framing conceptually spatializes the relationship between schools and prisons as a (linear or “downward”) pipeline with schools on one end and prisons on the other, a cross-disciplinary body of scholarship has theorized alternative configurations of this relationship. For example, in a seminal piece that carved out space for numerous others, abolitionist scholar-activist and educator, Erica Meiners (2007), develops the framing of the *school-prison nexus*: referring to the complex web of policies, practices, and ideologies that symbiotically link schooling and carceral systems. Both utilizing and expanding on this framing, scholars have unsettled the assumption that schools and prisons are fundamentally separate institutions, theorizing schools themselves as sites of gendered carcerality and anti-black enclosure (Sojoyner, 2016; Shange, 2019; Wun, 2016); and situating US schooling, as a system, within an assemblage of State apparatuses that sustain global regimes of carceral-colonial control (Vaught, 2017, 2019; Vaught et al., 2022; Annamma, 2016). Collectively, these studies advance an analysis of punishment and exclusion not as singular events or unintended outcomes of particular policies, but as *structuring logics* of the US carceral State, and therefore US schools (Rodríguez, 2010; Sojoyner, 2013; Shange, 2019; Vaught, 2017).

In my reading, what the site of collision between these diverse conceptualizations of the school-prison link enables is a re-spatialization of the focus of inquiry. Transdisciplinary (re)conceptualizations of the relationships between schools and prisons—for example, as a nexus (Meiner, 2007), an assemblage (Vaught, 2017), a regime of enclosure (Sojoyner, 2016)—each move, in different (and similar) and direct and indirect ways, away from a framing of separation and linearity, and towards more complex socio-spatial arrangements. Moving from this generative space of tension, I am interested in exploring the deeper entanglements between schooling and carceral systems, including the ways in which harsh punishment overlaps with both mundane forms and broader local-global landscapes of racialized exclusion and carceral control.

Returning to Jimmy’s (hi)story, while his critiques of FREE LA may have been uniquely sugar-free, his reflections on the everyday and seemingly unexceptional dimensions of schools that make “school” prison—things like bells in the hallway, and the ways teachers talk, and the food they serve for school lunch—speak to a collective pattern in the ways students reflected on their schooling experiences; and, iteratively, in the ways I analyzed those reflections and experiences from a critical geographic lens. Specifically, both students’ reflections on schooling generally, and the related comparisons students drew between FREE LA and the various other schools they attended—comparisons like having no bells and having conversations and the ability to move around—invite me to trace the less visible (yet no less visceral) ways in which “school” and “prison” are constitutively produced across time and space, and across numerous sites and scales.

However, my series of questions to Jimmy in the final ten minutes of his interview reflect my ultimate interest not simply in analyzing the deeper entanglements between schooling and

carceral regimes, but in exploring the sorts (and scopes and scales) of alternatives that might exceed them. Given decades of research on the racialized consequences of exclusionary discipline, recent and current research on the school-prison link is likewise increasingly invested in “dismantling” this link. From the diverse conceptual spatializations of the school-prison link reviewed above, there have emerged equally diverse conceptualizations of its potential solutions.

Current Literature: “Dismantling” the STPP

Given the evident consequences of exclusionary punishment for carceral system contact, criminological and related research has focused recently on examining “alternatives to discipline,” in an effort to dismantle the STPP and its racial inequalities (Hirschfield, 2018a, 2018b; Gottfredson et al., 2020; Rocque & Snellings, 2018). Common examples of these alternatives include Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS) (Bradshaw et al., 2015; Bradshaw et al., 2012; Horner et al., 2010; Bornstein, 2017; Feuerborn et al., 2016); “teen court” (Fader et al., 2015; Smokowski et al., 2020); and, in particular, restorative justice practices (e.g., Gregory et al., 2016; Jain et al., 2014; Deakin & Kupchik, 2018; Schiff, 2018; Payne & Welch, 2022). The purported purpose of these alternatives is to develop “more inclusive” mechanisms of managing student (mis)behavior and maintaining school safety (Deakin & Kupchik, 2018; Hirschfield, 2018a; Gottfredson et al 2020; Bradshaw et al., 2015; Fader et al., 2015; Smokowski et al., 2020; Bornstein, 2017; Feuerborn et al., 2016), while mitigating the racialized consequences of exclusionary discipline (Gottfredson et al., 2020; Mallett, 2016; Hirschfield, 2018a).

For example, between 2013 and 2015, the LAUSD Board of Education banned the use of suspension for “willful defiance” for elementary and middle school youth; and “overhauled” its existing disciplinary procedures with the district-wide implementation of “alternatives to

suspension” such as PBIS and restorative justice practices (LAUSD, 2013; Jones, 2019). Like the growth of scholarly and public consciousness around the school-prison link, the conditions of possibility for many of these alternatives and reforms were carved out by students and other young people most impacted by educational exclusion and carceral enclosure (see, e.g., Police-Free LAUSD Coalition, 2022). In various locations, alternatives to discipline such as restorative practices have meaningfully reduced rates of suspension (Samimi et al., 2023).

However, in addition to the co-optation and concessions that often accompany State-sanctioned implementation of community-led demands (see e.g., Sojoyner, 2016; Acey, 2000), this set of solutions produces another point of tension that Jimmy’s (hi)story offers a framework to explore. I understand Jimmy’s adamance that school will always be school and therefore always be prison, not as the definitive conclusion to a longstanding debate (and therefore a reason to take no action, or take new action solely in pursuit of another victory), but rather as an invitation to think from a different angle—to tell new stories, or old stories in new ways. This invitation invokes questions around the (ir)redeemability of US schools, and US schooling “in general,” that scholars exploring the school-prison nexus and related (spatial) conceptualizations have grappled with in various ways.

For example, in *Compulsory: Education and the Dispossession of Youth in a Prison School*, Sabina Vaught’s primary intervention is to decouple American education from its myths of democracy and meritocracy. Through a critical institutional ethnography of a prison school within a high-security youth detention center (in what she calls the Inside), Vaught shows how this façade of benevolence is one of the most violent functions of US schooling on the Outside. She demonstrates how in symbiosis with youth prisons, schools facilitate ongoing processes of State-sanctioned “Removal” through data collection and information sharing, and through the

ideological production of individualized and “automatic” Black failure. Relatedly, in *First Strike: Educational Enclosures in Black Los Angeles*, another seminal study on schools and prisons that has meaningfully informed my own, Damien Sojoyner (2016) argues that the public education system is structured by and operates through a counterinsurgent model of enclosure—referring to the enclosure of Black life, culture, sociality, resistance, and self-determination—which preceded, and therefore laid the groundwork for, the models of enclosure that shaped the development and expansion of the US carceral State.

Returning to my (and Jimmy’s) prior point, however, what these and related investigations present is not a “better” answer or self-righteous critique, but rather a rigorous set of questions and a meticulously developed archive of the possibilities that (always already) exist beyond the certainty and empiricism of policy-driven solutions (Sojoyner, 2013). Scholars (e.g., Sojoyner, 2016, 2017; Vaught, 2017, 2019; Vaught et al., 2022) have done so, specifically, by uplifting spaces (people and places) and knowledge/traditions that exceed or move outside (Gilmore, 2008; McKittrick, 2006, 2021) eurocentric epistemic terrains. Likewise, a critical geographic lens focuses not on easy solutions or singular alternatives to singular alternatives, but rather on exploring “how radical consciousness in action resolves into liberated life-ways, however provisional, present and past” (Gilmore, 2022, p. 474-75, emphasis added).

This study heeds the call for more transformative alternatives to the entanglements between schools and prisons, by exploring how people at the intersections of overlapping carceral-educational geographies organize themselves against the organized abandonment, racial displacement and spatial domination, and gendered-racial criminalization that are endemic to schooling and/in the US carceral state. To frame my critical geographic exploration of FREE LA, and to place this study and a critical geographic lens in conversation with school-prison

scholarship, I turn at a broad theoretical level to alternative education. I consider alternative schools—which are sometimes used in practice, but frequently subsumed in theory as “invisible” or carceral spaces (Crawford, 2020; Dunbar, 2001; Reyes, 2006; Dunning-Lozano, 2016; Selman, 2019)—as an understudied lens into complex configurations of carceral-educational enclosure, and, more importantly, as uniquely spatialized sites of meaning-making in the development of more transformative solutions. Specifically, as *un/forgotten spaces* that exist slightly “beyond” the traditional school system, alternative schools and the people who inhabit them are uniquely positioned to develop the sorts of solutions that (might) exceed paradigms of enclosure.

In the following sections, I discuss alternative education specifically as it relates to, and as a way of further fleshing out, this study’s core theoretical-conceptual frameworks and broader critical geographic approach. While, to be clear, this study is an ethnography of FREE LA, not of alternative schools generally, this focus and the following discussion are part of a broader interest in centering more expansive configurations of carcerality and displacement in examinations of the school-prison link; and in thinking curiously and critically about how we frame our frames of inquiry, and therefore our terrains of struggle.

§

PART II: THEORETICAL, CONCEPTUAL, AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORKS

Alternative Education in the Carceral-Education Landscape

Though multiple types of alternative schools exist, the purpose of alternative education as defined at the federal level is to provide for students whose “needs” cannot be met in a

traditional school setting (Sable et al., 2010). Many states rely on alternative education programs to serve students perceived to have behavioral problems, who have been expelled, or are in legal trouble. However, most states have established alternative education as a drop-out prevention strategy (Lange & Sletten, 2002; Porowski et al., 2014). While some scholars and policymakers take this stated purpose at face value, many highlight the failure to achieve this mission as a systemic issue with pressing implications for educational exclusion and inequality.

At national, state, and district levels, students of color are “disproportionately”¹¹ referred to alternative education (Chiang & Gill, 2010; Perzigian et al., 2017; Verdugo & Glenn, 2006; Wilkerson et al., 2016), as is the case in California (de Velasco, 2008; de Velasco & Gonzales, 2017). Studies reveal that many alternative schools are underfunded, lack (State-sanctioned) accountability and evaluation procedures, struggle to help students graduate (Foley & Pang, 2006; Fresques et al., 2017; Reimer & Cash, 2003), and produce high rates of drop-out (Hammond, 2017; Hill, 2007; Rotermund, 2007; Chiang & Gill, 2010; Wilkerson et al., 2016). Despite problematic metrics of success (for example, those that equate drop-out with failure; see Sojoyner, 2017), these statistics and features of alternative education are relevant to mapping the carceral-education landscape, in that dropout predisposes youth to surveillance and capture by multiple State institutions, and to harsher treatment once in the system (Goldman & Rodriguez, 2022).

At a broad level, then—and perhaps counterintuitively—the framing of a carceral-education landscape both reflects and helps conceptualize US schooling as a system that cannot be easily bifurcated into “traditional” and “alternative” because, as Chapter 3 discusses, its

¹¹ From an abolitionist standpoint, and following critiques that Ruth Wilson Gilmore among others have made, I take issue with language such as racial “disparities” and “disproportionality” in punishment, as it implies that racially “proportionate” criminalization and confinement would be desirable and just.

numerous moving parts function together to make (and remake) “school.” For example, alongside their differential terms, conditions, and accountability and reporting mandates, the mere heterogeneity of alternative schools in California alone (Kelly, 1993)—and the multiple genealogies and co-optations of alternative education generally (Krueger, 2022; Shange, 2019; OCS Project, 2024)—begs a more sustained consideration of what “school” is. Theoretically and methodologically, this broad spatialization of alternative education in (and as) the carceral-education landscape suggests that mapping relationships, power, and movement within and across space is a generative way of understanding schooling, carcerality, and the entanglements between the two.

Indeed, scholarship has highlighted the ways alternative schools expose young people to carceral system contact directly: alternative schools may be hyper-surveilled by justice officials based on the assumption that students there are more likely to be on probation, and many school districts rely on partnerships with law enforcement agencies to provide alternative education services (Hirschfield, 2018b; Reyes, 2006). In California, for example, some alternative schools are managed under the Department of Corrections. And while quantitative studies have found a direct racialized relationship between alternative education referral and detention (Vanderhaar et al., 2014), qualitative studies have examined how alternative schools themselves operate as carceral spaces, by emphasizing behavioral modification and surveillance (Reyes, 2001; 2006; Dunning-Lozano, 2018), and employing deficit-based ideologies and pedagogies (Dunning-Lozano, 2016; Kelly, 1993; Kim, 2008; 2011; Muñoz, 2004). As such, researchers have contended that alternative schools are “zones of racial isolation” (Dunning-Lozano, 2016; Dunbar, 1999; 2001), sites of racial capitalist differentiation (Selman, 2019), and “dumping grounds” for unwanted youth (Dunbar, 1999; Horsford & Powell, 2016; Soleil, 1998).

From a critical geographic lens, and drawing in particular on the insights of Black feminist geographies, these structural dimensions of alternative education within the carceral-education landscape highlight the symbiotic criminalization and gendered racialization of people and place, and thus the ways race, gender, and space are themselves constitutively constructed (McKittrick, 2006, 2011; Hawthorne, 2019). Inherently, this construction of racialized criminalized space—people and place—entails both material and discursive forms of spatial domination. And although some scholars have meaningfully explored the “resistance” strategies employed by alternative education students (e.g., Dunning-Lozano, 2016), both students and teachers at alternative schools have been conceptualized as “underclass” or “second-class citizens of education” (Dunbar 1999; Kim, 2008, p. 216); and alternative education students are consistently described in State reports and policy briefs as “vulnerable,” “at-risk,” and suffering from a host of behavioral, academic, and familial deficiencies (de Velasco, 2008; de Velasco & Gonzales, 2017).

Echoing Tauheedah’s warning, interspersed with hamburger bite-filled pauses, that *we don't need more research on how schools in the hood are fucked up*, the framing of a carceral-education landscape helps to understand and analyze the movement, relocation, and (seemingly natural) dis/placement of students within and across uneven educational geographies—in “urban” schools, “good” schools, alternative schools, not in school at all—as not only socially produced, but ongoing socio-spatial processes that are contested, reclaimed, and unsettled at multiple scales. It also helps to elucidate how such processes structure what or *who* is deemed a problem, and where we look (or not) for alternatives.

Within the conceptual and material context of the carceral-education landscape, I suggest that the processes, conditions, and narratives surrounding alternative schools converge to

position them as spaces that are rendered “un-geographic” (McKittrick, 2006) or “forgotten” (Gilmore, 2008), yet in fact exist at the very center of things. Indeed, as I have noted, alternative schools have been described by policymakers now seeking their “improvement” as “invisible spaces” (Crawford, 2020). The apparent use of, and scholarly and public narrative around—alongside the differential accountability standards for (de Velasco & Gonzales, 2017; Fresques et al., 2017)—alternative schools position them as operating slightly outside the traditional school system. However, rather than subsuming them as sites of despair, or as marginal spaces to be fixed and improved, thinking through alternative schools as *un/forgotten spaces* helps both to map State power (Vaught, 2017) and identify slippages in that power.

Critical geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2008) proposes that a particular sort of energy, a unique capacity to collectivize (hi)stories and resources, exists in “industries of last resort” and organized abandonment. Working specifically, as the prior chapter described, from FREE LA’s positioning of itself as neither an institution of confinement, nor an institution of traditional education, I am interested in what it might tell us about the sorts of spaces that exceed the entanglements between schooling and carceral regimes, and about the processes and praxes through which those spaces are forged. This dissertation explores what FREE LA’s (hi)story, mission, and model—as a space absorbed within, yet which emerged in explicit departure from overlapping geographies of educational and carceral enclosure—might tell us about abolitionist alternatives not simply to school discipline, or even (only) to prison, but to US schooling as a core anchor and constitutive apparatus of anti-black carceral regimes (Meiners, 2007, 2011, 2013; Sojoyner, 2013, 2016; Shange, 2019; Vaught, 2017; Vaught et al., 2022).

Thus, rather than contending with the statistical specifics of referral and push-out to alternative education (e.g., drop-out rates, underfunding) writ large, I am suggesting that the

constitutive processes of abandonment and departure that “converge in and as” (Gilmore, 2008) alternative schools are a lens into analyzing relations of confinement, displacement, and spatial reclamation as they are reconfigured across a fractured yet interconnected carceral-education landscape. The question is not, in other words, how FREE LA or other alternative schools exist as warehouses or “turning points” on a linear trajectory towards incarceration, but rather what the existence of un/forgotten spaces can tell us *about* the entanglements between schooling and carceral regimes; and about the ways people at the interstices of those entanglements organize themselves towards alternative forms of education, social organization, and anti-carceral transformation. Before transitioning to my ethnographic methodologies, and to continue my discussion of a critical geographic approach to schools and prisons, the following section further fleshes out the conceptual framing of *un/forgotten spaces*.

Critical Geographies of Schooling and Carcerality: Un/Forgotten Spaces in the Carceral-Education Landscape

In thinking through the possibilities generally, and that FREE LA presents specifically, for forging alternative educational spaces that exceed the carceral-education landscape, I am guided by Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s theorization of forgotten places. In “Forgotten Places and the Seeds of Grassroots Planning,” Gilmore (2008) theorizes prisons as “a single—though spatially discontinuous abandoned region” (p. 31). Critiquing her concept of the “gulag” as a way to capture the buildup of California’s prison economy (Gilmore, 2007), she contends that “it [did] not enable description of what else is out there, *beyond its margins*,” and asks: “what concept might get at the kinds of forgotten places that have been *absorbed into* the gulag *yet exceed them?*” (2008, p. 34). In response, she expands on the concept of “neither/nor” or “forgotten” places, and posits that the “awareness of being neither/nor” that comes with organized abandonment “opens up the possibility for people to organize themselves at novel resolutions”

(*ibid*, p. 36). Therefore, speculating on how the people most targeted by abandonment, displacement, and “the many other processes that accumulate in and as forgotten places” remain committed to alternative possibilities, Gilmore asks: “what capacities might such people animate, and at what scales, to make the future better than the present?” (p. 32).

This conceptualization of forgotten places helps me think through alternative schools generally, and FREE LA in particular, as critical sites of meaning-making positioned slightly beyond or outside the traditional school system, and as spaces inhabited by young people and educators with distinct experiential knowledge of spatial displacement *and* departure. Because FREE LA conceptualizes itself as an abolitionist alternative to, while at the same time being fundamentally entangled within, overlapping geographies of schooling and carcerality, it invites and enables an exploration both of the “processes that accumulate in and as” the carceral-education landscape, and the sorts of “novel resolutions” that might exceed it.

Thus, to reiterate the points made in the prior chapter, ‘forgottenness’ signifies not a pathologization of so-called marginal or “invisible” spaces, but rather a spatial relationship; likewise, it is not reducible to abandonment from above, but refers as well to the ways people and groups of people remove themselves from spaces in which their lives are devalued. It can therefore be clarified that forgottenness is a verb and praxis, not a static descriptor; and that to *exceed* in this context captures a particular type of abolitionist transformation that is distinct from reform, critique, or resistance (Campt, 2014; 2017; Haley, 2016; Moten & Harney, 2013). Despite these readings of forgottenness, I add the qualifier “un” to un/forgotten spaces for a few critical (geographic) reasons.

A critical geographic genealogy of un/forgotten spaces

When I first read “Forgotten Places and the Seeds of Grassroots Planning,” sometime in my second or third year of graduate school, Gilmore’s conceptualization of forgotten places registered to me as a clear “match” for FREE LA. In other words, the evident parallels and relevance of the concept—for example, with FREE LA’s positioning as both a space for youth “abandoned” by other schools, and a space committed to organizing against California’s prison regime—felt at the time like a framework that could (easily) help me organize and approach my various questions about FREE LA, abolition, education, and the sorts of victories we might actually count as victories. In self-reflexive hindsight, however, I am critical of my initial engagement with “Forgotten Places.” As the method of entanglement captures, it is by being curious; by asking questions rather than seeking answers or expertise; and by drawing connections between seemingly dissimilar things that we go about the work of telling new stories, or old stories in new ways.¹²

Also following the method of entanglements, however, it is my initial engagement with “Forgotten Places”—in iterative dialogue with FREE LA’s history, people, and place—that led me to other critical geographic literature, including and exceeding Gilmore’s rich body of work: the very literature that has, in part, invited and informed my retrospective introspections. For these reasons, among others I describe below, I found it more aligned with the interests and approach of a critical geographic frame, and with the abolitionist visions of this study, to the stick with (and sit with) that initial framing. Yet, while earlier drafts of my dissertation explored alternative schools as “forgotten spaces,” as the study progressed, I revisited and (slightly) reframed this framing.

¹² My gratitude to Dr. Sabina Vaught for consistently encouraging and supporting this, among numerous other forms of critical self-reflection.

Specifically, I added the qualifier “un” in un/forgotten spaces based on another critical geographic insight: that “to describe is also to produce” (Gilmore, 2022, p. 109), which captures the entanglement between the language and theories we use, the knowledges we draw from and create, and the spaces and social worlds we make (and remake). As the prior chapter discussed, the discursive and ideological naturalization of space as something that “just is” (McKittrick, 2006, p. xi)—for example, descriptions of alternative schools as ‘invisible spaces’ and of those who inhabit them as ‘second class’—works indispensably to fuel *material* landscapes of spatial domination, not only by criminalizing racialized people and places, but by obscuring them as absent, marginal, or solely victims of current and future geographical arrangements (McKittrick, 2006; Brand, 2023).

Even though Gilmore’s theorization of “forgotten places” explicitly rejects deterministic geographic frames—that is, by focusing on process and praxis—words and language are important. Un/forgotten spaces allows me to hold all the truths and insight in Gilmore’s (and other critical geographers’) analysis, without reifying the notion of marginal, invisible, or second-class people and places. Indeed, Gilmore has since critiqued her own framing of subaltern spaces as forgotten. Having used the term to conceptualize how rural societies which, as their “importance faded...became, as it were, ‘forgotten’”—and to capture how “organized abandonment produces the *experience* of having been forgotten or left out”—in a recent interview she qualified: “But of course, the people there didn’t forget themselves” (Gilmore, 2021).

It is for these reasons that critical geographic inquiry aims not simply to critique the “spatialization of difference” (McKittrick, 2006, p. 34; Gilmore, 2022), but to show how people

in places deemed un-geographic or (un)forgotten forge alternative possibilities, in and beyond the cracks of seemingly concrete regimes.



Fig. 1.1 Cracks in the Concrete (Right: Author; Left: YJC)

Likewise, my goal in this study is not to simply to document a totalizing and inevitable terrain of confinement and exclusion, but rather to understand how carceral power *works*—specifically by looking to the socio-spatial locations where its intersecting forces converge, and (thus) to the geographic places, praxes, and possibilities envisioned and embodied in and beyond the so-called margins of the carceral State. Importantly, as Gilmore (2008) contends, it is the act of being “forgotten” by State infrastructures—as the localized bureaucratic anchors of global racial capitalist regimes—that cultivates a unique capacity and socio-spatial context for liberatory struggle. Similarly (though not synonymously), Black and Black feminist geographic knowledges foreground how, despite their inseparable enmeshment with landscapes of dispossession, subaltern geographies and “geographic desires and opportunities” (McKittrick, 2006, p. 121) are irreducible to relations of domination (McKittrick, 2014; Hawthorne & Lewis, 2023; McKittrick & Woods, 2007; Reese, 2019). It is in this way that un/forgotten spaces might “*exceed*,” at the same time they are “*absorbed into*” the carceral-education landscape.

Un/forgottenness holds as truth these entanglements between displacement from above and departure from below, between organized abandonment and the liberated life-ways forged

by those who refuse to forget themselves. We might say, then, that the unique capacity that exists in and as un/forgotten spaces is not only the awareness of being neither/nor, but also (or maybe instead) of being both/and, before/beyond (Moten & Harney, 2013), still here. *Refusing to forget*.

Unforgotten: “Likely to be remembered;”¹³ “not lost to memory;”¹⁴ *to remember again*

Unforgetful: “Determined, dogged, cohesive.”¹⁵

Through this frame, in analyzing FREE LA’s departures from the carceral-education landscape—and the implications for abolitionist alternatives to schooling and carceral regimes—what is important theoretically and analytically are vision and process. In other words, just as critical and Black geographic knowledges focus on socio-spatial processes (rather than static descriptors) when analyzing relations of un-freedom (Gilmore, 2022), so too does a critical geographic frame emphasize process and praxis, and vision and imagination, in studying *how* people in un/forgotten spaces “forge liberated life-ways” beyond and outside enclosure (Gilmore, 2022; Purifoy, 2023; McKittrick, 2014). In turning to FREE LA’s processes and praxes and visions and imaginations, un/forgotten spaces positions FREE LA participants,’ and in particular FREE LA students,’ own theorizations of social problems and their potential solutions as central to the building of abolitionist futures. Likewise, this approach resists an analytical interest in predefined inputs and certain outcomes, focusing instead on the *entanglements* between the always ongoing, the not yet, and the must be: between what has happened, is happening, and will “*have had to happen*” (Campt, 2017) in the movement towards abolition.

¹³ Collins English Dictionary (n.d.)

¹⁴ Johnson’s Dictionary Online (n.d.)

¹⁵ Thesaurus.com (n.d.)

To conclude, and to transition into my research questions and methodologies, *un/forgotten spaces* and/in the *carceral-education landscape* offer a critical geographic lens to briefly revisit the (hi)stories and human complexities with which this chapter began. The theoretical and analytical focus of these conceptual frames, like critical geographies more broadly, on vision and praxis maps meaningfully onto an understanding of abolition not as an alternative input or desired outcome, but as an ongoing, unfinished, and insurgently uncertain process of liberation (see e.g., Rodríguez, 2023; Ben-Moshe, 2018). It is from this lens that the seeming contradictions in Jimmy’s reflections on FREE LA are (or might also become) conditions of possibility. Understanding both geographic domination and spatial reclamation as “ongoing spatial project[s]” (McKittrick, 2006, p. 121)—and schools and prisons not as things but dynamic sets of relationships—reveals how and why it can be the case that FREE LA is both still school and not like other schools, and both a former prison and a space of free movement, abolitionist education, and anti-carceral transformation—smack dab in the middle of South Central LA. Rather than asking whether FREE LA succeeds in abolishing the school-prison link, the question then becomes: “how is this space made, for and by whom, and towards what visions of the future—both realized and imagined?”

Research Questions and Approach

In light of these interests, and the insights and implications of a critical geographic approach, the overarching theoretical question guiding this study is: What are the deeper entanglements between schooling and carceral regimes, and what possibilities does FREE LA present for abolitionist alternatives to these entanglements? To operationalize this inquiry I investigate the following related research questions:

1) How do FREE LA students experience and reflect on their experiences in, and being removed from (or choosing to leave), traditional schooling? How do students compare their experiences at FREE LA to their experiences in other schools?

2) How and in what ways does FREE LA *depart* interpersonally, ideologically, pedagogically, and epistemologically from the carceral-education landscape? What praxes, knowledge traditions, relationships, terms of relationality, and forms of social-spatial organization do FREE LA participants create and/or use to do so?

Research Question 1 (RQ1) is the primary lens through which I investigate the deeper the entanglements between schooling and carceral regimes; and the practices, ideologies, and socio-spatial processes through which these entanglements are reconfigured across the carceral-education landscape—as experienced, theorized, and navigated by FREE LA students. Related, it is the juxtapositions that students make between FREE LA and other schools they attended that serve as the lens through which I analyze FREE LA’s departures from the landscape, and the implications for abolition. As Jimmy’s (hi)story illustrated, and as Chapters 3, 4, and 5 will demonstrate in detail, students’ repeated juxtapositions between FREE LA and the “regular schools” (including other alternative schools) they attended prior, emerged as a compass to analyze the myriad and seemingly mundane ways in and means through which schooling and carcerality are constitutively (re)produced, and thus the myriad scopes and scales of abolitionist departure.

In sum, my goal is to understand how the FREE LA space is made, through what means, and towards what possibilities for how the world might be otherwise. As an un/forgotten space, it is not just what FREE LA is doing that is important, but also how the space is envisioned and understood by FREE LA participants. In other words, I take equally seriously the “actual” processes and praxes that happen at FREE LA, and the articulated and embodied visions and

insights of the FREE LA community. Indeed, through a critical geographic frame, spaces do not exist without the people who make and remake them. And while I take all FREE LA participants' perceptions and reflections as critical (geographic texts), grounding this study most centrally are FREE LA students' experiences, insights, and articulated and embodied theories of what it means to live, move, and make space freely. To pursue these interests and inquiries, I employ critical ethnographic methodologies and a critical geographic method of *entanglements*.

Ethnographic Methodologies and Critical Geographic Methods

In the following and final sections of this chapter, I elaborate on the critical ethnographic and geographic methodologies and methods framing my exploration of FREE LA. I first briefly discuss the broad methodological traditions informing my ethnographic approach, using a core methodological concept, *observant participation* (Costa Vargas, 2008), to anchor this discussion. I then elaborate on how this critical ethnographic methodology works with and alongside a critical geographic method of entanglements.

Critical Ethnographic Methodologies: Observant Participation

As a series of entangled (hi)stories and conversations, this dissertation also unfolds in disciplinary dialogue with critical ethnographic methodologies. I am not attempting to engage thoroughly with the expansive (trans)disciplinary dialogues being developed by critical ethnographers. Rather, following a critical geographic method of entanglements, in this study I draw from a key text and related key concept—*observant participation* (Costa Vargas, 2008)—to frame my methodological and political commitments in relation to the ethnographic work.¹⁶

Critical Ethnographic Methodology: Observant Participation

¹⁶ This of course is also not to suggest that “observant participation” (or any other single concept) stands in for “critical ethnography” as a whole.

Over the course of preliminary and early fieldwork (about ten months), FREE LA graciously accepted me as an unpaid “student support” staff member. In August of 2021, as we transitioned from (COVID-19) distance learning to in-person learning, the FREE LA staff asked me to teach English. This radically shaped the project’s trajectory, and raised critical and ongoing questions around ethics, positionalities, obligations, and “the work” (see Part II of the prior chapter). As a (critical) critical ethnographic text, João Costa Vargas’ (2008) conceptualization of *observant participation* helped scaffold a framework to approach these questions, this study, and the ethnographic work more broadly.

In “Activist Scholarship: Limits and Possibilities in Times of Black Genocide,” Costa Vargas draws on his simultaneous training in anthropology, and activist organizing with two grassroots organizations in South Central LA (Coalition Against Police Abuse, and Community in Support of the Gang Truce), to conceptualize *observant participation* as a praxis of and “blueprint for ethnography that does not shy away from projecting explicit political involvement” (2008, p. 164). Departing from both participant observation, and ‘participatory’ research, *observant participation* refers to “active participation in [an] organized group, such that [ethnographic] observation becomes an appendage of the main activity” (p. 175). Drawing on Costa Vargas’ framework, and in line with various scholarships and knowledge traditions¹⁷ that have critiqued the notion and possibility of “scientific objectivity” (e.g., Collins, 1989; Grosfoguel, 2007; Mignolo, 2000; Prescod-Weinstein, 2020; Wynter, 2003), I make no attempt in my study to separate my two roles as educator and ethnographer, nor the ethnographic from the political.

¹⁷ To clarify, this paper does not aim to be in deep conversation with each of these scholarships and knowledge traditions; I reference them here to acknowledge the diverse dialogues surrounding questions of objectivity, methodology, and power.

At a broad level, this approach informed my praxis in each role in important ways. Rather than teaching with my teaching hat on, and then observing with my ethnographer hat on, I wore the two proverbial hats together, and this relationship itself became reciprocal. The nature of the questions I asked in my research, the knowledge traditions with which my study engages, and the praxis of listening deeply to students' (hi)stories in and beyond interviews, along with numerous other dimensions of the ethnographic process, radically shaped my understanding, approach, and pedagogy in the classroom. My research, then, shaped and deepened the relationships I was able to form with FREE LA students as an educator. At the same time, the trust I was able to build and insights I was able to gain as an educator shaped and deepened how the study unfolded, and in what directions.

In this way, observant participation is a methodological, necessarily political, and *relational* framework. Likewise, it is one that acknowledges and thinks with and through the inherent power dynamics involved in academic knowledge production. As Costa Vargas notes, "...scholars, especially those in the beginning of their career benefit from their involvement with grassroots organizations in ways glaringly disproportionate to what we can offer them" (p. 164-65). In my study, this recognition of the impossibility for truly horizontal or reciprocal relations in academic research, in fact, formed the basis of a relational/methodological praxis of accountability—to a set of obligations, political commitments, and relationships that exceed the bounds of the ethnographic work. Critical methodological decisions surrounding the ways I collect, analyze, and re-present ethnographic data were (and are) informed, in particular, by FREE LA students' shared histories of racialized surveillance, criminalization, and spatial domination in and beyond schools; and, more broadly, by the long and ongoing histories of

spying, surveillance, extraction, and exploitation that form(ed) the bedrock of academic research and the western academy.

For example, the phrases I used to introduce FREE LA students in the prior chapter—phrases such as ‘many’ or ‘most if not all of the students’ (see p. 12)—reflect an intentional decision not to track, chart, categorize, and quantify students and their stories as if they were scientific subjects or “territorialized objects (people and places as if they were things)” (Gilmore, 2022, p. 111). Likewise, I deliberately constructed my field notes in a way that prioritized privacy, beyond the technicalities of IRB-mandated ‘informed consent.’ I frequently made decisions not to document details or stories shared by students participating in the study—details and stories that fell within the boundaries of (IRB-approved) data collection—based on my awareness of the potential consequences, relationally or otherwise, of documenting the “wrong” thing. Put shortly, my obligations to FREE LA students and the FREE LA space vastly exceed my obligations to the “academic research;” this, through the lens of observant participation, *is* the ethnographic work.

In sum, I take the stance of observant participation because it aligns with the FREE LA space, students’ (hi)stories, and the scholarly/activist traditions with this study aims to be in conversation; and because it opens critical questions for and around my dual role as educator/ethnographer. As a broad methodological approach, observant participation shapes my use of specific ethnographic methods, and works with and alongside a critical geographic method of entanglements

Critical Geographic/Ethnographic Methods

Observant Participation

I conducted observant participation of FREE LA classroom, extracurricular and (YJC) movement-building activities in order to explore how FREE LA is constructed ideologically, epistemologically, pedagogically, and interpersonally; and the various ways and means through which it *departs* from the carceral-education landscape. At a broad level, observations were guided by my broad theoretical interests in abolitionist alternatives to schooling, carceral regimes, and the entanglements between the two; and by my second research question (RQ2). Iteratively, students' juxtapositions between FREE LA and their prior schools, as shared in interview and conversation, guided my observational focus on FREE LA (and FREE LA participants') praxes, visions, imaginaries, and ways of making place. Additionally, as I elaborate below, my observational focus, analytic approach, and general ethnographic engagement in and with the FREE LA space were guided by a critical geographic method of entanglements.

A Typical Day

For the first year of data collection (August 2020 to July 2021), including preliminary fieldwork, classes and other school activities were virtual due to the pandemic. During this time, as unofficial "student support" staff, I attended classes, staff meetings, and full-school orientations; offered input on curriculum and helped with grading (in particular, for the Humanities teacher at the time, Sir Bailey); and served as a mentor or resource for students generally. As mentioned, field work was structured by the nature of my engagement in "non-research" activities (Costa Vargas, 2008). Therefore, as we all moved in-person learning, and as I moved into my own classroom as English teacher, in August of 2021, I continued to attend other classroom spaces whenever possible, but the core focus of my observations shifted towards the

interactions, relationships, and (relevant) conversations that unfolded in my classroom—from the dual perspective of educator/ethnographer.

After our transition to in-person learning, I continued to attend various events and after school activities, such as student art exhibitions, field trips, and protests and actions, all of which were organized by FREE LA, YJC, or both. As my relationships with the space and the students deepened, I also began to participate in transformative justice circles (see Chapter 4), and other informal collective dialogue with FREE LA/YJC staff around support for students, issues and requests raised by students, the structure of the school and the reasons for that structure, among other related topics. Again, I approached these conversations as an educator, which radically shaped the insight I gained as an ethnographer. Particularly informative for my observations was Warrior Week: a two-week, full-school orientation period, held at the beginning of each

semester, where students are introduced to the mission and model of the school, including what it means and entails that FREE LA is grounded in abolition and TJ; and where FREE LA students and FREE LA/YJC staff engage in team building activities. Warrior Week thus offered a unique lens into FREE LA participants' own theorizations of and visions for the space. These extracurricular activities were a critical way I

centered my non-research obligations as English teacher, while also engaging deeply with numerous entangled dimensions and (hi)stories of the FREE LA space (body people and place).



Fig. 1.2 Warrior Week (Slide credit: Ms. Tracey, FREE LA TJ practitioner; Screenshot: Author)

During or following each day, I documented observations and personal reflections relevant to the above foci and research questions. In total, I conducted nearly 1,000 hours of fieldwork as an educator/ethnographer. As supplementary data, I also kept track of social artifacts I encountered and incorporated them into my observational field notes. This included (photos of) art and other creative projects used to decorate Chuco’s Justice Center, FREE LA/YJC social media posts, school flyers, and (in certain cases, if relevant and given consent) student assignments.

In sum, as a teacher, and later a tutor/mentor and substitute, observant participation meant that my observations followed the course of my engagements with the space, at the requests and needs of FREE LA students and staff, and according to my assigned and requested roles. In other words, rather than attending particular classes or events according to a preset plan, I observed wherever I was at, with my participation in “non-research” activities (Costa Vargas, 2008) taking precedence over my ‘fieldwork’ if and wherever the two conflicted. This could be considered a limitation in a certain sense: one might argue, for example, that a more systematic observation schedule (e.g., even time spent in each classroom), is more empirically accurate and rigorous. On the other hand, as the following chapters will reveal, becoming a part of the FREE LA space offered me a perspective, and enabled a depth of relationship with the students, that was and is invaluable—and not just ‘empirically.’ In this study, I am not only relationally experiencing, but methodologically observing, theoretically questioning, and analytically and experimentally (materially and metaphorically) provoking *entanglement*.

A Critical Geographic-Ethnographic Method of Entanglements.

As noted in the prior chapter, and as will be illustrated in depth in Chapter 2, both the (hi)stories of the FREE LA space (people and place), and the ways students and staff reflect on

their experiences at FREE LA, other schools, and in South LA more generally, invite me to trace the “seeable and unseeable” (McKittrick, 2006) entanglements between schooling and carceral regimes, across time, space, scale and (seemingly distant) subjects. Entanglements are what I am both looking for methodologically, and thinking through analytically, in conversations, field notes, and interviews—as illustrated through my engagement with Jimmy’s (hi)story in the introduction to this chapter. Entanglements, therefore, is both critical geographic method and a critical focus of inquiry.

Entanglements also maps onto a critical ethnographic methodology of observant participation in its critiques of, and intentional departures from, claims to academic “expertise.” As noted in the prior chapter, if entanglements invites tracing the connections across seemingly disconnected things, then as method it also invited me to explore seemingly disconnected literatures. Through a praxis of curiosity and creative experimentation, and as a critical geographic method of exploring the movement of peoples, places, and ideas across space, in the following chapters I pull from an array of scholarships, across an array of subjects, topics, disciplines, and theoretical traditions—without making claims to expertise. In doing so, I will continue to flesh out entanglements as a core conceptual and methodological framework in (this) critical geographic-ethnographic inquiry.

Education Histories

While participant observations (or observant participation) are a “staple” of ethnographic research, and are likewise pivotal in and to this study, I place equal emphasis on FREE LA students’ “education histories:” in-depth, open-ended narratives of students’ educational experiences from elementary to high school, across any spaces and subjects the students deem relevant. I conducted education histories like oral histories, which gather “personal recollections

of events, their causes, and their effects” from the perspective of the individual(s) experiencing them (Creswell, 1998, p. 49). In furtherance of my research questions, and in particular my interest in the deeper entanglements between schooling and carceral regimes, education histories aimed to capture a holistic illustration students’ experiences, and reflections on their experiences, in and being pushed (or pulled) out of traditional schooling, without restricting these experiences to any particular time, space, or event(s). And while there was only about ten minutes of space for these questions in the expansive ground that Jimmy covered in his education history, in general education histories also focused explicitly on students’ experiences at FREE LA, and their comparisons between FREE LA and the (often numerous) other schools they’d attended.

Over approximately two years, I gathered the education histories of 17 students. I did not “select” these students but rather repeatedly presented the option (in class and in conversation) to participate in the interviews, and allowed students to decide if and to what extent they wanted to share their (hi)stories (their histories, but also their stories). In a handful of cases, students disclosed certain details of their education (hi)stories in class discussions and/or conversations with me, and I more explicitly invited these students to expand on those details in interview. At least two students requested that I conduct a second follow-up interview, a request not unrelated to the financial compensation attached to these interviews, and therefore not unrelated to the structural conditions which all of the students navigated. While education histories are a primary source of data in this study—given, as mentioned above, my focus on student perspectives—informal conversations with all FREE LA students significantly bolstered education histories in answering my research questions. As also mentioned above, the findings that emerged in interview and conversation iteratively informed the focus of my ethnographic observations, and analysis of study data as a whole.

Finally, education histories inform the ways I re-present the ethnographic data and therefore the ways I write and (re)tell this story. While I repeatedly reminded students, in particular those in my English classes, about the study, in both taking field notes and writing the forthcoming chapters, I focus(ed) most explicitly on the insights, words, experiences, and (hi)stories of students I interviewed. My decision to do so was informed by the histories and critiques of ethnographic surveillance described above; and, relatedly, because I know—from my past experiences as a student and my current experiences as a teacher—that high schoolers have impeccably selective hearing. In other words, I was aware of the possibility that the information or questions I presented to students as an ethnographer could blend into (or go in one ear and out the other with) the information and questions I posed as a teacher. Focusing on the words and (hi)stories of students I interviewed was thus an additional methodological-relational decision that reflects the entangled political-ethnographic commitments and obligations of observant participation. However, in the following chapters, as with other work I've published (Goldman, 2023, 2024), I attempt to make these decisions in a way that reflects both the repeated sentiments, related insights, and shared histories across all students' perspectives (including those I did not interview); and the complexity and heterogeneity of people and the places they make.

Likewise rooted in an interest in the people who make and remake the FREE LA space, and in the praxes, perspectives, and socio-spatial processes through which they do so, I conducted semi-structured interviews with teachers and staff at FREE LA, and core organizers at YJC. These interviews meaningfully bolstered ethnographic observations and student interviews.

Semi-structured Teacher/Staff Interviews¹⁸

¹⁸ Generally, the interviews were structured to probe the second research question. I asked interviewees about their role in the Chuco's space; the nature of their engagement with students; their personal, ideological, and pedagogical approach to their role at

Over my two and a half years conducting fieldwork (and throughout my longer period as an educator) in the space, FREE LA staff has included: five core teachers (two of whom were employed for the full two and a half years, one of whom was employed for the first half of field work, two of whom were hired during the second half of fieldwork, and not including myself), two gardening teachers (one of whom, Zahra, was a student when I began); two peace builders (unarmed members of the South Central community trained in de-escalation), Dave and Charles; a lead TJ counselor and facilitator, Ms. Tracey; an academic counselor, Ms. Natalie, who handles administrative work, helping students enroll in classes, coordinating transportation and filling out work permits, along with numerous day-to-day responsibilities that ensure the school runs smoothly; a liaison between FREE LA and YJC, Lupita (also a FREE LA graduate); and various YJC organizers who engage with FREE LA during Warrior Week, Street University (an all-school Friday class focused on political education), and protests and organizing events; and two (rotating) MSW interns each year. In total, I interviewed five teachers, one (temporary) MSW intern, and three YJC organizers. As in the case with students, my informal conversations with all staff supplemented these interviews, and have deeply informed this project.

Analytical Strategy

I conducted all data analysis manually using a word-processing app called Scrivener, into which I transferred my compiled data set (field notes, interview transcripts, and artifact text) throughout data collection. Analysis of this dataset occurred in two general phases: data systemization and data thematization (Boellstorff, 2012). For feasibility and organizational

FREE LA; the organizational and interpersonal constraints they experience in fulfilling that role; how they see FREE LA as enabling that goal and/or as unique from other schools or institutions they have worked in; their visions of and for the school and YJC's broader movement; and how they envision and feel that FREE LA embodies abolitionist education and youth support. For YJC organizers, I also asked about the history of the Chuco's space, including its forced relocation and beautification (see Chapters 2 and 4); the history/genealogy of FREE LA, including their vision and purpose for forming the space as part of YJC's abolitionist movement; and how and why they see themselves, and FREE LA, creating an alternative to the school-prison nexus.

purposes, I analyzed a subset of all data collected between August 2020 and January 2023,¹⁹ focusing primarily on data collected between August 2021 and January 2023. This subset includes about 500 pages of field notes (including the collection of social artifacts and images), and about 300 pages of interview transcripts.

(Phase 1) Data Systemization. I began with a process of close, systematic reading of this subset of field notes, social artifacts, and interview transcripts, looking for preliminary topics, patterns, and relationships. I used Scrivener’s “highlight” and “comment” features to *tag* or *label* the data with high-level constructs, or broad categories. This initial step is called *open coding*, where the researcher reads across data to “identify and formulate any and all ideas, themes, or issues they suggest, no matter how varied and disparate” (Emerson et al. 2011, p. 172). However, the construction of preliminary categories was also loosely guided by my central research goals and questions, theoretical framing (abolitionist and critical geographic epistemologies), and relevant scholarship. By further sorting coded data into these broad categories, I iteratively refined or adjusted them. Using these higher-level categories, I created category folders into which I sorted relevant data, moving iteratively into *focused coding*. Through a “fine-grained, line-by-line analysis” (Emerson et al., 2011) of sorted data, I devised increasingly specific codes, to develop major topics and themes and identify central threads and juxtapositions within and across the broad categories. Identifying these preliminary threads leads me to the second phase.

(Phase 2) Thematizing the Data. From this fine-grained analysis, I moved into developing higher-level themes and conclusions. I systematically memo-ed data with “theoretical code memos” that identify, and iteratively refine, relationships, patterns, juxtapositions, and

¹⁹ This two and a half-year period also includes preliminary field work and data collection. Collection and analysis of preliminary data was pivotal in formulating and refining this study’s research questions and overall trajectory. However, preliminary data was not included in the subset analyzed in the dissertation’s final stages.

analytical threads within and across coded categories. In this phase, I organized coded data into folders with theoretical headings. In my study, the development of these higher-level themes is both grounded in the data (Charmaz, 2014) and informed by existing scholarship and theory, including the methodological-analytical implications of entanglements, and the conceptual and theoretical interests of *un/forgotten spaces*, the *carceral-education landscape*, and a broader critical geographic-ethnographic lens.

Conclusions and Continuations

Pulling from and weaving together just a few threads from a large and cross-disciplinary body of research on schools and prisons, this dissertation explores the numerous and complex entanglements between schooling and carceral regimes, as they are constitutively reproduced across an inherently uneven but ultimately alterable *carceral-education landscape*. By conceptually spatializing alternative education generally, and FREE LA in particular, as *un/forgotten spaces* operating slightly beyond both traditional schools and prisons, I explore {the possibilities for alternative forms of education, and socio-spatial organization, that exceed (even as they are absorbed into) these entanglements.

Roadmaps for the Landscape

This dissertation tells a story of multiple, entangled stories. Each chapter tells a story within this set of stories; in this way, each should be read as its own narrative, but also as one narrative enmeshed within a broader whole. As noted, while a critical geographic lens and related core conceptual frameworks anchor this dissertation's interests and approach as a whole, each chapter also draws on its own set of theoretical motivations, knowledge traditions, and scholarly works. This, as also mentioned, is a choice that follows a critical geographic method of entanglements. And while the connections between the forthcoming chapters are in part ongoing,

unfinished, and up to the reader's interpretation, briefly elaborating on the broad relationships between each chapter and the overarching story this dissertation tells, and thus between the chapters themselves, provides a useful roadmap to engage this dissertation.

While Chapters 3, 4, and 5 focus more explicitly on FREE LA's departures from the carceral-education landscape, and students' reflections on those departures, the purpose of Chapter 2 is to situate both FREE LA and the carceral-education landscape within a broader set of entangled (hi)stories. In situating FREE LA and its genealogy within numerous overlapping geographies—of Los Angeles, of spatial domination and reclamation, of memory and un/forgetting, and of modernity—Chapter 2 helps (re)spatialize the frame of inquiry, the terrain of struggle, and thus the scopes and scales of transformation necessary to exceed the school-prison link. In the specific ways I trace the threads in and from Zahra and Erica's (hi)stories with and of the rebel garden, this chapter further fleshes out and illustrates *entanglements* as critical geographic method and a critical focus of inquiry.

Chapters 3 and 4 then “zoom in” to the carceral-education landscape. If Chapter 2 tells a story of entangled (hi)stories, then Chapter 3 begins by telling new stories, or old stories in new ways. To visualize and expand on the concept of the *carceral-education landscape*, I begin the chapter with two vignettes that synthesize and partially imagine students' education (hi)stories. By telling a story of the carceral-education landscape from above and below, Chapter 3 contends with the possibilities for educational liberation beyond “school.”

In theorizing the possibilities for abolitionist education and unconditional care beyond the carceral-education landscape, Chapter 4 focuses in greatest detail on the ways and means through which the FREE LA space is made (and remade). This chapter demonstrates—through students' reflections, and my “observant participation” (Costa Vargas, 2008) in and with the space—how

FREE LA's foundations in abolition and transformative justice are mobilized in the everyday, in ways that allow *unconditional care* to become not a singular alternative to discipline, but rather a spatial condition. As such, this chapter deepens my ongoing discussions of scope and scale, by analyzing abolitionist education as an ongoing praxis and unfinished process of unlearning carceral terms of relationality, and forging alternative forms of social organization.

As mentioned in this dissertation's Introduction, Chapters 3 and 4 each analyze how US schooling reconfigures a perpetually uneven carceral-education landscape, and performs critical and indispensable work for carceral regimes, by repeatedly partitioning young people of color into gendered-racial hierarchies of humanness. Pulling together numerous threads from the prior chapters, and returning to the seeds planted in Chapter 2, Chapter 5 wraps up this dissertation by more fully fleshing out the "seeable and unseeable" (McKittrick, 2006) entanglements between schooling, carceral regimes, and modernity; and the possibilities for un/forgotten spaces that exceed them.

Together, these chapters tell a story of the numerous and entangled roots of the school-prison link, or carceral-education landscape, and of the multi-scalar roots and routes of transformation that people in un/forgotten spaces forge, reclaim, re-member, and never relinquished in the first place.

§

CHAPTER 2

To Split an Atom:
Schooling, Carcerality, and Modernity

*The message keeps coming
In so many ways
That you have to get to the root
And I realize each time it does
That I've spent so many of my days
Chasing fallen fruit
Trying to pick it up in bundles
Or catch it before it hits the ground
Carving away with raw fingers at the
Bruises and the scars and
Hanging the sweet parts back on the branches
Hoping they'll bloom from phantom limbs
Steady hands, a selfless heart,
And a life that doesn't feel so hard to live
But every hand with a green thumb knows
That by the time you've gathered all your thoughts and think
You've got your problems in a row
The house you've built with phantom limbs
Will have no sweetness left to sow
And the life you've tried so hard to
Make easy
And all the days you spent gathering
Fallen fruit
Turns out just to be a life and so many
Days spent running
From the work it takes
To heal a rotten root*

Returning to the Rebel Garden: Ruckus Roots and Red Leaves

It was the second Monday of April 2022, nearly eight months after being hired as FREE LA's English teacher, before my schedule finally allowed me to attend a rebel garden class for more than just a few minutes. The air that Monday was cool, but the sun was strong: too strong to feel like spring, but not quite strong enough yet to feel like summer. I arrived in the middle of a lesson being led by an educator from Ruckus Roots, an LA-based art and environmental organization that Erica and Zahra brought in to help facilitate.

