Horizons of Home and Hope: A Qualitative Exploration of the Educational Experiences
and Identities of Black Transnational Women

Dissertation

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Abstract

In this qualitative dissertation study, I will develop a theoretical framing that can be used for a deep and contextualized exploration of the experiences and narratives of Black transnational women within and outside of educational spaces. Positing that these experiences and narratives are shaped by settler colonialism/colonialism, racism, and heteropatriarchy, the goal of this study is to better understand Black transnational women’s narratives, stories, and experiences as connected to their languages, identities, and literacy practices. Doing so allows me to theorize their narratives, stories, and experiences by considering the complexities of anti-black racism, heterosexism, and colonialism both in their home countries and in the United States.

In the hopes of contributing to the emerging body of work on the anticolonialism in knowledge production and education (Emeagwali & Dei, 2014; Kempf, 2009), as well as the notion of transnational identities and ways of being, meaning, as occupying multiple spaces simultaneously (Mirón, 2014), this study is guided by the following research questions: (1) What lessons about the construction of race and gender can be learned from Black transnational/immigrant women? (2) What larger contexts impact the lives, identities, and educational experiences of Black transnational women
(3) What hopes, fears, and/or goals drive the educational pursuits of Black transnational women? (4) What specific struggles do these women face when trying to access sites of formal education? Based on these questions, I will draw on Black and transnational feminist theories, critical literacy studies, and anti-and decolonial theories to explore the ways in which the English language, spoken and written, can be used to facilitate social justice for Black transnational women. To explore these questions, I conducted a series of conversational, in-depth interviews with each of the 7 adult immigrant women (ages 25-35) in this study. Each women self-identified as Black in the context of the United States, and have had to reckon with their positionality and changing identities within U.S. educational spaces.
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Chapter 1: Introduction and Framing of Theoretical Approaches

“One afternoon in the Fall of 2014, I meet Naima\(^1\) for a tutoring appointment at a Panera Bread café. We embrace after speed walking toward each other with wide smiles on our faces. It has been weeks since we have been able to meet and we only have two hours to make it through GED materials. She hugs me tightly, and I am briefly engulfed in soft tufts of orange and brown fabric, inhaling a familiar scent of uunsi, the Somali incense Naima burns daily in her home. We enter Panera Bread and she reminds me: “I am paying today, don’t forget!” We both smile about our ongoing competition when it comes to treating each other. We order two cups of coffee from a cheerful cashier, whose long blonde hair is messily stuffed under her uniform cap. Naima quickly hands her a 50-dollar bill, and I know her swiftness is meant to discourage me from paying. The cashier smiles at me generously, hands me two empty coffee cups and 47 dollars and a few coins. Stunned into silence, I briskly hand the change to its rightful owner, Naima.”

I chose the narrative vignette above to open this dissertation study because, at least in part, it signifies what has led me to its pursuit. Moments after this instance, which I would in hindsight refer to as a micro-aggression\(^2\) (Solórzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000),

\(^1\) All names are pseudonyms for the purpose of protecting participants’ identities.

\(^2\) Solórzano, Ceja & Yosso (2000) define microaggression as “subtle insults (verbal, non-verbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously” (p.60).
Naima and I sat over our coffees with dampened moods. This was not the first time I had literally seen her rendered invisible in my presence, but it was a time that stood out to me because of the frequency with which the story came back up in our exchanges, including when we sat down for our interview for this study. Right after the incident occurred, I gently broached the topic of how she interpreted the cashier’s actions and her first reaction was: “I think it’s because I don’t speak English like you do.” While I pondered this, she continued: “Or she doesn’t like immigrants, or Muslims.” Two years removed from the incident and after deciding to develop and pursue this study, which has become an inquiry into the lives, languages, and educational experiences of Black women who were born outside of the U.S., Naima recalls this incident during one of our conversational interviews. After shuffling through consent forms and reading each word carefully, she asked me just before I turned the recorder on, “So what are the benefits of your study for Black immigrant women?” and, later, when the recorder was on: “Do you remember the time we went to Panera Bread?” I ask her to tell me what she remembers from that story and I tell her that I am not sure what benefits will exactly come from this study, but I assure her that I will tell the story about the cashier. I realize in that moment that the micro-aggression, as benign as it seems from the outside looking in, has stayed with her the way it has stayed with me. In many ways, her recollection of that moment, along with her hope that tangible benefits from this study will emerge for Black immigrant women, legitimized this work for me and pushed me to continue this research for her and the other study participants who all encounter U.S. racism, xenophobia, and misogyny.
Hence, this study did not emerge out of a desire to add to the growing body of literature on race, gender, and education in the United States of the 21st century. Rather, it was borne out of a need: a need to create a space in which to engage in dialogue with Black women who were born outside of the U.S. and who find themselves in a context shaped by the histories of indigenous genocide, settler colonialism, chattel slavery, and the ongoing struggle for positive representations of Black women in media and dominant discourses about race and gender. This study was also borne out of a need for me to think about my own community as a Black woman in the U.S. who is on a student visa, and the ways my own experiences relate to those of others.

I felt a deep need to peel back the layers of everyday encounters, such as the one discussed above, to reveal the systemic, intersectional and pervasive nature of how macro-structures impact our micro-experiences. In other words, I, in collaboration with the participants, seek to understand how racism, neo and settler colonialism, and heteropatriarchy impact our day-to-day experiences and how we can trace them across transnational linkages in our lives. Thus, the data stem from our experiences. The women who participate in this study are not randomly selected for an occasional interview. They are my friends, family members, students I have been tutoring for years, and women I met in professional spaces, who hold onto me as I hold onto them, because of our shared experiences of occupying so many margins at the same time.

I recognize that, from a research perspective, my close relationships with participants might make things messier; I know their stories, filtered through my own understandings of who they are, and they know my stories. Our relationships will exist long after this project has concluded and I worry about the harm that it might do to those
bonds that are so important to me. However, it was Naima’s urging to work to the benefit of Black immigrant women, and the ongoing struggles of Maya and Chrisette to access educational spaces despite their visa and/or undocumented status that motivated this study. It was also Haki’s fears with respect to raising Black boys in the United States, in addition to so many more factors, that convinced me that this study is both necessary and worthwhile.

Finally, in so many ways, their struggle is my struggle, as I have been leveraging my own privilege of education, fluency in English, and the ability to “pass” as American to write, fill out applications, translate, make phone calls, and broker meetings with authorities for those women/participants who asked me to do so. Thus, I understand my unique and privileged position of being a student, a researcher, and a teacher that enables me to create and pursue this study in the first place. According to Boylorn (2013), “Black women researchers can offer a privileged standpoint for collecting and analyzing the raw data of Black women’s lives” (p. 3). It is my goal, then, to leverage this privilege for the benefit of my participants.

I searched high and low for representations of us in educational scholarship. I wondered, where are our voices, our struggles, and our theorizations? I read Americanah by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2013) and finally saw a glimpse of a shared experience in print. I read as much educational scholarship that considered race, migration, literacy, and gender as I could, which is where I found that in educational discourses, discussions about race and equity are often (and understandably so) focused on African American

3 Please refer to the section on methodology for a deeper discussion of participant selection, researcher positionality, and the reduction of harm
boys and men and how to remedy their longstanding historical and sociopolitical disenfranchisement (George, 1993; Haddix, 2009).

Similarly, media discourses and educational discourses alike place a large focus on discussing immigration from South America, particularly as it relates to the education of English Language Learners (ELLs) from Spanish speaking countries (Calderón & Minaya-Rowe, 2003; Marian, Shook, & Schroeder, 2013). Little to no consideration is given to the narratives, educational experiences, or intersectional struggles of women who are racialized and identified as Black in the United States, but have also migrated to the United States and are learning English and maintaining their home languages. In other words, the languages, literacies, and identities of Black transnational women are rarely included in discussions that pertain to education, literacy, gender, and/or race. At the same time, the kind of knowledge that is produced by crossing borders and from having to position oneself both in the local (U.S.) histories of settler colonialism, race, and gender, whilst maintaining, or re-negotiating, one’s cultural identity, is not commonly taken into account in discourses about educational access, literacy, or racialization at large. Despite the wealth of theorizing that has been produced about race and gender, such as Black Feminist Theories (Hill Collins, 1990; Thompson, 2003) and womanism (Walker, 1983), the intersections of migration, racialization, and gender, particularly from the global South, have been richly engaged by transnational feminists (Grewal & Kaplan, 1994). The voices of Black transnational women have been largely excluded.

Theories of migration have been employed to explain contemporary immigration (King & Malmö högskola, 2012), while transnationalism, or the transnational as a category of analysis, has been theoretically and empirically mobilized to frame the
experiences of those who lead lives across national and metaphorical borders (Khagram & Levitt, 2008). A different approach to contextualizing migration and immigration has been employed by postcolonial and anticolonial theorists, who position European colonialism and imperialism as driving forces behind contemporary migration patterns, particularly from the global South to the global North (Emmer & Boogaart, 1986). Paolo Freire’s (2000) focus of literacy practices as a means of achieving empowerment in colonial spaces has been taken up by critical literacy scholars, thus allowing considerations of the political nature of reading, writing, and language use at large to enter educational discourses.

All of these theoretical frameworks provide important points of entry for framing the language use, knowledges, and experiences of Black women who have left their home countries for various reasons, and now reside in the United States, whilst maintaining ties with home. However, since many of the theories briefly outlined above have emerged from a U.S. context as a specific response to racialized sexism and other forms of oppression, I would argue that employing one of these theories alone would require amendments and substitutions to fully respond to the kinds of questions that have emerged as research questions for the study that is presented in this dissertation.

After building close relationships with Black transnational women from across the African diaspora both in the private sphere, as well as professionally in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TESOL) contexts for a number of years, the following research questions have emerged and will guide my study of their languages, literacies, and experiences with systems of oppression: (1) What lessons about the construction of race and gender can be learned from Black transnational/immigrant women? (2) What larger
contexts impact the lives, identities, and educational experiences of Black transnational women? (3) What hopes, fears, and/or goals drive the educational pursuits of Black transnational women? (4) What specific struggles do these women face when trying to access sites of formal education?

By pursuing this line of questioning, I will argue the following: (a) There does not currently exist a theoretical framework that can be comprehensively applied to contextualize how anti-black racism functions across contexts and under consideration of colonialism, gender constructions, and racialization, and that shapes educational access and literacy practices; and (b) Although decolonizing research, particularly methodologies (Smith, 1999), has become a goal of a small sub-section of educational researchers, there remains a dearth of work that provides practical examples of how decolonial and anticolonial methods can be practically applied to qualitative research in education. To contribute to these methodological approaches, I will argue that telling one’s own story, as it has been claimed by many Black women researchers and writers (Boylorn, 2009; Lorde, 1982), can be a means of decolonizing research processes if these stories seek to reject the imposition of colonial practices, such as placing more value on formalized languages and knowledges, or particular forms of storytelling. In the next section, I first provide a brief discussion of my use of terminology. Then, I will provide an overview of the theoretical frameworks that I draw on for this dissertation. This overview helps me explain why these frameworks are not currently suited on their own to explore how Black transnational women formally and informally engage with educational spaces that are shaped by institutional racism and colonialism, particularly as it relates to their language and literacy practices.
Terminology

Transnational scholars Amelina and Faist (2013) note that transnational research requires reflexivity on the part of the researcher when it comes to labeling participants with respect to the unit of analysis. They contend, “researchers benefit from strategies reflecting upon the dichotomization and ethnic labelling of research designs, methods of data collection, and data interpretation” (p. 5). Indeed, in order to claim research that centers the experiences, identities, and lives of Black transnational women, these categories must be first addressed and evaluated reflexively. In this section, I will discuss who counts as Black, who counts as transnational, and who self-identifies as a woman for the purposes of this study.