The class was gathered in an amorphous circle around the three handmade wooden beds filled with lettuce, strawberries, squash, and other produce. Most of the students stood directly under the ledge of the massive concrete building, scattered in between the three tall water towers with vines that dangle like feet still too young to touch the ground; others stood slightly beyond the ledge, seeking shady relief in the shadows it cast in supernatural shapes across the asphalt. As the lesson continued, thin veils of sweat formed over lips and created a dewy sheen on concentrated foreheads, including my own.

The Ruckus Roots educator was wrapping up his discussion of different irrigation systems the students might want to experiment with to help the garden grow, and shifting to the importance of lady bugs. He pulled out what looked like a ramen soup container, and opened it to reveal a landscape of tiny red dots that appeared solid, yet moving at the same time—like the oscillating vibration of (quantum) particles. On their own, the little rosy creatures might not cause a second glance; but together they formed a force that, apparently, none of the students wanted to reckon with.

All at once, the boys in the circle backed up from the ladybug-filled container in a movement so synchronized it could have passed as the opening to a choreographed dance. *Oh,*

hell naw was the collective rebuttal. Melina, a close friend of Jimmy and Kimora's, let out more of a shriek, causing Jimmy to cock his whole head sideways in an exaggerated movement that matched his "Damn, Melina! Right in my ear."

Nearly doubled over laughing, I gratefully took the opportunity to give the students, especially the boys, a hard time. "All the things you all say you're not scared of, and you can't handle some little lady bugs!"

"Right!" Zahra added, before gently inviting us back to the lesson. "It's just a lady bug." She welcomed one of the rosy creatures onto her index finger, and another two made a mad escape from the container, clinging onto the sleeve of her sweater.

"All you gotta do is take the container and give it a little shake over the plants." The Ruckus Roots instructor demonstrated, and five lady bugs traveled up his arm as the rest scattered like tiny red pepper flakes over the lettuce leaves. "Who wants to give it a try?"

Melina backed away further, using Jimmy and another student, her brother, as a shield.

As the students' initial reaction subsided into curiosity, Jimmy and some others slowly, one by one, gave it a try. A general calm seemed washed over the circle; even those who wouldn't hold the lady bugs in their hands peered on, fascinated by the process of seasoning these growing leaves with tiny drops of red. After his turn, Jimmy dipped his finger into the container and let one of the lady bugs crawl on. His rhythm hovered somewhere between silent and still: a seeming break in his impressively consistent display of satire, sarcasm, and wit.

With that same stillness, he extended his arm out to Melina and the calm, again, seemed to wash over her involuntarily. That is, until she actually made contact with the bug—at which point she let out another shriek and pulled her hand back, initiating the insect's quick descent onto Jimmy's shoe.

“C’mon, Melina!” Rather than annoyance or impatience, Jimmy’s encouragement seemed genuine and leveled, as if he was fully invested in her sharing this experience with him. With quiet focused stillness, he quickly scooped the bug back up, placing it—this time successfully—in Melina’s palm. Later on, as the lesson dwindled into conversations scattered, like shadows, across the asphalt of the gate-enclosed parking lot, Jimmy came to share the same ladybug with me.

§

This dissertation began with, has now returned to, and will ultimately conclude with the rebel garden. This is for a few reasons, some of which only became conscious to me in hindsight. In many ways, both materially and metaphorically, the rebel garden is a root: a space of grounding, entanglement, and growth; and a critical (geographic) dimension of FREE LA’s reclamation and transformation of carceral space. Zahra and Erica, FREE LA’s two rebel garden teachers, explained this vision of and for spatial reclamation in a presentation to other schools in the district:

The location of the garden is intentional. The rebel garden is in that location because it was the point of entry of where the buses would drop off youth that were going to be sentenced to life in a cell through the juvenile court. *We wanted to counteract that trauma with a space of growth and healing. Taking back what is ours.* Changing the narrative of what used to be into what could be (emphasis added).



Fig. 2.1 Rebel Roots (YJC)

As these words suggest, the rebel garden marks a point of dis/continuity: an enmeshment between spatial displacement and reclamation that situates it, and FREE LA, in particular ways within the carceral-education landscape. Both the praxes through which Zahra, Erica, and the FREE

LA students care for and learn from the rebel garden, and the way those praxes and the garden itself are conceptualized by Zahra and Erica, powerfully demonstrate the ways transforming (carceral) space is inherently a matter of transforming (carceral) relationships. Rereading the story above through the lens of Zahra and Erica's insights, for example, students' initial uneasiness to touch the lady bugs—while innocent and admittedly amusing—reflects a deeper set of histories, relationalities, and socio-spatial processes. In the aforementioned district-wide presentation, Zahra spoke to these histories as she explained the purpose and significance of the rebel garden, nearly a year before the Ruckus Roots lesson recounted above:

We as humans don't know the importance of natural healing—not going in a medicine cabinet, a hospital, a pharmacy, but actual herbs, fruits and vegetables. *We don't recognize the toxins in everyday things that we use because we are so out of touch with our roots.* The proper medicine is in the forests that grow on trees and in the ground, the soil you're scared to touch because it has bugs in it. But that same soil is what kills cancers from the air; we are not taught that house plants are very important in homes because the amount of toxins that are present there. Did you know that buying new things could be killing you? The paint on your walls, new furniture, and adhesives contain a toxic air pollutant found at its highest levels in indoor air, named benzene, which can lead to cancer and anemia. *And that's just the beginning of what's going on around us that we are blind to* (emphasis added).

Offering a retrospective blueprint, Zahra's words help situate the students' engagement with the lady bugs (and the rebel garden itself) within a complex and dynamic landscape, and within entangled, ongoing, and unfinished processes of spatial domination. In just this one paragraph, for example, we might trace entangled histories of ecocide and deforestation, pharmaceutical and consumer capitalism, the enclosure of green space and dumping of toxic waste in Black and brown places, and the carving away of knowledge and knowledges that exceed modernity's singular, linear death-drive forward—like how house plants help heal cancer and how medicine grows from soil

we're too scared to touch. Also from the lens of these entangled histories, Jimmy's (re)connection with the lady bug, and his careful and concentrated invitation to Melina to do the same, becomes a small snapshot of a broader (hi)story of reclaiming space, transforming relationships, and remembering roots.

And while I opened with a story visualizing students' engagement with the visions and praxes of the rebel garden, it is these visions and praxes themselves—specifically, as they are conceptualized by Zahra and Erica—that are my primary points of interest and departure in this chapter. Like Erica's explanation of the “idea” with which the rebel garden began (see Introduction), Zahra's reflections on what she understands as a collective fear to touch the soil—a disconnect from “our roots”—illustrates a particular *way* of telling the (hi)story of the garden that entangles it, and FREE LA, with seemingly disconnected (hi)stories across time and space. Throughout our hour-long interview, both Zahra and Erica repeatedly storied rebel garden in this way.

As such, the rebel garden again provides a fruitful foundation to explore the multiple and multi-scalar roots of the carceral-education landscape, and to tease out and think through some of the less visible, yet no less visceral, entanglements between schooling and carceral regimes. By tracing the threads that emerge from how the garden is conceptualized, envisioned, and cultivated by Erica and Zahra, I theorize both FREE LA and the carceral-education landscape as enmeshed within a broader set of histories and ongoing processes of spatial domination, racial displacement, and carceral State violence, the effects (and affects) of which are haunting, lingering, and *radioactive* in nature—like cancers from the air, and toxins in the walls of pastel homes, and other everyday things that could be killing us, even and especially when we can't see them. These processes and the lingering ghosts they leave entail and enact overlapping forms of physical, physiological, and ontological violence that work to displace, dis-member, and forget quantumly entangled relationships—between self and other,

palm and soil, people and place, and how the world is and could be—across time, space, and (sub)atomic scales.

Of course, landscapes of domination are neither inevitable nor inalterable (McKittrick, 2006; King, 2019), and there are always (also) histories, socio-spatial praxes, and geographic possibilities that people in un/forgotten places refuse to forget. Guided by Zahra and Erica’s insights, my ultimate interest is in how the rebel garden demonstrates—and is envisioned and utilized as—an ongoing praxis of, and imaginative blueprint for, abolitionist education in and beyond the carceral-education landscape. Specifically, as the lady bug lesson illustrates, and as I discuss in this chapter’s conclusion, Zahra and Erica’s present praxes and future visions for the garden prefigure abolitionist education/transformation as an experimental and inherently uncertain process of un-severing and re-membering relationships—all the way down to the root(s).

While this chapter develops its own claims, it also functions to lay a foundation for the forthcoming chapters, and does so in a few ways. First, the analysis and arguments I develop here help to situate FREE LA, its (hi)story, and this story, within a dynamic terrain of inquiry and expansive terrain of struggle. In situating both FREE LA and the carceral-education landscape within a broader set of histories, I plant the seeds for an ongoing exploration of schools and prisons that tends to their unlikely entanglements across time, space, and subject; and thus for a vision of abolitionist transformation that addresses multiple entangled roots through multiple entangled routes. Second, and in the specific ways I do so, this chapter helps to further flesh out and visualize a critical geographic method of entanglements.

In sowing a foundation for my overarching interest in the deeper entanglements between schooling and carceral regimes, this chapter situates each within an analysis of modernity. I

advance the argument that understanding the entanglements between schooling and carcerality requires understanding the entanglements between schooling and modernity—or, in other words, that these set of entanglements are themselves inseparably entangled. Rather than a core theoretical concept (or “novel” argument), however, I understand modernity as the structural and lived context within which this story takes place, and therefore as critical to a critical geographic exploration of the carceral-education landscape. Thus, before elaborating on the interests and inquiries shaping this chapter, in the following section I briefly discuss what modernity is and does, in (and as) the context of this story.

To do so, I pull from various texts that have informed or transformed my understanding of modernity generally, and its relevance to the school-prison link specifically. There is an expansive body of scholarship and transdisciplinary community of scholars developing rigorous theorizations, analyses, and critiques of modernity (or modernity/coloniality) (e.g., Quijano, 2000; Mignolo, 2007, 2018; Maldonado-Torres, 2007, 2008; Lugones, 2007, 2010). In this chapter, I am neither aiming to be in thorough conversation with these scholars and scholarships, nor claiming to be an “expert” on modernity. Rather, following a method of entanglements, I pull at and think with just a small collection of threads within this broader tapestry of conversation. From this discussion of modernity, which I expand in Part II, I transition into a separate but entangled set of literatures and (hi)stories that shape my exploration of the rebel garden in the sections to come.

The Carceral Landscape(s) of Modernity

In simplest terms, modernity is our present world order. It is a global social world and world-making project inaugurated and upheld through the entangled forces of colonialism, imperialism, and racial capitalism (Lugones, 2007, 2010; Machado de Oliveira, 2021; Maynard

& Simpson, 2022; Walia, 2013), and enforced through continuously shifting regimes of racial-sexual (and) carceral-State violence (McKittrick, 2006; Haley, 2016). Despite its inherent materiality, however, modernity is—above all—a narrative. It is a singular and teleological narrative, a “worlding story,” of the way the world was, is and must be; but one which has been brutally imposed as universal truth (Machado de Oliveira, 2021, p. 16; Dussel, 2000; Wynter, 2003). Aníbal Quijano (2000) describes the emergence of modernity in the following way:

During the same period as European colonial domination was consolidating itself, the cultural complex known as European modernity/rationality was being constituted. The intersubjective universe produced by the entire Eurocentered capitalist colonial power was elaborated and formalized by the Europeans and established in the world as an exclusively European product and as a universal paradigm of knowledge and of the relation between humanity and the rest of the world (p.171-72).

Thus, modernity refers to the centuries-long and ongoing project through which european, and subsequently western,²⁰ empires and elites have imposed their systems of knowledge and knowing, modes of political and economic organization, and regimes of social classification and human differentiation onto the entire world. And as scholars working across knowledge traditions have detailed, modernity is driven by and requires for its existence constant forward/upward movement—in the form of unfettered capital accumulation through human and extra-human exploitation—and in the name of so-called “progress” and civilization (Machado de

²⁰ European colonization of the americas in 1492 marks an immense historical rupture in the “modern/colonial world order” (Mignolo 2015), entangling 15th/16th century eurocentric domination to contemporary western hegemony and US imperialism. Hodges and Abu Shanab (1971) provide some useful clarity on this relationship: “From the turn of the [20th] century to the end of World War II, U.S. military actions objectively contributed to breaking up the old-style imperialism based on territorial annexations and overseas possessions. By the [19]60’s, however, an about-face had occurred with the U.S. having replaced the British, French, and Dutch presence throughout much of the underdeveloped world, if not by means of military annexations, then through economic enclaves or subsidiaries of U.S. corporations and other direct and indirect forms of economic and political dependency” (p. 8). It is important to note that while the specific configurations of power (or imperial powers) within the global landscape of racial capitalist modernity may have shifted, the singular narrative—the “paradigm of knowledge” and “intersubjective universe” that inaugurated modernity through the european colonial project—remains the epistemological, ideological, socio-spatial bedrock of our modern world order.

Oliveira, 2021; Maynard & Simpson, 2022; Rodríguez, 2021). This forward/upward movement is “propelled” by the “colonial desires to ‘discover,’ to conquer, occupy, own, rule, and control” (Machado de Oliveira, 2021, p. 19). In this way, modernity’s ongoing (and therefore unfinished) narrative plays out geographically, through likewise ongoing histories and overlapping forms of spatial domination—such as those that converged in the “idea” with which the rebel garden began.

Like all stories and knowledge systems, like all things that are not really things but rather sets of relationships, modernity moves across scale. The localized geographic manifestations of this death-drive forward (Maynard & Simpson, 2022) are multiple and multifaceted, and include but are not limited to the gentrification, development, and ‘urban revitalization’ projects that displaced FREE LA and the Chuco’s community from their original Inglewood home, so the city could build another parking garage; the pipelines, paint, pills and other poisons placed deliberately and systematically in Black and brown spaces, so that a handful of people can hoard lethal amounts of wealth; and the continuously renewed policies, practices, political agendas, and task forces aimed not only to criminalize and exclude, but increasingly to fix, save, or “improve” Black and brown people and the places they live or make space or call home—places like alternative schools, or “schools in the hood,” or Watts, South Central, Compton, Inglewood. In these ways and others, racial capitalist modernity is made and remade through material and discursive regimes of human differentiation, which “[organize] bodies, time, knowledge, relationships, labor, and space according to economic parameters” (Machado de Oliveira, 2021, p. 19).

US/western schooling plays a complex and indispensable role in this inherently uneven landscape. In particular, formal schooling—which, recalling Jimmy’s insights from the prior

chapter, is not synonymous with *learning*—is the primary portal to forward/upward social mobility in modernity, and thus to the resources, relationships, and access to social space we all should have unconditionally, simply because we are human (see also Watson, 2022; Stovall, 2018). As Emani, another FREE LA student—with whom I was lucky to form a friendship, during and beyond the course of this project—explained in her education history:

School is not—I don't know what the word is. It's not *human*. It's like a prison system...It's like they want us to hold our mindset in a box. And that's what they're doing. They imprison the mind. That's what it is...I feel like they just brainwash us. I told my mom, like 'mom, I don't need *school* to *be* something.' She'll go crazy, because she's brainwashed to believe that school is everything. You're nothing without school, you're nothing without your degree, you're nothing without graduating, you're nothing without, you know, all these certificates.

Emani's profoundly perceptive reflections begin to expose those less visible but no less visceral entanglements between “school,” prison, and the broader carceral landscapes of modernity. Specifically, as Emani notes and as Chapter 5 explores in detail, US schooling functions not only to punish and push-out racialized youth, nor simply to prepare young people for a capitalist economy (though these are inherently part of the story), but at a deeper level, and as a deeper root, to tell and retell—and therefore remake and *make real*—modernity's singular, linear narrative of who counts as human: of who is something and who is nothing and who is “naturally and perpetually condemned” (McKittrick, 2015, p. 5). Like Zahra and Erica's explanations of the rebel garden's purpose and praxes, Emani's reflections on the psychic and psychological dimensions of school and/as prison open critical (geographic) questions about the “seeable and unseeable” (McKittrick, 2006) roots of the carceral-educational landscape in, and as inherently entangled with, racial capitalist modernity. Like toxins lingering in homes and in the

air and in all these new things we buy that might be killing us, modernity's singular narrative seeps into the brain—moves through the school to “imprison the mind”—conditioning what we see as natural, which spaces (both people and places) we see as worthy of life.

As a “worlding story,” then, modernity also conditions what or who we define as social problems, and where we look (or not) for solutions. Indeed, if anti-carceral transformation and spatial reclamation are, as Erica and Zahra note, a matter of reclaiming narrative, then “all of this only raises the stakes for asking what else is going on—not in some protected enclave, but rather everywhere, both inside and out” (Tsing 2015, p. 61, emphasis added). This is the entanglement: between spaces of trauma, growth and healing; between what used to be and what could be; and between seemingly inevitable impenetrable systems, and the worlds that people in un/forgotten spaces carve out in and beyond the cracks in the concrete.

Unlikely Entanglements: Rebel Gardens and Radioactive Roots

It is these sorts of less visible but hardly less visceral entanglements—between schooling, carcerality, modernity, and the forms of social-spatial organization that might exceed them—that Zahra and Erica's recollections and reflections on the rebel garden invited me to explore. As Zahra's explanation of our “disconnect from our roots” illustrates, throughout their hour-long interview Zahra and Erica wove together overlapping histories of spatial domination, racial displacement, and carceral violence—across seemingly disparate spaces and struggles, and across geographic, epistemic, and *physiological* scales. Tracing (just some of) the threads that emerged from these varied histories, and curious about the unlikely and un-visible connections between them, I was brought back to my thinking around quantum entanglements, and in turn came across public and academic scholarship on nuclear colonialism (Churchill & LaDuke, 1986; Barad, 2017; Hibakusha Worldwide, 2021). My non-expert and deliberately experimental

dive into this literature raised generative questions, rather than concrete answers, around schooling, carcerality, and modernity—and therefore offered a critical (geographic) framework to tell new stories, or old stories in new ways.

Before elaborating on these insights and my engagement with them in this chapter, a few clarifying remarks are warranted. First, like my engagement with “modernity” above (and later in Part II), I am neither claiming expertise about nuclear colonialism, nor attempting to engage with the diverse knowledge traditions employed, and rich scholarly dialogues being developed within (de)colonial studies more broadly. I am also not suggesting that histories tied to particular peoples and places can simply be transported elsewhere as a convenient metaphorical or theoretical frame; nor that focusing on “land” necessarily and automatically means focus on “Indigenous” (a colonial ideology that is deeply embedded in both conventional and so-called critical western epistemologies). Rather, my engagement with nuclear colonialism and related topics in this chapter reflects a method of tracing entanglements, and an attempt to think through existing spatial and temporal relationships from an alternative angle. My interest is in being curious and asking questions about the (hi)stories and possibilities—both horrifying and magnificent—threaded through landscapes and “going on around us,” even and especially when we can’t see them.

Nuclear Colonialism: Blood at the Root

Nuclear colonialism is neither an abstract nor generalizable phenomenon. In a 1986 article, Anishinaabe scholar Winona LaDuke and American scholar Ward Churchill introduced the term *radioactive* or *nuclear colonialism* to capture, instead, a very specific (re)iteration of modernity’s forward-moving human-making projects: the systematic expropriation, plundering, and poisoning of Indigenous lands, and therefore Indigenous peoples and knowledges, to

maintain and expand the nuclear fuel and energy industry—“from uranium mining and refining to nuclear power and weapons production and weapons testing, ending with the [dumping of] resulting nuclear waste that remains dangerous for millennia” (Runyan, 2018, p. 25; Endres, 2009; Churchill & LaDuke, 1986). In the US, for example, over 500²¹ abandoned uranium mines are located on Navajo lands (US Environmental Protection Agency, 2023), resulting in the contamination of an estimated 85% of Navajo homes (Calvert, 2021). Seventy percent of uranium deposits are located on First Nations traditional lands worldwide (Graetz, 2015), with percentages much higher in settler colonial states such as the US, Canada, and Australia. More broadly, toxic nuclear waste has been systematically and deliberately dumped in Indigenous communities for centuries (Hibakusha Worldwide, 2021; Johnston, 2007; Jacobs, 2013; Hurley, 2022). The detonation of atomic bombs and other processes involved in nuclear weapons production—namely, US empire’s barbaric use of human guinea pigs to test the effects of radioactivity—have likewise systematically desecrated Indigenous ecologies. Globally, nuclear colonialism wreaks a specifically gendered/sexual form of (reproductive) violence, perpetrated largely at the hands of an “*atomic brotherhood*”—corporate, governmental and academic men in North America who developed an almost messianic faith in nuclear power, as the heir apparent to fossil fuels,” and as a particularly cruel and profoundly destructive means of accumulating profit (Runyan, 2018, p. 28, emphasis added).

In my non-expert reading, it is the specificity of nuclear colonialism that raises questions for and about a broader set of (hi)stories. Nuclear colonialism exposes the core logics, locomotion, and brutality of modernity, and the extent to which empires and global elites will go to hoard lethal magnitudes of power, wealth, and so-called progress: poisoning waterways and

²¹ Other estimates suggest over 1000 abandoned uranium mines are located on Navajo land (e.g., Brugge & Goble, 2002).

generations of people with them, plastering the shadows of children onto walls and sidewalks, picking up, changing a name, and doing the same thing all over. Nuclear colonialism unearths the constitutive relationship between the discursive/epistemic violences of modernity, which spatialize and story certain places and the people who live in them as un-geographic, uninhabited waste-lands (Salih & Corry, 2021; McKittrick, 2006; 2011); and the physical/physiological violences of modernity, which leave those places uninhabitable by decimating not only life now, but the possibility for life in the future (Barad, 2019).

In capturing a particular and peculiar level of brutality—a form of slow silent spatial domination that carves death into the bones so that the body begins to kill itself; that penetrates death deep into the body of the earth, into the fascia connecting mushrooms with trees, into the DNA of the soil, the coconuts, the livestock, the jellyfish, the womb—nuclear colonialism captures a broader and entangled set of (hi)stories. It exemplifies, in its specificity, the death-driven human-making movement of modernity: endless land accumulation through dispossession and displacement, through the dis-membering of communities, the tearing of children from the arms of mothers, the severing of peoples from the places they call home—all in the name of profit, Progress, pipelines, and parking garages. Karen Barad, a quantum physicist and feminist theorist—to whom my experimental dive into quantum entanglements led me, and whose work in turn has deepened my (non-expert) understanding of quantum entanglements—writes that the specificity of nuclear colonialism is what it does to time:

[T]he temporality of radioactive colonialism is not of a past that is passed, or even decays with time, but rather, an *ongoingness that is present*; and at the same time, as it were, the particularity of its nuclear nature is such that it has already colonized the future as well, making evident that nuclearity in its specificity radically scrambles, if not disassembles, the imperialist universalizing sequentiality of past-present-future (Barad, 2019, p. 525, emphasis added)

Rather than claiming or aiming to be an expert on nuclear colonialism (or colonialism more broadly), it is my engagement with Zahra and Erica’s reflections on the rebel garden that led me—through a critical geographic method of entanglements—to literatures and insights like those discussed above; and that, in turn, invited me to consider the complex histories of nuclear colonialism, and their material and metaphorical entanglements with and across the carceral-education landscape. As reflected in Barad’s (2019) words above, I experiment with nuclear colonialism in this chapter as a frame of analysis that disrupts linear analyses of time, place, and progress in explorations of the school-prison link, or any other social phenomenon. Thinking through the material, metaphorical, and analytical relevance of nuclear colonialism invites a way of thinking through and about social problems that focuses on the unseeable, un/forgotten, and “seemingly un-geographic” (McKittrick, 2006) or uninhabitable; one that scrambles time and names ghosts that linger long after the initial violence/event has occurs; and one that, in my non-expert and intentionally experimental reading, exposes with haunting un/certainty the ways in which we are all physiologically and ontologically entangled with the atomic apocalypse that is modernity, albeit in terribly, deliberately asymmetric ways (Maynard & Simpson, 2022).

Through a critical geographic method of entanglements, and evading claims to expertise, employing nuclear colonialism as an experimental analytic frame provides a lens to trace the “seeable and unseeable connections” (McKittrick, 2006) between seemingly disparate times, spaces, peoples, and struggles—connections threaded through and across cellular, molecular, physical, and metaphysical scales; connections with half-lives that exceed the initial act/event of violence; connections that erode pipelines and pathways and other one-way streets. The radioactive nature of nuclear colonialism, in particular, foregrounds the need to tell and listen to stories in particular ways: for ghosts, for toxins lying dormant in individual and collective

bodies, for traces of the past already fused to the future, and for the haunting lingering effects/affects of an ongoing and unfinished human-making project—which is also to say, of a social world that is subject to revision. Through this experimental analytic lens of nuclear colonialism, in the following sections I use Zahra and Erica’s insights as invitations and points of departure to take detours across time and space—not always in order, necessarily, to reach a singular definitive “finding” or conclusion, but rather to weave an ongoing/unfinished story of the many (hi)stories that converge the deeper one plunges beneath the surface.

Tracing entangled (hi)stories in this way is an “analytical choice” (Barad, 2017; 2019) that reflects a broader method—or methodological praxis—of curiosity. In her study of matsutake mushrooms, one I also came across while tracing threads from Zahra and Erica’s interview, Anna Tsing (2015) describes her own method of curiosity as one that “follows... multiple temporalities, revitalizing description and imagination;” this sort of curiosity loosens the rigid empiricism—from which there emerge policy-driven frameworks and progress-driven solutions—that stifles “our ability to notice the divergent, layered, and conjoined projects that make up worlds” (p. 21-22). It is only through tracing those layered worlds that we might begin to tend to the deepest roots, the most fundamental linkages between seemingly dissimilar things: like atoms and abolition, or schools and prisons. Likewise, it is in tracing such entanglements that we might unearth a different set of possibilities. Rather than static descriptors and causal links, concrete inputs or certain outcomes, a methodological praxis of curiosity—and method of (tracing) entanglements—entails making “a rush of troubled stories...part of our knowledge practices” (Tsing, 2015, p. 34). As Tsing writes: “it is in *listening to that cacophony of troubled stories* that we might encounter our best hopes” for worlds otherwise (ibid, emphasis added).

In this chapter, I analyze and build from the ways Zahra and Erica discursively locate the inception and significance of the rebel garden within “a rush of troubled (hi)stories,” using an experimental analytic lens of nuclear colonialism to trace some of the less visible but no less visceral connections between schooling, carcerality, and modernity. In Part I, I illustrate and experiment with a praxis of tracing entangled (hi)stories and ongoing processes of spatial domination, racial displacement, and carceral State violence across time and space in ways that don’t always result in concrete answers or certain conclusions. In Part II, I plunge beneath the surface of the carceral-education landscape to tend to the deepest root of these entangled histories and ongoing processes, and thus a fundamental link between schooling, carceral regimes, and modernity: a form of spatial domination waged at the realm of being (Machado de Oliveira, 2021). *Destruction at an atomic scale.*

Finally, to conclude I turn briefly to the ways Zahra and Erica’s conceptualization of the garden’s vision and praxis prefigures the uncertain, experimental, and ongoing/unfinished work of abolitionist education and anti-carceral transformation. This conclusion is a seed to which I return in the final chapter of this dissertation.

§

A Rush of Troubled (Hi)stories

By the time Zahra, Erica and I sat in my classroom for the rebel garden interview, the oddly shaped rectangle had been adorned with a bright blue and instantly beloved bean bag chair, a pull-out futon I got at Bob’s Furniture, and an unfinished/ongoing wall mural of an Aztec woman being painted by one of my students. As Zahra plopped down on the beanbag chair, Erica and I sat across from each other at one of the long student tables: her with a Tupperware container full of home-cooked food, and me with a chicken and bean burrito from Trader Joe’s.

Surrounded by desks always just shy of appropriate arrangement, and after swallowing a far too ambitious bite of burrito, I asked Zahra the same question I had asked Erica: “how did the idea for the garden begin?”

Building organically from Erica’s (hi)story of shared histories of displacement (see Introduction Part I), Zahra propped herself up on her elbows in the beanbag chair, and entangled the personal and collective through the memory of Mr. V: once a deeply beloved teacher, and now an intensely present spirit²² at FREE LA.

So my history was being Mr. V’s student, and having gardening as a class. We were learning how to grow these different things. He would come, like every day we come to school, or every other day, he would have some weird fruit we ain’t never seen, some weird vegetables we ain’t never seen, and literally he would just give us an allergy test like, you know, “write it down,” you feel me? And if it was nothin’ then we were trying some weird, exotic looking...just *stuff*. We were like, “Where did you get this from!?! Because they do not have this in the grocery store! Where did you *get* that from?”

Zahra paused for a moment, and the awe in her voice now as she remembered the curiosity in her voice then just sort of lingered there, settling over the half-finished mural and unevenly arranged chairs and brown paper wrapping from Trader Joe’s. A bit more soberly, she continued:

And then from there, Mr. V passed away over quarantine. And I didn’t know about Erica, I didn’t know about—we weren’t connected at the time, so I didn’t know that there was some other people taking care of the garden besides Mr. V putting *into* the garden. I wasn’t aware of that at the time, so my whole mindset was: I don’t want to let the garden, you know, go to waste. I don’t want the students not to learn what I’d been learning because *I* wanted to learn

²² Throughout my time as a teacher at FREE LA, Mr. V’s memory was constantly re-enlivened—by everyone, but by the students in particular. Though I met Mr. V a handful of times before I began working at Chuco’s, I learned far more about him after his transition. The students’ living collective memory of Mr. V—their repeated re-membering of the ways their relationships with him transformed their relationships with others, with themselves, with education, and with the Chuco’s space—radically informed and transformed my praxis as an educator and, undoubtedly, my ability to form my own relationships with the students.

about the garden, and I *liked* learning about the garden...A couple of months after [Mr. V] had passed, I got the call basically saying that I could work at Chuco's, and so that was one of my main priorities: I had to work in the garden. I feel like growing stuff yourself, it really opens your eyes to where, when you go in a grocery store you be like, "This do not look like this if I was to grow it myself, it do not look like that when it grow out the ground." It's just—it really, it's a real eye opener, right? And then, health issues, like people have diabetes, people have high blood pressure, all this *stuff*—and there's herbs that can help. I was just teaching my kids about that today: there's herbs that knock down the symptoms, or help you, you know, get through it and stuff! Rather than going over the counter with pills and pills and pills, you could be eating sage. Sage is for asthma—I been having asthma all my life and I'm just now learning that at 19 years old, I coulda been eatin' sage all my life! Right? And so it's just, you know, stuff like that, that the community needs to know.

Despite the chaos unfolding right outside the door (it was lunchtime, and the hallway connecting my room to the lobby was the impromptu cafeteria of choice), a calm had begun to settle in around us, joining the awe in Zahra's voice and creating a feeling like it wasn't just us, like it is never *just us*, sitting there in that space. Surely not having yet processed the complexity of Zahra's response, I responded not eloquently, but with the truth, nonetheless.

"That's dope."

Readjusting my body to face Erica, I stumbled over a few first drafts of my sentence before arriving finally at the question: "Your home was displaced, Chuco's was displaced. So do you see, like, building the garden here in a place that used to be a detention center as like—does that have a bigger meaning to you?"

In the time it took me to find my wording, Erica was already nodding, already knowing, already ready. Her voice molded to the shape of a barely visible smile as she shared:

Yeah, for sure. It's like reclaiming. I feel like reclaiming *land*, reclaiming *space*, um...*taking up* space, you know—rewriting the narrative of trauma to growth. And then, we're learning *as* we're growing. When this started, I had no idea what I was doing. And I still don't, and I'm

okay with that. I'm okay with not knowing. Because I know someone's—my community has my back. So, a lot of trial and error. But yeah, for sure. I feel like the biggest thing is reclaiming. It just gives me this sense of a direct impact when I see students interacting—though, I notice a lot of the times the students can act like, *Mmm—*

Erica paused and pursed her lips, imitating an *I'm too cool for this* face, and sucked her teeth. “You know?”

I did know. And I laughed, and she laughed, and then her laugh trailed off, and for a moment we sat there in that feeling like it's never just us. But only for a moment, before she continued:

But I *see* that [the students are] like, “Oh, okay, alright, this is not that bad.” Like, “Oh okay, this is cool.” And that—that *disconnection* between us, and the soil, and the land is so *real*. Because now we're living in a *virtual*, in a virtual society, where we're living through a screen. We're constant—like we live *through* the screen, and we live *for* the screen. So anything outside of that, it's just like, “I don't want to put my hands in the soil.” But yet, we can put our hands on these screens. And like one day, if this all goes to shit, do you know how to feed yourself? Do you know how to feed your *family*? When this concrete *breaks*, do you know how to till the land? Do you know how to do all that, because that's necessary to survive! And we've been *disconnected* from it, because they don't want us—especially as Black and brown people, they don't *want* us to know that, they don't *want* us to know how to feed ourselves, how to be healthy, how to combat these diseases. That's why we're fuckin *sick*! I read this study, in the 19—it was like the 90s? There was a study about how Black and brown people have the highest rates of amputation. And that's still the case today. Two thousand and *twenty-two*. Like, shit doesn't change. It's just progressively getting worse as we go. And this is stuff that's being instilled in our children. Like, look at how food has been given to us through public education: zero—I can guarantee you, zero nutritional value. *Zero*. It's all instant. So we're eating that since like, what? Kindergarten? Our taste buds get adjusted to that salty, cheesy, fatty, um...highly acidic foods. We don't—once we taste something else, or once we see a little bit of broccoli on our plate: “Ugh! Ew!” We get disgusted. We're just, “What the fuck is that?” Like, it has to be drenched in fucking barbecue for us to fucking eat some shit. And that's *sad*,

because it's just like...Our people, like the nations we come from, we weren't eating like that. And it's only until we came to *this* country where we had to *assimilate*... You know?

And there were some things I did know, but a lot that I didn't.

In re-membering the idea for the garden, its inception, and its personal and collective significance, Zahra and Erica wove a brilliant, haunting tale of entanglements: a “cacophony” of hidden (hi)stories across time, space, scale, and struggle. Using an experimental analytic lens of nuclear colonialism and a method of curiosity (Tsing, 2015), I ask in the following sections what connects those (hi)stories. What connects that “*disconnection* between us, and the soil, and the land,” with displacement from churches and homes, with memories that live in the teeth and the bones, with school lunch and severed limbs and *exotic fruit*, with the 1990s and being 19 the first time you learned that sage cures asthma and being in kindergarten the first time you learned that this place will kill you, silently and slowly, over and over, any way it knows how? In Part I, I take the time to follow these connections and the ghosts they leave across multiple ongoing/unfinished temporalities, less to arrive at a definite conclusion and more to unearth what haunts and lingers beneath the surface of seemingly disjointed landscapes. My intention in doing so is to sit with and think through the radioactive traces of carcerality in (and as) modernity, with which our alternatives to the school-prison link, or carceral-education landscape, must contend. Throughout Part I, I use italics to remind the reader and reground the story in Zahra and Erica's words; these italics weave a palimpsest of sorts, an archipelago of traces of the threads that I followed to get where I got.

In Part II, I turn and tend to the deepest root of these entangled, ongoing, and unfinished (hi)stories, and thus the most fundamental link between schooling, carceral regimes, and

modernity: a form of spatial domination waged at physiological and ontological scale. This analysis plants a seed to which I return most explicitly in Chapter 5.

§

PART I: Tracing the Terrain of Struggle

Strange Fruit: Red on the Leaves, Blood at the Root²³

Having found their way to California during the Great Migration, Willa and Charles Bruce bought two plots of land between 1912 and 1920. They brought with them long-standing traditions and genealogies of community: not long after their purchase, they opened Bruce's Beach, a small resort-like town, so that Black people across Los Angeles could have a space to *just be*.²⁴ With these genealogies as seeds, Black folks began to root themselves in the area, cultivating a flourishing community. The white communities surrounding the area revolted, for having damn near everything was still not enough. Modernity's death-drive forward knows no bounds or borders, even as it violently creates them.

And modernity doesn't follow laws: it makes and remakes them. Europe's brutal centuries-long crusades to exterminate whole worlds so that earth could be made 'property' led naturally to a host of contradictions—things like Black folks *reclaiming space*, and buying plots of land—and so in 1929 the City of Manhattan Beach created a series of new laws and told a big but unoriginal lie, and used eminent domain to seize the land bought by Willa and Charles Bruce. All this, so the story went, so a public park could be built. Before the official legal processes of land valuation were completed—for the value of Black space (both body and place) was neither

²³ See Billie Holiday (1939), *Strange Fruit*.

²⁴ For information on Bruce's Beach, see <https://ceo.lacounty.gov/ardi/bruces-beach/>.

a question nor part of the equation (McKittrick, 2014)—Bruce’s Beach was destroyed, and the land stood empty for nearly 30 years.

Central Park. 1825. Once Seneca Village.

Lake Lanier. 1912. Once Oscarville.

Delta Park. 1948. Once Vanport.

Lake Martin. 1923. Once Kowaliga, including the Kowaliga Academic Institute, land reclaimed by John Benson, who once tilled that land as a slave. Once Sousanna, including a school, “two mercantiles, a grist mill, a flour mill, a sawmill, a blacksmith shop, and a church,” including a cemetery, including 900 bodies, at least 900 bodies uprooted from the earth and displaced.²⁵

Once Kowaliga and Sousanna. Flooded by the Alabama Power Company so the city could build a dam. Entire Black towns, reclaimed lands where schools were built and communities were forged and children were raised, all razed or burned or stolen or flooded or destroyed in some other way. All covered over—and over and over—with things like parks and lakes and pipelines and parking garages.

Also around 30 years later, sometime in the 1950s, 300 Mexican/Mexican-American families comprising a “self-sufficient and tight-knit community,” whose members had “for decades...ran their own schools and churches and *grew their own food* on the land” (Zinn Education Project, 2024), were displaced from Chavez Ravine. All so that, the story went, a public housing complex could be built. In the three short years between 1949—when the Federal Housing Act gave Los Angeles City the right to use eminent domain in the service of the “public good”—and 1952, the vibrant tight-knit community of Chavez Ravine became, by one report’s characterization, a “ghost town” (ibid). By 1962, no public housing complex was to be found, but the Dodgers Stadium sat atop haunting foundations.

²⁵ See Morris (2022)

Much to modernity's denial, time runs in loops, not lines (Barad, 2019). Another fraction of a century later, in the *1990s*, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) announced its inauguration of a “major land acquisition and construction program” (Center for Urban Research & Learning [CURL], 2023), in which eminent domain would serve as its core apparatus to seize land on which the new schools would be built. From this inauguration, extending until at least 2015, the landscape of LA was radically transformed (Jensen, 2015). Middle-income families managed to successfully protest the demolition of their communities, so a new destination for land acquisition was determined. The children and families to be displaced would be low-income, Black and Latinx residents renting multi-family homes (CURL, 2023): the very children, in other words, these new schools were ostensibly built to serve. For just like Chavez Ravine, just like Bruce's Beach and Kowaliga and Soussana and Vanport and Seneca Village, just like Chuco's and IPR Artz, the spaces and places those children called home had always already been deemed waste-lands—deemed un-geographic and uninhabited and made uninhabitable (Gilmore, 2022; McKittrick, 2006; Wynter, 2003).

Because this is what modernity's death-drive forward does: it moves in, it displaces—it severs and dis-members—it destroys, it rapes, it kills and plunders and takes everything until there is nothing left and that is still not enough, so it moves onward, on to the next body, the next land, the next place it will set ablaze, leaving ghosts—thousands and thousands of ghosts—in its wake (Sharpe, 2016). It is nuclear, it is radioactive, it is a singular narrative played out geographically, through shifting regimes of spatial domination, over and under and all around us, even and especially when we can't see it.

This is what Exide Technologies did from its inception in the late 18th century until at least 2015. Over the course of nearly half a century, 19 years of which Exide was operating at

full capacity without a valid license, and 34 years of which were on a so-called “interim” permit, Exide repeatedly violated air pollution and hazardous waste regulations, poisoning over 10,000 residential properties and well over 100,000 residents in the predominantly low-income, Black and Latinx Southeast Los Angeles (Communities for a Better Environment [CBE], [2021](#))—not far from Chuco’s and IPR Artz and Chavez Ravine. Exide’s war crimes, alongside and constitutive of US empire’s nuclear experiments of asymmetrical neglect, explain the high concentrations of lead in soil and homes—and, therefore, in children’s bodies and brains and teeth and bones—that haunt hundreds of thousands of Angelinos of color today (Nazaryan, 2016; Hopper, 2019). In 2015, crumbling under the weight of community activism and its own financial and moral bankruptcy, Exide struck a deal with the US Attorney’s Office for the Central District of California: it admitted to years of “environmental crimes,” promised to clean up the mess it made, and avoided prosecution entirely (CBE, 2021). Exide, of course, did not clean up the mess it made. Instead, with the full support of the US legal apparatus, it abandoned its contaminated battery plant in 2015—in direct proximity to at least *twenty-two* LAUSD schools ([LAUSD, n.d.](#)), and within a radioactive radius of many, many more.

Lead poisons the soil, settles into its DNA, haunting and lingering and contaminating the earth for centuries (Soil & Plant Nutrient Testing Laboratory, 2019). Unable to eat things like fresh produce, *exotic fruit*, and *sage* from their own gardens, residents in proximity to Exide’s Man-made waste-land—like the natives of nuclear testing sites across the world (Barad, 2019; O’Rourke, [1986](#))—are forced to treat one slow, silent death with another: with things like processed food that does *not look like that if it were to come from the ground*, food with *zero nutritional value*; or with *pills and pills and pills* that wage their own cellular/molecular warfare. Lead exposure is associated with *high blood pressure*, heart failure, and higher rates of *diabetes*

(Bener et al., 2001). And, because the people most exposed to lead come from neighborhoods deemed more worthy of iron gates and concrete buildings and liquor stores than green space and hospital beds and schools that teach you *how to combat these diseases*, lead exposure is linked to higher rates of phantom limbs: in the 1990s, and *still in twenty twenty-two* (Jindeel, Gessert, & Johnson, 2016; Arya et al., 2018; Bryce et al., 2022).

Lead lives in the teeth and the bones for decades, but it makes its own ghosts along the way. Ghosts that make it harder to fight disease, harder to focus, harder to be still in one's own body. Like *fatty acidic foods* and *school lunches* that *adjust the taste buds*, lead poisons the brain, rewiring neural pathways and preventing synaptic growth. Its haunting, lingering effects/affects enliven modernity's carceral-discursive regimes, allowing researchers to link lead exposure to concrete measurable outcomes like "behavioral problems in school, school failure, hyperactivity, trouble concentrating, low impulse control and aggression, lowered IQ, higher rates of juvenile delinquency and arrests, and unemployment" (Horzinger, 2017, p. 27)—so that criminalization and enclosure can be used to justify criminalization and enclosure, over and over. Like heart failure, diabetes, asthma, and other preventable illnesses left in bodies deemed destined to die anyway, lead exposure often goes undiagnosed because the children most impacted and the places they come from have always already been exiled to the status of vulnerable, risky, deficient, angry, misbehaved, hyperactive, aggressive, criminal, arrested, incarcerated, unemployed, pushed-out, "naturally and perpetually condemned" (McKittrick, 2015, p. 5; Rothenberg et al., 1996).

And because Black and Brown spaces are deemed un-geographic and uninhabitable, places where Black and Brown children (might) have been raised are razed, tight knit communities are dis-membered, brains are poisoned, and limbs are severed.

This is what the US Atomic Energy Commission did at Shiprock, where unregulated radiation levels from the privately owned Kerr-McGee uranium mining shafts slowly suffocated the 100 Navajo miners working there for slave wages, until Kerr-McGee—like Exide—“*simply abandoned*” 71 acres of radioactive tailings, poisoning the area’s core water supply and generations of communities who relied on it to survive (Churchill & LaDuke, 1983, p. 57, emphasis added). This is what US empire did in the Tularosa Basin, land protected and cultivated by Apache peoples until 1850, when the US inaugurated its explosion as a nuclear super power with the detonation of the first atomic bomb (Salih & Corry, 2021). This is what US empire did in the Congo, whose Shinkolobwe mine supplied 80% of the uranium used in the bombs the US then dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Owens & Drozdenko, 2019)—and whose mines now supply the coltan, cobalt, and other minerals needed to make iPhones and PCs and cars and drones—entangling the shadows of Japanese children plastered on sidewalks and walls with the ghosts of Congolese children whose hands sift through poison for slave wages so that we, the civilized West, can *live through* and *for a screen*. This is what US empire did in the Bikini, Ānewetak, and Rongelap Atolls and the rest of the Marshall Islands and Christmas Island and Johnston Atoll (US Dept of Energy, 2000).

This is what we did, Zahra explained, in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.

Shortly after my question, “how did the idea for the garden begin,” I asked Erica and Zahra about the knowledge traditions that informed how that idea grew into a green oasis surrounded by an old iron gate. Following Erica’s response—“Community. My elders.”—Zahra again wove the personal with the collective:

“With me? Yeah, a lot of reading. And just realizing the whole world is an epidemic, right? It's all about *money* to the whole world, right? And so once I learned about Monsanto, and I learned about all the stuff that they—”

My face must have been blank, because she paused a moment before repurposing her sentence into a new one. “So, Monsanto’s a company that started off as a pharmaceutical based company. The guy, he worked in pharmaceuticals and then that went *bad*, right? That went terribly bad. They were the reason for the numbers of deaths, all kind of stuff like that. They're the people who released Agent Orange—you know what Agent Orange is?”

And I knew, but I didn’t. I knew the name, but not the story. Without skipping a beat, Zahra dug deeper:

“Agent Orange happened innn...” She narrowed her eyes as if straining to see the past. “I don't want to say the wrong place, because it's very detrimental...but basically Agent Orange was supposed to kill—it was used for a *war*.²⁶ It was supposed to kill—”

“A chemical?” I asked, my own brows narrowing.

“Mhm. A chemical that they jumped from airplanes, and it was orange powder. And it was supposed to, you know, get rid of all the plants so basically they can fight the war, see what’s on the ground, blah-blah-blah. What it ended up doing was covering the people, causing deformities for *years* to come—and the women, deformities in the children, just everything. They did them terribly, terribly, terribly wrong. And all they did was change their name and keep going. Their Roundup weedkiller—are you familiar with that?”

“Roundup weedkiller?” That one, not coincidentally, I did know. “Yeah.”

²⁶ Agent Orange was used in the Vietnam war, but heavily impacted, and continues to heavily impact, the surrounding territories of Laos and Cambodia (Dunst, 2019).

“Roundup weedkiller. So that's Monsanto. They have those seeds and they have that product, which is linked to cancers and all kinds of other stuff. Monsanto, if he caught you—he owned the farm, so any other farmers around him, he would threaten them, like death threats type thing. Literally, they was moving like the mob. This guy, he went to his grave fighting [Monsanto] and he was the only person that ever won against him! So [Monsanto] used to shut people down. He used to threaten them, he used to do all this kind of stuff to them, and then when [Monsanto] did wrong, they just changed their name, kept going.”

Just kept going, on to the next name, the next place, the next group of people and lands to kill and poison, because that is what modernity does. Over and over.

Following Agent Orange, the atomic explosion of Monsanto's herbicide production in the 1980s and *1990s* coincided with US empire's war on drugs abroad, where the military's use of Roundup to decimate coca and poppy plants in these *nations that Black and brown people come from* poisoned along with it hundreds of local subsistence crops, natural water supplies, and Indigenous animals (Tokar, 2002). And it coincided with US empire's war on youth at “home,” in the belly of the beast, where a recent nationally representative study—conducted by a coalition of mothers who refuse to see their children turn to ghosts—found that 95% of *school lunches* contain Roundup residue (Moms Across America, 2022; Cox, 2019): *zero nutritional value* supplemented with glyphosate and toxic metals that cause cancers, deformities, and other diseases *for years to come*. It is nuclear, it is war, it is an *epidemic*. Over and over.

And, as Zahra discerningly notes, it's all about money.

“[Monsanto] owns,” Zahra continued, “I want to say they own a good 80% of all the seeds in the *world*, and they're making these seeds so once they grow, they don't reproduce. When there's an apple, and there are seeds in the apple, you're supposed to be able to get those

seeds and reproduce another apple—they don't want that. They don't want you to grow anything. And they did that, you know, back, back in time—they did that too. And it just created scarcity, and it created a whole frenzy because people didn't know what to do, right? Once you take that main resource—if you take food away and there's nothing but seeds, and we don't know where to get seeds from, but then we find out where we get seeds from, we gotta go to this person and— they not gone give 'em to us! It's all a *money* thing.”

“Yeah.” Erica's tone was hushed, almost heavy. “Like she said, there's people that seed hoard. And there's [people] that have seed banks, and they have seed libraries and there's probably seeds that—we'll probably never have access to.”

“Never see,” Zahra said.

“Never see,” Erica repeated.

I sat there, quite frankly blown away. “So they literally like...*own a plant?*”

Zahra and Erica nodded.

“Well, stole,” I corrected myself, “But—”

“Stole. Yeah.” Erica's voice stayed low, as if burdened under the weight of time that runs in loops, not lines. “They claim, you know—”

“They *claim* they own it.” Zahra and Erica kept moving back and forth in this rhythm, this dance, this already knowing.

“It's scary.” Erica paused, and we all just sat there for a moment. But only for a moment, before she continued: “That ownership mentality—it just leaks into everything, you know?”

And I knew, but I didn't. But I knew, at least a little more than before, how much I didn't know.

§

And this is how the first part of the interview went. In re-membering the ideas with which the garden began, and the knowledge traditions through which those ideas grew into a garden in the center of a concrete lot, Zahra and Erica answered my questions by naming ghosts—by recalling assemblages of radioactive violence—through a temporal sensibility that foregrounds the ongoingness of modernity’s death-driven human-making carceral regimes. Disinterested in concrete inputs and certain results, in the section above I followed threads, taking the time to retrace the things Zahra and Erica shared and retell pieces of the entangled (hi)stories I found out later. My purpose in doing so was not to arrive at a specific conclusion or solution, but to listen to and with the haunting, lingering foundations that are always there, even and especially when we can’t see them.