Who counts as Black?

I recall the first time I encountered Naima. At the time (two years ago), she was 29 years old and proud to know her age, which she later noted, because in her home country of Somalia, it was not common that birth records were produced and retained in the 1980s, when the country was already wrought with civil war, which destroyed institutions. After being referred by their teacher, I met Naima and her friend for English tutoring in the lobby of a local community College, at which they both were taking a writing class at the time. I entered the lobby later than I had wanted to and was immediately greeted with warm embraces from both women. I recall feeling naked next to them due to my exposed arms, although just a moment before, I had been grateful for not wearing long sleeves in the heat of August. We immediately started chatting, and it wasn’t long before Mariam showed me pictures of her children, her husband, and quite a few selfies on her phone. She asked to see my family, and since I was single at the time, I produced images of my
Black Jamaican mother and my White German father. I recall her saying loudly (and having repeated it quite a few times since) “Oh, look at your mother! She is darker than me! I thought you were White, like Mexican.”

The experiences of Black immigrants in general have not been the focus of many research studies. The few studies that do exist, however, often fail to explicitly discuss who counts as Black, an identity marker that has been reclaimed and politicized by African American writers and scholars from various schools of thought (Gordon, 2003; Essien-Udom, 1962), but may be contended by those who hail from countries that are so predominately populated by African peoples that marking oneself as Black has been unnecessary until one arrived in the United States. On the other hand, knowing that Blackness is negatively connoted in many spaces across the world—particularly due to the globalization of White Supremacy (Allen, 2001), with its manifestations in predominately Black spaces through colorism—can represent a marker of difference that is not readily accepted by those who are formally racialized as Black, for example, on the U.S. census. U.S. notions of Blackness oftentimes still operate based on the one-drop rule, which focuses on lineage rather than phenotype and which further complicates the notion of Blackness and Black identity.

In either case, claiming or not claiming Blackness can create tensions that are founded in cultural or ideological difference. However, I would argue, not explicitly engaging the term allows it to potentially function in unwanted ways, particularly if it determines the recruitment of research participants. For example, in Moore’s (2013) work, The American Dream Through The Eyes Of Black African Immigrants in Texas, the author, who self-identifies as a Black immigrant, states that she collected qualitative
data from “80 Black African immigrants regarding the American dream” (p. 5).

Nevertheless, Moore fails to provide a discussion of whether or not the participants identified as Black, and if so, what this identity meant to them.

Hodges (2005), on the other hand, notes that Blackness in the context of Black immigrants remains to be viewed through a U.S. lens, without consideration of the very specific experiences, cultures, and backgrounds of those who are not descendants of the transatlantic slave trade. Relatedly, in his ethnographic work with African immigrant youth in Canada, Ibrahim (2014) explores the process of becoming Black. He asks various questions, including: “How does one make a woman, woman, or a Black person, Black? More importantly, what is the psychic and consequently ethnographic result of being made woman or being made Black?” (p. 13). Although questions of the intersectional nature of race and gender are not addressed comprehensively throughout his text, he does show that students access Black English as a Second Language as a means to forge Black identity in a predominately White space. Blackness in this case, then, is largely defined by U.S. American definitions.

For the purposes of this study, it is not my goal to impose pre-existing notions of what constitutes Blackness or Black identity onto the participants or the data. However, since my work is centered on Black transnational women, I draw on the context of the United States and the definitions I can find within this context for the purposes of sampling. Therefore, it is my goal to select participants who self-identify as Black, but also those who identify as Black for the purposes of the U.S. census.

Who counts as transnational?
Chrisette has asked me to accompany her to a meeting with an organization that can provide services for refugees. She is asked to recount her story, one marked by violence, fear, and tragedy multiple times, in order to determine her eligibility for services. In these sessions, I learn that she has given birth to two children in the United States, one passed away tragically. She has been in and out of the U.S. on a visitor visa and has now been here for one year. She has overstayed her visa by months, which causes the office worker to scramble for more information. Ultimately, it is her trauma and the threat of more bodily harm that make her eligible to stay.

Although the question of who counts as an immigrant may seem more straightforward than the question of who counts as Black, it is similarly complicated, particularly as people enter and leave the United States on different visa types and may hold different visas at particular moments in time. According to Portes and Rumbaut (2001), “immigrant children and U.S. born children of immigrants are the fastest growing segment of the country’s total population of children under 18 years of age” (p.19). This statement does not discuss who is included in the category of ‘immigrant’, particularly with respect to undocumented legal statuses, or the legal statuses of refugees, and asylum seekers. “Immigrant”, then is a legal designation as well as an identity marker frequently used by some of the women in this study. However, the designation ‘immigrant’ is not suited for this study as it only captures a portion of the experiences that come with crossing borders and navigating multiple identities and spaces.

The types of experiences that will be considered will include those pertaining to migration, gender, and racialization across different contexts. As one can see, Alisa’s brief narrative above would potentially exclude her from the term ‘immigrant’ because...
she is both undocumented and eligible for political asylum. For this reason, I will use the term ‘transnational’ instead as a way to indicate the crossing of borders, maintaining ties to one’s country of origin, and navigating the laws, cultures, and customs of multiple nation-states. Some of us are not here to stay, and some of us maintain lives straddling two or more nation-states. Thus, the term transnational allows for a discussion of similar experiences that may otherwise be excluded, such as those of Tee research participant Tee⁴, a biracial woman—half American, half German—who has spent her entire life navigating both spaces and dividing her time between both countries. The term transnational, then, is here not used as an identity marker, such as immigrant, but as a descriptor to illustrate lives and experiences that often occur between or in multiple spaces and localities, as well as the various allegiances, beliefs, and identities that this entails (Amelina & Faist, 2013).

Who counts as a woman?

Acknowledging that the identity of ‘woman’ is just as contested as other identities in the United States, as most recently proven by North Carolina’s adoption of HB2, a bill that regulates who may or may not enter women’s bathrooms, a discussion of who counts as a woman should also be included into this section. According to Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill (2013), there exists a connection among race, gender, and coloniality: “Because the United States is based upon notions of White Supremacy and heteropatriarchy, everyone living in the country is not only racialized and gendered, but also has a relationship to settler colonialism” (p. 9). In order to pursue an anticolonial approach to

⁴ Tee asked me explicitly not to use a pseudonym. As a compromise with respect to my ethical considerations, I have decided to use an abbreviation of her name
methodology, then, it is necessary to disrupt assumptions of biological sex as the primary factor that shapes or creates women’s experiences. However, the women in this study identify as cisheterosexual, meaning they identify with the gender they were assigned at birth and identify and/or present as heterosexual (Clarke, 2015).

These definitions or elaborations will become useful in the following sections in which I will outline the theoretical frameworks under consideration for framing the experiences of Black transnational women with respect to pursuing education in their respective fields in the climate of racism. This climate, what Moya Bailey (2013) and Trudy (2014, http://www.gradientlair.com/post/84107309247/define-misogynoir-anti-black-misogyny-moya-bailey-coined) call misogynoir, embodies a particular type of oppression experienced by Black women, which is steeped in antiblackness and misogyny.

Similarly to Dei (2006) and Arvin, Tuck, and Morril (2013), I posit that European imperialism, colonialism, and the modes of thinking and knowledge production that became part of their logic continue to shape the curricula, educational policies, and epistemologies that underlie many of the educational spaces in the U.S.. Furthermore, along with chattel slavery, European colonialism reshaped much of those parts of the world that are inhabited by people of color and that have greatly influenced European development and the globalization of White Supremacy (Allen, 2001). In the next section, I will discuss how anticolonial, postcolonial, and decolonial thought have been taken up in education. I highlight the potentials that may arise for the contextualization and exploration of the lives of Black transnational women if this school of thought engages critical pedagogy and Black and transnational feminisms.
Anticolonial Thought, Critical Pedagogy, and Black Transnational Feminisms in Education

For educational scholars invested in the study of knowledge production and experiences at the intersections of race, immigration, and gender in the current moment of globalization, considerations of ‘colonialism’ and ‘re-colonial relations’ (Dei, 2006)—that is, contemporary efforts on the part of nations to control and dominate others—can allow for more nuanced understandings of the larger systems of oppression that inform individual experiences. However, while only a few contemporary educational theorists and pedagogues (Dei, 2006; Tuck & Yang, 2012) seek to find ways to decolonize education and curricula, this is almost never done through an engagement of the potentials of Freirean critical literacy theories (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993), or transnational feminist theories for moving theory into practice (Nagar & Lock Swarr, 2010).

Considering the large number of students and migrants from former European colonies who enter the United States, as well as the ongoing disparity that exists between students of color and White students in terms of achievement, both anticolonial and decolonial approaches remain pertinent, even within U.S. spaces. Additionally, the United States is invested in global organizations, such as the World Bank, that foster neocolonial engagements in former colonies, particularly through the implementation of educational programs that are tied to ideological and financial sanctions. Because of this reality, anticolonial analyses that are focused on the local effects of these engagements, as well as those that show how ideas and ideologies travel and contribute to the creation of “scattered hegemonies” (Grewal & Kaplan, 1994), can prove beneficial.
I recognize that by placing a primary focus on how education and educational theory in the United States could benefit from anticolonial and decolonial theorizing, and by highlighting the transnational as a unit of analysis, I am inadvertently centering a hegemon that many of these theories seek to decenter. Grewal (2005) argues, however, that America cannot be only studied within its borders, and “postcolonial studies provides some useful ways of examining the relation between imperialism and culture” (p. 2). Thus, I recognize that the United States, among other spaces, is a settler colonial space (a space from which the colonizers did not leave, but settled) with its own history of White heteropatriarchal domination, marked by the systemic erasure of indigenous peoples, marginalization of African-descended people, periods of internment camps, and other atrocities that are often conveniently diminished in history books and the collective consciousness of the dominant group. As King (2006) notes, “the particular ways in which “Africa and Black experience and culture are taught normally institutionalizes a dangerously incomplete conception of what it means to be African and what it means to be human, which obstructs Black students’ opportunities to identify with their heritage” (p. 343). Some of these histories can be illuminated by considering the experiences of those who come from former colonies to the United States, particularly those who come

5 (Arvin et al. (, 2013, p.13) define heteropatriarchy as “the social systems in which heterosexuality and patriarchy are perceived as normal and natural, and in which other configurations are perceived as abnormal, aberrant, and abhorrent.” They see it as one mode of domination of settler colonialism in the United States.
to learn about the myths of the American dream and the endless upward mobility for immigrants.