It is this foundation, this cacophony of troubled (hi)stories, that comprise modernity’s carceral-education landscape: this landscape filled with scorched soil and strange fruit; filled with blood on the leaves and limbs severed from roots; filled with time that runs in loops not lines; with kids rounded up in buses and mines, kids pushed-out of pastel homes into concrete buildings where nice ladies who are paid slave wages will feed them something strong enough to kill weeds and anything else deemed waste—something slow and silent enough to *adjust taste buds* and flatten lungs and *disconnect* children from all these things their ancestors knew *back, back in time*, before a handful of people flooded towns and built parking garages and decided that the *whole world* ought to be about *money*. This is the landscape—these are the ghosts, the layered worlds, the radioactive ongoingness of modernity’s singular, linear narrative—with which our alternatives to both schooling and carcerality must contend.

In the following section, I explore the deepest root of these entangled (hi)stories to explicate with a bit more certainty the most fundamental link between schooling, carcerality, and

modernity. I do so by uprooting an original nuclear violence from which all others extend, *the splitting of an atom*: destruction at an apocalyptic scale.

§

PART II:

To Split an Atom: Schooling, Carcerality, and Modernity's Apocalypse

Modernity's Apocalypse

Europe split an atom long before Bohr and Heisenberg breached the quantum realm. From the 15th century onward, euro-modernity scorched the earth, inaugurating a radioactive apocalypse that is hardly passed (Sharpe, 2016), whose fallout is hardly settled. While nothing simply begins without having already been something else before (Barad, 2019), modernity “was ‘born’ when Europe...could constitute itself as a unified ego exploring, conquering, colonizing an alterity that gave back its image of itself” (Dussel, 1993, p. 66). Modernity refers to the centuries long and ongoing *epidemic* through which euro/western empire imposed—and imposes over and over—its knowledge systems; modes of governance; forms of political, economic, and social organization; ways of being; and regimes of citizenship, democracy, Civilization (Rodríguez, 2021), and Progress onto the *entire world*. Thus, while violently masquerading as universal truth, modernity exists only through coloniality (Mignolo, 2007; 2018; Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Wynter, 2003; Lugones, 2007; 2010; Quijano, 2000).

Critical scholarship on modernity also allows us to consider the ways coloniality (and therefore carcerality) itself is nuclear.²⁷ If colonialism is the occupation, theft, and/or violently

²⁷ To clarify and reiterate, my engagement with scholarship on modernity (/coloniality) and nuclear colonialism in Part II, like my engagement with modernity and nuclear colonialism in Part I, is part of a method of entanglement and methodological praxis of curiosity. In other words, I am not claiming to be an expert in coloniality, nor

imposed dependency of one nation/peoples on another, coloniality refers to colonialism's haunting, lingering effects/affects (Quijano, 2000; Maldonado-Torres, 2007): radioactive ghosts “*maintained alive* in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples...and so many other aspects of our modern experience” (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 243, emphasis added). Central to the coloniality/carcerality of modernity, as the prior section traced, is the theft and destruction of Indigenous lands and, with them, the (attempted) annihilation of Indigenous knowledges (Simpson, 2014; Salih & Corry, 2021); the constitutive theft/displacement (and subsequent labor exploitation) of Black and Brown peoples from the lands and nations they (might have) called home; and the carving of earth, over and over, into property that can be claimed, conquered, and ‘owned.’ And, as Zahra aptly noted, *it's all about money*.

This constant severing of hands from (poisoned) soil, however—a necessary precondition and ongoing/unfinished process of modernity—neither begins nor ends with killing weeds and dumping waste and claiming seeds so that a handful of mostly white men, an atomic brotherhood (Runyan, 2019), can hoard lethal amounts of wealth. This section takes up and builds from another key text that has informed and transformed my thinking around modernity: Vanessa Machado de Oliveira's (2021) *Hospicing Modernity*. In this pedagogically invaluable book, Machado de Oliveira develops the argument that this ongoing obliteration/spatial domination of life-sustaining ecologies in the name of profit, Progress, and parking garages is instead the radioactive fallout of a more original violence. She writes:

While most critics of modernity/coloniality associate colonialism with the expansionist occupation of lands and the subjugation of peoples, many Indigenous peoples see these

attempting to engage thoroughly in the broader set of knowledge traditions and scholarly dialogues within (de)colonial studies.

manifestations of violence as *symptoms of a deeper and older form of violence* that happens at ontological and metaphysical realms—the realm of ‘being.’ This deeper, older violence is the imposed sense of separation between ourselves and the dynamic living land-metabolism that is the planet and beyond, as well as the theological separation between creature and creator. This imposed sense of separation, or separability, is based on human exceptionalism, the idea that humans are a superior species that deserve to conquer, dominate, own, manage, and control the natural environment (pp. 19-20, emphasis added).

According to Machado de Oliveira, it is this *ontological* severing of “humans” from “nature”—this myth-storied-truth that humans are separate from the “living land-metabolism” with which all beings are quantumly entangled²⁸—that comprises the core nucleus of modernity’s carceral human-making projects. This is a form of spatial domination, a radioactive violence, waged at the ‘realm of being.’ To clarify and reiterate before continuing, I am neither claiming nor attempting to be in deep conversation with the expansive and heterogeneous insights, knowledge traditions, and dialogues that (might) comprise “many Indigenous peoples” (*ibid*). Rather, anchored in Machado de Oliveira’s book as a critical (geographic) text, it is the underlying argument of her specific insight above, around this ontological severing, that served as a generative point of departure in this chapter’s analysis: one which led me, naturally, to other related scholarship. For example, as Walter D. Mignolo (2017) elaborates, the modern Human—Man (2003), the white European self (King, 2019)—came into being *through* european colonizers’ onto-epistemic invention of “nature” as a single, separable, knowable (and therefore conquerable, controllable) entity. These insights invite us to consider this ongoing ontological severing as the deepest and oldest and bloodiest root, the initial atomic split, from which all other (hi)stories of radioactive violence extend; how this radioactive spatial domination *waged at the*

²⁸ On quantum entanglements see Zohar (1990); Barad (2010; 2012); Holmes (2021); Prescod-Weinstein (2021). See also Chapter 5.

realm of being is the poisoned soil underneath and underlying our present reality, its “worlding story” (ibid), its carving of people into hierarchies of humanness and earth into nation-states with “natural resources” (uranium mines, oil pipelines, fossil fuels, nuclear energy) to be penetrated, plundered, extracted, and owned.

From the experimental analytic lens of nuclear colonialism, we can consider how this ongoing/unfinished process of severing/dis-placing/dis-membering (quantumly) entangled relationalities—a form of spatial domination that is ontological in scale and (sub)atomic in scope—that haunts and conjoins seemingly disparate landscapes, unraveling the distance between here and there and 1492 and 1825 and the 1990s and twenty *twenty-two*. It is this deeper, older violence that explains the unseeable/unsettling/unsettled connections between seemingly dissimilar things: between Kowaliga and Bruce’s Beach and Chavez Ravine and IPR Artz and Chuco’s; between *living for a screen* and radioactive mines and that *ownership mentality that leaks into everything*; between phantom limbs and school lunches and all the lessons *gone to waste* in that imposed sense of separation between hand and soil—lessons like how to feed ourselves and how sage can cure asthma and *what to do when the ground breaks*. From the experimental lens of nuclear colonialism, the rush of entangled (hi)stories that informed Zahra and Erica’s genealogy of the rebel garden become the haunting, lingering vestiges of that original/ontological violence. This is a form of radioactive violence that creates its own ghosts along the way: ghosts that live in the brain and the taste buds and the teeth and the bones; ghosts that penetrate death deep into the body of the earth; ghosts that carve layered worlds into and across cellular, molecular, and physiological scales. From this lens, the (hi)story of the carceral-education landscape becomes—at its root—a story of what it means to be human.

Schooling Modernity’s Human

In the following sections, I pull from a set of key texts (or scholars) that have explored, and deepened my thinking around, the *physiological* entanglements of modernity. Consistent with prior chapters and a method of entanglements, my decision to focus on these texts was invited by following the threads, theorizations, and insights in Zahra and Erica’s storying of the rebel garden’s (hi)story; in particular, their own repeated return to physiological effects and affects: toxins in bodies; poison in soil and school lunch; amputations, asthma, and deformities for years to come; ownership mentalities and adjusted tastebuds and all these things we buy that are slowly killing us, even when we’re not the ones dying.

Working across a few of the texts that comprise her expansive and comprehensive body of work (see Scott, 2000), for example, Sylvia Wynter explicates how our neurochemical pathways, genetic compositions, and opiate reward/behavior-regulatory systems have been *physiologically (re)wired* to and by the governing codes, logics, and life-ways of racial capitalist modernity (e.g., Wynter, 2003; Wynter & McKittrick, 2015). Modernity, in other words, conditions not only how we perceive and engage with (and therefore make and remake) “reality” physically and psychologically, but—at the cellular, molecular, and subatomic scales—*how our bodies experience* success, joy, desire, satisfaction, meaning, matter, worth, knowledge, and rationality. Machado de Oliveira (2021) compares modernity’s neurochemical “feedback loops” to addiction, marking the haunting, lingering processes through which our bodies and brains become anatomically *adjusted* to a world that is *all about money*, to *virtual realities* and technological Progress, to upward mobility and the pursuit of individual autonomy and the figure of a Human, Man, who “practices, indeed normalizes, accumulation in the name of (economic) freedom” (Wynter & McKittrick, 2015, p. 10).

Machado de Oliveira writes, more specifically, that the imposed separability of ‘Humans’ from ‘nature’—and therefore from all living beings, human and non—is the primary self-reinforcing mechanism of modernity. By severing/dis-membering the intrinsic sense of worth that stems from being physically, metaphysically, and consciously entangled with a “living-land metabolism,” modernity carves existential wounds into individual and collective bodies; and compels us to treat those wounds with more belongings, more accolades, more autonomy, more accumulation, more property, and more participation in the “affective, intellectual, relational, and material economies” (p. 116) of a world inaugurated through apocalypse. Stated differently, the radioactive fallout of modernity’s original ontological violence is that our bodies are rewired, over and over—like brains poisoned by lead and toxic waste and *zero nutritional value*, like *taste buds adjusted to salty acidic foods*, like limbs dismembered and *deformed* by orange powder and abandoned mineshafts and Roundup weedkiller and school lunch—towards a particular mode of being human.

From this lens, there emerges a deeper analytic significance behind Zahra and Erica’s repeated re-turn to the physiological—the un-visible, but terribly visceral—effects/affects of modernity’s forward-moving, human-making, radioactive landscapes: the disease, the asthma, the amputations, the deformities, the seeds that don’t reproduce, the school lunch and adjusted taste buds, the food that does not look like that if it were to grow from the ground, the being sick, the ownership mentality, the living through and for the screen. And it is from this lens—of a form of spatial domination that is ontological in scale and sub/atomic in scope—that we can ask questions and be curious and think from different spatial/temporal angles about the deepest root of the carceral-education landscape.

If all coloniality is carceral,²⁹ and coloniality itself is nuclear, then what connects schooling to carceral regimes and (thus) modernity is not simply school discipline or school police or any other set of policies or practices on its own, but something much deeper, much more atomic, much more apocalyptic: US schooling³⁰ functions primarily and most fundamentally to reproduce and naturalize modernity's terms, metrics, and modes of humanness. I am intrigued by the possibility that within the carceral-education landscape, schooling “maintains alive” that original/ontological severing of Humans from quantumly entangled ecologies (Machado de Oliveira, 2021)—re-enlivens it, over and over, such that the body begins to enclose itself.

The material and metaphorical entanglements of nuclear colonialism, and the insights laid out above, provide a generative and experimental lens to consider the ways schooling functions not just to punish and push-out—nor simply to prepare youth for hierarchical roles in a capitalist economy (e.g., Bowles & Gintis, 1976)—but to rewire the brain, recalibrate the body, and physiologically/ontologically *instill in our children* the rationality, desirability, and inevitability of an apocalypse masquerading as universal truth. As modernity's core laboratory of epistemic domination,³¹ schooling works to neurochemically/anatomically *assimilate* young people into a world in which land is property, in which earth can be claimed and seeds can be owned, in which scorched soil is a natural and acceptable outcome of Civilization and Progress—and it functions,

²⁹ There are numerous ways in which coloniality is inherently carceral. See, for example, Fischer-Hoffman (2021); Vaught et al. (2022); Maynard and Simpson (2022); Darke and Khan (2021). Most broadly, the methods and models of governance, hierarchized political economy of wealth and worth, and singular mode of being Human that settler colonial nation-states and the global elite seek to maintain and naturalize—and the extreme and constant forms of violence and terror through which racial capitalism seeks to resolve its inherent contradictions (Gilmore, 2022; Hall, 1978)—will always and have always necessitated various forms of confinement, incapacitation, servitude, capture, and enclosure (Robinson, 2000; Gilmore, 2007; Sojoyner, 2017). See also Chapter 5.

³⁰ Any references to schooling in this section refer to US schooling, which itself reflects western schooling more broadly. Eurocentric/westernized models of schooling over-determine the modes and models of education that are valued, supported, rewarded and made (hierarchically) available globally (e.g., Henry, 2020). See also Chapter 3.

³¹ For the centrality of epistemic domination to both secondary and higher education in the Americas see, for example, Vaught et al. (2022); Grosfoguel (2013); Chatterjee and Maira (2014).

constitutively, to Round-up and *weed out* anyone who is unable or unwilling to swallow the pill. Schooling, stated (or speculated) differently, is a central site through which modernity's radioactive ghosts become woven into the body, the brain, the taste buds, teeth, and bones (Machado de Oliveira, 2021, p. 114-15).

Most centrally, this human-making project involves the conditioned “compulsion toward, and mental obsessions with, unaccountable consumption, unrestricted individual autonomy, exceptionalism, and pleasure within modernity,” which demands a constitutive denial of the radioactive violence on which most of that pleasure depends (Machado de Oliveira, 2021, p. 115). Despite and alongside the growth, opportunity, and access it (asymmetrically) affords, we might consider the ways schooling is a primary apparatus through which that *ownership mentality* is mined and matured as a natural resource on par with fossil fuels and their apparent heir in nuclear energy (Runyan, 2018). We might consider how it is through the spoken and unspoken curriculums of modern schooling that we are trained to forget (or, at best, not to remember) our inherent entanglements with a living land-metabolism; that we are taught not (or, at best, not taught) to look for the layered worlds buried under schools and stadiums and parking garages—not to listen to the ghosts it takes to make the screens we hold in palms that knew, *back, back in time*, how to till unpoisoned soil. It is in school that we learn, in many more ways than one, that in this world there are those who will live—the haves, the home-owners/degree-holders, the hard workers, voters, rational/forward-thinkers—and those who naturally, if unfortunately, will die: the un-geographic, uncivilized, uninhabitable, underside of Man-as-Human (McKittrick, 2015; Wynter, 2003; Wynter & McKittrick, 2015; see Chapter 5).

It is from well-meaning, overworked, and underpaid teachers—many of whom want genuinely to see their students “succeed”—that we learn what and who will be valued in a world

that commodifies human rights as prizes to be earned. And thus it is through schooling that we learn what solutions count and whose knowledge matters; where lessons about how sage cures asthma must *go to waste* so that children can learn instead, in student Kimora’s words, how to be a “good American citizen,” an entrepreneur, a college graduate—or a drop-out who failed or refused or demanded to be still in their own body, who will now occupy the bottom rungs of Civilization, joining the global majority as the alterity that gives back to modernity the ghostly image of itself (Dussel, 1993). It is through schooling that the constant forward/upward movement of modernity is rewarded—again and again—such that our bodies begin to define and desire for ourselves and our children a sense of mastery, autonomy, access, and control (Ahenakew, 2017) that depends inherently on separability, and thus on the maintenance of a world inaugurated through apocalyptic violence (Maynard & Simpson, 2022).³²

Indeed, if modernity’s epistemic/affective economies are defined by constant forward/upward movement through pipelines and pathways that lead to certain endpoints and downward turning points and pre-determined outcomes (Tsing, 2015; Ben-Moshe, 2018; Rodríguez, 2023; Machado de Oliveira, 2021), then we can consider the ways its neurochemical feedback loops *adjust* and *deform* the body and the brain to pursue “ontological concretes” in exchange for the “mystery, messiness, and entanglement of the living land” (Ahenakew, 2017, p. 81): conditioning our blindness to what is going on around us, our compulsion to buy all these things that might be killing us, our fear to touch the soil, a collective *disconnect from our roots*. Through mundane features of schooling, such as grades and diplomas, we learn that success is measurable, and we come to first experience and then habitually seek “achievement” in the form of something tangible we can bring home to parents or post on social media or add to our

³² There are, of course, always students and educators who refuse these lessons. This will be a repeated theme in the chapters to come.

resumes. Through formal and informal classification systems that define normal psychological/neurological functioning as the ability to produce knowledge through logic, science, and written word (Machado de Oliveira, 2021), schooling fuels a collective inability or unwillingness to invest our time and our hearts and our hands in things that can't be codified, commodified, verified, or owned.

As the place children spend a majority of their developmental years, it is in school that we most consistently receive validation—and thus, over time, the associated spikes in dopamine, oxytocin, and serotonin—for completing tasks and figuring out answers, not for “revitalizing description and imagination” (Tsing, 2015) and allowing ourselves to be stuck and confused and *okay not knowing*. It is through quotidian features of schooling—like bathroom passes and scheduled recess and no sleeping in class—that we learn, or are punished for refusing the lesson, not to listen to our bodies (see Chapter 3). It is inside of classrooms inside of concrete buildings not far from abandoned plants and other ghostly foundations, that we are trained to think rationally and behave appropriately and perform productively—over and over—cultivating a mentality, a particular way of being human, that *leaks into everything*. It is through conditions as mundane as school lunches (see also Chapter 1) that children are severed from all the lessons the land holds, all these *things the community needs to know*: like how our ancestors used to eat, and how herbs can treat disease, and how the possibilities for other worlds are always there, even and especially when we can't see them.

Continuing to explore the ways US schooling reinforces the physiological and neurofunctional configurations (Machado de Oliveira, 2021) of modernity is a crucial task for future work. For the purposes of the present chapter, however, my central curiosity (as opposed to concrete contention) is this: By *instilling in our children* modernity's modes and metrics of

what it means to be human—by “maintaining alive” that original atomic split—schooling helps turn bodies into nuclear testing sites; it helps turn individual and collective bodies against themselves, through an ongoing/ontological violence whose effects/affects are haunting, lingering, and radioactive nature. My central proposal (as opposed to so-called ‘empirical’ point), then, is that it is this severing/spatial domination *waged at the realm of being* (Machado de Oliveira, 2021, p. 19) that most deeply and most violently and most fundamentally entangles schooling, carcerality, and modernity.

This is the landscape, these are the ghosts, the cacophony, the rush of troubled (hi)stories, with which our alternatives to the school-prison link must critically, creatively, and curiously contend.

§

This chapter arrived, so to speak, at these conclusions in a way that reflects the messiness, ongoingness, and “scrambled temporality” (Barad, 2019) of the local-global landscape(s) in which the rebel garden, FREE LA, and the school-prison link exist. Through an experimental analytic lens of nuclear colonialism, a method of curiosity, and a praxis of tracing entangled (hi)stories (Barad, 2019; Tsing, 2015), I followed the threads that emerged in Zahra and Erica’s re-membering of the idea for and significance of the rebel garden, and the stories, lessons, and knowledges through which that idea grew into an oasis smack-dab in the middle of a concrete lot. In the ways Zahra and Erica wove this rush of troubled (hi)stories into their genealogy of the garden, however, they began already to prefigure the alchemical work of abolitionist education/transformation: of contending with the radioactive fallout of modernity’s earth-shattering atom-splitting apocalypse. To conclude this chapter, and transition into the

others, I turn briefly to the ways Zahra and Erica envision and cultivate this work through the rebel garden.

Conclusions and Continuations (Terrains of Struggle)

In the center of the rebel garden, surrounded by some stacks of hay and the three hand-made wooden beds where students sprinkled red asterisks on lettuce leaves, the rough crust of concrete has been cracked—pulled back like a scab—revealing the tender flesh of the Earth: an oasis within an oasis, enclosed by a large iron



gate. The wind has carried insurgent seeds across the tired, aching border, sowing its own plans for the garden. Life pushes its way up and out of the asphalt, out of that tender flesh of Earth, like limbs bursting from a cage. Some of those limbs have organized themselves into clusters: like the small patch of milkweed that provides monarch butterflies a space of rest, as they come and go as they please.

Sometime in May of 2023, as I sat on a stack of hay marveling at the stretch of earth, squinting against a sun warming up just enough to make furrowed brows glisten, I asked Erica what it would mean, and what it would take, to break ground on the entire parking lot. It wasn't the breaking that would be the hard part, she explained: it was the healing. Decades of being suffocated under the concrete had reconfigured the soil's DNA. Just like Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the Marshall Islands and Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. Just like the Native lands deemed National Sacrifice Areas: areas so poisoned by radioactive contamination that they no longer have the capacity to support life—now and already in the future (Hooks & Smith, 2004; Barad, 2019). Just like Chavez Ravine and Bruce's Beach and Sousanna and Kowaliga and other

spaces where Black and Brown children (might) have been raised—razed and flooded, deemed uninhabited and made uninhabitable, and *simply abandoned* once everything worth taking has been taken.

My question, in fact, was one I had already asked—but one that lingered with me, sat with me, followed me each morning as I drove my car through the large iron gate. Almost exactly a year earlier, as we sat surrounded by a half-finished mural, bean bag chair, and desks always just shy of appropriate arrangement, I asked Zahra and Erica about their plans, “what they envisioned,” for the garden. Following a collective reflection on their visions, dreams, and hopes (in their words) to expand the garden across and beyond the concrete lot, Erica explained:

“Let's say we *were* to break the asphalt and try to grow from the ground. We would have to test the soil for lead.” She paused, and a heaviness lingered in there in the space carved out by the absence of her voice. Filling that space, she continued, “And in LA, there's high, *high* levels of lead, *especially* in this community. I also work for an organization called LA Compost, and we focus on composting and basically diverting food waste from land fillers and creating it into an amendment for the soil. We work with different folks in the neighborhood to help put compost in their yards to remediate the soil. So it helps, you know, to kind of remediate what's *happening* in the soil. But it's not like a long—”

Erica paused again, as if composting her thoughts, before turning her sentence over into a new one. “It's a solution that's gonna take about seven, ten-plus years for it to be fixed, for us to even *grow* anything in the soil. And it's just really—it's really scary. It's really scary how contaminated the soil in LA is. Like, this is stuff that we still *breathe* in even though it's under us. We still take it, bring it in our homes, you know, our children *play* in it still. And...that's what's so scary about it.”

“Right. Yeah. And not to, um—” I cleared my throat awkwardly, looking for what it is I thought I wanted to say. “Uh, not to minimize that in any way, but I think it’s so beautiful y’all are committed to doing things that—you know, they say change happens seven generations down the line—”

“*Yeah.*” As I disentangled my thoughts out loud, Erica already knew.

“And y’all are still so committed to making changes that you don’t see the fruits of the labor [from] until seven years from now, but that’s—”

“That’s the point,” Zahra and Erica responded together, dancing their dance, already ready, already knowing.

“Yeah. That’s the point.”

“You don’t do it to see it tomorrow,” Erica elaborated.

“Nothing,” Zahra continued, “nothing—a flower doesn’t bloom overnight. Nothing, nothing sprouts overnight, right? It takes time, it takes water, and it takes *consistency*. If you leave a plant one day, you don’t water it for 5 days, it’s gone die. What you think, right? You gotta keep nurturing that plant so it can get bigger and bigger and bigger.”

“Breaking that asphalt was just so—” Erica squinted as if looking for the right words, or at a past that is never passed, or at a sun warming up just enough to make furrowed brows glisten. “It just resembles everything that that garden stands for. You know, it’s all in asphalt but yet, once we started watering, the cracks started to break. And little weeds, chamomile started popping up, and now there’s this one plant that attracts butterflies that’s growing through the cracks, and it’s just like—it’s *amazing*.”

“It is,” I said. Amazing, indeed.

§

Like the rush of (hi)stories that informed the inception of the garden, Zahra and Erica’s explanation of the garden’s present-future visions and praxis weaves an equally captivating tale: one that, through the experimental analytic lens of nuclear colonialism, becomes more than a metaphor. Erica’s conceptualization of poisoned soil as something that is *happening*—when understood as the radioactive fallout of that initial atomic split—surfaces the ongoingness of modernity’s human-making projects across the landscape of LA; and captures with haunting clarity how we are all entangled in this ongoing/unfinished apocalyptic destruction, albeit in terribly asymmetric ways. We breathe it in, our children play in it, track it out of concrete buildings and into pastel homes, into bodies and brains and taste buds and bones. From this lens, the task of abolitionist education/transformation becomes the uncertain, experimental, and alchemical work of un-severing/re-membering/re-mediating/re-wiring—of “*undoing the notion of the human* founded on the poisoned soil of human exceptionalism” (Barad, 2017, p. 86, emphasis added). It becomes the work of listening to ghosts, of tilling scorched earth, of tending to roots and uprooting toxins lying dormant in individual and collective bodies.

What does it mean to think through abolitionist education, in and beyond the carceral-education landscape, as an unfinished process and ongoing praxis of watering cracks in the concrete; of looking for blood on the leaves and caring for weeds and refusing to let lessons about sage go to waste; of plunging our palms beneath the surface to carve out from what was and what is, what must be? What does it mean to envision abolitionist transformation as something that requires constant care, something that takes time and water and *consistency*—something that does not, that cannot, happen overnight?

From the experimental analytic lens of nuclear colonialism’s haunting/lingering material and metaphorical entanglements, abolitionist education/transformation becomes not just a matter

of replacing school discipline or even defunding school police—but rather, the uncertain and experimental work of remediating soil; of composting *narratives of trauma* into new forms of growth; of *readjusting* our taste buds and treating our addictions to certainty and separability and ownership mentalities and the inevitability of an epidemic masquerading as universal truth. It becomes the work of physiologically recalibrating our bodies, *reclaiming that space*, creating (the) space for new assemblages, new synaptic connections, new roots and new routes; and of remembering all the lessons and life-ways that live forever in the bones, even and especially when we can't see them.

This is a form of transformation that is fundamentally epistemological and ontological in scope. *Transformation at a sub/atomic scale.*

The remaining chapters of this dissertation will re-turn and tend to this form, scope, and scale of abolitionist transformation. I will argue, in various ways and through numerous entangled stories, that this type of transformation exceeds the epistemic terrains of State-sanctioned policy-driven “solutions” to the school-prison link. The stories that follow weave an ongoing and inherently unfinished story of abolitionist education as neither an input nor an outcome, but rather a constant praxis of living and being otherwise: something that must be nurtured, over and over, without the certainty of best-practices and evidence-based solutions; without the satisfaction of seeing the fruits of our labors; without the immediate gratification of overnight growth. Through an ongoing/unfinished story of an oasis—a free space—surrounded by a large iron gate, I will argue that dismantling the school-prison link cannot be a matter of reforming or restoring or *assimilating* un/forgotten spaces; it cannot be about finding better or “more inclusive” ways to *instill in our children* a mode of knowing and way being human that will surely kill us all, even if we're not the ones dying.

From this lens, truly dismantling the school-prison link, or exceeding the carceral-education landscape, becomes the work of being *okay not knowing*, of knowing how much we don't know and how desperately we all need to live differently. It becomes the work of listening to ghosts—of plunging palms into poisoned soil to reach, on the other side

*a world of exotic fruits and unclaimed seeds
a world in which vines and foliage dangle like feet
on legs still too young to reach the ground:
a world in which weeds are sacred
and nothing is wasted
a world in which we know blood on the leaves
means blood at the root
a world in which we carve out
from that deepest wound
the possibilities for untethered existence.*

Absent these epistemological and ontological transformations, our so-called victories will only reconfigure a singular story, a radioactive narrative, masquerading as universal truth. The current chapter sowed a foundation for this argument by tracing the lingering (hi)stories and layered worlds within which FREE LA and/in the carceral-education landscape exist. Building from this broad foundation, and before returning in Chapter 5 back to that deepest root, the following chapter “zooms in” to the carceral-education landscape, and the legends, lessons, and life-ways that that exceed it. To do so, I begin with another story.

CHAPTER 3

There's Always a Way Out: Spatial Domination, Disappearance, and Free Movement in the Carceral-Education Landscape

Part I: (Holo)Mapping the Carceral-Education Landscape

Principal Craig's hairy white pointer finger met the holographic map with force, leaving a sticky imprint and the sound of peeling tape when he removed it. The cartographers—the Deans, Principals, and Assistant Principals—of Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) were huddled around this map, which covered the entire length of the large conference table in their headquarters. This was a highly advanced interactive map that cost a considerable amount of school revenue, which really should have gone to other things. The HoloMap was first adopted by the military, shortly followed by urban planners and others interested in the manipulation of space, and the movement of people and places that comprise it. Through their brotherhood with the LAPD, Principal Craig and a couple other administrators in LAUSD had gotten their sticky fingers on the technology. As self-proclaimed cartographers of the carceral-education landscape, they too had stakes in spatial domination.

LAUSD was in fact only a portion of the holographic map, albeit a large one. (It was out of scale; the entire map was grotesque and disproportional). The rest of the map spanned LA County, with faint depictions of mountains, valleys, etc. to symbolize neighboring counties and bordering districts. These outlying regions, which came into play at times, allowed Principal Craig and his fellow cartographers a more expansive, and therefore more exploitative, use of space. Some sites on the map were outlined clearly, complete with labels, shading, the whole work of art; alongside schools, these sites included juvenile halls, the Board of Supervisors, Child Protective Services (CPS), and other State institutions that played a central role in the movement of people and places and things across space. Other areas were shaded poorly or not at all, lumped into ambiguous zones that mulled over history, complexity and heterogeneity: places like neighborhoods, which were color-coded according to myths that were shifting yet

timeless. Each of the schools in LA County, including schools in juvenile hall, charter schools, private schools, alternative schools for the “good kids,” alternative schools for the “bad kids,” and everything else in between, were also labeled and color-coded according to categories that belied complexity and heterogeneity. Through this shading and labeling and lumping regime, the map and its cartographers inscribed narratives onto places and, as we will see, the people who inhabit those places.

With the help of university researchers, the map-makers developed a series of complex legends, brought to life through virtual 3-D game pieces that they could actually move around on the board. There were objects—furniture, electronics, office supplies—each one symbolizing a particular set of moves set into motion through a particular set of relationships. There were chairs, which symbolized the physical and ontological ranking of kids from good to Black (and everywhere/everyone in between). There were phones, which symbolized complex institutional and ideological networks between the various institutions (schools, prisons, ICE, CPS, etc.) that comprised the terrain. There were pieces of paper (referral slips, hall passes, diplomas, records) which symbolized the data points, descriptors, and “official” documentation of who belongs where and why. And there were bodies, or people, which moved and were moved around the board.

Multiple bodies were involved: labeled and shaded, like the places, with varying complexity. There were teachers and counselors, police and security guards, social workers and POs, parents, and, of course, the students. Students’ pieces were color-coded according to narratives, made and remade at the cartographer’s whim, based on the same algorithms that color-coded the places from which (it was presumed) they came. All of it was both haphazard and highly organized, overly simplistic and complex. From this holographic gaze from above,

bodies and objects and people and places could be labeled and lumped, tracked and charted, and most importantly controlled and contained. Or, so the legend has it.

§

Spoiler alert: the HoloMap isn't real. Though, I hesitate to say it is simply a myth.

Let me backtrack.

I grew up listening to stories, and doing my best to retell them. My grandmother was a Holocaust survivor, and from a very young age I was the recipient of weighty words. She taught me about war and liberation, about losing faith and refusing to let faith die. Most of all she taught me that stories are how we get at the shape of truth: against myth, against history books and mandated curriculum, against narratives inscribed onto people and places. And I learned, in some of my earliest attempts to listen and retell, that to scratch at the shape of truth you have to imagine against the weight of fact: you have to tell new stories, or tell old stories in a new way.

The HoloMap is one such story. It is a story that emerged from listening to a different set of (hi)stories: those of FREE LA students. Building, specifically, from students' education (hi)stories, this chapter makes two core and interrelated arguments: that US schooling operates intrinsically through mundane forms of spatial domination that are counterinsurgent in nature; and that (Black) students' persistence in moving freely charts epistemological ruptures in and from a carceral-education landscape that is neither fixed nor inevitable. Together, these arguments craft a metanarrative: one which reveals the ways spatial domination is always entangled with radical possibilities for living otherwise (McKittrick, 2006; 2011; Hartman, 2019). My interest in this chapter is in listening to these possibilities, to think beyond the constant recapitulation of "school" as a potential site of (educational) liberation.

To do so, I tell stories. Rooted in the broader abolitionist and critical geographic praxis of this dissertation—and informed, in particular, by the methodological-epistemological interventions of Black feminist geographic thought—I tell two stories that imagine, in different ways, beyond current fact and “what we already know” (McKittrick, 2017; 2014; Purifoy, 2023), in order to scratch at the shape of truth. I first tell a story of the carceral-education landscape from above; and I then tell a story of a different set of legends, life, and livingness (McKittrick, 2016), threaded through that landscape from below. I tell these stories, and then I tug at their threads to expand on the core claims stated above, and to weave together a metanarrative of spatial domination and its refusal, of a holographic gaze and the things it cannot see, of schooling and a different set of possibilities.

Let us track back, then, to the sticky finger...

§

When Principal Craig removed his hairy white pointer, leaving in its place an imprint and the sound of peeling tape, the map zoomed into his site: Watts Central High School. This was a highly advanced interactive map, with a series of complex legends, that cost a considerable amount of revenue which really should have been allocated elsewhere. When you clicked on a site, like a school, the HoloMap zoomed in to reveal incredible detail, including hallways, classrooms and little images of things, objects, bodies inside the classrooms. This zooming in and out between the specific and the vague, between particular places and the broader landscape(s) they comprised, was an anxious form of statecraft integral to making and shaping the landscape itself.

Principal Craig’s mitt came down again with similar force and stickiness, but this time to move a tiny 3-D piece, which symbolized a student, Beautiful. “There,” he said, “She was right

there. Hiding from me. Sneaky girl always changes her hiding spot. Bathroom on the first floor, hallway on the second, bathroom on the first, hallway on the third. We got cameras in the hallways, but it takes my every nerve not to install cameras in the bathrooms.” He made a disgusting winking gesture.

The boys club erupted into gargling spouts of laughter, spit flying onto the map next to the sticky fingerprints. Principal Jabari, who got into this for the “right reasons,” looked uneasy, his face contorted into a mixture of disgust and disappointment at his own lack of astonishment, as he often did in these meetings.

Zooming back out to the broader landscape, they tried to chart Beautiful’s path: where she had already been and where she ought to go. Principal Craig moved her piece (not a personal piece, but a random piece with the “appropriate” color), gliding it across the map, from school to school, including multiple middle and elementary schools. Of course, much of her path remained illegible to them, but myopia is the sort of powerfully destructive weakness that cannot see itself for what it is.

“Well, boys. What should I do?”

A chorus of slightly differing opinions blended together into more of the same. Only Principal Jabari’s voice could be heard slightly out of tune, as he suggested shifting her over to another school within LAUSD. Somehow, he had convinced the boys to allow this for the last student they tried to throw away, but that was a rarity. The other principals made and remade the game as they went; the rules were a changing same, which made them both powerful and porous.

“Eh,” Craig said, with smug nonchalance. He moved Beautiful’s piece over to a random alternative school and the piece *disappeared*, making the swipe-crunch sound that a computer makes when you move a file to the trash bin.

Jabari sighed. He was reaching the end of his patience, his conscience constantly fighting him. Many well-meaning administrators (mostly women and people of color) stay, convinced they can fight the system and, on occasion, making changes that have meaningful impacts on the lives of young people and their families. For Jabari, the contradictions were too great and a few months later he was pushed-out to a trash bin school, too. Principal Craig, on the other hand, was ultimately removed for “touching a student inappropriately.” But he maintained contact with the boys, and legend has it he became a social worker...or a cop.

§

Part II: The Legend Underneath the Landscape

The four boys and I wove through the narrow streets of South LA. Three recently enrolled students, Bandit, Kodak and Jayden, sat in the back, while Jimmy, one of the students I've known the longest, sat in the front. Cars, trucks, and tossed out furniture hugged both sides of what was supposedly a two-way road, so that each time a car came from the other direction I pulled into any oasis of space I could find, usually in front of someone's driveway, to let the car get past. I kept checking the speedometer. I usually drive alone, not with students, and LA streets are no joke. Every so often, the large van that takes FREE LA students home would fill up, and I would use the extra staff vehicle to drop off whoever didn't fit. On most of these days, the students I brought home would immediately connect to Bluetooth, eager to showcase the music they recorded that week in the school studio. Apparently, I passed the music test today, because no one seized the aux. Maybe they were just tired.

On every corner, sometimes more frequently than that, we passed a cop car. As one cut me off right before a light, I rolled my eyes in a dramatic exaggerated circle, landing them ultimately in Jimmy's direction.

His face didn't change. "Light's green," he said.

I looked forward and kept going. As we made our way out of the maze of stop lights, my eyes bounced back and forth between the road ahead of me, and the breaths of life that poked holes in the dense pollution of car exhaust and State surveillance. Thick, rich smoke billowed from street vendors' grills. A young woman waiting for the "walk" sign was having an animated conversation on her phone. Every few words she would throw her free hand up in the air, and the sun would hitch a ride on her diamond-studded acrylics. A family of four Angelinos, two of them young teenagers, were setting up a stand of Easter baskets and pastel colored balloons for sale. The same group of faces I always saw in front of my favorite (i.e., cheapest) gas station bumped music from a tiny speaker, passing between fingers some things that might help pass the time.

Jayden, Kodak, and Bandit, two brothers and their good friend, were being dropped off in the same place, while Jimmy was going a bit further. When I made drop offs, the students rarely gave me an address; I just needed to trust their directions. Against the drive for full disclosure and the certainty of a knowable destination—and over years of conversations, in cars, in interviews, in classrooms and text threads—I had learned that I needed to listen to a different set of truths.

They used landmarks as often as they used street names, drawing from an internalized map of histories, memories, and informal legends in ways that continuously fascinated and impressed me. As we approached their part of South Central, the comfortable silence in the backseat broke into an enthusiastic impromptu tour guide. The three boys pointed out buildings haunted by un/forgotten histories, shops that stored erased genealogies, corners that marked belonging etched in code; and the names of schools they used to go to, their friends went to, they

might have gone to if they weren't pushed or pulled into FREE LA. This compass, this legend underneath the landscape, is something all of the students at FREE LA possessed.

As we drove past the last high school the three boys attended before coming to FREE LA, I peered down narrow streets, wondering if we were passing their "hangout" spot. Autopilot kicking in, my mind drifted back a few days to my interview with Bandit and Kodak, in which they shared their shared histories being "kicked out" of South Central High School. We were sitting in my classroom at FREE LA, where I had taught English for the past year. While I fidgeted, characteristically, on one side of the long student desk, the two of them leaned back comfortably in their chairs on the other. As they narrated the experiences that converged in their simultaneous arrival at FREE LA, the base in each of their voices, like the clarity of their insight, belied their young age.

"So, yeah, we would go to school like when it was already lunch time. And they would get up on us over that. They knew where we...they knew our *hangout* spot." Bandit pushed the word hangout into the air.

"Outside of school?" My eyes were glued to a fraying thread on my staff sweatshirt. As the boys answered a concerted *yeah* in unison, I gave in to my temptations and began pulling at the thread, trying to break it off from the broader fabric.

Bandit continued. "And then the counselors and staff, they'll all go where we'll be at and they'll just tell us, 'Oh go to class, go to class.'" As the students often did when sharing their education histories, Bandit swiftly changed his tone to play the role of staff, mimicking a frantic search party.

"Or they'll send school police to the alley just [to] tell us like, 'Oh, y'all gotta go to class. You gotta go to class.'"

“They’ll find you off campus?” I looked up from my thread in naive surprise.

Again, a chorus. Yeah.

“That’s too much.” In these interviews, oftentimes the only thing to say was something they already knew, something that didn’t need to be said.

Despite my stating the obvious, Bandit confirmed, “Yeah, that’s just doing too much. That’s when... We really got up on them ‘cause of that. And they just, they knew we was gon’...tore [the school] up, you feel me? That’s why we just all got sent out.” He paused, took his phone out of his pocket to check the time, and shifted his position. “Hey Miss, you keep pulling that thread ’n you might just unravel the whole thing.”

As my mind wandered between images of fraying threads, hangout spots, and frantic search parties, Bandit’s actual voice from the backseat entered my daydream like a spirit, startling me out of autopilot.

“This corner is good, Miss.”

I pressed the brake and stopped abruptly at the corner, breathing sharp relief that no car was behind me. Knowing by now that they’d refuse, but feeling I needed to ask anyway, I offered to drive them all the way to their destination.

“Naw,” the three boys said, almost in unison. “We got it from here.”

I checked my rearview mirror quickly to make sure no cars were coming, and by the time I looked back up to say something they already knew—“be safe” or “see you tomorrow”—the boys had all but *disappeared* behind the corner of a building. All I caught was a glimpse of Jayden pulling an oversized hood over his head, revealing words penned in red font that had previously been hidden:

“There’s always a way out.”

Roadmap: Free Movement in the Carceral-Education Landscape

The remainder of this chapter pulls at the threads of these two stories to advance what I have mentioned are my two core claims. I argue, first, that formal schooling operates through various forms of spatial domination that attempt to track, force, or contain the movement of Black and brown young people within and between space(s)—which spaces they are allowed to inhabit or escape, when and in what ways—and within and across a carceral-education landscape more broadly. Secondly, these incessant efforts to track and control are not simply responses to (mis)behavior, methods of sorting, or draconic modes of maintaining safety and order, but rather anxious attempts to predict and contain free (Black) movement. These claims, in turn, suggest two others: first, that spatial domination is fundamentally counterinsurgent in nature; and second, that “school” (like prison) is not a fixed institution, or static and self-evident ‘thing,’ but rather a set “tenuous and unstable practices and relations [that are] subject to intervention and revision” (King, 2019, p. 78). Free (Black) movement in the context of schooling, in other words, signifies more than just a regulatory issue, a management risk, or even a disruption to the status quo; rather, it symbolizes an epistemological rupture that, when forced open, charts alternative ways of living, learning, making space, and moving through the world.

Reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of this dissertation and a method of entanglements, these claims incorporate and build on critical geographies of education (CGE), and contribute to broader dialogues around abolition, education, and carcerality. CGE analyze schools as key sites of social reproduction, exploring how educational projects, policies, opportunities and their spatial distributions shape and are shaped by local-global geographies of racial, gender, and class-based oppression (Kromidas, 2022; Holloway & Kirby, 2019; Pini et al., 2017; Serrano,

2022). But the emerging subfield also explores how community members, organizers, and activists “*contest* unjust geographies of education” (Nguyen et al., 2017, p. 22), resist racialized (educational) abandonment, and advance larger struggles for social and spatial justice, through the site of the school (Cahill et al., 2016; Cheng, 2016; Buras, 2013; Good 2017; Lipman, 2018). Rather than focusing only on domination, in other words, the recent focus in CGE is to “engage schools as sites where multiple co-constitutive projects come together and can be resisted” (Nguyen et al., 2017, p. 9). What this subfield adds to education studies, and might also add to studies of the school-prison link, is an analysis of schooling that situates it as a dynamic and relational terrain of struggle, shaped constitutively by broader spatial configurations of power and resistance.

Despite these insights, however, CGE has struggled against the weight of one of most timeless and seductive myths: the “deep down” benevolence, and thus salvageability, of American education. Hardly limited to CGE, this nimble and persistent myth weasels its way incessantly into otherwise “radical” demands for educational transformation, made by scholars and activists alike.³³ Seeking a different set of truths, this chapter takes as a point of departure a conclusion drawn by Henry (2020, p. 183) in his recent review of CGE: that, “while critical of some particularly egregious policies,” the emerging subfield has yet “to openly problematize its subject: the whole notion of compulsory, mass institutionalized schooling.” I suggest that this conclusion offers a meaningful point of departure to probe more expansive alternatives to the school-prison link.

³³ There are important interdisciplinary conversations around “abolitionist education,” particularly in the context of the school-prison nexus. While relevant, the visions for educational transformation made in this body of work differ in key ways from the visions I discuss here. Demands for radical curricular, epistemic, and ideological transformations through “abolitionist education,” while crucial and sorely needed, do not *necessarily* think beyond the site of the school. (For a notable discussion of “school abolition,” however, see Stovall, 2018).

To advance this dissertation’s exploration of the deeper entanglements between schooling and carceral regimes, and my interest in a more expansive set of solutions, this chapter raises questions about the consistency with which *schools* are taken-for-granted and recapitulated as the primary sites (or necessary portals) of transformation in the movement for educational justice, including recent and ongoing efforts to dismantle the STPP. A critical geographic method of entanglements guides my focus away from “particularly egregious” disciplinary policies, and to the ways US schooling extends the reach, materially and ideologically, of carceral regimes through its mundane terms, conditions, and features. I do so by listening to the insurgent forms of movement and place-making strategies embodied by young people within and outside of schools, which operate beyond the sorts of organized struggle typically characterized (and studied) as “activism” or collective resistance. These movements and the ruptures they force open are rendered illegible, unimaginable, and un-geographic (McKittrick, 2006) within frameworks of criminalization, as well as within frameworks of educational equality, access, restoration, or assimilation. Overall, I aim to think beyond “school” as the terrain on which abolitionist education, and other movements for (educational) liberation, might be achieved.

Epistemology and Method: Black Feminist Geographies

Bolstered by ethnographic observations and informal conversations with all FREE LA students, education (hi)stories with 13 students are the primary source of data for this chapter. To engage with these (hi)stories, this chapter draws its epistemological and methodological praxis from Black feminist geographic knowledge.

Black feminist geographies have detailed the centrality of map-making/cartography to conquest and the violent (re)iterative processes of constructing modernity’s Human—Man (Wynter, 2003), the white European self (King, 2019)—through Black and Indigenous death and

dispossession (King, 2019; Madera, 2023; Wynter, 2003; Wynter & McKittrick, 2015). However, in departure from both dominant and “critical” geographic analyses—which reinscribe, whether by valorizing or critiquing, the condemned status of Black space—Black feminist geographies refuse the dialectic that renders Black life either unintelligible, or knowable only in relation to (its inclusion within, exclusion from, or resistance to) systems of domination. In the specific ways they uncover the inextricability of “race, place and violence” (McKittrick, 2011), Black feminist geographies disrupt two core epistemic technologies of cartographic domination. The first of these technologies is to story space (both body and place) as fixed and ‘transparent’ (McKittrick, 2006; Hawthorne, 2019; Hawthorne & Lewis, 2023). The notion that space “just is”—that there *just are* invisible schools and white suburbs and those places you wouldn’t wanna raise your kids—is inextricably entwined with the spatialization of difference (McKittrick, 2006), and with gendered-racialized narratives inscribed onto people and the places from which (it is presumed) they come. The second epistemic technology is to begin *a priori* with, and therefore remain unable to imagine beyond, the “algorithmic fact” of Black abjection and placelessness (McKittrick, 2014; 2017). As McKittrick (2011) explains, this violent epistemic practice pervades the analytic and “commonsense” frameworks through which researchers (and others) understand the world. Specifically, our present eurocentric systems of knowledge and knowing—the stories we tell and how we tell them (Wynter, 2003)—become enclosed in a circuitous logic wherein the Black/non-white person or body can only ever be seen (rendered legible) as violent or violated. This is the case, McKittrick argues, even and especially in analytical critiques of that violence.

Radically disrupting these technologies of cartographic domination, Black feminist geographies begin instead from “a Black sense of place:” a place of Black life and livingness

(McKittrick, 2014, 2021), which “brings into focus the ways in which racial violences (concrete and epistemic actions and structural patterns intended to harm, kill, or coerce a particular grouping of people) *shape, but do not wholly define, black worlds*” (McKittrick, 2011, p. 947, emphasis added). This place of Black life and livingness, and the liberatory epistemological praxis of beginning from it, foregrounds how Black stories, knowledges, ecologies, imaginaries, and everyday spatial practices are inseparably enmeshed with modernity’s racial-carceral geographic arrangement(s), and therefore as well with the present-future and real-imagined possibilities that exist beyond it (Brand, 2023; Madera, 2023; McKittrick, 2006, 2014; McKittrick & Woods, 2007; Reese, 2019; Winston, 2021).

This enmeshment—or entanglement—is the metanarrative. It is the legends, the alternative sense of place, those errant paths, hideouts and hangouts, (un)forgotten histories, belonging etched in code, threaded through the carceral-education landscape. This enmeshment is a portal and point of departure to understand “what else happens” (King, 2019) beyond and beneath the white holographic/cartographic gaze (Hawthorne & Lewis, 2023). The epistemological interventions of Black feminist geographic knowledge are therefore also methodological. King (2019), for example, argues that through Black geographical reading practices, Black *uncontainability* surfaces as always already unsettling dominant cartographic configurations. Such reading practices, and related analytical orientations, begin with and are therefore able to “unearth” Black visions of liberation, forms of social organization, and ways of knowing, being and making space, that move outside Eurocentric epistemic regimes and white temporal-spatial logics (Brand, 2023; McKittrick, 2020).

These methodological-epistemological interventions have informed, in iterative conjunction with FREE LA students’ own repeated claims to space, the way I listen(ed) to

students' stories—not only in interviews, but over time, in conversations, in cars and classrooms, in text threads and impromptu tour guides that rupture comfortable backseat silences, and as both an ethnographer and educator. Likewise, these iterative interventions methodologically, analytically, and theoretically inform how I reread, interpret, make sense of, and retell students' stories in the sections that follow. In other words, Black feminist geographic praxis frames both what I say and, constitutively, how I listen(ed) to what students say, how students move, and what students say about movement—their own and others'.

Black feminist geographic praxis also informs the way the present study opened. Given how over-determined our current systems of knowledge/production are by Man's cartographic sensibilities (Wynter, 2003), it is the “combination” of real-imagined geographies (McKittrick, 2006) that allows us to stitch together a different set of truths and possibilities. Like those who have grappled with the violence of the archives (Haley, 2016; Hartman, 2008), Black feminist geographic knowledge production has turned insurgently to the “speculative—an integration of ‘what is’ and ‘what could be’ despite it” (Purifoy, 2023, p. 31; McKittrick, 2014) in order to tell new stories, or old stories in new ways that refuse to begin with and therefore arrive at a place of Black placelessness. The stories with which I began, which toyed in various ways with fact, detail, and chronology,³⁴ should thus be understood as analysis (Hartman, 2021), and as the

³⁴ The HoloMap visualizes core themes that emerged across students' stories. However, I wove in some specificities of Beautiful's story, such as bathroom tracking and principals who were removed for touching students inappropriately, which I revisit and discuss in the forthcoming sections. Additionally, the specific “moves” symbolized by the objects on the HoloMap (see p. 4) reflect actual events described by students in their education histories. One student, Kimora, described a teacher who “sat all...her ‘ideal smart kids’ in the front, and all the ‘whatever’ in the middle, and had the Black kids in the back.” Another student, Jimmy, described how his pre-school “just called CPS every time I got in trouble,” with some of these calls resulting in CPS showing up to his home and “searching the house.” In addition to the broad patterns of forced or contained movement symbolized by “pieces of paper”—patterns which impacted all of the students—Jimmy also described how his teachers would prepare referral slips for him in advance: “On Monday, they had a referral already signed, and the only thing they gotta put is what I did to get sent out [of class]. Because they knew I was gonna get sent out eventually.” In the second story, the drive through LA, all of the events described are things that happened and all of the things that are said were actually said, though not always in the precise order, or under the specific contexts, in which I (re)tell them. All interview transcripts specifically pertaining to students' educational experiences were quoted verbatim.

study's core metanarrative structure—its bones and background—while the following sections pull at the threads and fibers of those stories in order to stretch the analytical precision and clarity of the metanarrative they tell.