The stories, experiences, and narratives of Black immigrant women who have come to the United States in pursuit of education can provide additional insight into how language and literacy interact in a postcolonial world. These insights may be gained, for example, by interrogating the ways in which discourses about the superiority of English travel to other places, in turn making it mandatory for world-citizens to be proficient in the “language of the oppressor” (Rich, qtd. in hooks, 1994, 167). Thus, Black women’s narratives, experiences, and stories are my point of reference for bringing together three seemingly disparate frameworks—Anticolonial Thought, Critical Pedagogy, and Black Transnational Feminisms. I must note that I recognize that each framework individually and collectively offers an important contribution to framing these and many other human experiences.

This discussion, then, aims to investigate the ways anticolonial theory in education can be brought into conversation with transnational feminist theory and new literacy studies in order to consider how theory can move into praxis, particularly with respect to exploring and framing the narratives of immigrant women in the United States. This discussion helps me to consider the relevance of colonialism, as a historical frame and as a politics of knowledge, for work in literacy studies, especially as I grapple with understanding the roles of race and gender in critical literacy work that leads to liberatory praxis. In this theoretical discussion, it also becomes necessary to explore the role and utility of the category ‘transnational.’
For this purpose, I will first briefly review literature on Critical Literacies before shifting my focus to research on colonialism, neoliberalism, and women of color feminisms.

**Framing Critical Literacies**

Paolo Freire (2000) famously noted that in order to achieve liberation, the oppressed must be able to read the ‘word and the world’. Based on this notion, it is not enough for students to decode and understand the immediate meanings of texts without also being able to critically question them and understand how they fit into larger social contexts around the world. Reading, then, is political. Elsewhere, Freire (2000) argues that “freedom is not an ideal located outside of man; nor is it an idea which becomes myth. It is rather the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion” (p. 47). Based on this assertion, language and literacy must be taught, utilized, and understood in such a way that they allow the colonized, marginalized, and oppressed to fully understand their own material conditions and social locations in order to empower themselves and work toward social change. This notion, that is, the transformative power of language and literacy, has been taken up by the body of research now known as Critical Literacy Studies.

Lankshear and McLaren (1993) note, that by adding the word “critical” to the term literacy is crucial in that it alters how literacy studies has been conceptualized in the past twenty years. They cite Brian Street (1984) who claims that “literacy is best understood as a shorthand for the social practices and conceptions of reading and writing” (qtd. in Lankshear & McLaren, 1993, p. 1). Critical Literacy Studies, then, concerns itself with power, along the lines of the critical paradigm, as it relates to the
social practices and discourses that shape the ways in which reading and writing are conceptualized.

Street (1984, 1995) notes that in the United States, both the autonomous and the ideological model of literacy have emerged as the two dominant and competing models of literacy. According to Alvermann (2006), the autonomous model presents literacy as a set of skills for decoding and producing printed text. On the other hand, the ideological model conceptualizes literacy, or rather, multiple literacies, in ways that call for the consideration of multiple modalities and forms of communication.

The shift to critically re-conceptualizing how we view literacy in the 1990s also marked a move away from viewing literacy as a technology of the mind to viewing it as a social practice that already exists in the everyday lives of people (Street, 2006). Thus, literacy is not seen as a uniform set of skills to be taught and learned in schools, but rather as the various ways in which meaning is created and communicated. In the context of fostering such literacies in education, Neuman and Rao (2004) contend that in addition to viewing literacy as operational, cultural, and critical, “effective literacy also involves engaging with and creating a range of texts, building on the languages, experiences, cultures, and other assets of students, and communicating and expressing understanding in multiple ways, both independently and with others” (p.7).

The rearticulation of literacy through the ideological model has called into question not only what counts as literacy, but also what counts as a text, and ultimately, what counts as knowledge and sites of knowledge production worthy of study. Instead of asking whether or not people are literate, critical literacy scholars explore “where, how, and why youth practice literacy” (Paris & Kirkland, 2011, p.178). For example, in their...
study of the verbal artistry of African American, Latinx, and Pacific Islander youth in online spaces, Paris and Kirkland (2011) draw on the notion of ‘vernacular literacies’ to show how closely the spoken and written languages of young people are connected to their various identities. They understand vernacular literacies as literacies that are particular to a social group, in their case, Black youth, that require their own standards of proficiency that may or may not align with academic literacies. To be literate in these vernacular literacies, then, requires a distinct set of experiences and knowledge that, for example, goes beyond the acquirement of academic literacy or mathematical literacy, all of which are of varying importance depending on the context. The focus on racialized, ethnic, and gendered identities in relation to the practice of literacies by culturally and linguistically diverse young people and adults is rarely explored in ways that account for how these identities fit into larger contexts of empire, colonialisms, and emerging transnational knowledges about the self and others.

In addition to viewing literacy through a critical paradigm that considers how literacy instruction in schools has promoted deficit perspectives about students and their home languages and literacies, the rapid emergence of new technologies also requires a constant engagement with new literacy practices. Cope and Kalantzis (2000) argue for the existence of multiple literacies, or ‘multiliteracies’, that would “account for the context of our culturally and linguistically diverse and increasingly globalised societies; to account for the multifarious cultures that interrelate and the plurality of texts that circulate” (p.9). Thus, understanding literacy practices and instruction as ideologically marked social practices that are highly contextual requires new approaches to the instruction of reading, writing, and language.
Kinloch (2005) argues that these approaches must be shaped by Democratic Engagements, which means that the teaching and learning of literacy practices inside of schools should be based on dialogue and social relationships, instead of a banking model of education (Freire, 1970). If students already possess literacies (which they do), then teachers are not required to deposit knowledge into them. Rather, teachers should act as facilitators and conversational partners who provide students with a framework for literacy to occur for a variety of circumstances.

However, many larger entities, such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the World Bank (WB) continue to utilize an autonomous model of literacy, although they sponsor literacy programs around the world in the name of spreading literacy. According to Wickens and Sandlin (2007), critical literacy scholars assert that the nature of literacy instruction is highly political, while globally sponsored literacy programs (such as those sponsored by UNESCO and WB) are oftentimes a way of “continuing social control and fostering deficit perspectives and the literacy myth” (p.276). This ‘literacy myth’ stipulates that providing literacy instruction improves educational, cultural, and economic outcomes. Ultimately, the attempt to spread literacy through programs that are funded by international organizations further leads nations that rely on these services into reliance on the ideologies of those who provide them. According to Wickens and Sandlin (2007), these programs are neocolonial in nature. For Chilisa (2005), ‘neocolonialism’ means that even though many previously colonized countries won geographical and political independence, “the cultural and economic independence was never really, if at all, won. The colonial systems of domination continued, and were in fact entrenched in the neocolonial and globalization era, as the former colonizer continue to economically, culturally, financially, militarily and ideologically dominate what constitutes the so-called developing world, the Third World—in fact the formerly colonized nations (p.660)

This is but one point at which the rearticulation of literacy as part of an ideology intersects with both anticolonial and transnational feminist theorizing. For one, the notion that effective literacy practices are contextual and something that people already possess re-imagines (or advances) deficit narratives
about the ‘illiterate’ third world woman (Ramanujan, 2008), the intellectually inferior Black body (Dastile, 2013), and the immigrant student struggling to acquire academic English literacy.

Fanon (1967) argues that these deficit perspectives, which stipulate the inferiority of people of color, particularly Black people, also shape the pedagogy of those who internalize such perspectives. Fanon writes of a young woman—an Antillean pre-service teacher—who notes that she would not marry a Black man because White men are superior. On this point, Fanon (1967) states: “Such attitudes are not rare, and I must confess that they disturb me, for in a few years this young woman will have finished her examination and gone off to teach in some school in the Antilles. It is not hard to guess what will come of that” (p.48). Although the exchange between Fanon and the young woman occurred 50 years ago, pre-service teachers of color in the United States, for example, continue to struggle with being perceived as inferior in predominately White spaces (Meacham, 2008).

A pedagogical approach that takes into account the historical and contemporary implications of how deficit narratives about Black bodies (and other bodies of color) emerged in different parts of the world and are connected by a shared past of European movements may be of great benefit to a field such as critical and new literacy studies. This might be the case because critical and new literacy studies is heavily focused on elucidating the ways in which knowledges and meanings are formed and shared across space and time.

More than anything, however, a rearticulation of literacy as a means through which liberation can be achieved by allowing for critical engagements with systems of oppression (e.g., heteronormativity, patriarchy, racism, and the hegemony of English,
etc.) should become part of a framework that mobilizes anticolonial theory and transnational feminist theory for praxis inside and outside of classrooms. To draw deeper connections between these frameworks and to highlight the existing gaps in theorizing, I will next explain how postcolonial theories interact with U.S. educational theory in general. Then, I will provide some cases of how these theories are relevant to literacy programming and instruction in different contexts.

**Neoliberalism and Postcolonialisms**

Although there is a dearth of postcolonial, anticolonial, and decolonial theorizing and contextualizing in U.S. educational theory, a great effort has been made to theorize globalization, global education, and the literacies required to understand and compete in a global marketplace (Burbules & Torres, 1999; Monkman, 2014; Suárez-Orozco & Qin-Hilliard, 2004). Rarely, however, is the notion of globalization contextualized from a postcolonial or anticolonial lens, or rather, as Allen (2001) stipulates, seeing how European colonialism functioned as a globalizing force, which is continuously fueled by neoliberal forces to expand the reach of corporations and capital in ways that often promote neocolonialism. As discussed earlier in this chapter, various scholars such as Fanon (1967), Dei & Kempf, (2006), and Tuck & McKenzie, (2015), have richly employed anticolonial and decolonial approaches and theories in order to change the way we think about curricula, educational institutions, and the ideologies that drive the pedagogies of teachers.

In her exploration of women’s lives in the contexts of empire, Jones (2011) notes that “[p]ostcolonialism in education creates a break with colonialism and a critical revision of curriculum that is infused with inequity and hierarchy” (p. 1). What, then,
does this assertion mean for Black transnational women who have come to the United States for education and/or who move in and out of this space to benefit from the global marketability and prestige that are connected with being educated in the United States? To address this question is to realize that educational spaces in the U.S. remain part of the settler colonial project as much as they serve to engage in neocolonial endeavors.

For example, Hanson and Hentz (1999) argue that the conditions imposed on South Africa and Zambia by international financial institutions are neocolonial in nature because the provision of funds was connected to “the imposition of Western ideas on government officials, who in turn shape domestic policy” (pp. 479-480). Based on this assertion, Western neoliberal ideologies, such as privatization and the relentless pursuit of economic expansion and profit, oftentimes come at the price of a weakened social state. Thus, such ideologies have disrupted and dominated the state apparatus in countries that need(ed) to borrow funds from international financial institutions. In many cases, neoliberal ideology goes hand in hand with neocolonialism.