Another Roadmap

In the first section, I tug at the strands of the HoloMap by returning to the carceral-education landscape, to tell a story of schooling and/as spatial domination. Analytically, I pay attention to the ways students story the landscape from a (Black) sense of place, an internal compass, that both unveils and refuses the validity and naturalness of spatial domination. In the second section, as in the drive through LA, I (re)turn to what is always already threaded through that landscape. I turn to those 'illegible' paths, that movement from below, to (re)read the carceral-education landscape for "momentary ruptures" (King, 2019) that, if followed, might just unravel the whole thing. Jettisoning both the object and its critique, I turn to these movements as an alternative legend that invites us to ask: Beyond frameworks of "equal access" or "better schools," what would a broader vision of educational liberation look like? I conclude by looking to FREE LA as a model of how collective action might honor these forms of movement.

PART I: Returning to the Carceral-Education Landscape

Zahra: I used to talk. That's why I got kicked out...of the whole LAUSD system. I got in one fight on campus, and I was not even responsible for that fight. The others were off campus. But I was still kicked out and it was counted for as on campus. So, after ninth grade, I was not allowed to go—I was kicked out of the whole LAUSD system, out of the whole platform in general. So, I did not attend public school.

Margaret: Do you feel like, at your other schools, it was discrimination?

Zahra: Well, [that] was a primarily Black school. Soo, I would say no, not there. Officer

Li, he was a little racist though. Like that [man] told me if I step on *they* side of the sidewalk, he was gonna arrest me!

Margaret: Who's they?

Zahra: Mind you, I lived down the street from the school. So, like, that's my neighborhood, that's my area. So, you're telling me if I step on the school grounds, you're going to arrest me.

Like Zahra and Beautiful, many FREE LA students were shifted between multiple elementary, middle, and high schools, and/or banned from entire districts, before coming to FREE LA. Focusing on this pattern of young people first being moved between places, and then being “removed from the whole in general” in this section I advance the claim that spatial domination is endemic to schooling. I argue that through various forms and scales of spatial domination, schools are made and remade by claiming ownership over and inscribing difference into a broader landscape that includes multiple other State, public, and private institutions (including “informal” and alternative schools), as well as ideology and common-sense. In contributing broader interdisciplinary dialogues around abolition and education, my goal is not to paint the landscape as an impenetrable ‘thing,’ nor simply a site of resistance, but rather to expose it as a set of relations and an always “unresolved and incomplete project” (King, 2019) of stifling free (Black) movement. My purpose, as well, is to consider how these processes and relations operate and are concealed through relatively mundane rules, terms, and contracts of schooling.

Zahra's anecdote captures how schooling functions as part of a broader carceral apparatus that displaces and disappears people, by determining and naturalizing who has a right to be in

and of (a) place, and therefore, who has the right to be. As the HoloMap visualizes, through relationships with other institutions, ideologies and agents, schooling, as a fractured and heterogenous but interconnected landscape, dictates—beyond, but through, individual school sites—which spaces and forms of movement Black and Brown young people have access to. As Zahra asserts, that was her neighborhood. Yet, conjuring specters of Jim Crow-era “their side and ours” (and thus the plantation geographies that preceded them [McKittrick, 2011]), Officer Li embattles “school grounds” as both an exceptional space of racialized State power (and therefore whiteness, even in the absence of white people), and as the basis of her mattering. In this landscape, Zahra’s student status is her token to inhabit (“their”) space, even in a place where she lives.

Students’ education-histories revealed how this territorialization of space (both body and place) through the site of the school cuts in multiple directions, whereby movement that occurs off campus—in homes, in hoods, in “hangout” spots—is leveraged by school and confederate agents to dictate where and how movement and belonging ought to occur in the future. Students mentioned attending their previous schools to avoid being arrested for truancy, while others recalled times that CPS workers or school Superintendents had shown up at their homes and threatened to arrest their parents, many of them Black mothers, if they did not attend. While Zahra, too, was threatened with arrest, other students were arrested for trespassing at the schools they used to attend, and at schools they were currently attending, exposing schools as sites of conditional belonging shaped as much by who is there as who is not. Rather than exceptional, this policing of who gets to be where and when is an uninterrupted throughline connecting seemingly disparate coordinates across a continuously restructured carceral-education landscape.

Indeed, beyond arresting, suspending or physically displacing students, the means

through which schooling claims ownership over movement and space are much more mundane. In particular, schools reflect and regenerate the locomotion of prisons by institutionally marking students with records (disciplinary records, attendance records, report cards), pieces of paper that work like locks and keys to determine, within and far beyond the site of the school, which spaces they are allowed to inhabit, and to what quality of life they are entitled. Through an embodied knowing that stretches back centuries (Purifoy, 2023), numerous FREE LA students conceptualized formal schooling and college as a “scam”—even as they valued myriad forms of learning—while at the same time being keenly aware that graduating is important because, in student Jayla’s words, “to the white people it’s important.” Within a carceral-education landscape, moreover, simply being marked as “truant” or unenrolled in school makes young people more likely to be detained (Goldman & Rodriguez, 2022).

Given the centrality of schooling to capitalist mobility and relative “freedom” in carceral regimes, this marking, charting, and record-keeping—banal dimensions of schooling—functions as part of a broader operation of unevenly distributing life chances across the landscape and, valorized by myths of meritocracy (Vaught, 2017), obscuring them as the result of individual choices. Alongside and as part of activist/scholarly efforts to equalize educational access and opportunity across space (or, maybe, to repurpose those efforts towards other ends), we might also interrogate how such intrinsic features and relations of schooling, beyond “particularly egregious policies” (Henry, 2020), will always already differentiate in ways that reinforce and reproduce racial capitalist exploitation. Diplomas, for example, like keys to cages, advance a skewed definition of freedom contingent on unfreedom, normalizing particular markers of educational success as proxies for who counts as human. Likewise, elemental ingredients of schooling such as compulsory attendance and student status are fundamentally exclusionary

markers of who deserves access to education, and the myriad “doors” it opens, because they imply, necessarily, that some people do not deserve access. This hierarchical partitioning of resources, access, and life chances across space serves not only a material, but also a social and cultural function.

Spatializing Difference in the Carceral-Education Landscape

Indeed, the means through which schools (of multiple types) filter and normalize conditional forms of mattering and access, through the territorialization of body and place, are also ideological in form and consequence. Zooming back into Beautiful’s story:

Beautiful: I wouldn't even stay the whole day at school, because I just had enough. So, I would go home—and they still had a problem with that. I’m just like, how do you have a problem with *this*?

Margaret: Right. Like, you have a problem when I’m here and then—

Beautiful: Yeah. Y’all say it’s a problem when I don't go to class. And when I do go to class, it’s still the same outcome. So...what’s really the difference if I’m here or if I go home?

Beautiful explains how she was labeled and lumped wrong or non-compliant when she went to class, and wrong or non-compliant when she left, conveying the message that she belongs nowhere. Uprooting by exposing that message (Hawthorne, 2019), Beautiful insightfully relates these everyday forms of spatial domination to her broader history of ultimately being banned from LAUSD, and to broader racialized narratives of belonging, place, and placelessness:

I honestly feel like [schools] need to care more. Because when you just take a student like, ‘Okay, well, you can't go here no more. So, I don’t know what to tell you’—I feel

like when they do that, you tellin' me like, 'Well, shit, you not going nowhere in life, so... Might as well just fuck up and go do some dumb shit, and just go... *sit in a jail cell.*'"

Black feminist geographies unsettle by unearthing the ways geo-racial configurations of humanness are mapped out through cartographic violence (Wynter, 2003). McKittrick argues how racial, sexual, and economic “hierarchies are naturalized by repetitively spatializing ‘difference,’” and that “practices of domination, sustained by a unitary vantage point, naturalize both identity and place, repetitively spatializing where nondominant groups ‘naturally’ belong” (2006, p. xv). As both Zahra and Beautiful’s stories exemplify, through various scales and modes of spatial domination, schools reinforce ideological vantage points, which structure global world orders, by establishing “that some bodies belong, some bodies do not belong, and some bodies are out of place” (McKittrick, 2006, p. xv). In particular, Black girls are teleologically, algorithmically narrated as perpetually out of place and belonging nowhere (McKittrick, 2014, 2017; Morris, 2016; Shange, 2019; Wun, 2016).

At the level of ideology and common sense, through the interplay of material and discursive violence (Madera, 2023), the spatialization of difference also attempts to make real “the idea that space ‘just is,’ and the illusion that the external world is readily knowable” (McKittrick, 2006, p. xv). There “just are”, so the story goes, urban schools and Black neighborhoods and bad kids who “not going nowhere in life.” There “just are”, so the dominant cartographic legend has it, kids who go to college, and kids who never graduate, and kids who go to jail. Like prisons, schools occupy the public imaginary—in their ostensibly democratic function (Vaught, 2017), and seemingly natural if uneven spatial distribution—in ways that

normalize the carceral ideology that some people will live and move and be free while others, simply, will not.

But understanding how power moves, and how space is made and remade, resists the tendency to begin with Black placelessness as pre-determined, algorithmic fact (McKittrick, 2014, 2016). Both Beautiful and Zahra's stories unveil how individual agents leverage the material and ideological power of carceral institutions, property law, and broader so-called commonsense constructions of place, race, and belonging. Through, and as, a set of ideas and contestations, actors and absences, shifting policies, and unchanging practices, school is made and remade as an ostensibly public good, in ways that reconfigure and obscure racial hierarchies of humanness (Kromidas, 2022) and taken-for-granted notions of access. Yet, neither brute force nor coerced consent are able to fully erase the histories that exist before and beyond, the informal landmarks, the deep spatial awareness of what is real, of whose neighborhood this is, who lives here. In storying this landscape as irrational, and in dislodging by disclosing from below, the "supposedly stable spatial referents" (Hawthorne & Lewis, 2023, p.13; Madera; 2023) that sustain a cartographic gaze from above, Beautiful and Zahra send surface fractures across a landscape that is much less fixed, inevitable, and knowable than its cartographers map it out to be.

Threaded through and troubling the carceral-education landscape is an inability to understand the ways young people disappear themselves, and the possibilities they unearth in the process. Directly below the surface, complex systems of spatial domination reveal themselves, like holograms, as beams of light filtered through a series of mirrors and gadgets: as a "tenuous and unstable" landscape shaped and reshaped as much by errant movement from below as by the counterinsurgent attempts to comprehend and contain that movement from above (King, 2019, p.

78). Geographies of education, in developing top-down accounts and critiques of socio-spatial difference, can in fact naturalize this difference, in that “to describe is also to produce” (Gilmore, 2022, p. 109).

However, reading the carceral-education landscape for this movement from below—from and through a compass that centers Black life, legends, and livingness—a different (meta)narrative emerges. This entangled (meta)narrative denaturalizes the seemingly inherent/inevitable/natural orderings of bodies/place/race/opportunities and taken-for-granted solutions such as expanding inclusion into inherently exclusionary structures. Moving outside frameworks of vulnerability, outside frameworks of push-out, upward mobility, and other one-way streets, we might scratch at the shape of a different type of blueprint.

The Legend Underneath the Landscape

Two days after the interview with Bandit and Kodak, Nova and I sat in the same place. Thick short dreads, dyed blonde at the ends, framed his face, hovering right above his eyebrows.

Nova: The biggest difference in FREE LA is they give you freedom.

Margaret: Mhm.

Nova: All the other schools, they don't give you freedom to be who you want. Cause FREE LA, they say, ‘if you not gonna do work, you can go home.’

Margaret: Right.

Nova: Other schools, [if] you're not gonna do the work, you're goin' to detention. You either, they either gone suspend you—or you just not gonna get no credit. They not giving you no other option. Other than *failure*. You get what I'm saying? The difference is: if you not gone do work at FREE LA, you can go home. Do it on the computer

anytime you want to. You got a choice at FREE LA, you got freedom. I can't walk out of class at a normal school, and be gone a whole entire class period, and be like, 'yeah, I'm just not feelin it right now.' Cause then they gonna think, 'Oh, you just tryin to skip class. You not tryna be in class. You not tryna do this 'n that. You not tryna be around everybody.' But then, what are the circumstances in my life?

Nova paused here, and the brief silence that followed created a powerful space of clarity around his words. Moving from this space, he continued:

They always want to say, 'Oh, I *been* through that.' The teachers always tell you, 'I *been* through that. I understand you.' Well, I never hear one person say, 'Oh, I—I never really gone through that. Tell me more.'

Nova's reflections offer a moving point of departure to consider how the territorialization of space, in schools and through schooling, extends to both body and place. In Nova's experience relinquishing the right to free movement was a stipulation of "normal" schooling, where "doing the work" and "failure" form a narrow dichotomy that eclipses the possibilities for more liberatory forms of and relationships with education. This section argues that spatial domination, as an intrinsic feature of schooling, operates specifically in order to suppress and preclude the sorts of free movement, or ability to come and go, that might shape spaces of liberated and unconditional education. Through their shared essential problems of perception, both spatial domination and its commonsense solutions—greater access to or less exclusion from so-called good schools—foreclose the possibilities, embodied in young people's movements, for something else entirely. I began with Nova's thoughts on FREE LA as a point of departure to then revisit students' experiences in "other schools." Nova's juxtapositions between the two

offers an alternative legend to reread the carceral-education landscape not only for students' movements but for the possibilities of honoring those movements through collective action.

Pulling at the Thread

Reading below the landscape for “what else happened” (King, 2019; McKittrick, 2014), I found that Black and Brown students' persistence in moving freely—and the expansive visions of educational freedom they signify—is the primary (elusive) target of spatial domination. These forms of movement demonstrate young people's insistence on honoring their bodies and boundaries that—while rendered irrational/unimaginable through narratives of criminality, classificatory systems of risk and vulnerability, and demands for schools as sites of liberation—chart the blueprints for an alternative epistemological order where (Black) life is cared for unconditionally. Woven throughout students' education histories are forms of refusal and escape, within and beyond the site of school, preceded by a keen spatial awareness of their bodies being used as sites of territorialization, and thus an insurgent drive to disappear themselves.

Returning to the movements that foreshadowed Bandit and Kodak's departures to their hangout spot, Bandit explained:

Bandit: [School] was boring. And it was long periods, too. And the teachers, they just—they just get you mad, and you just walk out.

Margaret: Right.

Bandit: Yeah, that's what I would do. You feel me, if I get into it with a teacher, I just—bro, I'd just rather walk out.

Margaret: You just wanna leave instead?

Bandit: Yeah.

Margaret: And so that's why they said you were ditching or whatever?

Bandit: They would see me walking past [in] the hallways and stuff. But they don't know I would be ditching, though.

Despite “them” (teachers, staff, school police, cartographers) not always knowing, Bandit included “ditching,” walking out, and coming late within the host of (potential) reasons he was pushed between numerous schools. In addition to escaping to hangout spots and hiding in plain sight in hallways, students protected their spiritual and emotional boundaries by not going to school in the first place. As Jimmy explained:

People not in the mood for that every day. And, first of all, if I'm not in the mood when I wake up, and then I gotta go to school, that's gonna put me in a worse mood. So, now when I go to school, *something's* going to happen.

That is, rather than in response to a specific incident, students also moved in refusal of the terms and conditions of schooling, of the feeling of being contained, in general. And as Kimora shared in her education history:

I definitely had my own world, and I was going through a lot. If it took me ditching with my friends to be happy, I would go ditch with my friends to be happy.

This insurgent drive to come and go as they need creates what emerged in students' education histories, and in my time teaching at FREE LA, as a general ebb and flow. A dynamic diaspora shaped but not wholly determined by forces of domination and displacement (McKittrick, 2011). For example, in greeting a student at FREE LA who hadn't attended my class in a few weeks, I asked where she'd been and she replied: “I've been living my best life.” As both educator and ethnographer, I learned over time (and always imperfectly) to heed to these movements, against the weight of terribly seductive myths (McKittrick, 2006, p. xi) that to be in

school is to have a more safe and certain destination. Reading below and beyond dominant cartographic legends, I found that students were routinely punished specifically for these forms of movement for: “walking out,” hiding and wandering, and doing whatever it takes to be happy. Some students would return to school from their self-proclaimed wellness breaks and be told they cannot come back, either immediately, having lost their student status, or over time, having been labeled a “bad kid.” Backtracking to the beginning of her journey, we see that Beautiful was rendered belonging nowhere, not only for going home when she “had enough,” but distinctively for moving on her own terms:

Beautiful: My story in terms of school, it would have been like, I would say every school that I went to probably either kicked me out or expelled, suspended [me]. And all for very dumb reasons, like not going to class, not compliant with staff members. Uh, doing things on my own time. But, as far as myself, I know what I do and what I don’t do. And, as far as ‘compliant with staff’—yeah, sometimes I don’t comply. But yeah, I’m still go to class. I might not move as fast as you want me to—

Margaret: Mhm.

Beautiful: But I *will*.

As others have argued, Black students’ withdrawals from public schooling can be read as liberatory and insurgent departures from State-sanctioned spaces of carceral anti-black enclosure (Sojoyner, 2016, 2017; Shange, 2019). Alongside an awareness, and political analysis, that Black girls and boys are not entitled to emotions like anger in spaces like schools, young people walking out, or not coming, or doing things on their own time, demonstrate an unwavering refusal to disavow their internal compass in order to meet the compulsory demands of schooling and its pre-scripted metrics of (conditional) belonging. Tethered to our current Eurocentric

knowledge system, this internal compass can only ever be calculated as risk (McKittrick, 2014; 2016); squeezed into a narrow dichotomy of domination and resistance, or “death and survival” (Reese, 2019); or critiqued through closed analytic frameworks that begin and therefore end with Black placelessness. Wrenched from the white cartographic gaze, however, and beginning from a place that centers the entanglements between everyday (Black) spatial praxes and real-imagined geographies of liberation, another story unfolds. Rather than simply resisting or surviving, students’ movements *poke holes* in the set of interlocking institutions and ideologies comprising neoliberal carceral regimes, which command the extraction of bodily autonomy, through the policing of where bodies must be, for how long, and in what ways, as a “commonsense” stipulation of basic human rights: from education and housing to medical care and food (Gilmore, 2022).

That students were routinely displaced or told they cannot come back for moving on their own terms reveals how schools, beyond simply engines of stratification, are sites of inherently contingent access that demand young people relinquish their bodily sovereignty in exchange for an education. Constitutive features of formal schooling such as mandatory attendance, student status, minimum GPAs, schedules dictated by bells, and predetermined/permission-contingent bathroom breaks operate as quotidian forms of spatial domination that preclude the ability to come and go as one needs, and to move at a livable pace. Yet, students’ insistence on doing so suggests the potential for more radical visions of learning beyond the site of the school—beyond both the object and its constant reformulation through critique.

Cartographies of Counter/insurgency

It is these alternative worlds, these epistemological ruptures, I am arguing, that “school” as an ever-shifting institutional and ideological system works hard to extinguish through anxious

forms of statecraft. In addition to frantic search parties, trespassing arrests, home invasions, and exile across the landscape, desperate attempts to chart youths' paths emerged as an incessant stalking, following, tracking within schools in order to contain their movement before it even occurred. Returning again to the hairy white pointer finger, Beautiful's story ties together these multiple scales of spatial domination:

I had this one specific teacher. He was also a—I think he was the principal, or something. He was very so...hands on with everything...in *his* mind. I'm just like, damn, give me a break. Like, soon as I walk into school—'cause I used to walk to school every day, so it'll take me a minute to get there—he's, every day: 'You're late! You're this! You're that! Tardy! Detention! No lunch! And you're gonna sit in the class and...do this! And you're gonna clean up after lunch!' And I'm just like...Well, after lunch I'ma be sitting in the bathroom somewhere, because I'm not doing that! And they would literally come looking for me. When I say first floor to third floor, first building to the second building, they would literally come lookin' for me. 'Have you guys seen Beautiful? Have you guys seen her? Where's she at? And dah-dah-dah-dah.' And they would literally *watch* the cameras and track which bathroom I'm in.

Likewise, among the other ground he covered in describing the events at other schools that led him to FREE LA, Jimmy explained:

Jimmy: First of all, they used to *stalk* me, like around campus. Just follow me, every time.

Margaret: Who?

Jimmy: The staff. It was an assistant principal. My tenth grade year was his first year there. He used to follow me around every day. Every single day! Nutrition, lunch, passing

period. He used to come to my classes. Like, I think he had a crush on me.

Margaret: The assistant principal?

Jimmy: Yeah, but it's like ten of them.

Margaret: Just following you, for what? To see if you had something?

After dramatically listing a host of potential reasons, as equally ridiculous as they were probable, why he was “stalked” and “followed,” Jimmy claimed what Zahra, Beautiful, and many other students had concluded: “They was looking for a *reason* to kick me out.”

Having spun around in half-circles in my teacher's chair for the past five minutes, Jimmy abruptly stopped at the word reason.

“Okay,” I said.

The spinning resumed. “Because, like I said, I knew the system, so I knew how to stay out of trouble, and I knew what stuff I could get in trouble for, and I knew how to talk. So, I used to get out of a lot of situations.” He paused. “And it used to irritate them. So, they used to try to get me on anything. So that's pretty much—that's what I think that was.”

I watched his face disappear and return, disappear and return as he spun, thinking about how Zahra was “banned from the entire platform” for talking.

“They was hating,” Jimmy said as a matter of fact, placing his hand on the desk in front me and halting his movement for a moment. Maintaining eye contact, he pushed away from the desk again, letting his body spin as far as it would go before letting his head follow. “You know, because they can't catch me. *I'm too hot.*”

§

“‘Landmarks shift’ and ‘slip’ from the grip of those intending to fix and dominate people

and the earth” (King, 2019, p. 76). As Jimmy notes, the greatest threat to systems of schooling are young people who cannot be contained, not because they are a danger to themselves and others, as carceral cartographic legend teaches us, but rather because they breathe life into seemingly impenetrable, inevitable systems. Black and Brown students who “always find a way out” unravel the very premise of formal schooling: education with stipulations. However, the insurgent nature of these actions is eclipsed by frameworks of non-compliance, and rendered “un-geographic” (McKittrick, 2006) by the recapitulation of schools as both the problem and its only possible solution. Even if not viewed as criminal, young people intent on “living their best lives” or moving on their own time are often viewed as immature or irresponsible. They are people to be fixed or saved. The empty desks they leave when they depart are viewed as spaces to be filled, schools as sites to be reclaimed. Yet, disentangled from teleological algorithms and seductive myths and top-down “critiques” that begin and end with the certainty of violence (McKittrick, 2011; 2014), these movements weave a different, more life-affirming web of possibilities.

Rather than irresponsible, students’ movements within and across the landscape chart blueprints for a more transformative and unconditional relationship young people might develop with education—one that occurs on their terms, one that happens when they are ready. One that they can walk away from when it/things/life become too much, or when they’re “just not feelin’ it” right now. As space-making practices, these movements scaffold blueprints for a broader vision of educational liberation beyond expanded access into fundamentally exclusionary institutions and, ideally, beyond greater integration into a broader (global) territory that is inherently uneven and unjust. Concluding briefly with some of the ways FREE LA departs from the spatial domination endemic to schooling suggests the possibilities for collective action to

heed to the flow of these movements.

Conclusions and Continuations

As I have noted, YJC developed FREE LA in response to the seeming diaspora of young people of color across the carceral-education landscape (see Introduction and Chapter 1). As Nova's reflections captured, the ability to *come and go* is a critical distinguishing dimension of FREE LA. The various scales, within and to and from the space, at which FREE LA embraces free movement are shaped by their foundations in transformative justice (TJ) and abolition: both of which, I have also mentioned, offer a broad framework and set of everyday praxes for transforming the interpersonal, institutional, and ideological relationships that sustain carceral regimes. I focus briefly on three examples here. I then close by discussing the possibilities these departures present for the formation of non-school spaces of educational liberation, as one of the many roots/routes we might take towards more transformative alternatives to the school-prison link.

Departure I

Whereas students were ultimately exiled for “walking out” in other schools, young people at FREE LA are encouraged to leave (the classroom or the space) and come back when they are ready, in particular as it relates to honoring their emotions. As Ms. Tracey, FREE LA's main TJ facilitator, explained to the students during one Warrior Week orientation:

If you need time to go get your mind right, if you're angry today and need to leave for the day, that's okay. We won't take it personal because you are human and allowed to have a bad day.

As opposed to refusing to understand or, as Nova mentioned, claiming to always already “know” young people and the reasons they move the ways they do, FREE LA creates space for

youth to make themselves known at their own pace through conversations. As the following chapter will elaborate, at FREE LA conversation and communication—relatively mundane social processes, or capacities used towards other ends—serve as alternatives to punishment, exile, and “no option other than failure;” and as critical methods (everyday practices) for transforming carceral relationships within and between individuals, and therefore for transforming carceral space. Integral to this transformation, the ability to follow one’s internal compass—to leave, come back, and communicate on one’s own terms—without fear of being disappeared in the process is a key way FREE LA affirms movement. As Beautiful explained:

It’s not even just about conflict. Like, you can go, talk to them, have a conversation... Even if you having a bad day and don't want to talk about it right there *in that moment*, they're like, “Okay, well, we’ll give you some time.” I hated it in the beginning because I didn’t know how to talk at the time...Ms. Tracey doesn’t make us stay, never holds us hostage. But eventually I came back and got comfortable. I opened up and started talking.

This particular example demonstrates a radical departure from the epistemic violence of spatial domination and its attendant eurocentric/biocentric conceptions of humanness (Wynter & McKittrick, 2015), which render Black space (both body and place) as blank space (Brand, 2023); as “knowable (or findable and searchable)” (McKittrick 2014, p. 23; McKittrick, 2016; King 2019; see Chapter 5). This departure signifies the possibilities for an insurgent relational praxis of how we, as educators (and researchers), might *listen* to young people—as Chapter 5 will detail—how we might understand that there are some things we cannot understand, against the (death-)drive for full disclosure and the certainty of a knowable destination.

Departure II

Students leaving and coming back when they are ready might be for the day, and it might be for a semester or a year. Whereas, recalling Jimmy’s words, “in regular schools you get

kicked out for not coming,” in my time at FREE LA I have been touched on numerous occasions when a face unfamiliar to me, someone I presumed to be a new student, entered the lobby to sign up for classes and was *welcomed home* by the staff, like a family member returning from vacation. I began to realize how many youth flow to and from FREE LA: people with memories and deep ties to the space (and to South Central more generally) that vastly exceed my time in it. Whether because life showed up or because they just weren’t feeling it right now, this ebb and flow from FREE LA— influenced but not wholly determined by forces of domination—allows the space to be shaped as much by the people who are in it as those who are not, but in ways that from regimes of spatial domination and conditional belonging.

Departure III

Finally, in addition to transforming interpersonal relationships within the space, at the spatial scale FREE LA works to untether the institutional and ideological relationships through which schooling is made (and remade) across the carceral-education landscape. FREE LA’s abolitionist refusal to report to or allow police, probation officers, or other carceral agents into the building works to obstruct the State’s territorialization of and unfettered access to body and place through the site of the school. As YJC organizer Gloria explained of FREE LA/YJC’s reclamation of Kenyon Juvenile Detention Center: “The beauty is that you can now walk out of this building without being watched and followed.” More mundanely, FREE LA refuses to institutionally mark young people with suspension records, truancy citations, or failing grades— paper trails that also follow Black and brown youth across the carceral-education landscape, dictating like locks and keys which sorts of movements and to which sorts of places they have access.

Threaded through each of these examples is a current of unconditional belonging—to one’s own body and time, to the FREE LA space as a whole, and to the things that make us *feel* human. This unconditional belonging signifies the capacities of spaces created through collective action to be shaped, in small laps and sweeping waves, by young people’s (free) movements—like the shoreline heeds to the ebb and flow of the tide. In Ms. Tracey’s words: “*Staying* is a form of love. We are staying put.”

Unraveling the Whole Thing

What does it mean for a space to “stay put” so that young people are free to move into and away from sites of learning on their own terms, so that young people can always be *of* a place, without being tethered *to* place? What are the unchanging features and throughlines of schooling that preclude this form of belonging? On one hand, exposing the fickle practices and relations through which schools perpetuate spatial domination also exposes “already-existing capacities” (Gilmore, 2022, p. 127) that might be used towards other means. FREE LA shows how through relatively simple interactions, seemingly inevitable stipulations of schooling can be refused, signifying the possibilities for new or transformed educational spaces of unconditional belonging. However, remaining open to the contention that *schools*—as they are reconfigured through progressive (Shange, 2019) and regressive movements alike—become woven into a broader global territory of racialized exclusion, then strengthening our movements for abolition and for educational liberation means also diligently asking what else we can create. As student BabySD noted, “school is important because school is the only place for certain kids to go to.” If schools are the only places young people can access education, and more generally the only places they can *be*, then there will always be groups of young people who must sacrifice free movement for the sake of belonging.

And, of course, those who refuse to do so.

Taking those refusals as a set of directions, places like FREE LA offer an abolitionist blueprint not only for educational spaces shaped by , but also for moving “in wrecking-ball fashion” (Henry, 2020) through the physical and conceptual site of the school. Uplifting YJC’s demand for 50 new youth centers across LA, collective movements for educational liberation—and scholarly and activist efforts to dismantle the school-prison link—should also push for the creation of non-school spaces where young people can access various forms of learning on their own terms, and more simply where they can just be. Recognizing that education is much broader than school and what is taught therein, tethering our visions of educational transformation to various re-iterations of “schooling” may eclipse more expansive horizons and stifle our ability to scratch at a different set of truths.

While everyone deserves access to a quality education, not being in school is only dangerous because we have made it that way. True educational liberation would mean that young people are not threatened with arrest, with the specter of incarceration, homelessness, or death, for leaving or not coming to school. Educational liberation locally and globally would mean that schooling, as it is rooted in western epistemologies and ontologies, is not the metric of who deserves access: to movement, to space, and to the things all humans deserve unconditionally. Certainly, community control over schools is a crucial anchor of collective movements against genocidal spatial arrangements. However, critical goals that address immediate needs, like increased matriculation or equitable access to a better-funded public education system, might be repurposed as means to a different end—which is also to say a new beginning. Rather than creating more keys, we must abolish the cages and borders they police, rooting ourselves in the un/forgotten spaces they cannot seem to reach. To tell new stories and rewrite new legends,

rather than reconfigure the old, we must turn inward and look outward and ask, over and over:
What is the world we are building, and who are we building it for?

The following chapter further explores these possibilities for world-making beyond the carceral-education landscape, by diving more deeply into the juxtapositions students draw between FREE LA and the numerous other schools they have attended. While I continue to disentangle the relationships that comprise the carceral-education landscape, I turn more closely to the numerous roots/routes through which FREE LA departs from these relationships—beyond reform, beyond inclusion, beyond pipelines and pathways that lead to victories and solutions more deadly than the problems they aim to solve.

§

CHAPTER 4

Unconditional Care Beyond the Carceral-Education Landscape: Abolitionist Education as Everyday Praxis

Introduction: A Point of Departure and a Site of Return

When Zahra was still a student at FREE LA, shortly before she graduated, she told me this:

I was always smart. I never had a problem completing the work. That wasn't the problem for me. I think it was the focus. That's why I like FREE LA so much— 'cause it's people like me. It's people like me here, but not everyone is like *me*, you know? And especially the teachers—like, they just know. *They know life shows up for everybody.*

As we talked, a single braid, intent on freeing itself from the others, cascaded over her shoulder and she pushed it back without skipping a beat—her face, her breath, her eyes unchanging.

“In a regular school they don't really give a fuck,” she continued. “Like, say if your grandma died. They might care for the moment, or say they care, but once it starts affecting your performance? They don't.” She shook her head slowly, eyes narrowed, pointed towards the floor but looking past it. Looking at something that already happened, something replaying in her head. “Nah. Once it starts affecting your performance, they don't care at all.”

§

We had been sitting in my classroom at FREE LA, right around the time I was making the transition from teaching assistant to teacher/ethnographer. With no unfinished/ongoing wall mural, no bean bag chairs, and no students sitting in oddly arranged desks, the room felt heavy and hollow, as if its thick concrete walls were tired of having no windows—tired, like the old iron gate, of enclosing the possibility for life now, and already in the future (Barad, 2019).

The students, I think more than anyone, felt this heaviness. Despite the real and symbolic power of reclaiming, transforming, and beautifying a former detention center into a “freedom school,” the students understood—with that keen internal compass—that ghosts haunt and linger

long after the initial act/event of violence is over. Long after the sheriffs and judges and front desk workers have taken their keys and files and folders to the next job, the next mission, the next concrete building. Long after the gavel pounds, the buses depart, the doors that lock only from the outside have been closed and opened and then closed again. *That's probably why the rooms are so cold*, Jayla, a FREE LA student, once thought aloud. *Someone might have died in this building*. She feels it, she told me once in conversation, feels this knowing: that this building used to be a courtroom. That you can transform jail cells into art exhibits and concrete walls into archives, but you can't get rid of ghosts.

And yet, for every ghost, there are thousands and thousands of memories—thousands of lessons and life-ways and stories—that people un/forgotten spaces reclaim, and never relinquished in the first place. This is the enmeshment, the entangled roots/routes. This is the ongoing/unfinished work of a past that is hardly passed (Sharpe, 2016), and a future that unfolds in the present.

And this is why, as I've mentioned, I am not concerned with inputs and outcomes, clean breaks and concrete conclusions, and victories that aren't really victories. This is why, in this dissertation, I aim not to measure and (pre)determine whether FREE LA “succeeds” in abolishing the school-prison link—but rather to understand the ideological, pedagogical, and interpersonal construction of the space. This is why I ask: in what ways, at what scales, and through what means does FREE LA *depart* from the carceral-education landscape?

In this chapter, I wrestle with students' repeated theorizations of these departures through the concept of *care*. Specifically, my goal in this chapter is to think through students' conceptualizations of care at FREE LA—how it is envisioned, embodied, and experienced in the space—in contrast to the type of care students say they experience in ‘regular schools.’ Things

like, in Zahra’s words, “once it starts affecting your performance, they don’t care at all.” My goal, as well, is to consider what these conflicting articulations of care mean for abolitionist education—not as an outcome or destination, but as an ongoing/unfinished praxis of *exceeding*, even as we are absorbed into (Gilmore, 2008), a carceral-education landscape: this landscape filled with ghosts; filled with memories that live in concrete walls and pastel homes; filled with un/forgotten spaces (both people and places) who never stopped imagining other ways to live (Hartman, 2019). Building from the prior chapter, I (re)turn to students’ experiences navigating this landscape—and their perceptions of FREE LA’s attempts to exceed it—to wrestle with conflicting genealogies and possibilities of care: how it structures the landscape as a mechanism of domination, but also its potentialities as a means of departure.

Care in the Carceral Education Landscape

“Once it starts affecting your performance, they don't care at all.”

To do so, I want to return to Zahra’s words and read them alongside another student’s, who—some months after Zahra—similarly critiqued traditional schooling through the lens of its contradistinction to FREE LA. Amidst the noise of books being closed and backpacks being zipped, this student, Diego, said: “You know, Miss, they actually help you here at FREE LA. In regular schools, once you do a bad thing, they just think you’re a bad kid, a fuck up. And then *they don’t care about you anymore*. After that, they’re not gonna try to help you. They just kick you out.”

As reflective of sentiments expressed by multiple students, Zahra and Deigo’s words capture a core juxtaposition, and a critical point of departure. In particular, Zahra and Diego’s summary of the difference between FREE LA and “regular schools” reflects something that emerged continuously in my interviews and conversations with young people in the space. While

they express a profound sense of safety and trust in a school that does not rely on police or punishment, when I've asked students what makes FREE LA "different" for them, what I hear most often are things like: "they get it," "they understand" and, especially, "*they actually care.*" The frequent repetition of the phrase "they actually care" demanded that I grapple with this concept, and its place in the movement towards abolition.

Initially, this demand concerned me. Alongside its longstanding liberatory genealogies, *care* is also tethered to violent genealogies that have been and remain integral to colonialism, transatlantic slavery, and various other iterations of modernity's death-driven human-making projects. Care has been the fulcrum around which coerced reproductive, social, and other labor has been exploited and extracted (from Black women in particular), and around which violent and enduring gendered-racial ideologies and terms of order have been crafted (Hartman, 2016). Perhaps less visceral but no less violent, neoliberal individualized notions of care have functioned, at best, as an insufficient antidote to—and thus obscuration of—structural issues (Thompson, 1998). Thus, before thinking through the liberatory possibilities of care in abolitionist education, I build from Zahra, Diego, and other students' theorizations to discuss how a particular iteration of care—what I call *conditional care*—functions to sustain and naturalize a perpetually uneven carceral-education landscape.

Theorizing Conditional Care

As Zahra and Diego each capture, FREE LA students' experiences leaving or being pushed out of schools, and/or barred from entire districts, reveal that schools (like prisons) function institutionally, ideologically, and inevitably—that is, as a matter of design—through a type of *conditional care* that polices the traumas of students of color and criminalizes the decisions they make to survive a white supremacist social order. Conditional care captures how,

at a structural level and as a structuring principle, care in schools is meted out based on ableist, anti-black, and colonial metrics of inclusion that punish any divergence from the perfect white citizen—Man (Wynter, 2003), the white European self (King, 2019)—or what Kimora termed “the ideal kid” (see Chapter 5). These are metrics that are difficult for most and impossible for many to meet. Beyond performance, (proximity to) blackness always already places students on or outside the periphery of care—and, constitutively, of humanness—making educational inclusion a battle of respectability politics and spiritual/ontological warfare that “demand[s] self-negation as the key to an exam pass” (Willoughby-Herard, 2005). By hinging young people’s worth on *performance*, attendance, and behavior—and thus proximity to white humanness—conditional care exploits the ways, in Zahra’s words, “life shows up” for Black and brown young people: ways that are structurally inevitable conditions of racial capitalism—or forms resistance to it—obscured always as individual failures.

As constituent of racial capitalist schooling and racial capitalism more broadly, conditional care reserves both choice and chance as structural properties of whiteness. During her education (hi)story, for example, Beautiful reflected on FREE LA being the first space, out of the many schools she had been pushed out of and into, to offer her “more than one chance.” She shared: “FREE LA is really not like other schools, because [other schools] are like, ‘Okay, well, screw it. *I don't care about what you got going on*. Shoot, that’s *yo* problem.’” Finally, conditional care also punishes and abandons young people who willfully refuse to participate or perform in institutions, and according to laws, logics, and life-ways, that are predicated on their own death and dispossession. Less important than the reasons for which Beautiful, Zahra, Diego, or any of the other students were displaced between schools is the pattern—the structural

inevitability—of the displacement itself, including the ways it is justified and naturalized by exclusionary definitions of who is worthy of care.

Thus, within the carceral-education landscape—where there are, so the story goes, “good” schools and “urban” schools and “schools for the bad kids”—conditional care is both necessary for and an outcome of the carceral-colonial ideology that certain people are disposable. It is necessary for and an outcome of systems that disappear people, as racialized proxies for social problems, into so-called forgotten spaces (like prisons and alternative schools). As constituent of these ideologies and systems, conditional care is fundamentally anti-black, rooted in myths of meritocracy (Vaught, 2017), and binds productivity and performance to *who counts as human*. My argument is that this conditional care is an endemic feature of US schooling, and a core anchor entangling it with carceral regimes. My argument, further, is that this is not a matter of individual teachers who care or don’t care (although that is certainly important), but rather of the institutional and ideological contexts they operate within. To wrestle with conditional care is to recognize that relationships structure and are inextricably structured *by* these contexts, which determine the forms of social and spatial organization that are possible.

And wrestling I was, indeed. If conditional care played such a critical role in students’ displacement, then what were the students capturing (or reclaiming) in the repeated assertion that what makes FREE LA so different is that “they actually care”? Thinking through what might reasonably be conditional care’s antithesis (or antidote)—an *unconditional care*—requires thinking through “they actually care” on a structural or spatial scale. That is, rather than an emotion or condition or action that occurs (solely) at the individual level.

With this as a starting point, I ask in this chapter: What old-new genealogies, knowledge traditions, and epistemologies are students’ definitions of care entangled with? Relatedly, how

does *unconditional care* reflect FREE LA's broader grounding ideologies, everyday practices, and the social relationships that structure and are structured by the space? Animated by these questions, I take students' definitions as a starting point (and a set of directions) to understand how care is theorized and embodied in the FREE LA space, and to consider how FREE LA's demonstrations of care might serve as a blueprint for abolitionist departures from the carceral-education landscape.

Possibilities for Departure: Theorizing Unconditional Care

Building on the prior chapters, the current chapter contributes to this dissertation's broader arguments, around the scopes and scales of transformation necessary to exceed the school-prison link, by focusing more closely on *process/praxis*, and more systematically on the entanglements between the institutional, ideological, epistemological, and interpersonal. My intention in the following sections is not to prescribe a precise definition of unconditional care, but rather to think through what students *mean* by care at FREE LA. In this project of thinking through, FREE LA's origin story and the school's foundations in abolition and transformative justice (TJ) emerged as two points that help articulate how care is theorized and experienced in the space. As I discuss these origins and foundations, I move between discussions of care in vision/theory and care in everyday practice/praxis. Doing so reveals how unconditional care at FREE LA operates at and across ideological, epistemological, interpersonal, and spatial scales—in broad movements, formal practices, and seemingly mundane interactions. It also reveals, then, a critical (geographic) understanding of abolitionist education/transformation as an ongoing/unfinished commitment: something that takes time and water and consistency. Something that does not, that cannot, bloom overnight.

In Part I, I examine how unconditional care was envisioned through FREE LA’s origin story, and how this vision of care is continually enlivened through practices that refuse the disposability the carceral-education landscape requires. In Part II, I explore how FREE LA’s foundations in abolition and TJ shape their visions and practices of care in ways that allow for new terms of relationality, and thus radically different forms of socio-spatial organization, to emerge. Following a method of entanglements, reading FREE LA’s care practices alongside longstanding genealogies of care—specifically, abolitionist and Black feminist genealogies—helps identify what is being reclaimed and re-membered in students’ definitions, and illuminates the potentialities for care in abolitionist education in light (and in spite) of its violent iterations.

§

Part I

Returning to a Root: Care as Spatial Reclamation

What might “they actually care” mean at the structural or spatial scale?

Chapters 1 and 2 each offered, through an analysis of the rebel garden, brief genealogies of FREE LA/YJC’s (hi)story of displacement. While their beautification of a former detention center is a powerful metaphor and unfinished/ongoing promise for reclaiming and transforming carceral space, FREE LA’s origin story begins before this—before the forced removal, before the beautification— with a group of people who “lacked resources but not resourcefulness” (Gilmore, 2008), and who tirelessly refused to forget themselves (Gilmore, 2021). Recounting this history, Tauheedah, a dear friend and YJC organizer, shared with me:

“YJC started out in front of a store. Literally at a storefront. And we looked around and realized: all these youth from our community keep getting kicked out. So, we said, *Damn. We should make our own school.*”

Here was the seed. The idea, birthed between the words and breaths of conversation at a South Central storefront. The vision, cultivated and toiled over by a group of people who identified a need in their community, and organized themselves in response to patterns of organized abandonment and racial displacement. Whereas neoliberal, individualized notions of care are necessarily conditional, FREE LA's origin story is a lens into thinking about care beyond the scale of the individual. In this story, care is envisioned and embodied in the form of reclaiming, demanding, and *carving out space* as a means of collectively refusing landscapes of domination. Integral to understanding this care, and its potentialities for (the) abolition (of schooling), is who was doing the carving and for whom.

Expanding on FREE LA's genealogy in interview, Emilio—a YJC organizer with a presence that grounds you and a laugh that shakes the ground—laid the groundwork for this understanding:

What I was really inspired about when I first learned about FREE LA was that [its] *doors were open* to young people, regardless of what their system experience has been, what their immigration status is, and the trauma that they've been through in their personal lives and their families and generational trauma. The school was founded...by a group of formerly incarcerated and system-impacted people across LA County that decided we needed a space for the people most impacted, to be able to organize. Young Black and brown [and] Indigenous youth, particularly from South Central, Inglewood, Watts, Compton areas, were being pushed out of schools and into lock ups, into the war on youth, into oppressive systems...So basically, we're like, *students need a place to go, young people need a place to go. These schools aren't serving our young people.* We need to have our own school. And that's basically why, how FREE LA started (emphasis added).

Let us consider the implications of the statement that “students need a place to go, young people need a place to go.” That Black, brown, and Indigenous young people, and young people

living in racialized, criminalized geographic spaces—in a county that funds the largest prison system in the world—had nowhere to go.

That no school would take them.

Let us consider the possibility that this is not an anomaly or an aberration, but a structural inevitability of the carceral-education landscape.

It bears restating explicitly: FREE LA was formed by members of the community in response to the fact that schools across LA County refused to teach their children. In response to the refusal of State institutions to care for youth, community members—many of them formerly incarcerated or system-impacted young people themselves—*created a space outside* of those institutions, for Black and brown young people to just be. This demonstration of care in the form of creating, reclaiming, and carving out space is a radical gesture in an anti-black world where young people of color (especially those who are poor, queer, undocumented, and/or disabled) are relentlessly and systematically denied the right to (inhabit) space, the right to exist. Emilio’s reflections also begin to sketch out a vision of what is implied in *unconditional*.

FREE LA’s “open doors”—regardless of youths’ system experience, immigration status, and personal, familial, and generational trauma—signify an educational space that refuses metrics of exclusion, inclusion, or access contingent on performance, behavior, or proximity to white humanness. More than this, they signify a space premised on not only a tolerance of, but an explicit care for and responsiveness to, the trauma(s), modes of survival, and experiences being criminalized, confined, and surveilled, for which young people are—paradoxically—denied care in schools. These traumas and system-experiences, which serve as grounds for further criminalization in multiple institutional settings, *are* the ways “life shows up” for Black and brown young people. They are “what you got going on” that nobody cares about, and they

are direct vestiges of colonialism, slavery, and the present-historical, haunting/lingering violences of racial capitalist modernity.

Beginning as a recognition, an idea, FREE LA's origin story culminated in a broad, sweeping refusal of the "strategic abandonment" endemic to racial capitalist carceral regimes, "in which governing bodies carefully eschew responsibility for [social groups] deemed valueless by a logic of racialized criminalization" (Medel, 2017, p. 874). FREE LA's everyday care practices/praxes continually refuse this abandonment, and the disposability it naturalizes, by addressing rather than criminalizing the ways "life shows up," and by repeatedly rejecting the racial hierarchies of humanness on which conditional care, and carceral regimes more broadly, depend.

Origins in Practice/Praxis: Unconditional Care in the Everyday

As Diego's experiences highlight, who is deemed worthy of care is wrapped up in who is deemed worthy of help. In interviews and conversations, many students marked a process in other schools of being denied requests for help and, simultaneously, how "bad grades" were used as justification for their removal. Their stories elucidate the self-valorizing locomotion of a landscape that constitutively produces "(under)performance," and exploits it as an alibi for disposability. In contrast, in reflecting on their classroom experiences at FREE LA, students describe an ongoing pedagogical praxis of *leaving no one behind*. Rather than a particular policy, they emphasize everyday practices such as teachers "taking the time" to explain lessons to students who missed class (sometimes for days or weeks at a time), or did not understand the lesson the first time; allowing students to catch up on late work; and eschewing good attendance and behavioral/academic performance as metrics of who deserves help. Extending that initial

seed, these care practices are informed by a shared *structural* understanding of the ways life, in beauty and in hardship, happens beyond school.

However, what emerged more resoundingly from students' reflections on FREE LA is a praxis of care that exceeds the classroom, responding to multiple dimensions of young people's lives and the broader landscape(s) they navigate. As one student, Angel, explained:

This school is nice, you know. Like they help you with a lot of things, and they really give you more than one chance. They always go out their way to help with our grades or even if you want a job or anything they'll help you, or with an interview. Or if you wanna get your own money, they help you and everything. And they're against certain things that public schools do—that [public schools] would hate how we do here. You know, 'cause at regular schools, they're not gonna care about you getting money or whatever. Over there, they would rather let the cops deal with you than fix a problem. And here, they don't have cops in here. They'd rather work things out and fix things, instead of kicking kids out that really need help.

Angel's critique that schools "would rather let the cops deal with you than fix a problem" lays bare the shared locomotion between schools and prisons, which use punishment and exile as "all-purpose solutions to social and economic problems" (Gilmore, 2008, p. 32; Davis, 2003). Schools operate symbiotically within this landscape by not caring about those problems, instead churning *people* into problems—into "bad kids"—who can simply be disappeared (see Chapter 3). FREE LA's caring to help students with things like money and job interviews reflects their ongoing commitment to ensuring young people's basic needs are met—not only as a precondition for learning and an alternative to exile, but as a form of abolitionist care that insurgently refuses the systematic exclusion of racialized, criminalized peoples from the means of social reproduction (Medel, 2017) and self-determination.

Based on that initial recognition—that the students LA schools refused to teach live in areas most impacted by the economic dispossession racial capitalism requires—Lupita, the liaison between FREE LA and YJC, recently used her connections through YJC to organize a job program where young people get paid to come to school. Care about basic needs at FREE LA also exceeds formal programs, operating organically through the deeper personal relationships young people form within the space. For example, a student recently reached out to me about her housing instability. With that student’s permission I contacted Ms. Tracey, FREE LA’s main TJ counselor, who has connections to housing programs in LA, so that we could collectively create a care plan for her.

Another pivotal way FREE LA responds to the conditions that strategic abandonment creates is by refusing to criminalize the forms of survival it demands. Expanding on his incisive understanding of exile, Angel described another systemic pattern in “regular schools:” young people being exiled for protecting themselves.

Me and [another FREE LA student] went to [the same] high school. He got kicked out of [there] too, because he would get there late, and they did random searches or something like that. And he had a knife...because he would walk from school to his house. And he just has it, you know, to *protect himself*. But he had it in his backpack— not even on him, but in his backpack. And they kicked him out for that. He even explained it to them, like “I live far, and I walk home. So, at times I get there late and, you know, people are out doing dumb things, so I want to protect myself.” He tells [the Dean] that. The next day, they tell him he’s expelled.

In contrast, FREE LA cares against the contours of the carceral-education landscape by ensuring that young people have “safe passage.” As Ms. Tracey explained to the students during a full-school Warrior Week orientation: “If you do feel unsafe and like you need to bring [something] with you, talk to a staff member that you trust, and we will find an alternative. We

can accommodate [you] if you live too far...So that you can find a way to feel safe on the street, and so that we can find a way for you to feel safe here at [FREE LA].” FREE LA’s peace builders (unarmed members of the South Central community who are trained in de-escalation), Dave and Charles, pick up and drop off students at their preferred location in the school van, while teachers/staff also work to create accommodation plans for students who live particularly far.