In the United States, the political movement in educational policy is marked by standardization and accountability, privatized schools, and life in a time “when the good sense of the common good is withering, when policies with clear racializing effects are being instituted using the rhetoric of democracy, when urban (and rural) spaces are being reconstructed to benefit the most advantaged (Apple, 2011). However, as one can see by the examples of Zambia and South Africa provided by Hanson and Hentz (1999), these mechanisms occur in many spaces across the world and, when exported, are often connected to neocolonial ways to control and subjugate local markets, cultures, and communities.
The intensified focus on profit and participation in markets continues to call into question the purpose of education with respect to valuing the knowledges, histories, and identities of those who have built the United States, and the value of liberal arts and humanities. President Barack Obama famously drew on this rhetoric by noting that “folks can make a lot more potentially with skilled manufacturing or the trades than they might with an art history degree” (“The White House”, 2014, para. 21). Delving deeper into the rhetoric of neocolonialism presents one entry point for anticolonial and decolonial theorizing in education, particularly with respect to discussions about gentrification, privatized schools, and the effects these measures have on the experiences of historically marginalized and underserved populations. However, in order to fully explore anticolonial and decolonial theorizing as entangled with and potential departures from postcolonial theories, I will now briefly review the more recent emergence of postcolonial theories in the 1980s and 1990s. Doing so will allows me to discuss the ways in which these theories have entered the social sciences, particularly the field of educational theory and praxis.

Sparked by the publication of seminal works, such as Edward Said’s *Orientalism* in 1978, a new slew of postcolonial critiques re-emerged in the U.S. academy and universities across the world. Desai and Nair (2005) frame the field of postcolonial studies as follows:

> It is based on a long history of debate about issues such as the struggle for independence, the appropriability of the colonial languages, the role of regional cultures in nationalist traditions, the marginalization of gender and women’s issues in many newly independent nations, and the role of indigenous traditions in shaping a postcolonial modernity. (p.2)

Many of these critiques have been particularly productive with respect to
historicizing how European imperialism affected the economies, identities, and cultures in the former colonies. Others note that the emergence of neoliberal capitalism has created neocolonial relations, and thus moved the world into a “post-colonial condition” (Slemon, 1990), with multiple contemporary localized postcolonialisms occurring through ongoing continued imperialist engagements (Desai & Nair, 2005; Sewpaul, 2006). These critiques insist that there are multiple postcolonialisms that require localized analyses and that may be at contention with each other, despite potentially similar patterns and origins.

Loomba (1998) defines colonialism as the “conquest and control of other people’s land and goods” (p.2). Despite the effects of other types of colonialisms, many postcolonial scholars stipulate that European colonialism and imperialism were the most expansive forces that shaped the globe and relationships between groups of people until today.

Indeed, European colonizers established many of the borders between nations that we continue to uphold. Fisher (2012) contends that on the African continent, “Europe's arbitrary post-colonial borders left Africans bunched into countries that don't represent their heritage, a contradiction that still troubles them today” (para.1). Although educational systems in the colonial contexts are not explicitly addressed in the definition of colonialism above, their role can be viewed as part of the ‘complex and traumatic relationships’ between colonizers and colonized, since institutions of formal education became sites at which the colonizer’s languages, ways of knowing, ideologies, and governing systems were disseminated. Critiques of the dichotomized ways of viewing these relationships, as well as other critiques from the frames of decolonial and
anticolonial theories in education will be explored further in the next section.

**Postcolonial, Decolonial, and Anticolonial Theories in Education**

Postcolonial theories, with their focus on hybridity and the multi-directionality of colonial encounters, should not be conflated with anticolonial and decolonial theories, although all three strains of theorizing and contextualizing are deeply interconnected. According to Dei (2006), critics of postcolonial theorizing have pointed to the focus on textuality and discursive analyses in postcolonial theories at the expense of sufficient deep historical contextualization and considerations of the material impact of colonialism on the lives of people. This critique, he argues, is addressed by a contemporary anti-colonial approach that posits, “colonial constructions affect knowledge production with material consequences” (Dei, 2006, p. 13). Thus, anti-colonial theory allows for theorizations of counter-knowledges as theorized by postcolonial scholar Gayatri Spivak (1988), which makes possible the simultaneous consideration of equity and material consequences. Both are important concepts for education as they relate to the realities of funding, and the material impacts of colonialism on the trajectories of people of color in various spaces.

For the histories, knowledges, and truths of marginalized groups, the result is that “public education, within the greater societal context, cannot easily accommodate cultural sub-groups as sources of knowledge due to the possibility of collision between truths held by these groups and those of society as a whole” (Calsoyas, 2005, p.302). Hence, the relationship between institutions, such as schools and universities, and the nation-state is one that must be closely examined at multiple levels: policies, curricula, and pedagogy. This examination must be conducted in ways that are embedded in the historical,
geographic, and sociopolitical contexts of colonization and in ways that are specific to the various territories, nations, and states in which institutions exist.

For example, Viswanathan (1989) shows how the institutionalization of English literary studies was one way the British imposed colonial power in India, particularly through the selection of the curricula, or rather, the ways in which knowledge was disseminated and validated throughout the culture. She notes that “[c]elebrating the dominant culture as the arbiter of standards, morals, and religious values, the first position insists on the universality of a single set of works, primarily those of its own culture, in an effort to assimilate individuals to a single identity” (p.167). The canonization of literary works and the prestige that was and continues to be associated with this canon is one way to dominate the colonized—this approach either implicitly or explicitly devalues oral and literary traditions that pre-existed (or co-existed) in the languages and literatures of the colonized culture. Of course, the institutionalization of English literary studies or the canonizing of English is not exclusive to India. In the United States, despite its population of culturally and linguistically diverse students, most learners are also expected to master a literary canon that is often steeped in Victorian British aesthetics.

I will now briefly focus on how postcolonial and anticolonial theories have been applied in U.S. educational theory, by examining which questions are addressed by postcolonial and anticolonial scholars in the field of education, particularly as they relate to knowledge production and dissemination, racialization, and pedagogy. Dei (2006) stipulates that colonialism is not dead, but instead persists in educational spaces in the U.S., particularly as it relates to which knowledges are produced and get validated in the
public sphere and in classrooms. To him, decolonizing education means that colonized people must reclaim the histories previously excluded from the history of the colonized and colonial nations.