Finally, beyond simply refusing to criminalize young people, FREE LA collaborates with YJC’s abolitionist legal clinic to support students who do become court involved. What we call “court support” includes attending court with the student, helping build their case, posting bail, and gathering materials such as letters of support from teachers. In my experience, letter writers do not ask the facts of the case. Like YJC’s support for the broader South Central community, teachers support students unconditionally, based on a shared abolitionist understanding that young people do not grow in cages. Rather, like flowers and all other living beings, they grow in spaces where they are cared for—every day, over time, with consistency—all the way down to the root.

Of the five students I have written court letters for, all have noted that if it weren’t for FREE LA/YJC’s legal support they would likely be incarcerated. One of these students, BabySD, captured the broader significance of this form of care, and its inherent movement beyond the individual. He shared: “Other schools, for sure, are not going to help one of they students get bailed out of jail. And other schools don’t help change laws, and change the community. Other schools don’t even worry about the community.” FREE LA’s court support—and teachers’ participation in it—signifies a particularly radical departure from the terms and conditions of US schooling which position each individual *institutionally*, regardless of how

much they care, as agents of the State who must cooperate with the courts in the interest of so-called “safety.”

Each of the practices outlined above reflect, reclaim, and extend longstanding genealogies of abolitionist care, which refuse racialized hierarchies of humanness by unconditionally “support[ing] those made most vulnerable to criminalization” (Kaba, 2017); by ensuring people’s basic needs are met in the face of strategic abandonment (Medel, 2017); and by repeatedly developing alternatives to the use of criminalization as an “all-purpose solution” to systemic and structural problems. Rather than aiming to improve performance or produce more “ideal kids,” the intention of these care practices is to disrupt the disposability that carceral regimes story as inevitable, and to show up for each other as a community in the ways the State refuses.

Thus, FREE LA’s “open doors” are the borderless conduit(s) into a space where young people navigating overlapping landscapes of dispossession are not seen as disposable. As expert wayfinders, what the students are describing in *they actually care* is a space where they know they do not face the threat of removal, where they know they will not be further criminalized or abandoned for the ways they choose or refuse to navigate a social order predicated on their un-survivability. They are theorizing care in the form of creating/reclaiming (a) space where they do not have to be something or do anything in order to matter—which is to say, they matter unconditionally.

If traditional schooling and all its ideologies—of meritocracy, equality, and access, of forward/upward mobility and expanded opportunity—function only through disappearance, then what becomes legible are the abolitionist implications of a space created for and *by* those deemed least worthy of care. If it is true that within a carceral-education landscape there must always be

(Black, brown, Indigenous, queer, undocumented, and disabled) young people who have nowhere to go, then what emerges are the implications of a space predicated on an unwavering commitment to caring for those who are disappeared so that the traditional system can function. Rooted in students’ theorizations of what it means to “actually care,” what FREE LA’s origin story—in vision and everyday praxis—exposes, are the possibilities for reimagined educational spaces where no one is left behind. To “actually care” in the world young people desire means that no one needs to be thrown away. It means that young people who refuse to be governed by extractive institutions always have somewhere to go.

As its seed and soil, unconditional care emerges in, structures, and is structured by the space itself. This ongoing/unfinished process can be further understood through FREE LA’s foundations in abolition and TJ, and how these foundations create the contexts in which new forms of socio-spatial organization can emerge.

§

Section II

Unconditional Care and the Culture of FREE LA: Abolition and Transformative Justice

I think the difference with FREE LA and YJC is being unapologetically abolitionist and transformative justice-based. That's—that's the difference from most county or city or other nonprofit youth programs.³⁵

I’ve mentioned that restorative justice is one of the commonly proposed solution to the school-prison link (see Chapter 1). Thus, it provides a useful comparison and starting point to think through FREE LA’s departures. Whereas restorative justice seeks to reconcile conflict or *restore* relationships, transformative justice (TJ) seeks to *transform* the structural conditions,

³⁵ Emilio, personal communication, 2022

institutional and ideological systems, and power relationships that make harm and exclusion constant and inevitable (Kaba et al., 2021). Whereas RJ, as it has been taken up recently by the State, maintains carceral paradigms of humanness, TJ refuses victim/offender, innocent/guilty, and criminal/citizen binaries, recognizing that harm is cyclical, *entangled*, and multi-scalar. Building from an understanding of violence as both interpersonal and always also systemic, TJ is not just a response to harm or an alternative to punishment, but a constant, everyday transforming of the ways we relate to ourselves, one another, and the earth. And, as opposed to restorative justice, which is increasingly implemented as an “alternative” to punishment in schools and other institutions (including prisons), TJ refers necessarily to “a set of practices that happens *outside* the State” (Hassan, 2020). This difference—a crucial point for distinguishing educational reform from abolitionist departure—is reflected in FREE LA participants’ visions of TJ as a grounding ideology, rather than an “implemented” policy at FREE LA.

Ms. Tracey articulated this distinction during one Warrior Week: the first week of each trimester when, in addition to team building, students are introduced to (or reminded of) the mission and culture of the school. We had been sitting in what was once a courtroom. Mismatched chairs formed an imperfect circle; students cradled their backpacks between their knees, or hugged them in their laps. From the narrow doorway, you could see freshly painted murals that honored un/forgotten ghosts, breathing life into the walls of the school lobby.

“The idea of transformative justice is to create change,” she began. “We are not a regular school. The *foundation* of this school, your high school, is transformative justice—which means that our goals, our missions, our *relationships are all formulated to create change*. We do not call the police here. We do not use court ‘justice,’ though we will support you if you get court involved. Calling on the police for us is like calling on the devil. What we do here is have conversations, learn how to talk when we’re angry, or learn how to talk after we cool

down. Oftentimes, the courts and schools miss something, or *they just don't care* to ask. I promise you we'll ask what happened from your perspective" (emphasis mine).

Ms. Tracey's voice created soft waves of movement in the windowless room. After a short pause, she continued. "This is how I explain TJ love to young people," she said. "We are not talking about romantic love. I'm talking about loving people just because they are humans. I love you because you are human. How can I work with you because you are human? Support you because you are human? TJ has compassion for what you're going through."

Merging her own embodied theories of TJ with a long genealogy of the tradition, Ms. Tracey captures the elements of a space whose foundation—and forms of social organization—depart from the nexus between the courts and schools, which she theorizes as entangled through their demonstrations of conditional care. She explains how what grounds these alternative forms of social organization is not only a type of radical love but, necessarily, radically alternative conceptions of what it means to be human: what it means to be worthy of care and healing, beyond and outside of anything you have done in the past or might do in the future, or how well you can perform.

These broader interpersonal, ideological, and epistemological commitments of the space, as grounded in TJ, deepen a theorization of unconditional care beyond the individual, and entangle students' definitions with Black feminist genealogies of care.³⁶ Black feminist thought has long grappled with the centrality of care to colonial formations and, at the same time, its potentialities as "an antidote to violence" (Hartman, 2017). Black feminists have done the work to distinguish white feminist care—as care rooted in individualism, performed by or through the State, and in or through privatized/eurocentric conceptions of family—from care as (a)

³⁶ Black feminist genealogies of care are far from homogenous, and it would be impossible to describe them comprehensively in this chapter.

communal practice that builds towards something else entirely. Black feminist care is a deeply political framework and praxis rooted in a fundamental commitment to sabotaging present-historical structures of racial capitalism (Neely & Lopez, 2022; Nash, 2018; Sharpe, 2016)—not just the material conditions it creates, as the prior section discussed, but its terms of relationality. As opposed to individualism, as a violent mode of being and moving through the world, Black feminist care is rooted in the formation, transformation, and reorganization of *relationships*— as alternative modes of being (in community), and as antidotes to the anti-black and anti-relational project(s) of modernity (Gumbs, 2021).

This Black feminist commitment to interdependence has long envisioned and prefigured the conditions in which communal care, safety, and accountability can occur beyond the violence of carceral regimes, and explicitly challenges the exclusionary, carceral roots of white feminist care. Exemplified by the 1994 Violence Against Women Act—which “earmarked unprecedented federal funding” to “protect” victims of sexual/domestic violence through more policing, prosecution, cages, and criminalization—white feminists’ demands for “care” *through* the State has been integral to the expansion of the US prison regime (Thuma, 2019, p. 7). In contrast, both Black feminist and abolitionist genealogies of care recognize criminalization as itself a form of gendered-racial State violence inextricable from interpersonal violence (Thuma, 2019; Kaba et al., 2021), and critique the ways carceral regimes destabilize communities by leaving the roots of harm intact, and by severing the interdependency that truly keeps communities safe. This severing occurs not only through displacement, but also through the ways carceral-capitalist logics—of fear, individualism, ownership, and disposability—shape the ways we relate to one another at intimate scales. Black feminist care asks how we can move together in new ways that

uproot (the many roots/routes of) existing carceral structures, detoxify the soil, and make the space for other worlds to flourish (Gumbs, 2021).

Ms. Tracey's articulations of TJ as a grounding ideology and epistemology of the space echo these genealogies of care in her emphasis on "relationships formulated to create change," and in the explicit connections she draws between these relationships and FREE LA's unwavering refusal to call on the police. Though her emphasis on "communicating" rather than punishing may seem mundane, it signifies more than just an alternative to discipline. Rather, it signifies the potentialities of un/forgotten educational spaces, rooted in unconditional care, to exceed the terms of relationality and forms of social organization that structure and are structured by carceral logics and anti-black enclosures. The dialogue initiated by Ms. Tracey above went on to discuss teachers' and students' experiences learning the culture of TJ, specifically through "circles:" a practice of convening in conversation, or a series of conversations, to address the root(s) of harm and collectively construct next steps so that all members' humanity is honored. While TJ is not reducible to circles (as State-led implementations of restorative justice often is), they are a meaningful lens into unconditional care for two reasons.

First, FREE LA's use of circles in response to conflict is another pivotal juxtaposition students draw between FREE LA and other schools. For many students, interpersonal conflict was weaponized by prior schools as justification for their disposability, through precisely the processes of conditional care Ms. Tracey described. Second, circles are one way in which the broad theories/epistemologies of care articulated above—and the alternative visions of relationality and humanness they prefigure—are mobilized in practice. Rather than a singular practice, however, circles reflect and reverberate a broader praxis of care and communication

that moves through and across relationships, to create a spatial context in which new forms of accountability, safety, and interdependency unfold.

Embodied Foundations: Unconditional Care in/as Praxis

Emani's experiences in circles artfully weave together these threads. Some weeks after the collective Warrior Week conversation described above, Emani and I had this conversation in interview:

Margaret: How do other schools deal with conflict?

Emani: Suspension.

Margaret: Like right away?

Emani: I got into a fight after school one time and I *was not* the cause of the fight. The girl hit me first and I tried to defend myself...They suspended me for two days.

Margaret: There was no conversation?

Emani: No.

Margaret: So what do they do here?

Emani: It's a circle. You don't get suspended. I feel like they teach you to actually deal with your fuckin' problems and not just distance you from that person you got into a conflict with, and then come back to school with that grudge two days later, you know?

Margaret: Right. So you think that works? The circles work?

Emani: Me and [another student at FREE LA] we were not on the best terms when I got here. We was bumping heads, arguing, stuff like that. But once she got here things changed. Once we had the circle things became more open, we heard each other's side and after that, you know, after a few days things aren't just great but...It gets better. One morning it's "good morning," or "oh, what's up?," you know, "you're in the same circle I'm in," I'm not even uncomfortable to walk up to her or...There's not animosity anymore. They do a lot of things different that I will say I've never had in a different schooling.

Not caring about the root of a problem leaves those roots intact, creates “distance,” and makes it easier—in schools, in courtrooms, and in intimate relationships—to throw people away. At FREE LA, unconditional care occurs in the form of creating the space, through circles, to *ask why* (brown, 2017), to hear all sides and have all sides hear each other. Emani’s reflections highlight how doing so not only precludes the need for exile, refuses disposability, and prevents unaddressed conflict from festering—but, critically, generates new forms of understanding and new relationships across difference. Presciently, Emani frames circles not as a singular fix or “alternative” to suspension, but rather as a consistent, untimed, and nonlinear praxis of learning to coexist. Like Emani, many students speak about circles through their rippling, pedagogical effects: as an ongoing/unfinished process of learning “how to deal with our problems” in ways that foster connection, and of unlearning the anti-relational curriculum of carceral regimes that, in Beautiful’s words, “don’t nobody care so why just *not* talk about it.”

Indicating the pervasiveness of this anti-relational curriculum, in the Warrior Week conversation above, students and teachers alike shared how difficult it was to learn to communicate, and learn to trust—not only trust each other, but a broader, more ontological trust: that people deserve another chance, and that people (including ourselves) are capable of transformation. Transformation which, as both Emani and Zahra captured, might not happen overnight. This trust implies a fundamental recognition of *everyone*’s humanity that unravels the exclusive definitions of personhood undergirding conditional care, carceral regimes, and racial capitalist modernity more broadly.

Circles are one practice through which these terms of relationality become woven, over time, into the very foundation of the space. As one method of holding people accountable, they perform the relational and epistemological work of Black feminist and abolitionist care, which

discard hierarchies of humanness, refute “the false and damaging binaries we use to talk about [criminalized] people, like violent/non-violent and innocent/guilty” (Kaba, 2017), and seek the abolition of carcerality as it extends into, becomes entangled with, our daily lives. Abolitionist care conceptualizes non-carceral forms of accountability as, in fact, one of the most radical ways we can care for one another. To hold someone accountable for the harm they caused, rather than throw them away for it, *is* to recognize their inherent value as a human being and their capacity to learn, heal, and grow. It is a demonstration of care that inherently extends beyond the individual, plunging down to the root to seek communal transformation.

Beyond circles, FREE LA’s emphasis on trust, communication, and non-carceral accountability—as critical, relational dimensions of unconditional care—is cultivated through a broader everyday commitment to forging authentic connections, unraveling hierarchical relationships, and continuously centering support, safety, and healing over punishment and exclusion. Through seemingly mundane interactions, practiced repeatedly and in collaboration, carceral forms of social organization are unlearned and uprooted, making way for an ecosystem of care that operates at the spatial scale.

Ecosystems and Curriculums of Unconditional Care

In Ms. Tracey’s words, the goal of TJ is “not about correcting youth behavior,” but rather continuously “learning the students as a community, and what they need” through everyday interactions. For example, if a student is having a rough day, staff will inform other staff (e.g., through group text) to give that student more grace and understanding, or will ask the teacher/staff with whom they have the deepest connection to go check on them. Sometimes what students need is to vent, sometimes to eat, and other times to simply be in the space without being pressured to do work—without there being, to recall Nova’s story, “no option other than

failure.” By leaning on each other, and by continually moving from a place of communication and caring to ask “why,” deeper forms of trust and accountability are generated—not just in the wake of conflict, but as a general accountability to self, other, and the space.

Further, rather than typical power dynamics wherein “what the teacher (or cop, or judge, or adult) says goes,” accountability and communication at FREE LA disrupt the hierarchal teacher-student relationships endemic to carceral schooling. As Ms. Tracey accurately describes, “if a student has a problem with one teacher or staff, they are safe to go to another staff and bring it up and resolve the issue.” While students can call teachers into circle, staff also hold each other accountable in meetings and informal conversations on students’ behalf. As one student, California, recently told me in interview, FREE LA is not different from other schools because it is perfect; it is different because they actually care about how the students feel.

Bringing us full circle, this repeated emphasis on transforming carceral relationships reclaims and re-members longstanding Black feminist and abolitionist commitments to building communal networks of care (e.g., mutual aid) as a means of departure from the State. As everyday praxis, the trust and communication cultivated by/through unconditional care at FREE LA enables the revolutionary work of understanding what safety looks like beyond punishment—what it looks like for calling on the police to become obsolete (Davis, 2003)—and how we can collectively support each other in meeting those standards. Rather than a singular alternative to discipline, as restorative justice is increasingly used, this vision of unconditional care demands a new relational curriculum: an ongoing/unfinished process of relearning new (or reclaiming old) ways of existing together (Gumbs, 2021).

While this happens at FREE LA, in part, through formal trainings and orientations (like Warrior Week), it mostly occurs, in Ms. Tracey’s words, by “supporting each other in the

moment, learning in real time.” My own un/learning, for example, has occurred by participating in circles and by leaning on folks with greater knowledge about TJ for advice as situations arise. For both teachers and students, this process requires turning inward: it requires evaluating the ways we perpetuate the logics of disposability in our everyday lives and intimate relationships; the ways we conflate individualized punishment with care and safety; and the ways deeply ingrained assumptions and habits structure whose voices we deem valid, and whose lives we deem worthy of care. This opens broader points about the potentialities of unconditional care in abolitionist education/transformation, and for educators hoping to embody FREE LA’s model in other schools. Within the context of this dissertation, this highlights critical points about the scopes, scales, and roots/routes of transformation necessary to contend with the school-prison link.

Questions of Scope and Scale

The formulations of care discussed throughout this paper, and/as extensions of FREE LA’s broader abolitionist and TJ-based model, cannot simply be adopted as policy alternatives that respond to student (mis)behavior in new ways. Rather, they must be understood and practiced in ways that aim to restructure the very foundation of educational space, including the relationships among students and teachers in and outside the classroom, and between educational spaces and the broader, uneven landscapes they exist within. As adrienne maree brown writes, “what we practice at the small scale sets the patterns for the whole system” (2017, p. 53). Rather than models implemented from the top-down, the potentialities for unconditional care in abolitionist education lie in, and must begin with, deep internal and interpersonal transformations that ripple outward. By prefiguring at the smallest scale the world we want to see, as abolitionists and Black feminists long have, educators and students can work collaboratively to question:

What are the institutional, ideological, epistemological, and interpersonal mandates and conditions that preclude unconditional care in the specific contexts we are in? Which can be transformed at broader scales (such as school-wide policies), and which demand departure into un/forgotten spaces—classrooms, study groups, after-school collectives—that exceed even as they are absorbed into the carceral-education State?

Conclusions, Continuation, and Contradictions

As mentioned, this work is always unfolding and never without contradictions. Abolition is not a project of perfection, nor does it try to be; it is one of experimentation, of (honoring and learning from) process/praxis, and of working through (and understanding) *tensions* as part of the conditions of possibility for socio-spatial transformation. Departure from the State is complicated by many things, not the least of which is access to resources.

A primary example is ADA. Even while rejecting attendance as a metric for care and belonging, FREE LA's need for State funding for its own survivability means that those metrics must still be navigated—and, precisely *because* they reject attendance as a metric for care and belonging, access to resources is a barrier that at times creates gaps between what FREE LA would like, and is actually able, to offer. To fill in these gaps, as Section I discussed, FREE LA leans on its connections to YJC and other local organizations (some of which are non-profits), staff pool personal resources, and FREE LA/YJC continue their fight to redirect resources away from youth confinement and towards youth development in LA County. While this too entangles them, in various ways, to the State, their long-term abolitionist vision is that these entanglements, in Emilio's words, will “shift and transform, as more people are willing to take the deep dive...and be like, we don't need these systems to be able to sustain ourselves; we just need the resources to do it.”

That said, departure does not by any means occur as a “clean break,” definitive outcome, or concrete conclusion at FREE LA. But what FREE LA’s demonstrations of care do, are open important questions *about* departure. These questions echo what Christina Sharpe asks (us to do) as part of *wake work*. She writes:

I want, too, to distinguish what I am calling and calling for as care from state-imposed regimes of surveillance. How can we think (and rethink and rethink) care laterally, in the register of the intramural, in a different relation than that of the violence of the state? (2016; p. 20).

Using students’ definitions as a map, I’ve aimed in this chapter to read FREE LA as a blueprint for rethinking care “in a different relation than that of the violence of the state.” In heeding their demands, it became clear that what students were capturing is not necessarily new, but rather a reclamation, a continuation, and a particular demonstration of longstanding epistemologies of care that exceed the State and the (always conditional) site of the individual. To reclaim, re-member, or re-create these old-new genealogies is to reclaim a radical re-definition and re-vision of who counts as human. In their most radical potentials, these old-new genealogies might approach a decolonial care, like a decolonial love (Maldonado-Torres, 2021), as a “practice rooted outside modernity,” rooted in “the well-being of other human beings,” and rooted against the “*individual* as the basis of liberal democracy.”³⁷ Wise theorists as they are, students’ juxtapositions of these conflicting genealogies of care raise critical (geographic) questions—around the limitations of reform and the possibilities for abolition, around what demands *departure* and what is possible from within—that educators, community members, and

³⁷I credit and thank Dr. George Barganier for this language, which he shared in conversation in a study group as part of his personal reflections on decolonial love.

scholars must “think (and rethink and rethink)” collectively, collaboratively, and in ongoing conversation.

In the following and final chapter of this dissertation, I re-turn once more, and more closely, to the questions of humanness—and what it means to be human—that have been threaded through the (hi)stories told thus far. This is a return to that deepest root, the most fundamental connection, between schooling, carcerality, and modernity. Continuing with this chapter’s theorizations of abolitionist education as an ongoing/unfinished praxis, and with Chapter 2’s theorization of abolition as an experimental and uncertain process, Chapter 5 focuses on the possibilities and centrality of alternative definitions of humanness in the sorts of un/forgotten spaces that might exceed the carceral-education landscape. This is a form of transformation that is fundamentally epistemological and ontological in scope. As I will also argue, it is a form of transformation that inherently exceeds success/failure binaries and other one-way streets.

§

CHAPTER 5

Keeping it Human

Introduction

In my first semester teaching English at FREE LA, the layout of the oddly shaped classroom reflected my status as an enthusiastic, but non-‘credentialed’ high school educator: experimental, non-conventional, and a little rough around the edges. There were, as mentioned, the constantly shifting arrangement of long student desks, never quite in the right way; the beloved bean bag chair, accompanied shortly after by an equally beloved pull-out futon from Bob’s Furniture; and a rolling chair “borrowed” from the Chuco’s lobby that slowly tipped over if you leaned back in it even slightly. And perhaps my favorite aspect of the classroom: for my full first semester as a teacher at FREE LA, the massive whiteboard I was given remained on the floor (see Fig. 5.1).

YJC’s maintenance team had a lot to do as the school year began, and I wasn’t in any particular rush, so it just stayed there—the whiteboard—leaning against the wall. Leaning against the wall so that we had to gather mismatched chairs and beloved bean bags in amorphous circles around it. So that I’d sometimes need to stretch out my back before class started to be sure I could reach all parts of the board. So that my handwriting, a frequent point of amusement and good-hearted “roasting” from the students, would trail off down towards the bottom of the slightly lopsided canvas as I reached the end of my sentence. It was on this whiteboard on the floor that, at least from where I was standing, some of my most transformative conversations with the students unfolded.

The lesson today focused on a homework assignment that had been conceptualized by a student, Emani: to choose and watch a set of videos from the [Soft White Underbelly](#) YouTube channel. The channel features a series of first person interviews, termed “portraits of the human condition,” conducted and filmed in black and white videography by photographer [Mark Laita](#).

Specifically, inspired by Laita’s longer career capturing portraits of life on Skid Row, Soft White Underbelly archives the (hi)stories and narratives of those who live and make life “on the fringes of society:” gang members, sex workers, strippers, unhoused folks, runaways, people struggling with drug addiction and mental illness, and those who have otherwise been expelled from modernity’s boundaries of proper/governable/rational humanness.

In choosing this assignment for us, Emani opened space for a critical discussion around a pivotal question: of what it means to be human. This, however, was not the first time Emani, or her peers, had brought humanness into question. Weaving together various loose threads from the prior chapters, the following two-part chapter analyzes FREE LA students’ reflections on humanness, as critical (geographic) blueprints for the sorts of un/forgotten spaces that might exceed the carceral-education landscape. To do so I build from another repeated juxtaposition that students generally, but Black girls in particular and in unique ways, make between FREE LA and the other schools they’ve attended: that at FREE LA they are able to “live their truths,” show their “real sides,” and “be themselves.” Encompassing and entangling various iterations of this sentiment, Emani’s reflections, which she shared during her education history a few months after the Underbelly lesson, offer a rich point of departure for this chapter’s inquiries:

[At FREE LA], we keep it *human*. In school it's like, I don't know. You're *expected* to do what they want you to do, you're expected to think a certain way, talk a certain way, carry yourself a certain way, present—and you know, it's like here, we keep shit a buck.³⁸ ‘That's how you speak,’ or ‘that's who you are.’ That who you are is *acceptable*, you understand me?

³⁸ “Keep it a buck” means to keep things (relationships and relationalities) real, honest, transparent, truthful.

Building from these insights, Chapter 5 asks what it means, what is at stake, and what it might take to “keep it human” in and beyond the carceral-education landscape. In Part I, I extend this dissertation’s ongoing interest in the numerous entangled roots of the carceral-education landscape, by exploring the ways US schooling functions to reproduce and naturalize carceral regimes, by reproducing and naturalizing modernity’s terms of conditional humanness. Specifically, whereas Chapter 2 explored how schooling physiologically entrenches modernity’s “neurofunctional feedback loops” (Machado de Oliveira, 2021), and Chapters 3 and 4 discussed how hierarchies of humanness dictate conditional “access” to free movement and care, this chapter argues that US schooling both structures and is structured by a particular *way of knowing* (who counts as human) that is foundational to carceral regimes, and constitutive of racial capitalist modernity more broadly.

In iterative conversation with Emani and other students’ experiences and reflections, I build, as the other chapters have, from the insights of a few critical (geographic) texts that have meaningfully informed or transformed my thinking around humanness. Of these key texts are a small selection of Sylvia Wynter’s comprehensive corpus of work³⁹ (Wynter, 1992, 2003; see Scott, 2000), and a related set of studies engaging this work. In particular, Katherine McKittrick’s (2006) *Demonic Grounds*, and a collection of essays edited by McKittrick and Wynter (2015), *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, are critical texts in that they engage explicitly with the implications of Wynter’s broader thought projects to the question(s) and possibilities of keeping it human anew.

Man’s Underbelly: Modernity and the Human

³⁹ To be explicit, I make no attempt to completely or even thoroughly review this corpus of work for which, as David Scott notes in an interview with Wynter, “the scale and ambition of the project is as vast as it is complex” (Scott, 2000, p. 121). The interventions of Wynter’s that inform this chapter (and other scholarship that has informed this chapter) is one entangled piece in her expansive and transdisciplinary thought project.

Across a body of scholarly and creative work that spans subjects, sciences, disciplines, modalities, and knowledge/traditions (Scott, 2000), one of Wynter's core interventions is the concept of *Man*: as the ontological-epistemological meat-and-bones of modernity, and as a distinctly european yet now globally imposed "descriptive statement" of who counts as Human (Wynter, 2003). Wynter theorizes Man1 and Man2 as coinciding with two constitutive epochs in the development of "modern" european thought: the Renaissance and Enlightenment. Whereas in the former period, proper humanness was defined by/through the theological doctrines of the Church—i.e., Man as True Christian Self (Ferreira da Silva, 2015)—in the latter period, the doctrines of the Church were replaced by the juridical, political, and economic doctrines of the (racial capitalist) State, with the resulting paradigm of humanness articulated and verified through the emerging and so-called 'objective' biological sciences—i.e., Man as free will individual, political subject, the Survived of Darwin's fittest, "a figure now self-governed by its/his reason, articulated as reasons of state" (Wynter & McKittrick, 2015, p. 15). Though Man2 refers to modernity's present "descriptive statement" of what it means to be human, both of these onto-epistemic doctrines—as distinctly european⁴⁰ creations brutally imposed as universal truth—have constitutively overdetermined the terms of proper/acceptable humanness throughout the globe. As McKittrick (2015, p. 10) writes, in conversation with Wynter:

These figures, both Man1 and Man2, are...*inflected by powerful knowledge systems* and origin stories that explain *who/what we are* (emphasis added). These systems and stories produce the lived and racialized categories of the rational and irrational, the selected and the dysselected, the haves and the have-nots as asymmetrical naturalized racial-sexual human

⁴⁰ As noted in Chapter 2, european colonization of the americas in 1492 marks a historical rupture in the "modern/colonial world order" (Mignolo 2015), entangling 15th/16th century eurocentric domination to contemporary US/ western hegemony. Hodges and Abu Shanab (1971, p. 8) help clarify this relationship: "From the turn of the [20th] century to the end of World War II, U.S. military actions objectively contributed to breaking up the old-style imperialism based on territorial annexations and overseas possessions. By the [19]60's, however, an about-face had occurred with the U.S. having replaced the British, French, and Dutch presence throughout much of the underdeveloped world, if not by means of military annexations, then through economic enclaves or subsidiaries of U.S. corporations and other direct and indirect forms of economic and political dependency."

groupings that...signal the processes through which the empirical and experiential lives of *all* humans are increasingly subordinated to a figure that thrives on accumulation.

Of central interest to me in this chapter are these powerful knowledge systems, what McKittrick (2015, p. 3) also calls “epistemological regimes,” through which gendered-racial hierarchies of humanness—like good kids/bad kids, criminal/citizen, rational/irrational, Man and his Underbelly—are *made real* in modernity. Likewise, I am interested in the ways modernity’s epistemological regimes are constitutive of a related set of interpersonal mandates: (anti)relational codes that function to naturalize and entrench hierarchical humanness, and thus carceral regimes, by conditioning the public to do the work of the State. In Part I, building from Emani’s and other students’ reflections on being unable to be themselves in school—on being “expected” to think, talk, act, and *be* “a certain way”—I explore how this entanglement between the epistemological and interpersonal works to produce a self-reinforcing “social [and spatial] structure...based on the acceptance and implementation of power-relations as the normative mode of relations” (Wynter, 1992, p. 77). I am curious, specifically, about the ways schooling operates a key site in and through which this socio-spatial structure is solidified, rehearsed, and contested.

But this, of course, is only one part of the story. Reflecting my focus on the transformative blueprints that converge in and emerge from un/forgotten spaces (Gilmore, 2008; McKittrick, 2006), my ultimate interest is in exploring how the visions and praxes of humanness embodied by those on the so-called “fringes” of carceral modernity might lead us towards something else entirely. Indeed, Man—as the only possible way to be Human—exists only through the ongoing (and therefore unfinished) criminalization, spatial domination, and attempted (but always incomplete) annihilation of co-existing epistemologies, cosmologies, and possibilities of being in and of the world (Ferreira de Silva, 2015). It is this entanglement

between Man's singular universe and the pluriverse of worlds that (might) exceed it that motivates the inquiries in this two-part chapter. In Part II, then, I turn to Black girls' reflections on what it means (or might mean) to "keep it human" at and beyond FREE LA. Interpreting this question and its potential answers broadly, I focus on the girls' reflections on *listening*. Thinking alongside these reflections, I speculatively theorize and actively think through listening as a praxis that might move outside our present ways of knowing (McKittrick, 2021) to forge new terms of relationality, forms of socio-spatial organization, and possibilities for realizing (and thus *realizing*) our inter-human entanglements (Wynter & McKittrick, 2015; Barad, 2010; 2012).

§

PART I

Under (the) Belly of the Beast: Schooling, Knowing, and Being in Modernity

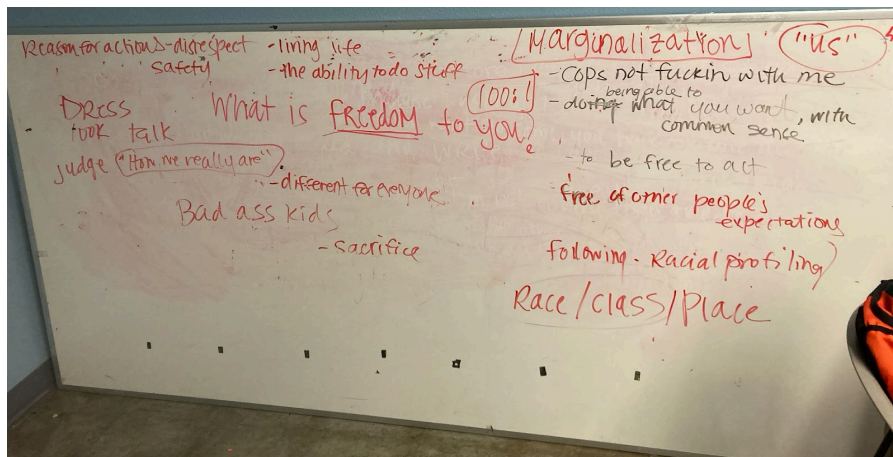


Fig. 5.1 Under (the) Belly of the Beast (Author)

For homework, per Emani's instructions, the students had each watched their own selection of videos from the Soft White Underbelly channel. After briefly discussing which videos they chose and why, I shifted into the lesson. The energy in the class was already low that day, but I was hopeful the conversational (and, to keep it a buck, improvisational) nature of the lesson would shift that.

“So,” I said, peeling myself off of the wall where I’d been leaning next to the whiteboard, “What is the theme—uh, what is the *thread* connecting each of these interviews?”

What followed was a pause long enough for me to take a brief nap with my eyes open, as my mom would say. Just as I was about to try a different angle, someone in the back of the oddly shaped room offered: “They all got a fucked up life in some way.”

Well. Not wrong, I thought to myself. Still somewhat experimenting with where I wanted to take the lesson, I asked, “What groups in society experience marginalization?”

Another long pause.

“That’s a big ass word. *Marginalization*.” Angel was leaning back dangerously in the half-broken rolling chair, fearlessly testing how far the laws of physics could be stretched until they demanded compliance.

I wrote it on the board. *Marginalization*.

“It is,” I said. “What’s it mean?”

After a sluggish detour through theory and definitions, Emani summarized our collective conclusions much more concisely than I. “So it means to categorize,” she said. In one swift movement she flipped her head over, gathered her hip-length, deep red braids in her hands, and spun them into an impossibly perfect bun on the top of her head. “To place in a category.”

“Right,” I said. “A category on the margins. On the periphery.” Hopeful the energy in the room was picking up, I returned to my initial question. “What groups are marginalized in our society?”

The only audible answer was the slow creak of physics refused.

“Alright, what about youth? Young people. Are they marginalized?”

A few nods broke up the stillness of sleepy stares. It was something, at least.

“Compared to who?” I kept probing. “Adults?”

No nods this time. Just the groan of a chair on its last leg and a kid evading Newton’s code. Feeling like maybe they ‘just weren’t feeling it right now’ (see Chapter 3), I put the cap back on the marker and leaned again, like the white board, against the wall.

“Well, not all youth,” Angel said finally, springing the chair (miraculously) onto four legs. “It’s different for us versus them.”

“Us vs. them,” I repeated. Trying not to be overly eager, I paused, letting the words hang in the air in front of me. I wrote “*US*” on the board in sloppy penmanship and circled it.

“Okay. Who’s us and who’s them?”

“Them,” Angel said, “The white kids, rich kids.”

The chair creaked.

“And who’s, uh...*us*?” I continued, pausing awkwardly at the irony of who was doing the asking.

Angel looked around the room. He had a slight smile on his face and the usual hint of laughter in his voice, but he was being serious. “Us,” he said. “*The bad ass kids.*”

I felt my brow burrow and head go back suddenly but slightly, as if flinching from some invisible thing flying through the air. In hindsight, I’m not really sure why the answer caught me so off guard.

Bad ass kids. I wrote it on the board.

I turned to face them, trying to match the humor in Angel’s voice, but ultimately just sounding concerned, and probably a bit naive. “Do you all think you’re bad ass kids?”

There was a bit of mumbling, but mostly they were just looking at me. “Alright,” I said, determined to find a point of departure. “Well. Do you think *other* people think you’re bad ass kids?”

Finally, the conversation flowed. The “yes” was near unanimous. Taking advantage of the rhythm, I peeled my body off the wall for a second time, pointed around the room, and asked each student individually: Why?

In the conversation that ensued, the students presciently described the elements, ingredients, and relations involved in the production of bad ass kids. Coursing nimbly through public perception, and rooted in an insurgent awareness of the types of people who congregate in un/forgotten spaces, they outlined with precision what it is that marks the boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them.’

“The way we talk.”

“Things we say.”

“How we look.”

“How we dress.”

I scrambled to scribble all of them, all the ingredients and governing codes (Wynter, 2003), on the lopsided, unmounted whiteboard. I did another round of “why’s,” soliciting second thoughts. The most common answer, one almost everyone agreed upon, was “some of the shit I do,” or “the things I’ve done.” I wrote that on the board, too.

“So your actions?” I clarified

Yeah, was the collective response. Our actions.

“People just judge us is the main thing.” Angel summed it up. “They don’t know how we really are.”

Looking back at the board, I asked, “Well, do you think if someone does a ‘bad’ thing it makes them a bad person?” Hearing my question out loud I followed it with another. “Do you think there’s such a thing as a bad person? Or a bad ass kid?” And then another. “Like, do you think anyone is just born bad?” My string of questions unfolded and hung in the air in front of me. Hardly the socratic method, I think I was genuinely asking them for answers.

It depends, was the response from those who chose to give one. Evading my search for a concrete yes or no, the students instead offered a different type of answer: “everything has a reason.”

And then I got schooled.

One student—who attended regularly and contributed greatly to my class for about two months, before I never saw him again—had been sitting quietly on the edge of the pull-out futon, his backpack still on his shoulders. Now he spoke calmly, with the sort of rhythm that signifies a rupture between knowledge and wisdom. “I’ve done things,” he said. “That doesn’t make me a bad person, but it doesn’t make me a good person. I don’t see it as good and bad.”

“Mm,” I said, struck by the clarity of the statement. “So, you’re just a person.”

Yeah, was the unspoken response. Just a person.

Us vs. Them: Knowing Man’s Other

Man, as the basis of modernity and “the measuring stick through which all other forms of being are measured” (McKittrick, 2015, p. 3), is a savage invention of the european colonial encounter. Upon contact with peoples, lessons, and life-ways that exceeded eurocentric ‘Truth’ about how the world is, was, and ought to be, colonizers codified their self-image—Man-as-Human—through the creation, subsequent negation, and attempted annihilation of the Black and Indigenous/Native “Other” (King, 2019; Wynter, 2003). These Others were to become, through

the european colonial project, the human-turned-building blocks of modernity's Underbelly, and the fodder for carceral regimes

...with this category in the United States coming to comprise the criminalized majority Black and dark-skinned Latino inner-city males now made to man the rapidly expanding prison-industrial complex, together with their female peers—the kicked-about Welfare Moms—with both being part of the ever-expanding global, transracial category of the homeless/the jobless, the semi-jobless, the criminalized drug-offending prison population (Wynter, 2003, p. 261).

Speaking insurgently from this place of Other(ed)ness, the students disrupt and disentangle, by exposing and explaining, how this human-making project plays out in the context of the carceral-education landscape. Throughout the Underbelly lesson, they focused not on *bad ass kids* as a fixed and predetermined genre of (sub)humanness, but rather “on the ways in which such categories work themselves out in relation to the human, being human, human being, and codes that govern humanness” (McKittrick, 2015, p. 8).

The way we talk.

Things we say.

How we look.

How we dress.

The things we do.

Our actions.

What I want to think through, however, is not the specific codes and metrics—the ways of dressing, speaking, acting, thinking, looking—that carve the parameters of “expected” and “acceptable” humanness in the carceral-education landscape (although this is certainly important); but rather, at a deeper level and as a deeper root, the epistemological regimes they

signify. Threaded through the conversation above is an uprooting of the “powerful knowledge systems and stories” (McKittrick, 2015, p. 10; 2020) which congeal those codes and metrics into the gendered-racialized categories of good and bad kids: embryonic subjects to occupy the “global, transracial” categories of rational/irrational, selected/dysselected, have/have nots, them/us.

Of pivotal importance here are two related points: first, the emphasis students place on their actions, behaviors, and other external or visible, and thus ostensibly *knowable* characteristics; and, second, their reflections—in and beyond this conversation—on being “judged” and misunderstood: on people not knowing, in Angel’s words, “*how they really are.*” These points scaffold a departure for two related claims I want to think through in Part I. My first claim is that schooling reproduces carceral regimes, and thus modernity’s human-making projects, by reinforcing and naturalizing a particular *way of knowing* (and thus determining) humanness that is based on exteriority and visibility. My second claim is that this way of knowing is constitutive of, and mobilized through, a regime of *interpersonal mandates*: (anti)relational codes that comprehensively, though not inevitably, structure the forms of social-spatial organization that unfold within carceral regimes. My goal is to develop these claims in ways that clarify, in particular, Black girls’ inabilities to “be themselves” in school; and thus in ways that allow me to consider, in Part II, what it might mean to keep it human beyond the carceral-education landscape.

Ways of Knowing (Who/How We Really Are)

In simplest terms, what reproduces Man’s over-determination—as the flesh-and-bones of modernity and its only possible mode of being human—is a way of knowing which dictates, first, that one’s humanness *can* be “known;” and, second, that this knowability can be

determined and verified (and therefore categorized and hierarchized) through external, visible, and measurable characteristics. This way of determining humanness based on exteriority/visibility is inextricable from Man's intrinsic compulsion to know (with certainty), in order to then conquer and control, 'nature' and the cosmos (Machado de Oliveira, 2021; Rodríguez, 2021); and is underwritten by the "biocentric logic of race, which sorts and assesses bodies according to the phenotype and attendant evolutionary scripts" (McKittrick, 2016, p. 5). As McKittrick explains, this biocentric logic of race, as the flesh-and-bones of Man-as-human is

part of a larger common-sense belief system that seemingly *knows* and thus *stabilizes* the biological data that validate unevolved black deviance; this belief system thus *knows*, in advance, who should live, who should survive, who should die, who is naturally selected, and who is naturally unselected...shaping what we think we know about, and how we know, black people (*ibid*).

Inextricable from Man's singular and overdetermined origin story that we are purely biocentric beings,⁴¹ the biocentric logic of race stories both race and racial difference as real, biologically determined, and perceivable/knowable through that which is external/visible. Man, in other words, "[came] into being through encountering geographic unknowns"—peoples and places deemed uninhabitable or unimaginable within christian europe's systems of knowledge—"and *making them biocentrically knowable*" (McKittrick, 2006, p. 127-28, emphasis added; Wynter, 2003). As McKittrick (2016) explains, these ways of knowing who/what we are "move from the physiological figure outward" (p. 8), reinforcing the "notion that the raced and gendered body can

⁴¹ One of the most profound interventions of Wynter's work is that we are not purely biocentric beings, as european/Darwinian evolutionary scripts would have it. Rather, we are mythos and bios—we *are* the stories we tell. These stories, as Chapter 2 discussed, come to physiologically/neurochemically structure our genetic codes, opiate reward, and behavior-regulatory systems, such that we come to live (and re-enliven) Man's myths as Truth. As McKittrick (2016, p. 3-4) further explains, this "biocentric conception of the human...assumes, then, that we are bio-evolutionary humans that do not author this racially coded bio-evolutionary script; it assumes that the human is inherently, and all, natural (produced only by nature), which, in turn, situates black subjects as naturally unevolved."

elicit transparent data,” and therefore that ‘Otherness’ can be determined, categorized, and known through “seeable epidermal differences” (p. 6).

Moving beyond McKittrick’s immediate focus on biological data and (visibly racialized) bodies, I want to consider a broader implication of her insights: that the epistemological practice of “knowing” humanness, based on that which is external/visible, is one that necessarily denies the internal and *inherently unknowable* breadth of Black (or any other) people’s humanity. Students’ assertions that behind the various behaviors and actions for which they are categorized as bad ass kids, “everything has a reason,” gestures to this unknowable interiority, and destabilizes a foundational and self-reinforcing claim of Man’s epistemic regimes: that to be beyond humanness is to lack the ability, capacity, and natural right to *reason* (Wynter, 1992; Wynter & McKittrick, 2015). Another critical text, Kevin Quashie’s (2012) *The Sovereignty of Quiet*, helps clarify this point.

Critiquing the law-like “determination to see blackness only through a social public lens,” Quashie (2012) theorizes the unknowability of Black people/humanity through the concept of the *quiet interior*: which refers to the “full range of one’s inner life—one’s desires, ambitions, hungers, vulnerabilities, abilities, fears” (p. 6). As I wrote in a recent article (Goldman, 2023, p. 35), also engaging this theorization of the quiet interior:

Quashie argues compellingly the harm ravaged, and the insurgent, marvelous, and ordinary worlds erased, unheard, and unseen, when blackness and Black people are perceived solely in relation to systems of domination, and the “social world” more broadly, whether in their oppression by or resistance to it. Thus, [Quashie’s] interventions pull from and echo...a longer genealogy of Black feminist praxis and poetics that “dislodges” the body, the exterior, as “the only source of black knowledge (and therefore liberation)” (McKittrick, 2017, p. 99).

In counterinsurgent place of these expansive and inherently unknowable (inner) worlds, Man measures Human—makes being human/human being knowable—through a set of concrete inputs and outcomes that dictate “acceptable” political, economic, cultural, linguistic, aesthetic, and behavioral performance in the forward-moving, profit-accumulating projects of Progress and White Being (Rodríguez, 2021; Machado de Oliveira, 2021). Thus, including but beyond one’s (perceived) race, humanness in modernity—in particular, one’s deservingness of the physical and metaphysical things that make us *feel* human—is “known” and hierarchically categorized through a host of variables and data points that exist outside one’s inherently unknowable inner world: achievements and accolades, diplomas and degrees, school records, court records and bank records, passports and IDs, certificates and CVs, the quantity and quality of the things one owns, and, of course, how one behaves, looks, dresses, thinks, and speaks. These metrics work like locks and keys to both produce and justify the terribly asymmetric distribution of life chances across space, in part by pervading the social imaginary. Indeed, to recall Emani’s reflections from Chapter 2, people are “*brainwashed* to believe that you’re *nothing* without school, you’re nothing without your degree, you’re nothing without graduating, you’re nothing without...all these certificates.”

I argue that it is this way of knowing humanness, through that which is external or visible, to which FREE LA students speak in naming the governing codes through which “bad ass kids” are made. My proposition is that schooling—as a heterogeneous landscape made and remade through the carceral State (see Chapter 3), and as the place many children spend most of their days—is a key site and core apparatus through which this way of knowing becomes entrenched and naturalized as a common-sense logic of the social structure (Wynter, 1992), and thus an ordering principle of socio-spatial relationships, within carceral regimes. In and beyond the Underbelly conversation, this way of knowing and relating based on exteriority/visibility

emerges in students' repeated critiques of people and institutions judging *who*, but not knowing *how* "they really are;" and it is reflected in the structurally inevitable displacement of students unable or unwilling to perform as "expected" (see Chapters 3 and 4). Turning specifically to the education (hi)stories of Black girls at FREE LA, this way of knowing surfaces as an epistemic root underlying the girls' inability to be themselves and live their truths—to feel like "who they are is acceptable"—in traditional schools.

A Different Kind of School Project: The Socio-Spatial Production of Bad Ass Kids

Describing the differences between FREE LA and other schools she had attended, Kimora shared in interview:

With regular LAUSD [Los Angeles Unified School District] schools, it's *systematic*. Like [a] *factory*. Straight by the books. They don't care about how you feel emotionally. They don't think about what you go through at home, and why you lash out the way you lash out. If you lash out, you're just defiant, you're just a bad kid—or just, 'Oh look, that little kid over there is just not a good kid.' And they want you to—they *separate* you from the rest of the group of what they have 'ideal' good kids are. And if you're not their ideal kids, you're just, 'Fuck you. You're just to the side. We're worried about *this* right now.'

Kimora's words powerfully illustrate the constitutive relationship between schooling's factory-like production of hierarchical humanness (ideal kids/bad ass kids; us/them), and an equally systematic institutional and *interpersonal* practice of determining one's right to belong—to be in and of a space—based on that which can be seen, judged, and known: especially but not exclusively one's actions and behavior. Undergirded by a deeper epistemological regime, and irreducible to school discipline policies, this factory-like system demands the *systematic* negation of young people's whole Selves (Goldman, 2023): not only their lives beyond school, but their inner lives (Quashie, 2012), their emotions and, especially, their reasons. Indeed, the partitioning

and “separating” of human life Kimora describes can only exist, like Man himself, through the systematic denial of the Other’s capacity to reason/have reasons (Wynter, 1992), to explain why (brown, 2017; see Chapter 4), and to be embodied (not just a body)/more-than-meets-the-eye. What exists beyond and beneath the exterior, in other words, must be rendered unintelligible, irrational, or “un-geographic” (McKittrick, 2006) in order for people to be known, separated, and disappeared. This conjures up, of course, the familiar image of the principal/PO/CO/judge who judges without asking or caring why; who, without knowing all the things they don’t know, simply sweeps “to the side”—into un/forgotten spaces like prisons and alternative schools—anybody deemed criminal/defiant/*just not a good kid*.

I want to suggest, however, that beyond its deployment by “official” State agents, this way of knowing comprehensively structures the terms of relationality, and thus the entire set of social relationships, that unfold within carceral modernity: that it is something, like that “ownership mindset,” that leaks into everything (see Chapter 2). Something, like poisoned soil, that we breathe in and track into our homes. Something, like radioactive fallout from that initial atomic split, that rewires our individual and collective bodies, albeit in terribly asymmetric ways. Specifically, I want to consider the ways Man’s epistemological regimes are constitutive of, and mobilized through, a related set of *interpersonal mandates*: (anti)relational codes that govern not only the relationships between the people and the State, but amongst the people themselves. And I want to consider the ways schooling—as a critical apparatus of US imperialism (Vaught et al., 2022; Caban, 2002) and a core anchor of anti-black carceral regimes (Sojoyner, 2016)—is a key site through which these regimes of knowing/relating become woven into the individual and collective psyche, circumscribing the forms of social organization that are possible, especially but not exclusively within State-sanctioned spaces. The following and final section of Part I

develops these proposals, and thinks through their implications for the scopes, scales, and sorts of transformation that might “keep it human” beyond Man (Mignolo, 2015; Wynter, 1994), and beyond the carceral-education landscape.

Public School, Poisoned Soil

Motivating these claims is another systematic pattern: the frequency and significance of bullying in the education (hi)stories of Black girls at FREE LA—not only by teachers and cops, as Chapter 3 illustrated, but by other students as well. For Zahra, for example, “judgment” from her peers converged with four pivotal life events—a court case, educational exclusion, a pregnancy, and an abortion—to preclude the possibility of her “living her truth” in public schools:

Zahra: When I did find out I was pregnant I still was attending [another continuation school]. And there was another girl that went there and she was pregnant, but she was showing. I did not show at all. And, like I said, just the way they treat people, I could just imagine if I said, ‘Oh I’m pregnant.’ I could just *imagine*.

Margaret: Like the students or the teachers?

Zahra: The students! The *kids*...It’s just [being] judged, afraid of how people look at you. ‘Cause they don’t understand. If it don’t happen to them, they talk about it bad. If it don’t apply to them in some kind of way, if they don’t know somebody who had went through it—even, even if they do know somebody who went through it—nine times out of ten if you’re young and you’re female, that’s just what they put on you as far as like *stereotype*. People just think every Black girl out here fuckin’ and getting pregnant, and—it’s just a stereotype. So, as far as being accepted in a public school, I don’t think I would have been. I don’t think I would have been able to live my truth at all in a public space.

Zahra’s experiences, alongside those of other Black girls at FREE LA, reveal the translation of Man’s knowledge systems into a “publicly narrated belief system” (McKittrick,

2016, p. 7), inhabited and rehearsed by students and State agents alike, in which the full and unknowable breadth of Black girls' humanity must be un-imaginable (McKittrick, 2006). Her words open a critical space to consider the ways powerful epistemological regimes "leak into" everyday relations, permeating the social structure and imagination (Wynter, 1992). I want to suggest that Zahra's concern with "how people look at you" (with what *shows* on the body/exterior)—and her statement that "if it don't happen to them, they talk about it bad" (that what people can see but don't understand, they judge and stereotype)—are not simply indictments of gossiping teens or high school rumors. Rather, the systematic judging, bullying, and stereotyping that Zahra and other Black girls experience represent everyday manifestations and *interpersonal mobilizations* of a deeper epistemological regime: one which renders the external/visible/'physiological figure' (McKittrick, 2016) as the only source of knowledge and knowing who gets to be human. Zahra's inability to "live her truth at all in a public space" exposes this regime of knowing/determining humanness as a pervasive governing logic of socio-spatial relations in modernity: one which deploys students, peers, parents, and the "public" as enforcers of Black placelessness and unbelonging.

Continuing with Zahra's story: her insistence on bodily autonomy, enmeshed with Man-made, State-manufactured instability (in particular, an open court case which left her uncertain about her future), converged to inform her decision to get an abortion. The "public" response she feared experiencing as a result—which compelled her to go through the abortion alone—further clarifies the symbiosis between the epistemological and the interpersonal, and powerfully illustrates how modernity's human-making regimes are mobilized and *made real* through Man's anti-relational codes:

[People] can be judgmental, too judgmental. To not even be able to relate, or have went through the same things...I literally see it damn near every day on social media, like people really bash the fuck out of people who get abortions. And it just be the people that can't relate, or *the people that don't know* what it takes to even live with yourself after the fact...Honestly, I didn't want to live. The hate that they put out there, that they try to make you feel—like I really *felt like a bad, bad, bad ass person*. And I knew damn well that I wanted my baby. And I still felt that way. Because that's what they portray, that's what they put out there: you get rid of a baby, *you're just a killer* for the rest of your life... They make it seem like if you got one, you got a hundred. They make you seem like you're just...*You're less than* (emphasis added).

Defining people by that which is external, observable, and therefore ostensibly knowable—the situation one is (presumed to be) in, the decisions or choices one makes or refuses, the things one has done or not done or might do—is an epistemic script-turned interpersonal mandate which folds both the State and the public into the insatiable bowels of modernity. What is critical here, with respect to the school-prison link, is the centrality of these ways of knowing/relating to the reproduction of carceral regimes. As evidenced in the factory-like production of bad ass kids who *just are* defiant, and Black mothers and others who *just are* killers and bad ass people, Man's ways of knowing/relating function to entrench widespread “public” acceptance of, and therefore collective complicity in, an evolutionary narrative in which some people will live and be free and be human while others, simply, will not. As Instagram user Indigenous Anarchist (@indigenousanarchist)⁴² explains:

We see this with Homelessness. We see this with Refugees. We see this with the Incarcerated...It does serve a purpose though, *to define people by their circumstances*. And

⁴² Much appreciation to @indigenousanarchist for permission to use this quote. The person who runs the @indigenousanarchist account is a self-identified Native woman who uses the social media platform to spread political education, often rooted in her own (ongoing) experiences as an unhoused person.

that's to *separate ourselves* from them because every degree of separation helps it hurt *us* less. Of course, that's the very definition of both privilege and complicity (emphasis added).

It is this way of knowing (who/what we are) based on exteriority—based on one's circumstances and accomplishments, certificates and degrees, status, speech, and appearance, and chosen or coerced modes of survival—that *makes real* the genres of humanness which sustain global carceral regimes: the criminal, the offender/reoffender, the terrorist, the psychopath, the illegal/alien/refugee, the at-risk/jobless/dropout/defiant/drug dealer/killer/bad ass kid. This is a death-driven, human-making, World-building, and earth-shattering project lived and rehearsed in the everyday, and always to our own demise (even if we're not the ones dying).

It is this way of knowing/relating that conditions “the global middle classes” (Wynter [in Scott], 2000]) to ignore or justify the human and extra-human suffering that cushions our desires and pleasures in the so-called first world. It is this way of knowing/relating that conditions the “public” to deem desirable or at best inevitable the millions of people we lock in cages and trap between borders and disappear into un/forgotten spaces. It is this way of knowing/relating that conditions the voters, the taxpayers, the “good American citizens” (in Kimora's words), to believe that the piles of dismembered corpses our tax-funded bombs scatter across the so-called middle east are somehow necessary, or at least “over there.” And it is this way of knowing/relating—this singular epistemic story learned, lived, and mobilized as universal Truth—that conditions otherwise well-meaning people to *expect* and therefore *accept* Black un-livingness: as seen in Black girls and women who have nowhere to live their truths; as seen in the haunting/lingering vestiges of transatlantic slavery, and the never-ending regimes of neocolonial rule and capitalist extraction across Africa and most parts of the so-called global south; as seen in children as young as four working in radioactive cobalt mines in the Congo and

blood-stained diamond mines in Angola, Sierra Leone, Liberia and elsewhere, so that we can live in Man's naturally scarce and asymmetrically abundant "virtual reality" (see Chapter 2); as seen in 48 rapes per hour in the US-backed "crisis" in Sudan; as seen in the endless Man-made State-endorsed cycles of famine, flooding, fighting, disease, displacement, and un-livability in the so-called third world—all of which then "loop back" (McKittrick, 2016) to reinforce a "commonsense belief" that there is only so much livingness to go around and that the "haves" have, by virtue of their choices, their ethics, their accolades, and their humanness, been naturally and biologically Selected to survive.

It is the systematic epistemological-interpersonal practice of presuming to know—of judging, of "talking about it bad" but not asking why, of not knowing "how we really are," not understanding how much reason, livingness, and unknowability always and *unconditionally* lies beyond the exterior—that prefigures the "fact" of non-humanness that carceral regimes require. My suggestion has been that this regime of knowing/relating is an organizing logic of social relations in US schools, one which fuels the production of bad ass kids, lubricates the locomotion of carceral regimes, and both necessitates and naturalizes the production of "public space" in which the humanness/humanity of Black girls must be an impossibility.

A final point here is worth noting, one which I'll return to in greater depth in Part II. As a commonsense logic and organizing principle of socio-spatial relationships, this way of knowing/relating enlivens the severing process detailed in Chapter 2, by both demanding and producing a sense of "separation" (to recall Indigenous Anarchist's words) between self, other, and earth (Machado de Oliveira, 2021). These epistemological mandates, then—with their everyday manifestations and interpersonal mobilizations in the judging, bashing, hating, portraying, assuming, stereotyping, separating, and bullying of those variously condemned to

Man's Underbelly—exist in a self-reinforcing relationship with a singular origin story violently masqueraded as universal truth: that we are biocentric and atomized individuals in a knowable and deterministic world, rather than quantumly entangled beings “related and accountable to what is unknowable, things that are not visible or imaginable within and around us” (Machado de Oliveira, 2021, p. 45; Barad, 2010; 2012; Zohar, 1990; Wheatley, 2006; Torday, 2023). In other words, Man's epistemic regimes and (and as) modernity's singular linear narrative (Machado de Oliveira, 2021) exist only through the conditioned negation of our human and extra-human entanglements.

Destruction at an atomic scale.

Questions of Scope and Scale

The question that emerges from these connections, then, has to do with the scopes and scales at which we conceptualize complex social problems and their potential alternatives. As institutions made and remade in and through shifting relations to the State, schools are inherently structured by modernity's regimes of knowing/determining humanness. This is not to say that schooling (which, recalling Jimmy's insights from Chapter 1, is non-synonymous with learning or education⁴³) does not contribute invaluablely to the well-being and life circumstances of many young people; nor that students and teachers do not refuse hierarchical humanness in various and brilliant ways; nor that educational access and contestations over “public” schools (see Chapter 3) are inherently useless pursuits. Rather, my interest is in being curious and critical about the terrains on, and means through which, we fight for freedom.

What would it mean to create alternatives to the school-prison link that not only replace school discipline or remove school police, but also, and necessarily, contend with Man's

⁴³ For a brilliant discussion of this difference, see Stovall (2018).

compulsory paradigm of humanness and its attendant epistemic-(anti)relational codes? What would it mean to create alternatives, to both schooling and carceral regimes, that contend with the conditioned negation of our inter-human and extra-human entanglements? This is another way of asking, more broadly, how we might develop alternative forms of education and socio-spatial organization that exceed the carceral-education landscape, by continuously contending with its numerous entangled roots: not only the institutional, interpersonal, and ideological, but always also as well, the epistemological and ontological. Briefly placing these questions in conversation with recent school-prison literature helps clarify the point I am trying to make, and provides a useful transition into Part II.

Here, we can take as a point of departure the students' emphasis on their actions and behaviors being systematically judged and misunderstood. As I have noted school-prison literature generally, and research on the school-to-prison pipeline (STPP) in particular, often focuses on exclusionary "zero tolerance" school discipline, and posits that it is an issue for two primary reasons: first, zero tolerance discipline excessively criminalizes misbehavior that ought to be dealt with through different means (e.g., Gottfredson, 2020; Kupchick & Deakin, 2018; Morgan et al., 2020); and, second, zero tolerance discipline differentially criminalizes Black, brown, and disabled youth for the 'same behaviors' as their white, able-bodied peers (e.g., Losen & Skiba, 2013; Rocque & Snellings, 2018). As mentioned, finding alternative ways to deal with harm and conflict in schools is incredibly important, and a continued demand of youth and communities most impacted by carceral-education exclusion (see Introduction Part I). However, I also want to consider how the State-sanctioned implementation of "alternatives to discipline" as (singular) solutions to the school-prison link can reify, and become underwritten by, the same epistemological regimes as the problems they seek to address.

In seeking new ways of responding to youth (mis)behavior, common responses to the STPP—such as restorative justice (RJ) and positive behavioral interventions and support (PBIS)—rewrite “acceptable” behavior as the metric of *who* we are: of who is human, who belongs, who deserves to be in and of a space. Equally important are the stated goals and intended outcomes of RJ and PBIS, which prioritize, as I’ve described elsewhere, “self-regulation, healthy attachment to teachers and schools, and improved academic and behavioral performance” (Goldman, 2024, p. 34). In light of the arguments developed above, this raises critical questions. In what ways do State-sanctioned “alternatives to school discipline” maintain an epistemological, and therefore methodological and relational, attachment to that which can be known—seen, observed, measured, confirmed, predicted—with certainty (e.g., regulated behavior, academic and behavioral performance)? In what ways do they move through and towards (always conditional) inclusion into Man’s compulsory paradigm of being and knowing and being known; and through and towards modernity’s “singular pulse of progress” (Tsing, 2015)? In what ways might reifying behavior—misbehavior, positive behavior, student behavior, teacher behavior— as the root of the problem, preclude “the possibility of undoing and unsettling—*not replacing or occupying*—Western conceptions of what it means to be human” (McKittrick, 2015, p. 2)?

Rooted in FREE LA students’ insights and informed by their (hi)stories, it is not *just* the criminalization of behavior—or particular modes of dressing, thinking, speaking, acting, performing—that ties schools to prisons (though these are inherently part of the equation); but, at a deeper level and as a deeper root, a way of knowing (judging, stereotyping, separating) the human based on visibility and exteriority. This way of knowing, as noted, is constitutive of a distinctly european yet now globally imposed epistemological regime that naturalizes humanness

as something that *can* be known, measured, and determined—something that can be seen, observed, and verified—and thus as something that will always be conditional and up for debate. It is therefore not only the decriminalization of, and non-punitive ways of responding to, behavior deemed criminal, defiant, or un-acceptable that must form the crux of abolitionist education and praxis (though this is enmeshed and inherently important). Rather, or also, it is making space for (and through) alternative ways of knowing, relating, and keeping it human—beyond exteriority/visibility, in and beyond the carceral-education landscape. Less than proposing answers, I am suggesting we might ask more questions like:

What does it mean, what is at stake, and what might it take to “keep it human” in abolitionist education, and beyond the carceral-education landscape? How might we tend to the poisoned soil, under public schools and in public spaces, on which Man’s human-making projects unfold? Recalling Erica’s words from Chapter 2, how might we understand these human-making projects as something that “is *happening*,” as something that is radioactive and ongoing and unfinished and all around us, something that we all breathe in, track into our homes, that our children play in (always in terribly and systemically uneven ways)? And what are the ways those consigned to Man’s Underbelly “can, and do, provide a way to think about being human anew” (McKittrick, 2015, p. 3)? These questions, alongside the arguments laid out in Part I, guide my engagement with FREE LA students,’ and in particular Black girls’ reflections on humanness in Part II.

§

PART II

Keeping it Human

“[T]hose currently inhabiting the underside of the category of Man-as-human—under our current epistemological regime, those cast out as impoverished and colonized and undesirable and lacking reason—can, and do, provide a way to think about being human anew. Being human, in this context, signals not a noun but a verb” (McKittrick, 2015, p. 3).

Introduction

We were standing in front of the LA Board of Supervisors building, a concrete edifice carved out by three huge windows that relentlessly reflected the cloudless 4:00 PM glare.

Kimora was up next. In true character she got up to the mic and introduced herself with a hair flip, sending her perfectly laid extensions flying through the air, before they landed gracefully on her right shoulder. As she faced the crowd of people facing the massive State building, some holding signs and fists, others holding cameras and microphones, I thought of the many times she waltzed into my classroom, snapped her fingers and said, as often with her movement as with her words: *Don't worry, everyone. Princess Kimora is here.* As I've described elsewhere, everywhere Kimora went, she brought with her this unspeakable unknowable glow (Goldman, 2024).

It was mid-October of 2021, about a month or so after the Underbelly lesson. Sometime in the middle of the school day, Lupita and other YJC organizers spread word about a protest happening that afternoon in Downtown LA. The protest was organized by a Los Angeles-based youth-led group, [Students Deserve](#), and students from local school districts in response to two recent “fatal shootings” by school police, including the murder of an 18-year old Latina mother with an infant child. FREE LA students were invited to attend and, for graduation credit, speak at the protest about their own experiences with school police and the need for “cops off campus.”

Kimora took the mic following a poignant speech by Jimmy. Like her cousin, Kimora used FREE LA as a blueprint and counter-example to articulate both the violence and obsolescence of school police.

“We don’t need them,” she said as a matter-of-fact, her hair swaying softly in agreement. “At my school, we don’t have them. We have two peace builders, Dave and Charles, and they actually care about us. The difference between peace builders and school police is that we just talk about it. And they listen. Schools need peace builders who actually care about the children they interact with.”

Kimora paused for a moment, and the sun reflecting off the windows of the massive State structure created a barely visible aura around her, more like a hum (Campt, 2017) than a halo. But only for a moment, before she continued, “I feel like youth are just misunderstood and need to be heard. And my school is different because they listen.”

§

As Kimora’s speech captures, inextricable from Black girls’ and other students’ experiences being judged and misunderstood in schools and public spaces is an equally systematic pattern: not being heard. Likewise, in describing what made them feel “accepted” at FREE LA—what made them feel like they belong, like they could live their truths (that is, the very things that make us *feel* human)—what emerged from the girls’ reflections is a blueprint and point of departure: listening. In the following sections, I think through and alongside the girls’ education histories—both their experiences in schooling and their reflections on those experiences—in light of the question of what it means, or might mean, to keep it human anew. As noted, I interpret(ed) this question and its potential answers as encompassing an expansive constellation of all the things that make us feel like who we are (and *how* we are) is “acceptable:”

things like being heard and feeling understood. This means that my analysis of the girls' reflections on humanness/keeping it human included but exceeded explicit mentions of words like humanness, human, and humanity—allowing a seemingly unrelated or disconnected concept, like listening, to take up theoretical space. It also implies that the theory of listening which emerged from my analysis is one that was developed in relation, or through a set of relations: between the girls, their (hi)stories, my reading of their (hi)stories, and the knowledge traditions and critical texts that iteratively informed that reading.⁴⁴

Guided by these reflections and (in) relations, and as Kimora's words above suggest, I theorize and think through *listening* as an anti-carceral and inherently relational praxis: one that has the potential to exceed and destabilize the epistemic scripts and anti-relational mandates that enliven Man's human-making projects in and beyond schools. Listening, as rooted in the experiences and insights of Black girls at FREE LA, is both a praxis of and blueprint for an alternative way of sensing, making sense and making space, that moves beyond and outside exteriority, visibility, and knowability, and thus through and towards a praxis of keeping it human "anew."

Before continuing, a few preliminary notes provide important context for the reader. The following sections can be considered an ongoing/unfinished thought project, open to revision and intended to be revisited. Because I am thinking through listening as a praxis and blueprint, as I discuss my reading of the girls' experiences at and reflections on FREE LA, I speak both in terms of what FREE LA does, and what its model suggests is or might be possible in other (un/forgotten) spaces. In other words, the theory of listening developed below is in part a speculative blueprint. Relatedly, as the following sections will elaborate, listening in the context

⁴⁴ In other words, I am not simply extracting a predefined theory of listening as/or keeping it human from the girls' stories.

of carceral-education landscape, and with respect to the school-prison link, does not signify a precondition or desired outcome or perfect form of abolitionist education, nor does it imply that FREE LA has “succeeded” in moving beyond Man. Rather, I consider the possibilities of and for listening as an ongoing/unfinished praxis of sensing, making sense, and making space otherwise. In this way listening is both a praxis and a promise: because it is a verb, not a noun.

Thus, whereas the prior chapters, and Chapter 4 in particular, provided concrete details of FREE LA’s everyday praxes and ways of making place, Part II of this chapter theorizes both humanness (or what it might mean to keep it human) and listening (as a praxis of/for keeping it human otherwise) through the lens of the entanglements between Black girls’ reflections, and the ways these reflections play out at FREE LA. As McKittrick meticulously illustrates in *Demonic Grounds*, “Black women’s spatial knowledges” and “unique geographic concerns” are both “concealed by racial, sexual, and economic processes,” and inherently enmeshed with present-future material geographies and geographic possibilities (2006, p. 121). For these reasons, I am not as focused on pinning down or illustrating exactly “how” listening happens at FREE LA (though this will be a focus of my future work), as I am in thinking about the implications of Black girls’ reflections on humanness and listening *as* blueprints, and as blueprints for the sorts of un/forgotten spaces that might exceed the carceral-educational landscapes of Man’s modernity. Thus, in iterative conversation with FREE LA students’ insights, the remainder of this chapter builds from *Demonic Grounds* and other critical (geographic) texts⁴⁵ to ask questions and be curious about the possibilities for reclaiming, remembering, re-rooting and rerouting

⁴⁵ As with Part I and other chapters, and following a method of entanglements, in Part II I pull from an array of texts, which themselves pull from and contribute to an array of knowledge traditions, none of which I aim or claim to engage as an “expert.”

alternative forms of education, and socio-spatial organization, that we may have forgotten—or become blind to (see Chapter 2)—in all our looking.

Keeping Our Ears on New Ground: *Listening Beyond Man*

Man's world is knowable, visible, seeable, trackable, verifiable, certain, empirical and—above all—rational. It is split, severed, separate, separable into concrete things with concrete outlines; into inputs and outcomes; into pipelines and pathways; into Body and Mind, Creator and Created (Machado de Oliveira, 2021), Human and Nature, Man and Other, *Us and Them*. Things and people and spaces and knowledge are divided into discrete entities, parts, zones, and disciplines (Mignolo, 2018; Wheatley, 2006; Lugones, 2010). Knowledge that counts is knowledge that can be seen: written in words, codified in the certainty of consonants and vowels, documented in books, archived as data. Things that cannot be seen, cannot be verified—cannot be known. And things that cannot be known cannot be controlled or contained.

In these ways, Man signifies and encompasses a *world-sense* that privileges visuality (Mignolo, 2018). As the poisoned soil of our present social structure and imagination (Wynter, 1994), Man's compulsory paradigm of knowing/being human structures the ways we sense and make sense of, and therefore the ways we make (and remake), the world. Scholars working across numerous knowledge traditions, and contributing to various trans/disciplinary debates, have analyzed, theorized, and critiqued—in various and contextually-specific ways—how Man/modernity's emphasis on seeing/visuality as the most (or only) civilized/rational sense systematically (and counterinsurgently) eclipses other ways of sensing, understanding, and being in and of the world (e.g., Campt, 2017; Diaz, 2006; Machado de Oliveira, 2021; McKittrick, 2006; Prescod-Weinstein, 2021; Quashie, 2012; Robinson, 2020). As with other chapters, and following a method of entanglements, I make no claim or attempt to be *in* these diverse and

transdisciplinary conversations—only to be curious about the space those conversations open, and the questions they might allow us to ask.

Constitutive of modernity's (ongoing) inception through making the unknown "biocentrically knowable" (McKittrick, 2006, p. 128), Man's privileging of visibility/exteriority plays out in various ways, and through various means, across time: through ethnographic observations and documentations of Man's savage/barbarian Other and its irrational/uncivilized ways; through the cartographic violence (*ibid*; King, 2019) used to first map the earth as the World, and then carve each of them into nation-states, private property, and pipelines; through commodified, categorized, categorizable bodies displayed on auction blocks, swung like strange fruit from blood-stained leaves, severed and paraded through town for everyone to see. Man loves a spectacle. And because modernity is not a 'thing,' but rather a narrative—"a worlding story...that actively does things, including conditioning the habits of knowing and being of those whose lives and livelihoods are intertwined with it" (Machado de Oliveira, 2021, p. 16)—this raises critical (geographic) questions about what we think we know, and *how* we think we know ('who/what we are') (McKittrick, 2015).

I want to suggest that this circumscription (or enclosure) of the senses informs and explains the "misunderstanding" that Kimora, other Black girls, and various students at FREE LA repeatedly critique. This relationship between how we make sense, and who or what we cannot (or claim to) understand, is reflected in the questions Vanessa Machado de Oliveira (2021, p. 102) asks of our inter/personal entanglements in and with modernity. She invites readers to turn inward and consider:

How is the possibility of my understanding (knowing or sensing), or lack thereof, shaped and limited by my lived experience? What is *this experience (of not knowing)* teaching me about the likelihood of possibilities that I could not have imagined existed? (emphasis added).

What might the experience of not knowing teach us about “how we *really* are,” and where we go from here? With an interest in asking new questions and telling old stories in new ways, and by thinking with and through the reflections and “unique geographic concerns” (McKittrick, 2006) of Black girls at FREE LA, I speculatively theorize *listening* as an anti-carceral and inherently relational praxis that might move outside our present ways of knowing/sensing what it means to be human, and thus through and towards keeping it human anew.

Keeping Our Ears to the Ground: Listening to the Unseeable

“And that’s how the whole school noticed me... Since that one fight, I was known.”

Just as it had throughout her education history, and across our various conversations, California’s voice as she described how she became “known” at one of her prior schools hovered somewhere between hushed and quiet—in a rhythm that seemed to resonate “at frequency that is felt rather than heard” (Campt, 2017, p. 31). So that I had to really listen, not just hear. So that even though she was sitting about two feet away from me, both of us secluded in the silence of FREE LA’s (unusually) empty music studio, I had to push my ear towards her to be sure I understood.

“In a good way or a bad way?” I asked.

“Both,” she said.

And I repeated it back. “Both?”

“Like I start to be intimidating.”

“Mhm. And how did the school deal with the fight?”

“Um... They came into the bathroom. The students. They came with phones, and they *recorded* everything. They didn’t help us—because the floor was wet, I could have killed her.”

“Right,” I said, filling a space that might have been better off silent.

“I could have hit her head into the sink,” California continued, remembering the present-past possibilities with which she is entangled. “She could’ve hit mine. But everyone just egged it on. And the floor was wet, which means I could have slipped and hit my head, or she could have.

“Right,” I repeated, finally registering her prior point aloud. “Somebody could have died.”

“And...there were *no staff*.”

“Nobody came?”

“They didn’t come ‘til after everyone crowded the door. So, I was just like...the staff would have *let* the students kill each other. Now I’m looking back on it...they would have.”

Among and as entangled with the numerous insights and stories that comprised California’s education history, the conversation above is a critical (geographic) blueprint and offers a critical point of departure to consider another systematic pattern that emerged in Black girls’ education (hi)stories: many of the girls described reporting violence or the threat of violence (including but not exclusively in the form of bullying) to school teachers and administration, and being repeatedly ignored and unheard. California becoming “known” and “noticed” *through* that fight captures how within our present systems of knowing, Black girls are simultaneously unintelligible, and knowable (only) through violence: through the wounded or wounding body/exterior. California’s education history—alongside Zahra, Kimora, Emani and other Black girls’ (hi)stories—opens critical space to consider the un-visible but violently visceral entanglements between Man’s ways of knowing/relating (based on that which visible/exterior/noticeable), and the ongoing/unfinished production of public schools and public space in which Black girls’ humanness must be an impossibility.

Specifically, California’s recollection that staff “didn’t come ‘til after everyone crowded the door” invites us to consider (in order to contend with) the violence that always already exists, even and especially when we can’t see it. Here I am referring not only to the interpersonal violence that happens behind closed doors (though this is inherently part of the equation), but at a deeper level, and as a deeper root, to the ways gendered anti-black violence is the organizing logic of, and (pre)condition of possibility for, modernity (Rodríguez, 2021). Scholars across knowledge traditions have expansively, carefully, and painstakingly archived, analyzed, and theorized (geographic) possibilities beyond the pervasiveness of gendered-racial violence {in and as modernity}. This violence—epistemological, ontological, interpersonal, and sub/atomic in scale and scope—is, in Christina Sharpe’s (2016) words, *the weather*. It is always and everywhere and under and all around us. Recalling Zahra and Erica’s insights from Chapter 2, we might think of this violence is the poisoned soil we breathe in and play in and track into public spaces and pastel homes, often times un-knowingly. And it is this point that allows us to make sense of Black girls’ experiences being systematically judged, misunderstood, ignored, and unheard in schools and other public spaces. These experiences, which resulted in more than one girl needing to defend herself⁴⁶ (and thus being further criminalized), signal how Man’s ways of knowing preclude us from *seeing*, and therefore sensing, this violence—often at all, but at best before it’s too late.

On the other hand, however, California’s reflections on the ways FREE LA has helped her reveal how Man’s epistemological regimes are neither totalizing nor inevitable. These reflections elucidate the possibilities for listening as a praxis of and for “keeping it human” in (and as) abolitionist education.

⁴⁶ In other cases this labor fell on the mothers, who felt compelled to move their daughters from and between schools in order to protect their safety in ways the State refused to.

Margaret: Has the school [FREE LA] helped you at all with anything?

California: Umm...mentally? Yes, definitely they have.

Margaret: When you said they help you mentally, how is that?

California: With the communication, and the showing love, and the showing the respect. Showing that I'm being *heard*. Someone's listening to me. I'm not being ignored. I'm not feeling like I'm being bullied and no one's helping.

Listening, in this context, is a praxis of sensing and making sense otherwise: one which might allow us to name and notice Man's human-making projects as they play out across terribly asymmetric, yet ultimately alterable (King, 2019; McKittrick, 2006) landscapes. Rooted in the girls' experiences and insights, this form of listening refers not only to "hearing" the voices of those consigned to modernity's Underbelly—"under our current epistemological regime, those cast out as impoverished and colonized and undesirable and lacking reason" (McKittrick, 2015, p. 3)—though this is inherently part of the equation; but rather, in a deeper way and as a deeper route, being perceptive to that which has been rendered unseeable and unsayable because it has been storied as Truth. This praxis and promise of listening is captured poignantly in another profound blueprint California offered: the importance, in her words, of "*keeping one's ear to the ground.*"

What might we sense if we kept our ears to the ground beneath our feet, if we pressed our ears to the "poisoned soils of human exceptionalism" (Barad, 2017) on which we've built our schools and our pipelines and our ways of knowing and being known? What if listening, in abolitionist education and beyond the carceral-education landscape, was a way to notice and name the violence of Man's human-making regimes as they play out in our everyday relationships; in our conceptions of self, other, desire, success; and in the spaces we make and

inhabit and move between? I want to suggest that listening, as a praxis of and towards keeping it human anew, might help us sense and make sense of the ways we track the Weather with us—into our places of play and study, into our homes, deep into our bodies and brains and taste buds and bones. This potential and promise of listening is reflected meaningfully in California’s simultaneous appreciation for, and *critiques of* FREE LA.

Directly after her reflections on how FREE LA has helped her mentally, by listening to and not ignoring her, California shared the following:

California: Because, you know, I'm 20 years old. Bullying never will stop. And it still happens! And at least I can call it out.

Margaret: Right. Yeah. And I appreciate you telling me to call it out, too.

California: Right. *This is right in our faces*, and we don't even notice that half of the school probably don't come to school because they're being bullied.

California’s point that “this is right in our faces, and we don't even notice” highlights the limits of visibility/exteriority, and simultaneously suggests and embodies a critical need for other ways of knowing, sensing, and relating. California elaborated on this point by naming, more specifically, the presence of homophobia in the FREE LA space. In fact, both California and another Black girl, Jayla, brought this to my attention in interviews and conversations, sensing and noticing that which evaded the staff’s view (including my own). At the time, there were two openly queer people at FREE LA, neither of whom are there any longer. Like California, Jayla lamented during her interview that one of her peers, an openly gay student, was being bullied by a group of his peers, and would skip coming to school and going on field trips because of this. In Jayla’s words:

There needs to be consequences about that because...he really goin through it. And I can—I could just imagine. ‘Cause he gotta deal with it at home, and then you gotta come to where you gotta get your education and deal with it? *That’s* deep. That's beyond deep.

All of this leaves us with a few critical points. First, the praxis of listening that the girls (allow us to) envision and embody, is a praxis of accounting for and being accountable *to* who/what has been rendered unintelligible within our current epistemological regimes. Like California’s care for the other (likely Black) girl who might have killed/been killed, this listening is a praxis and promise of radical compassion: a noticing of the presence that exists in absence, a naming of what is *happening* beyond closed doors and right in our faces. Second, and inextricably, are the ways this listening is (or might become) a praxis of *not knowing*—of knowing that there are things we can’t know. Listening at a deeper level to Jayla’s words above, we can hear the limits placed (and honored) around knowability. Her statement that she “could just *imagine*” what her peer was going through is at once a display of radical compassion, and an insurgent awareness of her inability to fully understand (to fully *know*, fully ‘grasp’) his situation or circumstances. This simultaneity of radical compassion and not knowing it all (but knowing this shit goes deep) exemplifies the promise and potential of listening to move outside Man’s ways of knowing/relating, and to make space for a different epistemic-interpersonal code: that we should not need to know everything (or anything) about someone, to know that they (because we) are human.

Indeed, what also precluded Black girls and their peers from “being” in public schools and public spaces, and thus what is equally important for a theory of listening otherwise, was a systematic epistemological and interpersonal negation of all that is embodied beyond the body: that quiet, expansive, and inherently unknowable inner Self (Quashie, 2012; Goldman, 2024). How might listening as a praxis of *not knowing* become, in fact, a way of knowing/relating

otherwise? What possibilities for abolitionist education, and what new forms of socio-spatial organization, might emerge through an ongoing/unfinished praxis listening to the things we don't know?

In the following and final section of this chapter, and to think through these questions, I want to use as a point of departure a point I made briefly at the close of Part I. I proposed that Man's "anti-relational mandates...exist in a self-reinforcing relationship with a singular origin story violently masquerading as universal truth: that we are biocentric and atomized individuals in a knowable and deterministic world, rather than quantumly entangled beings" in an equally unknowable cosmic pluriverse of possibilities. And I proposed, therefore, that our alternatives to the school-prison link must contend with Man's ways of knowing/relating, which "work constitutively through the conditioned negation of our inter-human and extra-human entanglements." In the following section, I build again from the girls' insights to speculatively theorize listening as an ongoing/unfinished praxis of making space: one which allows, or might allow, for new terms of relationality, new forms of understanding, and therefore new possibilities for realizing (and *realizing*) our inter-human entanglements, to emerge. Focusing closely on Zahra's experiences and reflections, I think through listening as a praxis (verb) and blueprint that forges these possibilities by creating the space to tell and hear (our) stories—to tell and hear new stories, or old stories in new ways—and therefore to engage in the alchemical and necessarily collective work of remediating poisoned soil, all the way down to the root.

Listening: Beyond Knowability, Towards Entanglement

Zahra's Story

“So,” I asked Zahra about half-way into her hour-long education (hi)story. “Do you feel like there's something that could have made spaces safer for you as a Black girl? Or as a girl going through the specific things you were going through?”

“I really felt like there was *no* space for me. I felt like—” Zahra paused, a heavy kind of pause that seemed less a search for words than an acknowledgement of what is unsayable. “Um, I felt like—” She paused again.

Earlier on in the interview, as Zahra described her abortion and how broken it made her feel, her voice broke with her. For a few minutes she had talked through the tears, slowly, as if pushing through quicksand. Now, the tears had moved to ebb from flow, but some of their lingering traces remained. “I don't know—I don't know how to feel. It was like, what I compared it to—which is what I *felt* like—when I got put on the table.” She sniffled and pressed the bridge of her palms into her eyes, into that shoreline holding the ebb of the tide. “And they started to pump anesthesia. I was fighting it. I was fighting it, I was *fighting* it. I wasn't supposed to eat that morning either. I had some ice cream and everything before I went in there. And when I say I did not give a fuck about my life—I knew I was not supposed to eat and everything, like I did not *care*. I did not, I did not.”

She sniffled again, and in the same breath breathed in deeply, as if regrouping herself. With a bit more bass, but the same steady rhythm, she explained: “I just felt like it was so *frowned* upon on that, if I was to bring it [the decision to have an abortion] to *anybody*, I would get a...a fucked up reaction. Yeah, so quick to judge but you don't know *why*...But you'll bash somebody for wanting to be in a certain space, wanting to be in a certain energy, when they know they could provide. And so I didn't feel like there was a place for me.” She shook her head. “I didn't. Mm-mm.”

“So you felt like Chuco’s [FREE LA] was that space?”

“Um. ” Zahra narrowed her eyes, tilting that glistening shoreline just slightly to the side as she thought thoughtfully about my question and her answer. “In the beginning I would say—I wouldn't say I was tied in enough. But, like I said, talking to Mr. V opened up a lot of doors.”

Earlier in the interview, Zahra had described how Mr. V—the deeply beloved teacher and now intensely present spirit who inspired Zahra’s interest in the rebel garden (see Chapter 2)—was the first person to “start to crack the shell open” when she arrived at FREE LA, shortly after the circumstances described above. “[Mr.] V got me to Nat.⁴⁷ Nat got me to [Ms.] Tracey. I didn't go in talking about it, you know, right off the bat. I got a lot of trauma. My pregnancy and probation is just not the start at all.” Zahra cleared her throat and paused again for a moment. But only for a moment before she continued: “Ms. Tracey made me feel like I belonged. Ms. Tracey made me feel like my decision was okay. Ms. Tracey...She helped me come to terms with my whole situation. She—I would say she nurtured me, as like a...like a mother and a daughter, you know? That kind of relationship. And she just made me feel like it was *okay*.”

Zahra sniffled again. Her voice hovered somewhere between fighting back more tears, and pouring water onto wounds. “Of course it's gonna take me some time to get the, the hate or whatever I feel for myself out. But as far as coming to terms with my situation, coming to terms with my choice, coming to accept everything for what it was—as far as every aspect: boys, girls, the baby...probation, what I want to do with my life, everything—that was my somebody to talk to. That was my somebody just to go in there and lay down and *cry*. That was my person if I just didn't want to, if I didn't want to be in *class*. Because I was just so depressed, like the first couple

⁴⁷ Natalie (Nat) is FREE LA’s academic counselor.

months of school, I really didn't do shit like that. Because I was just so depressed. And so, yeah, Ms. Tracey, by the end of the year she pretty much—Yeah, she got me out of it.”

Being listened to is inseparable from having someone to talk to, someone to share our stories with; and being heard is what makes us feel accepted, like “who we are is acceptable,” like we belong. These are the things, in other words, that make us *feel* human. Importantly, what Zahra felt was heard and listened to at FREE LA—her choices, her circumstances, her story—are precisely what she felt was “looked at,” judged, stereotyped, and misunderstood in public schools and public space. This relationship, between the ways we make sense of the world and spaces we build, is the context in which listening might become a praxis of and for “keeping it human” anew, in and beyond abolitionist education.

In considering these possibilities, a few threads from the excerpt above are especially illuminating: in particular, Zahra’s recognition of the time it would take to get the “hate or whatever I feel for myself out,” and the related “shell” she had built around herself; and the relationship between Zahra having someone to tell her story to—that is, having the space for her story to be shared and heard—and her feeling like FREE LA was a space for her to *be*, and be herself. Building on the prior section’s discussion of how listening might move us beyond the limits of visibility, this section discusses how listening, as an ongoing/unfinished praxis, might move us through and towards a praxis of entangled inter-humanness (Wynter & McKittrick, 2015; Barad, 2012). Like the theory of unconditional care developed in the prior chapter, listening—when understood and practiced as everyday praxis, as an alternative way of knowing/relating—can, and does, become woven into the very foundations of the FREE LA space.

Sharing Stories on Poisoned Soil

To begin, Zahra’s (hi)story sheds light on the ways listening, as a praxis of and for keeping it human anew, enables the work of plunging into individual and collective wounds to reach, on the other side, radically different ways of being. Sharing our stories and feeling like our stories are heard, in other words, is how we (might) engage in the alchemical work of remediating Man’s poisoned soil, of un-severing that initial atomic split, of beginning to “crack the shell.” Because, as Wynter so compellingly puts forth, *we are* the stories we tell.

Part I discussed how Man’s ways of knowing and relating, based on exteriority and visibility, are enmeshed with a compulsory paradigm of what it means to be human (Rodríguez, 2021; Wynter, 2003). Under this epistemological-interpersonal regime, we are judged based on fractions of ourselves—how we look, speak, think, act, dress; what shows on our bodies; our circumstances, situations, choices, and certificates—such that the entangled and unknowable inner *Self* (Quashie, 2012) is eclipsed and enclosed by the atomized, visible, knowable *individual* (Goldman, 2024). In her analysis of the relationships between “border imperialism,” colonialism, and global racial capitalism, Harsha Walia (2013) describes how the political economy of modernity leaks into the social structure, producing and self-reinforcing isolation and atomization. She writes:

Each of us plays such an atomized role in the global economy—like cogs in a wheel—that *our social relations come to mimic that atomization*. This psychological and social isolation, first, encourages our addiction to consumer culture, which in turn feeds endless capitalist production, and second, *perpetuates our fears of one another*, which justifies ever-expanding state surveillance and criminalization within border imperialism (p. 103, emphasis mine).

The judgment, bullying, and misunderstanding that Black girls and other students experienced in schools—not only by school police and State agents, but by students and peers—

is both necessary for and an outcome of the isolation and atomization Walia describes above. What is especially important, with respect to listening/keeping it human anew, is the way this atomization *physiologically rewires* our individual and collective bodies (see also Chapter 2). Being systematically judged, unheard, not listened to, and misunderstood, in other words, has physical and metaphysical consequences: it severs the tongue, makes us less likely to open up (see Chapter 4), and activates neural pathways that restrict our ability and desire to understand others and ourselves (Magnet & Dunnington, 2022). So we learn, in schools and public spaces, to build shells and borders around our bodies and all that we embody—sometimes un-knowingly, and always to our own demise. If Man’s ways of knowing/relating both require and reinforce a sense of separation and separability between self, other, and earth (Machado de Oliveira, 2021), then listening and “keeping it human” otherwise must move beyond atomization.

Zahra being able to “come to terms” with and “accept” her choices, her circumstances, and *herself*—by sharing her story and feeling like her story was heard—reflects the potentialities of listening to generate new forms of social organization that move beyond atomization, isolation, shells and borders, and towards inter-human entanglement. It also exemplifies a broader pattern. In reflecting on their experiences at FREE LA, numerous Black girls described a similar process of profound personal and interpersonal transformation, one which included transformed relationships with Self, with other, and with change (see also Goldman, 2024). Turning briefly to Kimora’s story, the following words overlap powerfully with Zahra’s, and capture how this type of transformation, this process of plunging into individual and collective wounds, both enables and is enabled by a way of knowing/relating that exceeds visibility/exteriority:

This school [FREE LA]...they understand that people go through things, and why they act. They don't take shit personal. They don't like, "Oh, well, I'm not gonna fuck with you because you did this." They're like, "Okay, you're having a hard time, you're a hurt person. Hurt people hurt people. They understand that, and they try to help people. I was a hurt person that hurt people! And Ms. Tracey has made me realize, it's okay to change. It's okay to let go of things that have hurt you before, it's okay...to not be understood. But it's how I deal with it, it's how I act behind it, it's how I move forward from it.

Both Zahra and Kimora's reflections on what made FREE LA different for them illustrate a space, a set of relationships and terms of relationality, that radically disrupt the systematic practices that numerous students described experiencing in other schools: like being judged, like not being asked why, like people and institutions claiming who, but refusing to understand *how* they really are. In this context, listening (to new stories, or old stories in new ways) engenders, enables, and lives already a new vision of humanness. Humanness here is not a static, seeable, separable, noun: you *just are* a bad ass kid, you *just are* defiant, a killer, criminal, at-risk, jobless, dysselected, never-more-than-meets-the-eye. Rather, humanness is a verb: an unfinished/ongoing process of becoming. This is a praxis not of fully "knowing" who/what we are—as Kimora mentions, it's okay not to be fully understood—but rather of constantly and collectively learning (and relearning) *how* and *why* we really are.

As an alternative way of making sense (and therefore making space), listening might dislodge us from Man's singular and overdetermined evolutionary story which, in rendering human being/being human "biocentrically knowable" (McKittrick, 2006) inherently renders it fixed, static, and predetermined. This notion of fixed (and therefore knowable) humanness *is* the flesh-and-bones of carceral regimes, which lock human beings into static and all-subsuming categories—criminal, offender, killer, terrorist, bad ass kid—in order to then lock them in cages,

in between borders, and under the belly of Man's beast. As Part I argued, this notion of the fixed/knowable/categorizable human is *made real*, in schools and public space, through (anti)relational codes which demand the negation of our inter- and extra-human entanglements. Herein lies the significance of the relationship that Zahra and Kimora (allow us to) draw between sharing our stories and feeling like our stories are being heard, and recognizing that "*it's okay*:" to change, to be dynamic, to be imperfect and make mistakes, and even to be misunderstood. It is in this way that listening provides a promise and praxis of plunging into pain, into our individual and collective pasts and their haunting/lingering traces, in order to break the shell, tend to the root, and realize—so what we might *realize*—the possibilities for radically different ways of being.

This happens, in part, by sitting down and really sharing our (hi)stories, but it also refers to something more everyday: something that culminates at FREE LA into a *spatial condition* in which, in Emani's words, "people [are] able to voice they opinion without feeling shame for voicing they opinion." Zahra likewise captures this condition in her reflection that "anything that comes my way, there's somebody in here I could talk to, there's somebody in here that can help me." This suggests, in other words, that listening (as a praxis of keeping it human anew) is not something that happens only when young people need a place to "lay down and *cry*," as Zahra described of her early interactions with Ms. Tracey (although this is inherently important); but rather something that must be practiced constantly, something that must become woven into the very foundations of liberatory space.

Listening, from this lens, becomes a geographic, space-making, and therefore world-building praxis. The following section completes this chapter by reflecting briefly on how this unfolds at FREE LA: specifically, how listening to and sharing (our) stories creates the spatial

conditions for new terms of relationality, new forms of understanding and connection, and therefore new possibilities for moving beyond knowability, towards entanglement. The Conclusion then considers the implications of listening in the context of abolitionist education and the school-prison nexus.

Beyond Knowability, Towards Entanglement (How We Really Are)

*You just never know who you're walking past, you never know
what a person been through. You just never know.*

—Zahra, FREE LA graduate

“Literally anything that comes my way, there's somebody in here I could talk to, there's somebody in here that can help me,” Zahra explained. “This is the only place I *don't* feel out of place.”

“So you feel like the main difference is the support?”

“The support. I would say the transparency. Like everybody in here got a story. And—” Zahra paused again, but a lighter, a less heavy pause. “Yeah, everybody in here got a story and, you know, we may not know everybody's into detail, whatever the case may be. But I feel as [though] everybody is *sympathetic* to everybody. As far as personal things, differences, whatever the case may be, I feel like everybody is understanding to an extent.” With her tears now settled into ebb, Zahra was speaking slowly, thoughtfully, deliberately.

“So you think it would be different if everybody in here didn't go through things that they can relate [to]?”

“No, not even that. I wouldn't even say *relate*. I would just say things—it would be different if nobody in here had *trauma*. If I was the only person walking around here with trauma, how can you understand me? How can we come to—” She paused again, a deep

meaningful pause. Zahra, like so many of the students, spoke with such profound wisdom, with such a profound and perceptive grasp on the landscapes they/we inhabit. It was absolutely captivating. “You may not understand me,” she continued, “but you may have some form of healing for me. How can we figure that out if you have no trauma?”

What Zahra describes above is a radical revision of what it means to understand: what it means to know, to sense, to make sense of. This form of understanding is not simply a negation or reworking of the “misunderstanding” that Zahra, Kimora, and their peers describe. Rather, it is a form of understanding that holds in and with it the inherent limits on complete knowability. As Zahra so powerfully explains, knowing all the details and being able to “relate” are irrelevant to a deeper form of knowing: that everyone has a story. This is a profound recognition that there is always more than meets the eye, always more than can be seen, judged, or known on and from the surface.

Listening beyond the exterior, then, enables and entails a form of understanding which acknowledges the full humanity in everyone: that that humanity is there, *unconditionally*, whether or not we’re willing or able to see it (brown, 2017), and whether or not we can “relate.” This is a form of understanding that exceeds the need to know for certain. Listening, in this context, might become a way of making sense that pulls us into the unknown/unknowable: a praxis that can, and does, invite us to consider what the experience *of not knowing* (Machado de Oliveira, 2021) can teach us about how we really are, and where we might go from here. It is in this way that not knowing might become, in fact, a way of knowing/relating otherwise.

Finally, Zahra’s reflections above allow us to consider more deeply what it means to move through and from poisoned soil, towards keeping it human anew. In my reading, the

following two questions Zahra poses are profound blueprints for considering the promise and praxis of listening in and beyond abolitionist education: “If I was the only person walking around here with trauma, how can you understand me?” and “You may not understand me, but you may have some form of healing for me. How can we figure that out if you have no trauma?” In light of Zahra’s and the other girls’ (articulated and embodied) reflections on keeping it human anew, I interpret Zahra’s emphasis on trauma not as a call for trauma bonding, or for shared experience as the metric for shared understanding. Rather, in my reading, she is highlighting both difference and pain as crucial sources of connection we must plunge into (Lorde, 1984[2007]; King, 2019). In my reading, Zahra’s questions and reflections are an invitation to name and notice the ways we *all* sit atop ghostly foundations; the ways in which “the empirical and experiential lives of *all* humans are increasingly subordinated to a figure that thrives on accumulation” (McKittrick, 2015, p. 10); and the ways we have *all* inherited terribly asymmetric, but inherently entangled wounds: physical, metaphysical, and existential in scale and scope.

How do we listen to the wounds of the world? How do we all listen to ghostly foundations, to blood on the leaves, to poison that lives for decades in the teeth—but (always) also, to the ways memory lives forever in the bones? Listening, sharing and hearing stories, is how we (might) “figure that out;” how we might realize—in order to *realize*—the ways we *all* have a story, and the ways all of our stories are quantumly entangled in unknown, to-be-know, and magnificently unknowable ways. What are the spaces we might make, the worlds we might create, the ways we might *heal together* if we look less and listen more—or if we look and listen and taste and smell and feel deeply, all at once; Mind and Body, Created and Creator, all beings in and as a “living-land metabolism”? In California’s words:

“Love is blind, but the wind is *powerful*.”

The wind *is* love. Because you just feel it.”

Conclusion

Pulling together various threads from the prior chapters, this two-part chapter has discussed a deeper epistemological and ontological root of the nexus between schooling, carcerality, and (therefore) modernity. Part I argued that what entangles schooling with modernity, and therefore with carceral regimes, is Man’s human-making projects. Schooling and carceral regimes, I’ve suggested, are enmeshed through their constitutive roles in reproducing and naturalizing Man’s epistemological regimes and compulsory paradigms of being and knowing who counts as human. But this, of course, was only one part of the story.

In Part II, I theorized *listening* as an alternative way of knowing/relating that moves beyond and outside visibility, exteriority, and knowability. Through my reading of Black girls’ reflections and experiences, I proposed that listening is both a promise (a blueprint) and a praxis (a verb) of and for “keeping it human” anew, and specifically for realizing (and thus *realizing*) our inter- and extra-human entanglements (Wynter & McKittrick, 2015; Barad, 2010; 2012; 2017; Machado de Oliveira, 2021; Holmes, 2020; Wheatley, 2006; Zohar, 1990).

I concluded Part I by discussing the implications of my arguments for analyses of the school-prison nexus, or school-to-prison pipeline (STPP). Specifically, I contended that that commonly proposed solutions to the STPP—Restorative Justice (RJ), Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), and other behaviorally-focused “alternatives” to school discipline—are circumscribed by the same epistemological regimes as the problems they seek to resolve. I therefore want to conclude Chapter 5 by briefly discussing the implications of *listening*, as theorized in Part II, for abolitionist alternatives to the school-prison nexus that exceed and destabilize Man’s carceral, epistemological, and interpersonal regimes.

Keeping it Human: Implications for Abolitionist Education in and Beyond the Carceral-Education Landscape

The ways the girls embody their own insights and reflections on listening/keeping it human *as praxis* shed light on the ways listening might open space to remediate the poisoned soil of Man-as-Human (Wynter, 2003; Barad, 2017; Weheliye, 2008; 2014), and forge “more humanly workable geographies” (McKittrick, 2006, p. xii) beyond the carceral-education landscape. Indeed, what is profoundly important, especially with respect to the ways change happens, is how the girls’ reflections on listening and being heard simultaneously inform their appreciation for *and* critiques of FREE LA. California, for example, reflected on being listened to, feeling heard, “not feeling like she’s being bullied and no one’s helping,” as one of the conditions of FREE LA that has helped her “mentally” the most. At the same time, she draws my/our attention to the criticality *and* possibilities of “keeping our ears to the ground”—to notice and name who/what has been rendered un-visible, unsayable, or unimaginable, so that people can be categorized, separated, and known. Specifically, in noticing and naming the homophobia that haunts and lingers in the FREE LA space, both California and Jayla highlight the ways poisoned soil still seeps into liberatory spaces. None of us, in other words, are immune from the Weather (Sharpe, 2016).

That is to say, Man’s ways of knowing/relating are everywhere and under and all around us. They haunt and linger and do their work in schools and public spaces. Like lead that reconfigures the earth’s DNA, Man—and his “ownership mindset”—*leaks into everything* (Chapter 2). From this lens, neither abolitionist education nor listening as abolitionist praxis, are preconditions or end goals or measurable in terms of success and failure. In other words, the presence of listening as an alternative way of knowing/relating (and therefore making space) at FREE LA does not imply that FREE LA exists somewhere wholly apart from modernity. None

of us do. That is, of course, the nature of entanglements. Rather, the presence of listening as a spatial condition at FREE LA signifies the possibilities of and for “keeping it human” anew—as an ongoing/unfinished praxis that moves across terribly uneven, but ultimately alterable (McKittrick, 2006; King, 2019) landscapes.

What does this tell us about the scopes, scales, and possibilities of an abolitionist educational praxis that might begin to “crack the shell,” to un-sever the atom, to get to the root—to the deeply entangled roots—of the school-prison nexus, by “undoing and unsettling—*not replacing or occupying*—Western conceptions of what it means to be human” (McKittrick, 2015, p. 2)? In departure from behaviorally-focused alternatives to school discipline, and top-down policies and “best practices” more broadly, the type of listening the girls’ reflections (allow us to) envision and embody must become (and continue becoming) an everyday, inter/intra-relational praxis of knowing, relating, and keeping it human otherwise. I’ve suggested that this praxis might invite and allow us (as teachers, as researchers, as humans entangled in a “living-land metabolism”) to notice the violence that is always there—before it’s too late, and even and especially when we can’t see it. In this way, listening beyond Man is a praxis of shared accountability that aligns with the values, vision, and praxes of transformative justice: it is a praxis of being (and being aware that we are) accountable for the entangled roots of harm as they emerge in the everyday, and before they culminate in someone killing/being killed (Mingus, 2020; Kaba, 2021; Hassan, 2021). Listening is an ongoing/unfinished praxis of accounting for that which goes ignored, unheard, and unnoticed, even (or especially) as it is being looked at, watched, judged, and recorded.

It is also, as I suggested in the final section of Part II, a praxis of sharing and listening to our stories, in ways that might help us realize (and therefore *realize*) the pluriverse of truths

we've failed to notice in all our looking: that it's okay to change, to be hurt and imperfect,⁴⁸ to have your own reasons and regret your own choices without being defined by them; that everyone has a story and that there are some things we just can't know; and that we don't need to know everything, don't need to know every detail, don't need to be able to relate or imagine or fully understand—to understand how we really are: quantumly and cosmically inter-human (Barad, 2012; Holmes, 2020; Prescod-Weinstein, 2021).

Listening is therefore not an input or outcome or something to be tracked and measured through success/failure binaries. It is not a new right way to be human, a new singular truth, or a promise of perfection. It is much more entangled and ongoing and uncertain and unknowable than that. It is a process and a praxis, ongoing and unfinished, which reveals the ways in which our social world is subject to revision.

The blueprint is the verb.

*Life and death become precious in a world
in which we know only, for certain,
that there is so much we don't know.*

⁴⁸ As Beautiful shared in her education (hi)story: "I like that they [FREE LA] let me do my own thing and let me be myself. And not just like, 'okay, well you gotta be perfection.' Cause I'm not perfect! Nobody's perfect. And if you're perfect, something is really wrong. It's something really wrong."

CONCLUSION

The Stories We Tell

Making Space

Things tended to travel by word of mouth at FREE LA. A group of students told me on Monday, February 28th about a full-school play they'd organized and were going to be performing that Friday, May 4th, to close out Black History Month. They would each be playing revolutionary figures of their choice, the students told me, which they'd researched on their own. The students would also be performing scenes, or acts, that honored maroons and their shared and entangled histories of resistance and struggle with Native peoples. The students invited me on Tuesday, and then again on Thursday.

"Miss Margaret, you're coming, right?" Mila, specifically, had asked me every day since Monday. Mila was a bit more private with her (hi)stories, but she, and my relationship with her, were immensely transformative to my thinking and relationality in and beyond this project. "To the play. Will you be coming tomorrow?"

"Miss Mila," I said. Mila was one of the handful of girls I by then habitually addressed as "Miss," probably because they did the same for me. "I will be there." It was Thursday until I was finally able to give her a definite answer, having received confirmation that I could cancel a (graduate studies-related) meeting.

Things also tended to happen last minute at FREE LA, sewn or sowed together just in time by people who lack resources but not resourcefulness (Gilmore, 2008). It was all makeshift. We made place within a space. I came early to help set up. We made a large rolling white board into a curtain. We staggered mismatching chairs in the formation of a theater's audience section. We clapped and covered our ears when the microphone forced the play to a screeching pause because someone stood too close to the speaker.

Lupita introduced the play, her animated voice breaking every few minutes, characteristically, into a contagious, full-hearted laugh. Lupita brought a unique and critically important energy to the space, as a system-impacted woman of color, a FREE LA graduate, and a current YJC organizer. Lupita was filled with emotion that she poured generously into the fight for liberation. She introduced an overview of the play, a brief review of the acts to come, framing that which was yet to come as “the stuff they will never teach you in traditional schools.” Each act, as the students had shared with me a few days prior, told a story, a set of stories entangled in various ways in and with Black (Hi)story.

Brief Intermission: An Introduction to this Conclusion

This conclusion uses FREE LA students’ Black History Month play, and the processes and praxes surrounding it, to make some summarizing points and draw some final reflections. Rather than develop an analysis from this vignette, as the body chapters have done, I invite the reader to engage with the following and final story as a moving image of the various concepts and contentions that have been threaded across and developed throughout this dissertation. At the broadest level, the students’ play powerfully demonstrates and embodies the ways people in un/forgotten spaces “tirelessly imagine other ways to live” (Hartman, 2019), and insurgently refuse to forget themselves. It also stories the ongoing/unfinished relations of counter/insurgency that sustain carceral-colonial regimes and racial capitalist modernity—the enmeshment between spatial domination and all the legends, lessons, and life-ways that empire can never destroy—and thus visualizes the ways our social world is subject to revision. There is also another, perhaps quieter thread running through the play, and thus through the vignette below: about the stories we tell. After the vignette, I will conclude with some remarks on this thread. Until then, I invite the

reader to notice these various moving threads, among others that I haven't named and might not have noticed, as they read a brief story of how the FREE LA Black History Month play unfolded.

§

Peculiar Fruit

Telling stories is how we get to the root.

Zahra's one-woman act shared a rich, un/forgotten history of all the Black spaces no longer on the map: entire Black towns, cities, neighborhoods covered over by lakes, washed out and washed over—and over and over—in order for white houses and white businesses and white towns to be built. But there is always more than one story, always more than one thing going on in any particular place across numerous particular times. Zahra also narrated folk tales, real-imagined possibilities, that white folks who swim in those lakes never return.

Other students narrated histories of revolt and refusal, each speaking through the words and world views of ancestors and historical figures: better-known revolutionaries, like Nat Turner, and everyday Black folks, Black women and children, who endured untold violence yet (or precisely because they) never stopped imagining other ways to live (Hartman, 2019). And at some point, there was the refrain:

...yet they call us the savage.

Yet, while resistance was and is the thread, and although the tempo of the play was upbeat and high spirited, the violence of the narratives told felt, at times, like a film of fog in the air, hovering, unsettling but never quite settling on a surface. In between two of the acts, there was a brief silence during which that fog felt like some of—just some of—the things we might hear if we kept our ears to the ground. And at some point, the silence turned into the background of a song: *Strange Fruit*. In place of Billie Holiday's melodic voice, however, there were song

lyrics spoken, like spoken word, by Jade Green. Jade is one of the current YJC directors and was a long-term Humanities substitute during my time teaching English at FREE LA (see [Vargas, 2023](#) for a powerful interview with Jade about her own story of confinement, criminalization, and all the things the carceral State can never destroy). She enunciated the words, spoken not sung, over a beat that carries with it the sound of aching trees, of wind carrying seeds, carrying insurgent (hi)stories washed out of textbooks and off of maps, but never out of memory.

...and they say some people never returned.

And always if you listened, beyond and beneath the terror, the thread and the root of the play was resistance. A quiet, burning ember.

Afterwards, we filtered out of the makeshift theater and into the back porch, that artery leading to the rebel garden. We sat at lunch tables and on top of them—the kind of lunch tables that leave patterned specters on legs still too young to touch the ground. Smoke billowed from the grill, releasing the sweet savory smell of bacon, burgers, and hotdogs. The wind sent a chill across the patio area, sending some of us to get blankets from our cars. The forecast today was cloudy. It was actually supposed to rain, but the sun methodically forced its way through the clouds, creating traveling pockets of warmth. I noticed, though, that the sun seemed to shine on the garden the whole time, which the garden seemed to return with glowing halo of greenish-purplish gold. In part because of the beauty, but also because I'd forgotten a sweater, I found myself migrating towards the garden.

I never knew peach trees bore such beautiful flowers. I was so engrossed, Zahra's hand on my shoulder didn't even startle me. My eyes stayed locked on the peach tree. "Wanna give me a tour?"

And so we walked around, our words and eyes moving faster than our feet. She introduced every plant and flower and vegetable like someone might introduce their children: by their names, humbly boasting, showing them off in a way that was both proud and selfless. There was only one she couldn't name—a peculiar fruit.

“I don't remember planting this one” she said. Then she looked at me, plucked one of the peculiar fruits off its branch, and looked around with a good-hearted mischievous grin, as if the fruit was forbidden. It was purple on one side and green on the other.

“What is it?” She asked. She held it up to eye level.

“Shit. You're the expert!” I opened my palms towards her, as if handing the question back, and she left with the peculiar fruit in her pocket. For a few minutes I resumed my aimless wander through the plants, stopping again at the peach tree which I up until then did not know grew such beautiful flowers. But only for a minutes before Zahra reappeared, wearing the kind of joy and enthusiasm you only really see in children, or in those rare selves who refused to let the child inside them be hushed by the “daily realities that make adults fear change.”⁴⁹

“I cut it open.” Zahra extended her palm and sweet syrup dripped from the inside of the radiantly colored, imperfect circle, this peculiar *exotic looking* fruit, and onto her hand. “It's a passionfruit,” she said, “Wanna try some?”

She took a bite of her half and then scooped out the seeds, turning them over in her hand to clear off the thick embryonic sap around them. Then she dropped them into the large brass birdbath at the center of the garden, which had dried into a rich red-clay hue during the random two-day heat wave earlier that week. “You have to let the seeds dry up before you plant them,”

⁴⁹ This is a quote from a speech shared by Zahra, I believe prior to her being hired as a gardening teacher, during a youth-led protest organized by YJC in the height of the summer 2020 uprisings. The full quote, which is quoted from a source I do not know, is the following: “We call on the youth who, like the eagles, see truth more clearly and have solutions that adults cannot see. We call on the youth to guide us, because youth have the vision to see changes that are needed where daily realities can make adults fear change.”

she told me, her eyes fixed gently on the seeds moving freely between her palms. “After that, they just need a little bit of love.”

§

The Stories We Tell

This dissertation told a story of many entangled stories. This was an ongoing and unfinished story about stories, about entanglements, about space, about relationships, and about the terrains on which we (might) fight for freedom. I learned to tell stories from my grandma. Or rather I learned from my grandma what it means to tell stories that move things, that move people and relationships (Machado de Oliveira, 2021). The more I told this story, about FREE LA and the people who make and remake it, the more I became interested in the stories we tell, how we tell them, and how they become a part of us (us as collective, us as quantum, us as entangled). My grandma also taught me, through the stories she told and how she told them, that the most critical question is always, or often, one of framing. How do we frame our stories within a broader set of (hi)stories? How do we frame the social problems we find ourselves variously entangled within, which is also to ask: how do we frame our terrain(s) of struggle?

Because of the nature of academic writing, I’ve framed this story, in part, in relation to a particular body of literature. In this way, this dissertation developed (as) an ongoing critique. I’ve framed this critique, most immediately and explicitly, as a critique of criminological and related school-to-prison pipeline (STPP) scholarship’s focus on exceptional discipline, isolated policies, and individual student (mis)behavior to explain the relationship between schools and prisons; and its focus (therefore) on proposing “more inclusive” forms of discipline, restorative practices, and other behaviorally-focused policy reforms, as ‘solutions’ to dismantle this

relationship. Beyond this immediate object of critique, however, this dissertation has attempted to make a broader epistemological intervention.

A central and overarching claim I've attempted to develop in the preceding chapters is that criminological and related social science scholarship on the school-prison link, as well as on alternative education, has been limited by eurocentric paradigms of knowledge and knowing, which hierarchically rank, separate, and spatialize particular bodies and places—certain spaces—as un-geographic (McKittrick, 2006), un-imaginable and unintelligible, irrational/subrational (Wynter & McKittrick, 2015), and *forgotten*. Throughout this dissertation I have drawn on an interdisciplinary web of knowledge traditions, in particular abolitionist, critical and Black feminist geographic, Black Studies and decolonial knowledge traditions, each of which move, in various ways, outside the carcerality/coloniality of eurocentric thought. Informed by the theoretical insights, methodological implications, and political commitments and possibilities of these scholarly and activist traditions, I have theorized the school-prison link—what I've termed and analyzed as a *carceral-education landscape*—as only one part of the story: as the cauldron (Robinson, 2000), in fact, for what is always already going on beyond and beneath enclosure (Moten & Harney, 2013); for what is threaded through the poisoned soils of carceral-colonial landscapes from below; for what is reclaimed, re-membered, never relinquished by people who refuse to forget themselves (Gilmore, 2008).

In doing so, my attempt wasn't to tell a story for the purposes of bashing a body of work, delegitimizing a certain set of praxes, or proposing a singular alternative to regimes of singular alternatives. Rather I'm suggesting, as many others have in many ways for a very long time, that the stories we tell matter (Wynter, 2003; McKittrick, 2021). Telling our stories, our personal and collective stories, and our personal stories in light of the collective, is how we (as researchers, as

educators, entangled) can be accountable to history, now and already in the future (Barad, 2019). And listening to stories, as Chapter 5 proposed we might do—listening to the ways of making place and “keeping it human” that have been rendered un-imaginable yet un/forgotten within our present systems of knowledge and knowing (McKittrick, 2021)—is how we can scratch at a different set of truths, a more expansive set of possibilities, and the sorts of victories that only work when we realize that our lives and deaths are entangled, and (might) become precious in a world in which we know only, for certain, that there is so much we don’t know.

§

References

Introduction

- Abolish the UC. (2022). *We are not the union: Dispatches from disgruntled workers and students across the UC*. Retrieved from <https://libcom.org/article/we-are-not-union-dispatches-disgruntled-workers-and-students-across-uc>
- Acey, C. (2000). This is an illogical statement: Dangerous trends in anti-prison activism. *Social Justice*, 27(3), 206–211.
- American Psychological Association. (2008). *APA Zero Tolerance Task Force report*. <https://www.apa.org/pubs/reports/zero-tolerance>
- Anderson, J. D. (2010). *The education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*. University of North Carolina Press.
- Annamma, S. (2016). Disrupting the carceral state through education journey mapping. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 29(9), 1210–1230. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2016.1214297>
- Agudelo, F. I., Cole, D., Gallant, S., & Mabee, C. (2021). Restorative justice and the school-to-prison pipeline: A conceptual framework to address racial and ethnic disproportionality. *Children & Schools*, 43(3), 141–148. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cs/cdab014>
- Balakrishnan, S. (2023). Prison of the womb: Gender, incarceration, and capitalism on the Gold Coast of West Africa, c. 1500–1957. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 65(2), 296–320. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417522000469>
- Barad, K. (2010). Quantum entanglements and hauntological relations of inheritance: Dis/continuities, spacetime enfoldings, and justice-to-come. *Derrida Today*, 3(2), 240–268. <https://doi.org/10.3366/drt.2010.0206>
- Barad, K. (2012). On touching—the inhuman that therefore I am. *Differences*, 23(3), 206–223. <https://doi.org/10.1215/10407391-1892943>
- Becker, H. (2018). Dissent, disruption, decolonization: South African student protests 1968 to 2016. *International Socialist Review*, 111(Winter 2018-19), 31-47.
- Black Panther Party. (1966). The Black Panther Party Ten-Point Program. *The Black Panther*.
- brown, a. m. (2017). *Emergent strategy*. AK Press.
- Burton, O. (2023). Targeting revolutionaries. *Radical History Review*, 146, 11–31. <https://doi.org/10.1215/01636545-10302807>
- Byrne, M. (2020). Exhausting people, extracting revenue: Police, prisons, and counterinsurgency. *Social Justice*, 47(1/2), 93–116. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27094575>
- CalTech Science Exchange. (n.d.). *What is entanglement and why is it important?* <https://scienceexchange.caltech.edu/topics/quantum-science-explained/entanglement>
- Campt, T. M. (2017). *Listening to images*. Duke University Press.
- Chatterjee, P., & Maira, S. (Eds.). (2014). *The Imperial University: Academic repression and scholarly dissent*. University of Minnesota Press.

- Clarno, A. (2017). *Neoliberal apartheid: Palestine-Israel and South Africa after 1994*. University of Chicago Press.
- Cops off Campus Coalition. (2022). *The coalition*. <https://copsoffcampuscoalition.com/coalition/>
- Crawford, K. (2020). Stanford researchers usher in a new era for California's 'invisible' schools. Retrieved April 25, 2024 from <https://ed.stanford.edu/news/stanford-researchers-usher-new-era-california-s-invisible-schools>
- Costa Vargas, J. H. (2008). Activist scholarship limits and possibilities in times of Black genocide, in C. Hale (Ed.) *Engaging contradictions* (pp. 164-182).
- Cuellar, A. E., & Markowitz, S. (2015). School suspension and the school-to-prison pipeline. *International Review of Law and Economics*, 43, 98-106. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.irl.2015.06.001>
- Davis, A. Y. (2003). *Are prisons obsolete?* Seven Stories Press.
- Deakin, J., & Kupchik, A. (2018). Managing Behaviour: From Exclusion to Restorative Practices. In J. Deakin, E. Taylor, & A. Kupchik (Eds.), *The Palgrave International Handbook of School Discipline, Surveillance, and Social Control* (pp. 511–527). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-71559-9_26
- de Velasco, J. R., & Gonzales, D. (2017). *Accountability for Alternative Schools in California*. Stanford, CA: Policy Analysis for California Education.
- Department of Justice (DOJ) (2024). *History of the federal use of eminent domain*. Environment and Natural Resources Division. <https://www.justice.gov/enrd/condemnation/land-acquisition-section/history-federal-use-eminent-domain>
- Dixon, E., & Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, L. (Eds). (2019). *Beyond survival: Strategies and stories from the transformative justice movement*. AK Press.
- Dunbar, C. (2001). From Alternative School to Incarceration. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 7(2), 158-170.
- Dunning-Lozano, J. L. (2016). Race and opportunity in a public alternative school. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 19(2), 433–460. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2014.911163>
- Dussel, E. (1993). Eurocentrism and modernity (introduction to the Frankfurt Lectures). *Boundary 2*, 20(3), 65–76. <https://doi.org/10.2307/303341>
- Dussel, E. (2000). Europe, modernity, and Eurocentrism. *Nepantla: Views from South*, 1(3), 465-478. <https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/23901>.
- Estrin, R. (2022). *LA youth push county to close jail cells for juveniles*. KCRW. <https://www.kcrw.com/news/shows/greater-la/county-prison-music-oc/chuco-youth-jail>
- Fabelo, T., Thompson, M., Plotkin, M., Carmichael, D., Marchbanks, M., & Booth, E. (2011). *Breaking schools' rules: A statewide study of how school discipline relates to students' success and juvenile justice involvement*. Council of State Governments Justice Center.
- Fleischer, M. (2020). *Want to tear down insidious monuments to racism and segregation? Bulldoze L.A. freeways*. <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2020-06-24/bulldoze-la-freeways-racism-monument>
- Giamarino, C. (2021). *UCLA cops off campus abolition map*. <https://hub.arcgis.com/documents/63bc06b3a7f4415d92daf9c3b114e4e4/explore>

- Gilmore, R. W. (2007). *Golden gulag: Prisons, surplus, crisis, and opposition in globalizing California*. University of California Press.
- Gilmore, R. W. (2008). Forgotten places and the seeds of grassroots planning. In Charles R. Hale (Eds.), *Engaging contradictions: Theory, politics, and methods of activists scholarship* (pp. 31-61).
- Gilmore, R. W. (2022). *Abolition geography: Essays towards liberation* (B. Bhandar & A. Toscano, Eds.). Verso Books.
- Haley, S. (2016). *No mercy here: Gender, punishment, and the making of Jim Crow modernity*. The University of North Carolina Press.
- Hassan, S. (2020). *What is transformative justice?* Barnard Center for Research on Women. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U-_BOFz5TXo.
- Hartman, S. V. (2019). *Wayward lives, beautiful experiments: Intimate histories of riotous black girls, troublesome women, and queer radicals*. Horton Press.
- Hartman, S. (2021). Intimate history, radical narrative. *The Journal of African American History*, 106(1), 127–135. <https://doi.org/10.1086/712019>
- Henry, K, Catagnus, R.M., Griffith, A., & Garcia, Y. (2022). Ending the school-to-prison pipeline: Perception and experience with zero-tolerance policies and interventions to address racial inequality. *Behavior Analysis in Practice*, 15, 1254–1263. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40617-021-00634-z>
- Hirschfield, P. J. (2018). Trends in School Social Control in the United States: Explaining Patterns of Decriminalization. In J. Deakin, E. Taylor, & A. Kupchik (Eds.), *The Palgrave International Handbook of School Discipline, Surveillance, and Social Control* (pp. 43–64). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-71559-9_3
- Holmes, B. A. (2020). *Race and the cosmos: An invitation to view the world differently* (Second edition). CAC Publishing.
- Jones, C. (2019). L.A. *Unified's ban on willful defiance suspensions, six years later*. <https://edsources.org/2019/how-l-a-unifieds-ban-on-willful-defiance-suspensions-turned-out-six-years-later/620949>
- Kaba, M., Nopper, T. K., & Murakawa, N. (2021). *We do this 'til we free us: Abolitionist organizing and transforming justice*. Haymarket Books.
- Kelley, R. D. G. (2017). *What is racial capitalism and why does it matter?* UW Simpson Center for the Humanities. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=--gim7W_jQQ
- King, T.L. (2019). *The black shoals: Offshore formations of Black and Native studies*. Duke University Press.
- La Gente. (2010). *Center supports urban youth through self-empowerment and education*. <https://lagente.org/center-supports-urban-youth-through-self-empowerment-and-education/>

- LAUSD. (2013). *School climate bill of rights*.
<https://www.lausd.org/cms/lib/CA01000043/Centricity/Domain/416/School%20Climate%20Bill%20of%20Rights.pdf>
- Lugones, M. (2007). Heterosexualism and the colonial/modern gender system. *Hypatia*, 22(1), 186-209.
- Lugones, M. (2010). Toward a decolonial feminism. *Hypatia*, 25(4), 742–759.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40928654>
- Machado de Oliveira, V. (2021). *Hospicing modernity: Facing humanity’s wrongs and the implications for social activism*. North Atlantic Books [Kindle Edition].
- Maldonado-Torres, N. (2007). On the coloniality of being: Contributions to the development of a concept. *Cultural Studies*, 21(2–3), 240–270.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601162548>
- Maldonado-Torres, N. (2008). *Against war: Views from the underside of modernity*. Duke University Press.
- McKittrick, K. (2006). *Demonic Grounds: Black Women And the Cartographies of Struggle*. University of Minnesota Press.
- McKittrick, K. (2015). Unparalleled catastrophe for our species? or, to give humanness a different future: Conversations. In K. McKittrick (Ed.), *Sylvia Wynter: On being human as praxis*. Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822375852>
- Medel, C. (2017). Abolitionist care in the militarized borderlands. *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 16(4), 873-883.
- Meiners, E. (2007). *Right to be hostile*. Routledge.
- Meiners, E. R. (2011). Ending the School-to-Prison Pipeline/Building Abolition Futures. *The Urban Review*, 43(4), 547–565. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-011-0187-9>
- Mignolo, W. D. (2017). Racism and coloniality: The invention of “Human(ity) and the three pillars of the colonial matrix of power (racism, sexism, and nature). In P.C. Taylor et al. (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion to the Philosophy of Race* (pp. 461–474). Routledge.
- Mignolo, W. D. (2018). The conceptual triad: Modernity/coloniality/decoloniality. In W. D. Mignolo & C. E. Walsh (Eds.), *On Decoloniality* (pp. 135–152). Duke University Press.
- Mingus, M. & Kim, M. (2020). We take care of us webinar #7: Transformative justice. TransformHarm.org. https://transformharm.org/tj_resource/wetakecareofus-webinar-7-transformative-justice/
- Mingus, M. (2018). *Mia Mingus of the Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective*. We Rise Podcast (Ep. 5). Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VV_5reooT_Y.
- Morgan, H. (2021). Restorative justice and the school-to-prison pipeline: A review of existing literature. *Education Sciences*, 11(4), 159. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11040159>
- Muñiz, J. O. (2021). Exclusionary discipline policies, school-police partnerships, surveillance technologies and disproportionality: A review of the school to prison pipeline literature. *The Urban Review*, 53(5), 735–760. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-021-00595-1>

- Monte, S. (2013). *School safety tour through South Central*.
<https://intersectionssouthla.org/story/school-safety-tour-through-south-central/>
- Moten, F., & Harney, S. (2013). *The undercommons: Fugitive planning and Black study*. Minor Compositions.
- Mowen, T., & Brent, J. (2016). School discipline as a turning point: The cumulative effect of suspension on arrest. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 53(5), 628–653.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022427816643135>
- The OCS [Oakland Community Schools] Project (2024). *Educate to liberate*. OCS Project.
<https://www.theocsproject.org/educate-to-liberate>
- Payne, A., & Welch, K. (2022). Transforming school climate and student discipline: The restorative justice promise for peace. In: Velez, G., Gavrielides, T. (eds) *Restorative justice: Promoting peace and wellbeing*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13101-1_4
- Police-Free LAUSD Coalition. (2022). *From criminalization to education: A community vision for safe schools in LAUSD*. <https://www.safeschoolslausd.com/>
- Prescod-Weinstein, C. (2021). *The disordered cosmos: A journey into dark matter, spacetime, and dreams deferred* (First edition). Bold Type Books.
- Purifoy, D. (2023). Call us alive someplace: Du Boisian methods and living Black geographies. In C. Hawthorne & J. Lewis (Eds.), *The Black geographic: Praxis, resistance, futurity* (pp. 27-49). Duke University Press.
- Quijano, A. (2000). Coloniality of power and Eurocentrism in Latin America. *International Sociology*, 15(2), 215–232. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580900015002005>
- Ramírez, M. M. (2020). Take the houses back/take the land back: Black and Indigenous urban futures in Oakland. *Urban Geography*, 41(5), 682–693.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2020.1736440>
- Reyes, A. (2006). The Criminalization of Student Discipline Programs and Adolescent Behavior. *Journal of Civil Rights and Economic Development*, 21(1), 73-110.
- Robinson, C. [1983] (2000). *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. University of North Carolina Press.
- Rodríguez, D. (2006). *Forced passages: Imprisoned radical intellectuals and the U.S. prison regime*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Rodríguez, D. (2021). *White reconstruction: Domestic warfare and the logics of genocide* (First edition). Fordham University Press.
- Sahagún, L. (2018). East L.A., 1968: ‘Walkout!’ The day high school students helped ignite the Chicano power movement. LA Times. Retrieve June 2024, from
<https://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-1968-east-la-walkouts-20180301-htmlstory.html>
- Samimi, C., Han, T. M., Navvab, A., Sedivy, J. A., & Anyon, Y. (2023). Restorative practices and exclusionary school discipline: An integrative review. *Contemporary Justice Review*, 26(1), 28–47. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10282580.2023.2204884>

- Schiff, M. (2018). Can restorative justice disrupt the ‘school-to-prison pipeline?’ *Contemporary Justice Review*, 21(2), 121–139. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10282580.2018.1455509>
- Selman, K. J. (2019). Building the necropolis through time and space: Racial capitalist forces in the disciplinary alternative school. *Contemporary Justice Review*, 22(4), 309–333. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10282580.2019.1672045>
- Simpson, A. (2016). The state is a man: Theresa Spence, Loretta Saunders and the gender of settler sovereignty. *Theory & Event*, 19(4). <https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/633280>.
- Shange, S. (2019). *Progressive dystopia: Abolition, antiblackness, and schooling in San Francisco*. Duke University Press.
- Shujaa, M. J. (Ed.). (1994). *Too much schooling, too little education: A paradox of black life in white societies*. Africa World Press.
- Skiba, R. J. (2015). Interventions to Address Racial/Ethnic Disparities in School Discipline: Can Systems Reform Be Race-Neutral? In R. Bangs & L. E. Davis (Eds.), *Race and Social Problems* (pp. 107–124). Springer New York. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4939-0863-9_7
- Skiba, R. J., Arredondo, M. I., & Williams, N. T. (2014). More than a metaphor: The contribution of exclusionary discipline to a school-to-prison pipeline. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 47(4), 546–564. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2014.958965>
- Smith, L. T. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples* (Second edition). Zed Books.
- Sojoyner, D., M. (2013). Black Radicals Make for Bad Citizens: Undoing the Myth of the School to Prison Pipeline. *Berkeley Review of Education*, 4. <https://doi.org/10.5070/B84110021>
- Sojoyner, D. M. (2016). *First strike: Educational enclosures in Black Los Angeles*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Sojoyner, D. M. (2017). Another Life is Possible: Black Fugitivity and Enclosed Places. *Cultural Anthropology*, 32(4), 514–536. <https://doi.org/10.14506/ca32.4.04>
- Stop LAPD Spying Coalition. (2018). *Before the bullet hits the body: Dismantling predictive policing in Los Angeles*. <https://stoplapdspying.org/before-the-bullet-hits-the-body-dismantling-predictive-policing-in-los-angeles/>
- Stovall, D. (2018). Are We Ready for ‘School’ Abolition?: Thoughts and Practices of Radical Imaginary in Education. *Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education*, 17(1), 51-61. <https://doi.org/10.31390/taboo.17.1.06>
- Students Deserve. (2022). *What is Students Deserve?* <https://www.schoolslastudentsdeserve.com/who-are-we.html>
- Sudbury, J. (Ed.). (2005). *Global lockdown: Race, gender, and the prison-industrial complex*. Routledge.
- Sykes, B. L., Piquero, A. R., Gioviano, J. P., & Pittman, N. (2015). *The school-to-prison pipeline in America, 1972–2012*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935383.013.110>

- Torday, J. S. (2023). Consciousness, embodied quantum entanglement. *Progress in Biophysics and Molecular Biology*, 177, 125–128. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pbiomolbio.2022.11.002>
- Vaught, S. E. (2017). *Compulsory: Education and the Dispossession of Youth in a Prison School*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Vaught, S. E., Brayboy, B. M., & Jeremiah, C. (2022). *The school-prison trust*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Wald, J., & Losen, D. J. (2003). Defining and Redirecting a School-to-Prison Pipeline. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 99, 9-15.
- Walia, H. (2013). *Undoing border imperialism*. AK Press.
- Wiener-Bronner, D. (2014). *Obama administration asks schools to drop zero-tolerance approach*. The Atlantic. <https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2014/01/ending-zero-policy-discipline/356812/>
- Wun, C. (2016). Against Captivity: Black Girls and School Discipline Policies in the Afterlife of Slavery. *Educational Policy*, 30(1), 171–196. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904815615439>
- Wynter, S. (2003). Unsettling the coloniality of being/power/truth/freedom: Towards the human, after Man, its overrepresentation—an argument. *CR: The New Centennial Review*, 3(3), 257–337.
- YJC. (2020). <https://x.com/YouthJusticeLA/status/1269809123320688640>
- YJC. (2023). *Mission and history*. Youth Justice Coalition. Retrieved April 26, 2024 from <https://youthjusticela.org/history/>.
- YJC. (n.d.[1]). FREE LA High School. <https://youthjusticela.org/free-l-a-high-school/>
- YJC. (n.d.[2]). About the space: Jesse "Chuco" Becerra. <https://youthjusticela.org/chuco/>
- Zohar, D. (1990). *The quantum self: Human nature and consciousness defined by the new physics*. Quill.

Chapter 1

- Agnew, R. (1992). Foundation for a general strain theory of crime and delinquency. *Criminology*, 30(1), 47-87.
- Agudelo, F. I., Cole, D., Gallant, S., & Mabee, C. (2021). Restorative justice and the school-to-prison pipeline: A conceptual framework to address racial and ethnic disproportionality. *Children & Schools*, 43(3), 141–148. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cs/cdab014>
- Anderson, J. D. (2010). *The education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*. University of North Carolina Press.
- Annamma, S. (2016). Disrupting the carceral state through education journey mapping. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 29(9), 1210–1230. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2016.1214297>
- Bacher-Hicks, A., Billings, S., & Deming, D. (2019). *The School to Prison Pipeline: Long-Run Impacts of School Suspensions on Adult Crime* (No. w26257; p. w26257). National Bureau of Economic Research. <https://doi.org/10.3386/w26257>

- Ben-Moshe, L. (2018). Dis-epistemologies of abolition. *Critical Criminology*, 26(3), 341–355.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10612-018-9403-1>
- Boellstorff, T. (Ed.). (2012). *Ethnography and virtual worlds: A handbook of method*. Princeton University Press.
- Bornstein, J. (2017). Can PBIS Build Justice Rather Than Merely Restore Order? In N. S. Okilwa, M. Khalifa, & F. M. Briscoe (Eds.), *Advances in Race and Ethnicity in Education* (Vol. 4, pp. 135–167). Emerald Publishing Limited.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/S2051-231720160000004008>
- Boyd, T. M. (2009). Confronting racial disparity: Legislative responses to the school-to-prison pipeline. *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review*, 44(2), 571-580.
- Bradshaw, C. P., Mitchell, M. M., O'Brennan, L. M., & Leaf, P. J. (2010). Multilevel exploration of factors contributing to the overrepresentation of black students in office disciplinary referrals. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 102(2), 508– 520.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/a0018450>
- Bradshaw, C. P., Waasdorp, T. E., & Leaf, P. J. (2012). Effects of school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports on child behavior problems. *PEDIATRICS*, 130(5), e1136–e1145. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2012-0243>
- Bradshaw, C. P., Waasdorp, T. E., & Leaf, P. J. (2015). Examining variation in the impact of school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports: Findings from a randomized controlled effectiveness trial. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 107(2), 546–557.
- Braithwaite, J. (1999). Restorative justice: assessing optimistic and pessimistic accounts. *Crime and Justice*, 25, 1-127. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1147608>
- Brand, A.L. (2023). Today like yesterday, tomorrow like today: Black geographies in the breaks of the fourth dimension. In C. Hawthorne & J. Lewis (Eds.), *The Black geographic: Praxis, resistance, futurity* (pp. 264-286). Duke University Press.
- brown, a. m. (2017). *Emergent strategy*. AK Press.
- Caban, P. (2002). The colonizing mission of the US in Puerto Rico. In , C. Vélez-Ibañez, A. Sampaio, & M. González-Estay (Eds.), *Transnational Latino/a communities: Re-examining politics, processes and culture* (pp. 114–45).
- Campt, T. (2014). Black Feminist Futures and the Practice of Fugitivity. Helen Pond McIntyre '48 Lecture, Barnard College. Retrieved Sept 7 2021 from
<http://bcrw.barnard.edu/blog/black-feminist-futures-and-the-practice-of-fugitivity>
- Campt, T. (2017). *Listening to images*. Duke University Press.
- Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory* (2nd edition). Sage.
- Chiang, H., & Gill, B. (2010). *Student Characteristics and Outcomes in Alternative and Neighborhood High Schools in Philadelphia*. Cambridge, MA: Mathematica Policy Research.
- Crawford, K. (2020). Stanford researchers usher in a new era for California's 'invisible' schools. Retrieved from <https://ed.stanford.edu/news/stanford-researchers-usher-new-era-california-s-invisible-schools>

- Collins English Dictionary (n.d.). *Definition of 'unforgotten.'*
<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/unforgotten>
- Costa Vargas, J. (2008). Activist scholarship limits and possibilities in times of Black genocide, In C. Hale (Ed.) *Engaging contradictions* (pp. 164-182).
- Cox, A. M. (2015). *Shapeshifters: Black girls and the choreography of citizenship*. Duke University Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (1998). "Chapter Four: Five Qualitative Traditions of Inquiry." In *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Cuellar, A. E., & Markowitz, S. (2015). School suspension and the school-to-prison pipeline. *International Review of Law and Economics*, 43, 98–106. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.irl.2015.06.001>
- Curran, F. C. (2016). Estimating the Effect of State Zero Tolerance Laws on Exclusionary Discipline, Racial Discipline Gaps, and Student Behavior. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 38(4), 647–668. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0162373716652728>
- Davis, A., Dent, G., Meiners, E. R., & Richie, B. (2022). *Abolition. feminism. now*. Haymarket Books.
- Deakin, J., & Kupchik, A. (2018). Managing Behaviour: From Exclusion to Restorative Practices. In J. Deakin, E. Taylor, & A. Kupchik (Eds.), *The Palgrave International Handbook of School Discipline, Surveillance, and Social Control* (pp. 511–527). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-71559-9_26
- Devlin, D. N., & Gottfredson, D. C. (2018). Policing and the School-to-Prison Pipeline. In J. Deakin, E. Taylor, & A. Kupchik (Eds.), *The Palgrave International Handbook of School Discipline, Surveillance, and Social Control* (pp. 291–308). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-71559-9_15
- de Velasco, J. R., Austin, G., Dixon, D., Johnson, J., McLaughlin, M., & Perez, L. (2008). *Alternative Education Options: A Descriptive Study of California Continuation High Schools* (Issue Brief).
- de Velasco, J. R., & Gonzales, D. (2017). *Accountability for Alternative Schools in California*. Stanford, CA: Policy Analysis for California Education.
- Dunbar, C. (1999). African American males and participation: Promising inclusion, practicing exclusion. *Theory Into Practice*, 38(4), 241–246.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00405849909543860>
- Dunbar, C. (2001). From Alternative School to Incarceration. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 7(2), 158-170.
- Dunning-Lozano, J. L. (2016). Race and opportunity in a public alternative school. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 19(2), 433–460. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2014.911163>
- Dunning-Lozano, J. L. (2018). School Discipline, Race, and the Discursive Construction of the “Deficient” Student. *Sociological Spectrum*, 38(5), 326–345.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02732173.2018.1532364>

- Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (2011). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. University of Chicago Press.
- Fabelo, T., Thompson, M., Plotkin, M., Carmichael, D., Marchbanks, M., & Booth, E. (2011). *Breaking schools' rules: A statewide study of how school discipline relates to students' success and juvenile justice involvement*. Council of State Governments Justice Center.
- Fader, J. J., Lockwood, B., Schall, V. L., & Stokes, B. (2015). A promising approach to narrowing the school-to-prison pipeline: The WISE arrest diversion program. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice, 13*(2), 123–142.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1541204014521249>
- Feuerborn, L. L., Wallace, C., & Tyre, A. D. (2016). A Qualitative Analysis of Middle and High School Teacher Perceptions of Schoolwide Positive Behavior Supports. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions, 18*(4), 219–229.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1098300716632591>
- Foley, R. M., & Pang, L.-S. (2006). Alternative Education Programs: Program and Student Characteristics. *The High School Journal, 89*(3), 10–21.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/hsj.2006.0003>
- Fresques, H., Vogell, H., & Pierce, O. (2017). *Methodology: How We Analyzed Alternative Schools Data*. Retrieved April 23, 2019 from
<https://www.propublica.org/article/alternative-schools-methodology>
- Fronius, T., Darling-Hammond, S., Persson, H., Guckenburg, S., Hurley, N., & Petrosino, A. (2019). Restorative justice in US schools: An updated research review. WestEd Justice & Prevention Training Center.
- Gilmore, R. W. (2007). *Golden gulag: Prisons, surplus, crisis, and opposition in globalizing California*. University of California Press.
- Gilmore, R. W. (2008). Forgotten places and the seeds of grassroots planning. In Charles R. Hale (Eds.), *Engaging contradictions: Theory, politics, and methods of activists scholarship* (pp. 31-61).
- Gilmore, R. W. (2021). *Activists say: Ruth Wilson Gilmore*. The Forge.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z0SOKx29e38>
- Gilmore, R. W. (2022). *Abolition geography: Essays towards liberation* (B. Bhandar & A. Toscano, Eds.). Verso.
- Giroux, H. (2003). Racial injustice and disposable youth in the age of zero tolerance. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 16*(4), 553–565.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0951839032000099543>
- González, T. (2012). Keeping kids in schools: Restorative justice, punitive discipline, and the school to prison pipeline. *Journal of Law & Education, 41*(2), 281-335.
- Goldman, M., & Rodriguez, N. (2022). Juvenile court in the school-prison nexus: Youth punishment, schooling and structures of inequality. *Journal of Crime and Justice, 45*(3), 270–284. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0735648X.2021.1950562>

- Gottfredson, G. D., Gottfredson, D. C., Payne, A. A., & Gottfredson, N. C. (2005). School Climate Predictors of School Disorder: Results from a National Study of Delinquency Prevention in Schools. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 42(4), 412–444. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022427804271931>
- Gottfredson, D. C., Crosse, S., Tang, Z., Bauer, E. L., Harmon, M. A., Hagen, C. A., & Greene, A. D. (2020). Effects of school resource officers on school crime and responses to school crime. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 19(3), 905–940. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9133.12512>
- Haley, S. (2016). *No mercy here: Gender, punishment, and the making of Jim Crow modernity*. The University of North Carolina Press.
- Hammond, B. (2017). *Dropout rates at Oregon’s alternative high schools cry out for better oversight, audit says*. Retrieved from https://www.oregonlive.com/education/2017/12/dropout_rates_at_oregons_alter.html
- Hartman, S. V. (2019). *Wayward lives, beautiful experiments: Intimate histories of riotous black girls, troublesome women, and queer radicals*. Horton Press.
- Hartman, S. (2021). Intimate history, radical narrative. *The Journal of African American History*, 106(1), 127–135. <https://doi.org/10.1086/712019>
- Hawthorne, C. (2019). Black matters are spatial matters: Black geographies for the twenty-first century. *Geography Compass*, 13(11), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12468>
- Hawthorne, C. A., & Lewis, J. S. (Eds.). (2023). *The Black geographic: Praxis, resistance, futurity*. Duke University Press.
- Heitzeg, N. A. (2014). Criminalizing Education: Zero Tolerance Policies, Police in the Hallways, and the School to Prison Pipeline In P. Lang (Ed.), *From Education to Incarceration: Dismantling the School-to-Prison Pipeline*, 11-46.
- Hemez, P., Brent, J. J., & Mowen, T. J. (2020). Exploring the School-to-Prison Pipeline: How School Suspensions Influence Incarceration During Young Adulthood. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, 18(3), 235–255. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1541204019880945>
- Hill, E. G. (2007). *Improving alternative education in California*. Legislative Analyst’s Office.
- Hirschfield, P. J. (2008). Preparing for prison?: The criminalization of school discipline in the USA. *Theoretical Criminology*, 12(1), 79–101. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362480607085795>
- Hirschfield, P. J. (2018a). Schools and crime. *Annual Review of Criminology*, 1, 149-69.
- Hirschfield, P. J. (2018b). The role of schools in sustaining juvenile justice system inequality. *The Future of Children*, 28(1), 11-36.
- Hirschfield, P. J. (2018c). Trends in school social control in the United States: Explaining patterns of decriminalization. In J. Deakin, E. Taylor, & A. Kupchik (Eds.), *The Palgrave International Handbook of School Discipline, Surveillance, and Social Control* (pp. 43–64). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-71559-9_3

- Hoffman, S. (2014). Zero benefit: Estimating the effect of zero tolerance discipline policies on racial disparities in school discipline. *Educational Policy*, 28(1), 69–95.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904812453999>
- Homer, E. M., & Fisher, B. W. (2020). Police in schools and student arrest rates across the United States: Examining differences by race, ethnicity, and gender. *Journal of School Violence*, 19(2), 192–204
- Horner, R. H., Sugai, G., & Anderson, C. M. (2010). Examining the evidence base for school-wide positive behavior support. *Focus on Exceptional Children*, 42, 1–15.
- Horsford, S. D., & Powell, K. L. (2016). Second Chances Academy: Alternative School or Pathway to Prison? *Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership*, 19(1), 18–27.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1555458915624729>
- Irwin, K., Davidson, J., & Hall-Sanchez, A. (2013). The race to punish in American schools: Class and race predictors of punitive school-crime control. *Critical Criminology*, 21(1), 47–71. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10612-012-9171-2>
- Jain, S., Bassey, H., Brown, M. A., & Kalra, P. (2014). *Restorative justice in Oakland schools: implementation and impacts*. Oakland Unified School District. Retrieved from <https://www.ousd.org/cms/lib07/CA01001176/Centricity/Domain/134/OUUSD-RJ%20Report%20revised%20Final.pdf>
- Johnson's Dictionary Online. (n.d.). 'Unforgotten'.
<https://johnsonsdictionaryonline.com/views/search.php?term=unforgotten>
- Jones, C. (2019). L.A. Unified's ban on willful defiance suspensions, six years later. EdSource.
<https://edsources.org/2019/how-l-a-unifieds-ban-on-willful-defiance-suspensions-turned-out-six-years-later/620949>
- King, T.L. (2019). *The black shoals: Offshore formations of Black and Native studies*. Duke University Press.
- Kelly, D. M. (1993). *Last chance high: How girls and boys drop in and out of alternative schools*. Yale University Press.
- Kim, J.-H., & Taylor, K. A. (2008). Rethinking Alternative Education to Break the Cycle of Educational Inequality and Inequity. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 101(4), 207–219. <https://doi.org/10.3200/JOER.101.4.207-219>
- Kim, J. (2011). Narrative inquiry into (re)imagining alternative schools: A case study of Kevin Gonzales. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 24(1), 77–96.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09518390903468321>
- Krueger, S. (2022). *Fighting and building for liberatory education: A conjunctural analysis of Chicago's alternative schools* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois at Chicago]. ProQuest. Retrieved from <https://www.proquest.com/openview/88725269a7d83197b97b73f37fad9c5e/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>

- Lange, C. M., & Sletten, S. J. (2002). *Alternative education: A brief history and research synthesis*. National Association of State Directors of Special Education.
- Laub, J. H., & Sampson, R. J. (1993). Turning points in the life course: Why change matters to the study of crime. *Criminology*, 31(3), 301–325. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-9125.1993.tb01132.x>
- Losen, D. J., & Gillespie, J. (2012). *Opportunities suspended: The disparate impact of disciplinary exclusion from school*. The Center for Civil Rights Remedies at The Civil Rights Project.
- Mallett, C. A. (2016). The school-to-prison pipeline: A critical review of the punitive paradigm shift. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 33(1), 15–24. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-015-0397-1>
- Marchbanks, M. P., Peguero, A. A., Varela, K. S., Blake, J. J., & Eason, J. M. (2018). School strictness and disproportionate minority contact: Investigating racial and ethnic disparities with the “school-to-prison pipeline.” *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, 16(2), 241–259. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1541204016680403>
- Maynard, R., & Simpson, L. B. (2022). *Rehearsals for living*. Haymarket Books.
- McKittrick, K. (2006). *Demonic grounds: Black Women and the cartographies of struggle*. University of Minnesota Press.
- McKittrick, K. (2011). On plantations, prisons, and a black sense of place. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 12(8), 947–963. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2011.624280>
- McKittrick, K. (2014). Mathematics Black life. *The Black Scholar*, 44(2), 16–28. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5816/blackscholar.44.2.0016>
- McKittrick, K. (2016). Diachronic loops/deadweight tonnage/bad made measure. *Cultural Geographies*, 23(1), 3–18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474474015612716>
- McKittrick, K. (2021). *Dear science and other stories*. Duke University Press.
- Meiners, E. (2007). *Right to be hostile*. Routledge.
- McKittrick, K. & Woods, C. (2007). No one knows the mysteries at the bottom of the ocean. In K. McKittrick & C. Woods (Eds.), *Black geographies and the politics of place* (pp. 1–13). Between the Lines.
- Meiners, E. R. (2011). Ending the school-to-prison pipeline/building abolition futures. *The Urban Review*, 43(4), 547–565. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-011-0187-9>
- Mingus, M. (2018). *Mia Mingus of the Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective*. We Rise Podcast (Ep. 5). Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VV_5reooT_Y.
- Mittleman, J. (2018). A Downward Spiral? Childhood Suspension and the Path to Juvenile Arrest. *Sociology of Education*, 91(3), 183–204. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038040718784603>
- Moffitt, T. E. (1997). Adolescence-limited and life-course-persistent offending: A complementary pair of developmental theories. *Developmental Theories of Crime and Delinquency*, 7, 11–54.

- Monahan, K. C., VanDerhei, S., Bechtold, J., & Cauffman, E. (2014). From the School Yard to the Squad Car: School Discipline, Truancy, and Arrest. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 43(7), 1110–1122. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-014-0103-1>
- Morgan, H. (2021). Restorative justice and the school-to-prison pipeline: A review of existing literature. *Education Sciences*, 11(4), 159. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11040159>
- Morris, M. W. (2016). *Pushout: The criminalization of Black girls in schools*. The New Press.
- Moten, F., & Harney, S. (2013). *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*. Minor Compositions.
- Mowen, T., & Brent, J. (2016). School Discipline as a Turning Point: The Cumulative Effect of Suspension on Arrest. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 53(5), 628–653. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022427816643135>
- Mowen, T. J., Brent, J. J., & Boman, J. H. (2020). The Effect of School Discipline on Offending across Time. *Justice Quarterly*, 37(4), 739–760. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2019.1625428>
- Muhammad, K. G. (2010). *The condemnation of blackness: Race, crime, and the making of modern urban America*. Harvard University Press.
- Muñoz, J. S. (2004). The Social Construction of Alternative Education: Re-examining the Margins of Public Education for At-Risk Chicano/a Students. *The High School Journal*, 88(2), 3–22. <https://doi.org/10.1353/hsj.2004.0025>
- Nance, J. P. (2016). Students, police, and the school-to-prison pipeline. *Washington University Law Review*, 93(4), 919–987.
- Na, C., & Gottfredson, D. C. (2013). Police Officers in Schools: Effects on School Crime and the Processing of Offending Behaviors. *Justice Quarterly*, 30(4), 619–650. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2011.615754>
- Nicholson-Crotty, S., Birchmeier, Z., & Valentine, D. (2009). Exploring the Impact of School Discipline on Racial Disproportion in the Juvenile Justice System. *Social Science Quarterly*, 90, 1003-18.
- Novak, A. (2019). The School-To-Prison Pipeline: An Examination of the Association Between Suspension and Justice System Involvement. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 46(8), 1165–1180. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093854819846917>
- Novak, A., & Fagan, A. (2022). Expanding research on the school-to-prison pipeline: Examining the relationships between suspension, expulsion, and recidivism among justice-involved youth. *Crime & Delinquency*, 68(1), 3–27. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128721999334>
- The OCS [Oakland Community Schools] Project (2024). *Educate to liberate*. OCS Project. <https://www.theocsproject.org/educate-to-liberate>
- Owens, E. G. (2017). Testing the school-to-prison pipeline. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 36(1), 11–37.

- Payne, A. A., Gottfredson, D. C., & Gottfredson, G. D. (2003). Schools as communities: The relationships among school organization, student bonding, and school disorder. *Criminology*, 41(3), 749-778.
- Payne, A.P., & Welch, K. (2010). Modeling the effects of racial threat on punitive and restorative school discipline practices. *Criminology*, 48(4), 1019-106.
- Payne, A., & Welch, K. (2022). Transforming school climate and student discipline: The restorative justice promise for peace. In: Velez, G., Gavrielides, T. (eds) *Restorative justice: Promoting peace and wellbeing*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13101-1_4
- Perzigian, A. B., Afacan, K., Justin, W., & Wilkerson, K. L. (2017). Characteristics of Students in Traditional Versus Alternative High Schools: A Cross-Sectional Analysis of Enrollment in One Urban District. *Education and Urban Society*, 49(7), 676–700. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124516658520>
- Pesta, R. (2018). Labeling and the Differential Impact of School Discipline on Negative Life Outcomes: Assessing Ethno-Racial Variation in the School-to-Prison Pipeline. *Crime & Delinquency*, 64(11), 1489–1512. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128717749223>
- Porowski, A., O’Conner, R., & Luo, J. L. (2014). *How do states define alternative education?* U.S. Department of Education. Institute of Education Sciences.
- Purifoy, D. (2023). Call us alive someplace: Du Boisian methods and living Black geographies. In C. Hawthorne & J. Lewis (Eds.), *The Black geographic: Praxis, resistance, futurity* (pp. 27-49). Duke University Press.
- Quan, H. L. T. (2017). "It's hard to stop rebels that time travel": Democratic living and the radical reimagining of old worlds. In G.T. Johnson & A. Lubin (Eds.), *Futures of Black radicalism* (pp. 173-193). Verso.
- Quijano, A. (2000). Coloniality of power and Eurocentrism in Latin America. *International Sociology*, 15(2), 215–232. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580900015002005>
- Ramey, D. M. (2016). The Social Structure of Criminalized and Medicalized School Discipline. *Sociology of Education*, 88(3), 181–201. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038040715587114>
- Reimer, M. S., & Cash, T. (2003). *Alternative schools: Best practices for development and evaluation*. National Dropout Prevention Center/Network.
- Reese, A. M. (2019). *Black food geographies: Race, self-reliance, and food access in Washington, D.C.* University of North Carolina Press.
- Reyes, A. (2001). Alternative Education: The Criminalization of Student Behavior. *Fordham Urban Law Journal*, 29(2), 539-559.
- Reyes, A. (2006). The Criminalization of Student Discipline Programs and Adolescent Behavior. *Journal of Civil Rights and Economic Development*, 21(1), 73-110.
- Robinson, C. [1983] (2000). *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. University of North Carolina Press.

- Robinson, C. J., & Robinson, E. (2017). Preface. In (Eds.) Johnson, G. T., & A. Lubin (Eds). *Futures of Black Radicalism*. Maple Press.
- Rocque, M. (2010). Office discipline and student behavior: Does race matter? *American Journal of Education*, 116, 557-581.
- Rocque, M., & Paternoster, R. (2011). Understanding the antecedents of the “school-to-jail” link: The relationship between race and school discipline. *Journal of Criminal Law & Criminology*, 101(2), 633 - 666.
- Rocque, M., & Snellings, Q. (2018). The new disciplinology: Research, theory, and remaining puzzles on the school-to-prison pipeline. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 59, 3–11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2017.05.002>
- Rodríguez, D. (2006). *Forced passages: Imprisoned radical intellectuals and the U.S. prison regime*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Rodríguez, D. (2010). The Disorientation of the Teaching Act: Abolition as Pedagogical Position. *The Radical Teacher*, 88, 7-19.
- Rodriguez, D. (2023). *Beautiful revolutionary wildness and counterinsurgency with Dylan Rodriguez*. Millennials Are Killing Capitalism. <https://millennialsarekillingcapitalism.libsyn.com/beautiful-revolutionary-wildness-and-counterinsurgency-with-dylan-rodriguez>
- Rosenbaum, J. (2020). Educational and Criminal Justice Outcomes 12 Years After School Suspension. *Youth & Society*, 52(4), 515–547. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X17752208>
- Sable, J., Plotts, C., & Mitchell, L. (2010). *Characteristics of the 100 largest public elementary and secondary school districts in the United States: 2008–09*. US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED512593>
- Sampson, R. J., & Laub, J. H. (1997). A life-course theory of cumulative disadvantage and the stability of delinquency. In T. P. Thornberry (Ed). *Advances in criminological theory: Vol. 7. Developmental theories of crime and delinquency*, (p. 133–161). Transaction Publishers.
- Schiff, M. (2018). Can restorative justice disrupt the ‘school-to-prison pipeline?’ *Contemporary Justice Review*, 21(2), 121–139. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10282580.2018.1455509>
- Selman, K. J. (2019). Building the necropolis through time and space: Racial capitalist forces in the disciplinary alternative school. *Contemporary Justice Review*, 22(4), 309–333. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10282580.2019.1672045>
- Shange, S. (2019a). *Progressive dystopia: Abolition, antiblackness, and schooling in San Francisco*. Duke University Press.
- Shange, S. (2019b). Black girl ordinary: Flesh, carcerality, and the refusal of ethnography. *Transforming Anthropology*, 27(1), 3–21. <https://doi.org/10.1111/traa.12143>
- Simpson, L. (2014). Land as pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence and rebellious transformation. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 3(3), 1-25.

- Skiba, R. J., Peterson, R. L., & Williams, T. (1997). Office referrals and suspension: Disciplinary intervention in middle schools. *Education and Treatment of Children, 20*(3), 295-315.
- Skiba, R. J., Arredondo, M. I., & Williams, N. T. (2014). More than a metaphor: The contribution of exclusionary discipline to a school-to-prison pipeline. *Equity & Excellence in Education, 47*(4), 546–564. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2014.958965>
- Shollenberger, T. L. (2015). Racial disparities in school suspension and subsequent outcomes: Evidence from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth. In D. J. Losen (Ed.), *Closing the school discipline gap: equitable remedies for excessive exclusion*.
- Smokowski, P. R., Evans, C. B. R., Rose, R., & Bacallao, M. (2020). A Group Randomized Trial of School-Based Teen Courts to Address the School to Prison Pipeline, Reduce Aggression and Violence, and Enhance School Safety in Middle and High School Students. *Journal of School Violence, 19*(4), 566–578. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15388220.2020.1780133>
- Simpson, A. (2014). *Mohawk interruptus: Political life across the borders of settler states*. Duke University Press.
- Soleil, G. (1998). *Schools for Disruptive Students: A Questionable Alternative?* Office of Educational Research and Improvement. Charleston, WV: Appalachia Educational Lab.
- Sojoyner, D., M. (2013). Black radicals make for bad citizens: Undoing the myth of the school to prison pipeline. *Berkeley Review of Education, 4*. <https://doi.org/10.5070/B84110021>
- Sojoyner, D. M. (2016). *First strike: Educational enclosures in Black Los Angeles*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Sojoyner, D. M. (2017). Another life is possible: Black fugitivity and enclosed places. *Cultural Anthropology, 32*(4), 514–536. <https://doi.org/10.14506/ca32.4.04>
- Solórzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. J. (2002). Critical race methodology: Counter-storytelling as an analytical framework for education research. *Qualitative Inquiry, 8*(1), 23–44. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107780040200800103>
- Stovall, D. (2018). Are We Ready for ‘School’ Abolition?: Thoughts and Practices of Radical Imaginary in Education. *Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education, 17*(1), 51-61. <https://doi.org/10.31390/taboo.17.1.06>
- Swartz, K., Osborne, D. L., Dawson-Edwards, C., & Higgins, G. E. (2016). Policing schools: Examining the impact of place management activities on school violence. *American Journal of Criminal Justice, 41*(3), 465–483. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-015-9306-6>
- Sykes, B. L., Piquero, A. R., Gioviano, J. P., & Pittman, N. (2015). *The school-to-prison pipeline in America, 1972–2012*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935383.013.110>
- Theriot, M. T. (2009). School resource officers and the criminalization of student behavior. *Journal of Criminal Justice, 37*, 280-287.
- Thesaurus.com (n.d.). ‘Unforgetful.’ <https://www.thesaurus.com/browse/unforgetful>

- Umbreit, M. S., Coates, R. B., & Roberts, A. W. (2000). The impact of victim-offender mediation: A cross-national perspective. *Mediation Quarterly*, 17(3), 215–229. <https://doi.org/10.1002/crq.3900170303>
- Vanderhaar, J., Munoz, M., & Petrosko, J. (2014). Reconsidering the Alternatives: The Relationship Between Suspension, Disciplinary Alternative School Placement, Subsequent Juvenile Detention, and the Salience of Race. *Journal of Applied Research on Children*, 5(2), 1-32.
- Vaught, S. E. (2017). *Compulsory: Education and the Dispossession of Youth in a Prison School*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Vaught, S. E. (2019). Vanishment: Girls, punishment, and the education state. *Teachers College Record: The Voice of Scholarship in Education*, 121(7), 1–36. <https://doi.org/10.1177/016146811912100706>
- Vaught, S. E., Brayboy, B. M., & Jeremiah, C. (2022). *The school-prison trust*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Verdugo, R. R., & Glenn, B. C. (2006). *Race and Alternative Schools*. Retrieved from <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojdp/grants/226234>
- Wald, J., & Losen, D. J. (2003). Defining and Redirecting a School-to-Prison Pipeline. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 99, 9-15.
- Wallace, J. M., Jr., Goodkind, S. G., Wallace, C. M., & Bachman, J. (2008). Racial/ethnic and gender differences in school discipline among American high school students: 1991-2005. *Negro Educational Review*, 59, 47-62.
- Weaver, J. L., & Swank, J. M. (2020). A case study of the implementation of restorative justice in a middle school. *RMLE Online*, 43(4), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19404476.2020.1733912>
- Watkins, W. H. (2001). *The White architects of Black education: Ideology and power in America, 1865-1954*. Teachers College Press.
- Weisburst, E. K. (2019). Patrolling Public Schools: The Impact of Funding for School Police on Student Discipline and Long-term Education Outcomes: Patrolling Public Schools. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 38(2), 338–365. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pam.22116>
- Welch, K., Lehmann, P. S., Chouhy, C., & Chiricos, T. (2022). Cumulative racial and ethnic disparities along the school-to-prison pipeline. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 59(5), 574–626. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00224278211070501>
- Welch, K., & Payne, A. A. (2010). Racial Threat and Punitive School Discipline. *Social Problems*, 57(1), 25–48. <https://doi.org/10.1525/sp.2010.57.1.25>
- Welch, K., & Payne, A. A. (2012). Exclusionary School Punishment: The Effect of Racial Threat on Expulsion and Suspension. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, 10(2), 155–171. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1541204011423766>

- Welch, K., & Payne, A. A. (2018). Latino/a Student Threat and School Disciplinary Policies and Practices. *Sociology of Education*, 91(2), 91–110. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038040718757720>
- Wilkerson, K., Afacan, K., Perzigian, A., Justin, W., & Lequia, J. (2016). Behavior-Focused Alternative Schools: Impact on Student Outcomes. *Behavioral Disorders*, 41(2), 81–94. <https://doi.org/10.17988/0198-7429-41.2.81>
- Wolf, K. C., & Kupchik, A. (2017). School Suspensions and Adverse Experiences in Adulthood. *Justice Quarterly*, 34, 407–430.
- Wright, J. P., Morgan, M. A., Coyne, M. A., Beaver, K. M., & Barnes, J. C. (2014). Prior problem behavior accounts for the racial gap in school suspensions. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 42(3), 257–266. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2014.01.001>
- Wun, C. (2016). Against Captivity: Black Girls and School Discipline Policies in the Afterlife of Slavery. *Educational Policy*, 30(1), 171–196. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904815615439>
- Wynter, S. (2003). Unsettling the coloniality of being/power/truth/freedom: Towards the human, after Man, its overrepresentation—an argument. *CR: The New Centennial Review*, 3(3), 257–337.
- Zhang, G. (2018). The effects of a school policing program on crime, discipline, and disorder: A quasi-experimental evaluation. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, 44, 45–62. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-018-944>

Chapter 2

- Ahenakew, C. R. (2017). Mapping and complicating conversations about Indigenous education. *Diaspora, Indigenous, and Minority Education*, 11(2), 80–91. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15595692.2017.1278693>
- Arya, S., Binney, Z., Khakharia, A., Brewster, L. P., Goodney, P., Patzer, R., Hockenberry, J., & Wilson, P. W. F. (2018). Race and socioeconomic status independently affect risk of major amputation in peripheral artery disease. *Journal of the American Heart Association*, 7(2), e007425. <https://doi.org/10.1161/JAHA.117.007425>
- Ansfield, B. (2020). Still submerged: The uninhabitability of urban redevelopment. In Katherine McKittrick (Ed.), *Sylvia Wynter: On being human as praxis* (pp. 124–141). Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822375852-006>
- Barad, K. (2010). Quantum entanglements and hauntological relations of inheritance: Dis/continuities, spacetime enfoldings, and justice-to-come. *Derrida Today*, 3(2), 240–268. <https://doi.org/10.3366/drt.2010.0206>
- Barad, K. (2012). On touching—the inhuman that therefore I am. *Differences*, 23(3), 206–223. <https://doi.org/10.1215/10407391-1892943>
- Barad, K. (2017). Troubling time/s and ecologies of nothingness: Re-turning, re-memembering, and facing the incalculable. *New Formations*, 92(92), 56–86. <https://doi.org/10.3898/NEWF:92.05.2017>

- Barad, K. (2019). After the end of the world: Entangled nuclear colonialisms, matters of force, and the material force of justice. *Theory & Event* 22(3), 524-550. <https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/729449>.
- Ben-Moshe, L. (2018). Dis-epistemologies of abolition. *Critical Criminology*, 26(3), 341–355. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10612-018-9403-1>
- Bener, A., Obineche, E., Gillett, M., Pasha, M. A. H., & Bishawi, B. (2001). Association between blood levels of lead, blood pressure and risk of diabetes and heart disease in workers. *International Archives of Occupational and Environmental Health*, 74(5), 375–378. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s004200100231>
- Bowles, S., & Gintis, H. (1977). *Schooling in capitalist America: Educational reform and the contradictions of economic life*. Basic Books.
- Brugge, D., & Goble, R. (2002). The history of uranium mining and the Navajo people. *American Journal of Public Health*, 92(9), 1410–1419. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.92.9.1410>
- Bryce, Y., Katzen, B., Patel, P., Moreira, C. C., Fakorede, F. A., Arya, S., D’Andrea, M., Mustapha, J., Rowe, V., Rosenfield, K., Vedantham, S., Abi-Jaoudeh, N., & Rochon, P. J. (2022). Closing the gaps in racial disparities in critical limb ischemia outcome and amputation rates: Proceedings from a Society of Interventional Radiology Foundation research consensus panel. *Journal of Vascular and Interventional Radiology*, 33(5), 593–602. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvir.2022.02.010>
- Calvert, M. (2021). *Toxic legacy of uranium mines on Navajo nation confronts interior nominee Deb Haaland*. PulitzerCenter.org. <https://pulitzercenter.org/stories/toxic-legacy-uranium-mines-navajo-nation-confronts-interior-nominee-deb-haaland>
- Center for Urban Research & Learning [CURL]. (2023). *Community uprooted: Eminent domain in the U.S*. CURL. <https://www.luc.edu/eminent-domain/siteessays/losangelesca/>
- Chatterjee, P., & Maira, S. (Eds.). (2014). *The Imperial University: Academic repression and scholarly dissent*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Churchill, W., & LaDuke, W. (1986). Native America: The political economy of radioactive colonialism. *Insurgent Sociologist*, 13(3), 51–78. <https://doi.org/10.1177/089692058601300306>
- Clarno, A. (2017). *Neoliberal apartheid: Palestine-Israel and South Africa after 1994*. University of Chicago Press.
- Communities for a Better Environment [CBE]. (2021). Exide technologies: A cycle of environmental injustice. CBE. <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/4d6ff22563d24538aedac2c8d767009c>
- Darke, S., & Khan, O. P. (2021). Coloniality, just war & carceral injustice in Brazil. *Punishment & Society*, 23(5), 723–740. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14624745211041849>
- Dunst, C. (2019). *The U.S.’s toxic agent orange legacy*. The Atlantic. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/07/agent-orange-cambodia-laos-vietnam/591412/>

- Dussel, E. (1993). Eurocentrism and modernity (introduction to the Frankfurt Lectures). *Boundary 2*, 20(3), 65–76. <https://doi.org/10.2307/303341>
- Endres, D. (2009). The rhetoric of nuclear colonialism: Rhetorical exclusion of American Indian arguments in the Yucca Mountain nuclear waste siting decision. *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, 6(1), 39–60. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14791420802632103>
- Fischer-Hoffman, C. (2021). Carceral coloniality in Venezuela: Theorizing beyond the Latin American penal state. In S. Darke, C. Garces, L. Duno-Gottberg, & A. Antillano (Eds.), *Carceral communities in Latin America* (pp. 145–168). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-61499-7_7
- Gilmore, R. W. (2007). *Golden gulag: Prisons, surplus, crisis, and opposition in globalizing California*. University of California Press.
- Gilmore, R. W. (2008). Forgotten places and the seeds of grassroots planning. In Charles R. Hale (Eds.), *Engaging contradictions: Theory, politics, and methods of activists scholarship* (pp. 31-61).
- Gilmore, R. W. (2022). *Abolition geography: Essays towards liberation* (B. Bhandar & A. Toscano, Eds.). Verso Books.
- Gordon, A. F., & Radway, J. A. (2008). *Ghostly matters: Haunting and the sociological imagination* (New University of Minnesota Press edition). University of Minnesota Press.
- Graetz, G. (2015). Energy for whom? Uranium mining, Indigenous people, and navigating risk and rights in Australia. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 8, 113–126. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2015.05.006>
- Grosfoguel, R. (2013). The structure of knowledge in westernized universities epistemic racism/sexism and the four genocides/epistemicides of the long 16th century. *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*, 6(1), 73-90.
- Hall, S. (1978). *Policing the crisis: Mugging, the state, and law and order*. Macmillan.
- Henry, J. (2020). Beyond the school, beyond North America: New maps for the critical geographies of education. *Geoforum*, 110, 183–185. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2020.01.014>
- Hibakusha Worldwide. (2021). *Hibakusha worldwide* <https://hibakusha-worldwide.org/en>
- Holiday, B. (1939). *Strange Fruit*. Commodore.
- Holmes, B. A. (2020). *Race and the cosmos: An invitation to view the world differently* (Second edition). CAC Publishing.
- Hopper, L. (2019). Lead contamination found in baby teeth of children living near battery smelter. USC Environmental Health Centers. <https://envhealthcenters.usc.edu/2019/05/lead-contamination-in-baby-teeth.html>
- Horzinger, N. (2017). *Toxic traces: Historical trauma, slow violence and the discursive framing of lead exposure in Baltimore, MD*. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/33353912/Toxic_Traces_Holzinger_pdf
- Hurley, J. (2022). Nuclear settler colonialism at sea, or how to civilize an ocean. *American Quarterly*, 74(4), 969–995. <https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.2022.0065>

- Jacobs, R. (2013). Nuclear Conquistadors: Military Colonialism in Nuclear Test Site Selection during the Cold War. *Asian Journal of Peacebuilding*, 1(2), 157–177. <https://doi.org/10.18588/201311.000011>
- Johnston, B. R. & School for Advanced Research (Santa Fe, N.M.) (Eds.). (2007). *Half-lives and half-truths: Confronting the radioactive legacies of the cold war* (1st ed). School for Advanced Research Press.
- Jensen, D. (2015). See how LAUSD’s massive building program transformed L.A. neighborhoods. LAist. <https://laist.com/news/lausd-eminent-domain>
- Jindeel, A., Gessert, C., & Johnson, B. P. (2016). Variation and trends in lower extremity amputation rates in Los Angeles county hospitals 2000-2010. *The International Journal of Lower Extremity Wounds*, 15(3), 232–240. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1534734616653843>
- King, T.L. (2019). *The black shoals: Offshore formations of Black and Native studies*. Duke University Press.
- LAUSD [Los Angeles Unified School District]. (n.d.). *Exide and Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC)*. Los Angeles Unified School District. <https://www.lausd.org/Page/2030>
- Lugones, M. (2007). Heterosexualism and the colonial/modern gender system. *Hypatia*, 22(1), 186-209.
- Machado de Oliveira, V. (2021). *Hospicing modernity: Facing humanity’s wrongs and the implications for social activism*. North Atlantic Books [Kindle Edition].
- Maldonado-Torres, N. (2007). On the coloniality of being: Contributions to the development of a concept. *Cultural Studies*, 21(2–3), 240–270. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601162548>
- Maynard, R., & Simpson, L. B. (2022). *Rehearsals for living*. Haymarket Books.
- McKittrick, K. (2006). *Demonic grounds: Black Women and the cartographies of struggle*. University of Minnesota Press.
- McKittrick, K. (2011). On plantations, prisons, and a black sense of place. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 12(8), 947–963. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2011.624280>
- McKittrick, K. (2014). Mathematics Black life. *The Black Scholar*, 44(2), 16–28. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5816/blackscholar.44.2.0016>
- McKittrick, K. (2015). Unparalleled catastrophe for our species? or, to give humanness a different future: Conversations. In K. McKittrick (Ed.), *Sylvia Wynter: on being human as praxis*. Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822375852>
- Mignolo, W. D. (2007). Delinking: The rhetoric of modernity, the logic of coloniality and the grammar of de-coloniality. *Cultural Studies*, 21(2–3), 449–514. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601162647>
- Mignolo, W. D. (2017). Racism and coloniality: The invention of “Human(ity) and the three pillars of the colonial matrix of power (racism, sexism, and nature). In P.C. Taylor et al. (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion to the Philosophy of Race* (pp. 461-474). Routledge.

- Mignolo, W. D. (2020). 7 The invention of the human and the three pillars of the colonial matrix of power: Racism, sexism, and nature. In W. D. Mignolo & C. E. Walsh, *On decoloniality* (pp. 153–176). Duke University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822371779-010>
- Morris, B. (2022). *The Black town under Lake Martin: A father & son's dream of greatness*. Newson. <https://newsone.com/4289947/john-benson-black-town-under-lake-martin-alabama/>
- Nazaryan, A. (2016). *In Southeast Los Angeles, your front yard might be a toxic waste site*. Newsweek. <https://www.newsweek.com/2016/04/15/los-angeles-exide-lead-arsenic-pollution-444339.html>
- O'Rourke, D. (1986). *Half life: A parable for the nuclear age*. Kino International.
- Owens, J. & Drozdenko, T. (2019). *The DRC and America's nuclear weapons*. Outrider.org. <https://outrider.org/nuclear-weapons/articles/drc-and-americas-nuclear-weapons>
- Prescod-Weinstein, C. (2021). *The disordered cosmos: A journey into dark matter, spacetime, and dreams deferred* (First edition). Bold Type Books.
- Quijano, A. (2000). Coloniality of power and Eurocentrism in Latin America. *International Sociology*, 15(2), 215–232. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580900015002005>
- Robinson, C. (2000[1983]). *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. University of North Carolina Press.
- Rodriguez, D. (2023). *Beautiful revolutionary wildness and counterinsurgency with Dylan Rodriguez*. Millennials Are Killing Capitalism. <https://millennialsarekillingcapitalism.libsyn.com/beautiful-revolutionary-wildness-and-counterinsurgency-with-dylan-rodriguez>
- Robinson, D. (2020). *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies*. University of Minnesota Press. <https://doi.org/10.5749/j.ctvzpv6bb>
- Rothenberg, S. J., Williams, F. A., Delrahim, S., Khan, F., Kraft, M., Lu, M., Manalo, M., Sanchez, M., & Wooten, D. J. (1996). Blood lead levels in children in South Central Los Angeles. *Archives of Environmental Health: An International Journal*, 51(5), 383–388. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00039896.1996.9934426>
- Runyan, A. S. (2018). Disposable waste, lands and bodies under Canada's gendered nuclear colonialism. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 20(1), 24–38. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2017.1419824>
- Salih, R., & Corry, O. (2022). Displacing the Anthropocene: Colonisation, extinction and the unruliness of nature in Palestine. *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space*, 5(1), 381–400. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2514848620982834>
- Sharpe, C. E. (2016). *In the wake: On Blackness and being*. Duke University Press.
- Simpson, L. (2014). Land as pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence and rebellious transformation. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 3(3), 1-25.

- Sojoyner, D. M. (2017). Another Life is Possible: Black Fugitivity and Enclosed Places. *Cultural Anthropology*, 32(4), 514–536. <https://doi.org/10.14506/ca32.4.04>
- Suárez-Krabbe, J. (2014). Pluriversalizing Europe: Challenging belonging, revisiting history, disrupting homogeneity. *Postcolonial Studies*, 17(2), 155–172. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2014.966413>
- Tsing, A. L. (2015). *The mushroom at the end of the world: On the possibility of life in capitalist ruins*. Princeton University press.
- US Dept of Energy. (2000). *United States nuclear tests July 1945 through September 1992*. US Department of Energy, Nevada Operations Office.
- US Environmental Protection Agency. (2023). *Abandoned mines cleanup*. US Environmental Protection Agency. <https://www.epa.gov/navajo-nation-uranium-cleanup/aum-cleanup>
- Vaught, S. E., Brayboy, B. M., & Jeremiah, C. (2022). *The school-prison trust*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Walia, H. (2013). *Undoing border imperialism*. AK Press.
- Wynter, S. (2003). Unsettling the coloniality of being/power/truth/freedom: Towards the human, after Man, its overrepresentation—an argument. *CR: The New Centennial Review*, 3(3), 257–337.
- Wynter, S., & McKittrick, K. (2015). Unparalleled catastrophe for our species? or, to give humanness a different future: Conversations. In K. McKittrick (Ed.), *Sylvia Wynter: On being human as praxis*. Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822375852>
- Zinn Education Project. (2024). Chávez Ravine: A Los Angeles story. <https://www.zinnedproject.org/materials/chavez-ravine>
- Zohar, D. (1990). *The quantum self: Human nature and consciousness defined by the new physics*. Quill.

Chapter 3

- Agudelo, F. I., Cole, D., Gallant, S., & Mabee, C. (2021). Restorative justice and the school-to-prison pipeline: A conceptual framework to address racial and ethnic disproportionality. *Children & Schools*, 43(3), 141–148. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cs/cdab014>
- Brand, A.L. (2023). Today like yesterday, tomorrow like today: Black geographies in the breaks of the fourth dimension. In C. Hawthorne & J. Lewis (Eds.), *The Black geographic: Praxis, resistance, futurity* (pp. 264-286). Duke University Press.
- Buras, K. L. (2013). ‘We’re not going nowhere’: Race, urban space, and the struggle for King Elementary School in New Orleans. *Critical Studies in Education*, 54(1), 19–32. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2013.741072>
- Cahill, C., Alvarez Gutiérrez, L., & Quijada Cerecer, D. A. (2016). A dialectic of dreams and dispossession: The school-to-sweatshop pipeline. *Cultural Geographies*, 23(1), 121–137. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474474015597431>
- Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Sage.

- Collins, P. H. (1989). The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought. *Signs*, 14(4), 745–773. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3174683>
- Gilmore, R. W. (2007). *Golden gulag: Prisons, surplus, crisis, and opposition in globalizing California*. University of California Press.
- Gilmore, R. W. (2008). Forgotten places and the seeds of grassroots planning. In C.R. Hale (Ed.), *Engaging contradictions: Theory, politics, and methods of activist scholarship* (pp. 31–61). University of California Press.
- Gilmore, R. W. (2022). *Abolition geography: Essays towards liberation* (B. Bhandar & A. Toscano, Eds.). Verso.
- Goldman, M., & Rodriguez, N. (2022). Juvenile court in the school-prison nexus: Youth punishment, schooling and structures of inequality. *Journal of Crime and Justice*, 45(3), 270–284. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0735648X.2021.1950562>
- Good, R. M. (2017). Histories that root us: Neighborhood, place, and the protest of school closures in Philadelphia. *Urban Geography*, 38(6), 861–883. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2016.1182286>
- Grosfoguel, R. (2007). The epistemic decolonial turn: Beyond political-economy paradigms. *Cultural Studies*, 21(2–3), 211–223. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601162514>
- Haley, S. (2016). *No mercy here: Gender, punishment, and the making of Jim Crow modernity*. The University of North Carolina Press.
- Moten, F., & Harney, S. (2013). The university and the undercommons. In S. Harney & F. Moten, *The undercommons: Fugitive planning & Black study* (pp. 25–43). Minor Compositions.
- Hartman, S. (2008). Venus in two acts. *Small Axe*, 12(2), 1–14. <https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/241115>
- Hartman, S. (2019). *Wayward lives, beautiful experiments: Intimate histories of riotous black girls, troublesome women, and queer radicals*. W.W. Norton.
- Hartman, S. (2021). Intimate history, radical narrative. *The Journal of African American History*, 106(1), 127–135. <https://doi.org/10.1086/712019>
- Hawthorne, C. (2019). Black matters are spatial matters: Black geographies for the twenty-first century. *Geography Compass*, 13(11), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12468>
- Hawthorne, C., & Lewis, J. (Eds.). (2023). *The Black geographic: Praxis, resistance, futurity*. Duke University Press.
- Henry, J. (2020). Beyond the school, beyond North America: New maps for the critical geographies of education. *Geoforum*, 110, 183–185. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2020.01.014>
- Holloway, S. L., & Kirby, P. (2020). Neoliberalising education: New geographies of private tuition, class privilege, and minority ethnic advancement. *Antipode*, 52(1), 164–184. <https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12587>
- Kaba, M. (2017). Free us all: Participatory defense campaigns as abolitionist organizing. <https://thenewinquiry.com/free-us-all/>

- Kaba, M., Nopper, T. K., & Murakawa, N. (2021). *We do this 'til we free us: Abolitionist organizing and transforming justice*. Haymarket Books.
- King, T.L. (2019). *The black shoals: Offshore formations of Black and Native studies*. Duke University Press.
- Kromidas, M. (2022). Mothering and the racialised production of school and property value in New York City. *Antipode*, 54(1), 284–304. <https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12780>
- Lipman, P. (2018). Segregation, the “Black spatial imagination,” and radical social transformation. *Democracy & Education*, 26(2), 1–8.
- Madera, J. (2023). Shaking the basemap. In C. Hawthorne & J. Lewis (Eds.), *The Black geographic: Praxis, resistance, futurity* (pp. 50–71). Duke University Press.
- Mignolo, W. (2000). *Local histories/global designs: Essays on the coloniality of power, subaltern knowledges and border thinking*. Princeton University Press.
- Morgan, H. (2021). Restorative justice and the school-to-prison pipeline: A review of existing literature. *Education Sciences*, 11(4), 159. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11040159>
- McKittrick, K. (2006). *Demonic grounds: Black women and the cartographies of struggle*. University of Minnesota Press.
- McKittrick, K. (2011). On plantations, prisons, and a black sense of place. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 12(8), 947–963. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2011.624280>
- McKittrick, K. (2014). Mathematics Black life. *The Black Scholar*, 44(2), 16–28.
- McKittrick, K. (2016). Diachronic loops/deadweight tonnage/bad made measure. *Cultural Geographies*, 23(1), 3–18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474474015612716>
- McKittrick, K. (2017). *2017 feminist theory workshop*. Duke Gender, Sexuality & Feminist Studies. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ggB3ynMjB34&list=PLtP-W8vSOZt_fq4AUdyS6fU3G0RjZky7g
- McKittrick, K. (2021). *Dear science and other stories*. Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781478012573>
- McKittrick, K. & Woods, C. (2007). No one knows the mysteries at the bottom of the ocean. In K. McKittrick & C. Woods (Eds.), *Black geographies and the politics of place* (pp. 1–13). Between the Lines.
- Meiners, E. R. (2007). *Right to be hostile: Schools, prisons, and the making of public enemies*. Routledge.
- Morris, M. W. (2016). *Pushout: The criminalization of Black girls in schools*. The New Press.
- Nguyen, N., Cohen, D., & Huff, A. (2017). Catching the bus: a call for critical geographies of education. *Geography Compass*, 11(8), 1–13.
- Ortiz, W. (2019). *Punishment is not justice: Defying definitions after sexual violence*. TransformHarm.org. https://transformharm.org/rj_resource/punishment-is-not-justice-defying-definitions-after-sexual-violencepunishment-is-not-justice-defying-definitions-after-sexual-violence/
- Patino, V. (2023). Youth leading the charge against fentanyl. <https://spectrumnews1.com/ca/la-west/public-safety/2023/11/27/youth-leading-the-charge-against-fentanyl->

- Pini B., Gulson, K., Kraftl, P., & Dufty-Jones, R. (2017). Critical geographies of education: an introduction. *Geographical Research*, 55(1), 13–17.
- Purifoy, D. (2023). Call us alive someplace: Du Boisian methods and living Black geographies. In C. Hawthorne & J. Lewis (Eds.), *The Black geographic: Praxis, resistance, futurity* (pp. 27–49). Duke University Press.
- Reese, A. M. (2019). *Black food geographies: Race, self-reliance, and food access in Washington, D.C.* University of North Carolina Press.
- Dylan Rodríguez. (2010). The disorientation of the teaching act: Abolition as pedagogical position. *Radical Teacher*, 88, 7–19.
- Serrano, C. (2022). Schooling in the university town: the racial capitalist foundations of education. *Antipode*, 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12904>
- Shange, S. (2019). *Progressive dystopia: Abolition, antiblackness, + schooling in San Francisco.* Duke University Press.
- Sojoyner, D. (2016). *First strike: Educational enclosures in Black Los Angeles.* University of Minnesota Press.
- Sojoyner, D. (2017). Another life is possible: Black fugitivity and enclosed places. *Cultural Anthropology*, 32(4), 514–536.
- Stovall, D. (2018). Are we ready for ‘school’ abolition?: Thoughts and practices of radical imaginary in education. *Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education*, 17(1). <https://doi.org/10.31390/taboo.17.1.06>
- Vaught, S. (2017). *Compulsory: Education and the dispossession of youth in a prison school.* University of Minnesota Press.
- Vaught, S., Brayboy, B., & Chin, J. (2022). *The school-prison trust.* University of Minnesota Press.
- Winston, C. (2021). Maroon geographies. *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, 111(7), 2185–2199. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24694452.2021.1894087>
- Woods, C. (2017). *Development arrested: The Blues and plantation power in the Mississippi Delta.* Verso Books.
- Woodson, A. (2021). Afropessimism for us in education: In fugitivity, through fuckery and with funk. In C. Grant, A. Woodson, & M. Dumas (Eds.), *The future is Black: Afropessimism, fugitivity, and radical hope in education* (pp. 16–21). Routledge.
- Wun, C. (2016). Against Captivity: Black Girls and School Discipline Policies in the Afterlife of Slavery. *Educational Policy*, 30(1), 171–196. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904815615439>
- Wynter, S. (2003). Unsettling the coloniality of being/power/truth/freedom: Towards the human, after Man, its overrepresentation—an argument. *CR: The New Centennial Review*, 3(3), 257–337.
- Wynter, S. & McKittrick, K. (2015). Unparalleled catastrophe for our species? Or, to give humanness a different future: Conversations. In K. McKittrick (Ed.), *Sylvia Wynter: On being human as praxis* (pp. 9–89). Duke University Press.

Youth Justice Coalition (YJC). (n.d.). FREE LA High School. <https://youthjusticela.org/free-l-a-high-school/>

Chapter 4

brown, a.m. (2017). *Emergent strategy*. AK Press.

Campt, T. M. (2017). *Listening to images*. Duke University Press.

Collins, P. H. (1987). The meaning of motherhood in black culture and black mother/daughter relationships. *HECATE: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Women's Liberation*, 4(2), 3-10.

Gilmore, R. W. (2007). *Golden gulag: Prisons, surplus, crisis, and opposition in globalizing California*. University of California Press.

Gilmore, R. W. (2008). Forgotten places and the seeds of grassroots planning. In C. R. Hale (Ed.), *Engaging contradictions: Theory, politics, and methods of activists scholarship* (pp. 31-61).

Gilmore, R. W. (2020). *Geographies of racial capitalism with Ruth Wilson Gilmore: An Antipode Foundation film*. Antipode Online.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2CS627aKrJI&t=170s>

Gumbs, A.P. (2021). *Undrowned: Black feminist lessons from marine mammals*. AK Press.

Hartman, S. (2016). The belly of the world: A note on Black women's labors. *Souls*, 18(1), 166–173. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10999949.2016.1162596>

Hartman, S. (2017). *In the Wake: A salon in honor of Christina Sharpe*. Barnard Center for Research on Women. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DGE9oiZr3VM>

Hartman, S. V. (2021). *Wayward lives, beautiful experiments: Intimate histories of riotous black girls, troublesome women, and queer radicals*. Horton Press.

Hassan, S. (2020). *What is transformative justice?* Barnard Center for Research on Women.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U-_BOFz5TXo

Kaba, M. (2017). *Free Us All: Participatory defense campaigns as abolitionist organizing*.
<https://thenewinquiry.com/free-us-all/>

Kaba, M., Nopper, T. K., & Murakawa, N. (2021). *We do this 'til we free us: Abolitionist organizing and transforming justice*. Haymarket Books.

- Kelley, R. D.G. (2017). *What is racial capitalism and why does it matter?*
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=--gim7W_jQQ&t=927s
- Maldonado-Torres, N. (2021). Prologue: Decolonial psychology as a counter-catastrophic science, in G. Stevens & C. C. Sonn (Eds.), *Decoloniality and epistemic justice in contemporary community psychology* (pp. vii-xiv). Springer.
- Medel, C. (2017). Abolitionist care in the militarized borderlands. *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 16(4), 873-883.
- Nash, J. C. (2018). *Black feminism reimaged: After intersectionality*. Duke University Press.
- Neely, A. H., & Lopez, P. J. (2022). Toward healthier futures in post-pandemic times: Political ecology, racial capitalism, and Black feminist approaches to care. *Geography Compass*, 16(2). <https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12609>
- Robinson, C. J., & Robinson, E. (2017). Preface. In G. T. Johnson & A. Lubin (Eds), *Futures of Black radicalism*. Maple Press.
- Sharpe, C. E. (2016). *In the wake: On Blackness and being*. Duke University Press.
- Sojoyner, D. (2016). *First strike: Educational enclosures in Black Los Angeles*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Thompson, A. (1998). Not the color purple: Black feminist lessons for educational caring. *Harvard Educational Review*, 68(4), 522-554.
- Thuma, E. (2019). *All our trials: Prisons, policing and the feminist fight to end violence*. University of Illinois Press.
- Willoughby-Herard, T. (2005). Writing in solidarity: The new generation. *Race & Class*, 47(2), 88-99.
- The Youth Justice Coalition (YJC). (2022). <https://youthjusticela.org/history/>

Chapter 5

- Ahenakew, C. R. (2017). Mapping and complicating conversations about Indigenous education. *Diaspora, Indigenous, and Minority Education*, 11(2), 80–91.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15595692.2017.1278693>

- Barad, K. (2010). Quantum entanglements and hauntological relations of inheritance: Dis/continuities, spacetime enfoldings, and justice-to-come. *Derrida Today*, 3(2), 240–268. <https://doi.org/10.3366/drt.2010.0206>
- Barad, K. (2012). On touching—the inhuman that therefore I am. *Differences*, 23(3), 206–223. <https://doi.org/10.1215/10407391-1892943>
- Barad, K. (2017). Troubling time/s and ecologies of nothingness: Re-turning, re-memembering, and facing the incalculable. *New Formations*, 92(92), 56–86. <https://doi.org/10.3898/NEWF:92.05.2017>
- Barad, K. (2019). After the end of the world: Entangled nuclear colonialisms, matters of force, and the material force of justice. *Theory & Event* 22(3), 524–550. <https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/729449>.
- Bowles, S., & Gintis, H. (1977). *Schooling in capitalist America: Educational reform and the contradictions of economic life*. Basic Books.
- brown, a.m. (2017). *Emergent strategy*. AK Press.
- Caban, P. (2002). The colonizing mission of the US in Puerto Rico. In , C. Vélez-Ibañez, A. Sampaio, & M. González-Estay (Eds.), *Transnational Latino/a communities: Re-examining politics, processes and culture* (pp. 114–45).
- Campt, T. (2017). *Listening to images*. Duke University Press.
- Ferreira da Silva, D. (2015). Before Man: Sylvia Wynter’s rewriting of the modern episteme. In K. McKittrick (Ed.), *Sylvia Wynter: On being human as praxis*. Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822375852>
- Deakin, J., & Kupchik, A. (2018). Managing behaviour: From exclusion to restorative practices. In J. Deakin, E. Taylor, & A. Kupchik (Eds.), *The Palgrave International handbook of school discipline, surveillance, and social control* (pp. 511–527). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-71559-9_26
- Díaz, V. (2016). Stepping in it: How to smell the fullness of Indigenous histories. In C. Andersen & J. M. O’Brien (Eds.), *Sources and methods in Indigenous studies*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315528854>
- Dussel, E. (1993). Eurocentrism and modernity (introduction to the Frankfurt Lectures). *Boundary 2*, 20(3), 65–76. <https://doi.org/10.2307/303341>
- Gilmore, R. W. (2007). *Golden gulag: Prisons, surplus, crisis, and opposition in globalizing California*. University of California Press.
- Gilmore, R. W. (2008). Forgotten places and the seeds of grassroots planning. In Charles R. Hale (Eds.), *Engaging contradictions: Theory, politics, and methods of activists scholarship* (pp. 31-61).
- Gilmore, R. W. (2022). *Abolition geography: Essays towards liberation* (B. Bhandar & A. Toscano, Eds.). Verso Books.
- Goldman, M. (2024). Care and the quiet self: Youth sovereignty, self-determination, and other things that glow. *Palimpsest: A Journal on Women, Gender, and the Black International*, 12(2), 28–58. <https://doi.org/10.1353/pal.2023.a919606>

- Gottfredson, D. C., Crosse, S., Tang, Z., Bauer, E. L., Harmon, M. A., Hagen, C. A., & Greene, A. D. (2020). Effects of school resource officers on school crime and responses to school crime. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 19(3), 905–940. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9133.12512>
- Grosfoguel, R. (2013). The structure of knowledge in westernized universities epistemic racism/sexism and the four genocides/epistemicides of the long 16th century. *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*, 6(1), 73-90.
- Henry, J. (2020). Beyond the school, beyond North America: New maps for the critical geographies of education. *Geoforum*, 110, 183–185. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2020.01.014>
- Hodges, D.C & Abu Shanab , R. E. (1971). *NLF: National liberation fronts, 1960/1970*. Morrow.
- Holmes, B. A. (2020). *Race and the cosmos: An invitation to view the world differently* (Second edition). CAC Publishing.
- King, T.L. (2019). *The black shoals: Offshore formations of Black and Native studies*. Duke University Press.
- Lorde, A. (1984[2007]). Uses of the erotic: The erotic as power. In A. Lorde (Ed.), *Sister outsider: Essays and speeches*. Crossing Press.
- Lugones, M. (2010). Toward a decolonial feminism. *Hypatia*, 25(4), 742–759. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40928654>
- Machado de Oliveira, V. (2021). *Hospicing modernity: Facing humanity's wrongs and the implications for social activism*. North Atlantic Books [Kindle Edition]. Magnet & Dunnington, 2022
- Maldonado-Torres, N. (2007). On the coloniality of being: Contributions to the development of a concept. *Cultural Studies*, 21(2–3), 240–270. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601162548>
- Maldonado-Torres, N. (2008). *Against war: Views from the underside of modernity*. Duke University Press.
- McKittrick, K. (2006). *Demonic grounds: Black Women and the cartographies of struggle*. University of Minnesota Press.
- McKittrick, K. (2015). Unparalleled catastrophe for our species? or, to give humanness a different future: Conversations. In K. McKittrick (Ed.), *Sylvia Wynter: on being human as praxis*. Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822375852>
- McKittrick, K. (2016). Diachronic loops/deadweight tonnage/bad made measure. *Cultural Geographies*, 23(1), 3–18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474474015612716>
- McKittrick, K. (2021). *Dear science and other stories*. Duke University Press.
- Mignolo, W. (2015). Sylvia Wynter: What does it mean to be human? In K. McKittrick (Ed.), *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*. Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822375852>

- Mignolo, W. D. (2020). 7 The invention of the human and the three pillars of the colonial matrix of power: Racism, sexism, and nature. In W. D. Mignolo & C. E. Walsh, *On decoloniality* (pp. 153–176). Duke University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822371779-010>
- Morgan, H. (2021). Restorative justice and the school-to-prison pipeline: A review of existing literature. *Education Sciences*, *11*(4), 159. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11040159>
- Nhất Hạnh. (2014). *Fear*. HarperOne.
- Na’puti, T. R. (2019). Archipelagic rhetoric: Remapping the Marianas and challenging militarization from “a stirring place.” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, *16*(1), 4–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14791420.2019.1572905>
- Prescod-Weinstein, C. (2021). *The disordered cosmos: A journey into dark matter, spacetime, and dreams deferred* (First edition). Bold Type Books.
- Quashie, K. (2012) *The sovereignty of quiet: Beyond resistance in Black culture*. Rutgers University Press.
- Quijano, A. (2000). Coloniality of power and Eurocentrism in Latin America. *International Sociology*, *15*(2), 215–232. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580900015002005>
- Robinson, D. (2020). *Hungry listening: Resonant theory for Indigenous sound studies*. University of Minnesota Press. <https://doi.org/10.5749/j.ctvzpv6bb>
- Rodríguez, D. (2021). *White reconstruction: Domestic warfare and the logics of genocide* (First edition). Fordham University Press.
- Runyan, A. S. (2018). Disposable waste, lands and bodies under Canada’s gendered nuclear colonialism. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, *20*(1), 24–38.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2017.1419824>
- Scott, D (2000). The re-enchantment of humanism: An interview with Sylvia Wynter. *Small Axe*, *8*, 119–207.
- Sharpe, C. E. (2016). *In the wake: On Blackness and being*. Duke University Press.
- Simpson, A. (2016). The state is a man: Theresa Spence, Loretta Saunders and the gender of settler sovereignty. *Theory & Event*, *19*(4). <https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/633280>
- Simpson, L. (2014). Land as pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence and rebellious transformation. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, *3*(3), 1-25.
- Sojoyner, D. (2016). *First strike: Educational enclosures in Black Los Angeles*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Sojoyner, D. M. (2017). Another life is possible: Black fugitivity and enclosed places. *Cultural Anthropology*, *32*(4), 514–536. <https://doi.org/10.14506/ca32.4.04>
- Stovall, D. (2018). Are we ready for ‘school’ abolition?: Thoughts and practices of radical imaginary in education. *Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education*, *17*(1).
<https://doi.org/10.31390/taboo.17.1.06>
- Suárez-Krabbe, J. (2014). Pluriversalizing Europe: Challenging belonging, revisiting history, disrupting homogeneity. *Postcolonial Studies*, *17*(2), 155–172.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2014.966413>

- Torday, J. S. (2023). Consciousness, embodied quantum entanglement. *Progress in Biophysics and Molecular Biology*, 177, 125–128. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pbiomolbio.2022.11.002>
- Tsing, A. L. (2015). *The mushroom at the end of the world: On the possibility of life in capitalist ruins*. Princeton University press
- Vaught, S. E., Brayboy, B. M., & Jeremiah, C. (2022). *The school-prison trust*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Walia, H. (2013). *Undoing border imperialism*. AK Press.
- Weheliye, A. G. (2008). After Man. *American Literary History*, 20(1–2), 321–336. <https://doi.org/10.1093/alh/ajm057>
- Weheliye, A. G. (2014). *Habeas viscus: Racializing assemblages, biopolitics, and black feminist theories of the human*. Duke University Press.
- Wynter, S. (1992). Beyond the categories of the master conception: the counterdoctrine of the Jamesian poesis. In P. Henry & P. Buhle (Eds.), *C.L.R. James's Caribbean* (pp. 63-91).
- Wynter, S. (1990). Beyond Miranda's meanings: Un/silencing the 'demonic ground' of Caliban's woman. In C.B. Davies & E.S. Vido (Eds.), *Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature*, pp. 355-372.
- Wynter, S. (2003). Unsettling the coloniality of being/power/truth/freedom: Towards the human, after Man, its overrepresentation—an argument. *CR: The New Centennial Review*, 3(3), 257–337.
- Wynter, S., & McKittrick, K. (2015). Unparalleled catastrophe for our species? or, to give humanness a different future: Conversations. In K. McKittrick (Ed.), *Sylvia Wynter: On being human as praxis*. Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822375852>
- Wheatley, M. J. (2006). *Leadership and the new science: Discovering order in a chaotic world* (3rd ed). Berrett-Koehler publ.
- Zohar, D. (1990). *The quantum self: Human nature and consciousness defined by the new physics*. Quill.

Conclusion

- Barad, K. (2019). After the end of the world: Entangled nuclear colonialisms, matters of force, and the material force of justice. *Theory & Event* 22(3), 524-550. <https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/729449>.
- Gilmore, R. W. (2008). Forgotten places and the seeds of grassroots planning. In Charles R. Hale (Eds.), *Engaging contradictions: Theory, politics, and methods of activists scholarship* (pp. 31-61).
- Hartman, S. (2019). *Wayward lives, beautiful experiments: Intimate histories of riotous black girls, troublesome women, and queer radicals*. W.W. Norton.
- Machado de Oliveira, V. (2021). *Hospicing modernity: Facing humanity's wrongs and the implications for social activism*. North Atlantic Books [Kindle Edition].
- McKittrick, K. (2006). *Demonic grounds: Black Women and the cartographies of struggle*. University of Minnesota Press.

- McKittrick, K. (2021). *Dear science and other stories*. Duke University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9781478012573>
- Moten, F., & Harney, S. (2013). The university and the undercommons. In S. Harney & F. Moten, *The undercommons: Fugitive planning & Black study* (pp. 25–43). Minor Compositions.
- Robinson, C. [1983] (2000). *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. University of North Carolina Press.
- Vargas, A. (2023). *Disrupting the school-to-prison pipeline*. palabra.
<https://www.palabranahj.org/archive/disrupting-the-school-to-prison-pipeline>
- Wynter, S. (2003). Unsettling the coloniality of being/power/truth/freedom: Towards the human, after Man, its overrepresentation—an argument. *CR: The New Centennial Review*, 3(3), 257–337.
- Wynter, S., & McKittrick, K. (2015). Unparalleled catastrophe for our species? or, to give humanness a different future: Conversations. In K. McKittrick (Ed.), *Sylvia Wynter: On being human as praxis*. Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822375852>