The reclamation of the past informs the ways situated knowledges are produced on part of the colonized in the present moment. Chakrabarty (1992) argues, “insofar as the academic discourse of history—that is ‘history’ as a discourse produced at the institutional site of the university is concerned, ‘Europe’ remains the sovereign, theoretical subject of all histories” (p.1). Similar to Viswanathan’s (1989) assertion that the field of English literary studies in India and in the United Kingdom was constituted by centering Eurocentric standards, Chakrabarty argues that the field of history underwent a similar process, in which Europe remains the central point of analysis in former colonies and the European academy itself.

Decentering Europe in social studies, English language arts, and other content areas is one crucial aspect of decolonizing curricula and instruction. This decolonization can help to achieve a consistent and radical reclamation of histories and knowledges from historically oppressed groups in the United States, including Indigenous Americans, African Americans, and other people of color who have shaped the country through numerous migratory flows. Further, the ways we historicize fields of study must also be contextualized from a perspective that critically analyzes the purposes and goals that drove their constitution both in local and international contexts. Contemporary scholars (Dei & Kempf, 2006; Tuck, 2015), whose inquiry emerges from postcolonial theories and its critical engagement have called for the consideration of anticolonial and decolonial thought for a deeper consideration of how colonial and neocolonial processes affect
institutions.

Calling for the decolonization of African subjects and knowledge production, Dastile (2013) and Dei (1992) suggest that due to “the social imagery of African subjects as backward and lazy, with no voice, an African-centred decolonial paradigm makes a case for scholars to ‘unlearn, to rethink, to reconceptualise and deconstruct the hegemonic discourses’ (Dastile, 2013, p. 94). Despite Dastile’s (2013) call for theorizing African decolonization through various approaches that center Africa instead of ‘elsewhere’, the suggestion that African subjects are considered ‘backward and lazy’ calls into question where, how, and by whom this social imagery is produced. Further, African-centered theorizations of decolonization also raise questions of authenticity (e.g. who is allowed to speak with authority on matters of Africa), particularly as it relates to diasporic subjects.

Africa, based on these assertions, remains an ‘imagined community’, an imagined space grounded in historical contexts of nation-building (Anderson, 1983) and is imagined as the only authentic space for theorizations of decolonizing knowledges.

For those of African descent who are oppressed in White supremacist nations, I would argue that the imaginary of ‘Africa’ as a motherland may resemble an imaginary of home. This is particularly expressed through the intellectual strains of Black Nationalism and Garveyism (Garvey, 1970), which do not necessarily focus on the diversity of the continent, but rather on the continent as an imagined space of ancestry.\(^6\) I would further argue, however, that the ‘lazy, backward African subject’ is part of the

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\(^6\) Marcus Garvey’s efforts toward Black Nationalism also included efforts of repatriation of Black people to Africa.
Eurocentric imaginary and, therefore, cannot necessarily be used as the basis for African-centered deconstruction and epistemologies, as proposed by Dastile (2013). Rather, it would be fruitful to engage discourses of deficit, inferiority, and underdevelopment both in African spaces and elsewhere, especially under consideration of global anti-black racism, in order to expose and deconstruct their White Supremacist underpinnings.

As Allen (2001) notes, the globalization of White Supremacy is translated even into places where few Whites live through the privileging of light skin tones and approximations of Whiteness. These considerations also call into question the locus of anticolonial and/or postcolonial frameworks, whether in reference to the relationship between the global South and Europe, with diaspora as an afterthought, or analyzing diaspora and the subjects it produces as important foci. Although these considerations may seem superficial at first glance, they pose a challenge to theorizations of anticolonial approaches to education in the context of the United States, and even Europe, as well as the identities that were produced through the pursuit of empire.

For the project of decolonizing American education, a decolonial approach allows for an ongoing unlearning and deconstruction of White Supremacy, both for students and for teachers, as well as an engagement with the knowledges and histories produced by and through settler colonialism in the United States. According to Tuck (2015), curriculum has been a tool of excluding indigenous peoples from settler colonial spaces. Similar to the critiques of English literature studies by Viswanathan (1989) and the field of history by Chakrabarty (1992), Tuck and McKenzie (2015b) note that the field of curriculum studies has not only been a tool of settler colonialism, but it also played a significant role in its maintenance. This, they argue, was achieved and continues
to persist through the adoption of ‘colonialist consciousness’ (p. 60), a term coined by Grande (2004), which is expressed through five core beliefs in settler colonialism in general, and traditional curriculum studies in particular.

Based on Grande’s (2004) and Tuck and McKenzie’s (2015) assertions, these core beliefs include: (1) the notion of individualism, (2) a belief that progress constitutes change, and change constitutes progress, (3) a belief that faith and reason can be effectively separated, (4) the belief that reality is worldly and relativistic, (5) a belief in individualism, and the belief in the superiority of human beings over nature. The adoption of these core beliefs has driven traditional curriculum studies. Through these beliefs, curricula were developed to erase the indigenous peoples from what was taught and how it was taught by centering the settler and colonizer as the rightful holder of knowledge and power.

Jones (2011) notes that “if colonial and postcolonial can be used to describe actual, physical locations that have been colonized and metaphorical states of organizing and understanding the world, then colonial and postcolonial education can be described in more than one manner.” (p.65). This statement has multiple implications for educational praxis. For one, it indicates that educational theorizing that considers the postcolonial can and should take into consideration both geographical space, as well as metaphorical ways of knowing and being. Secondly, decolonizing educational praxis, then, is not relegated to scholars from colonized spaces, but considers the ways in which colonial systems impact thought and knowledge production. Colonial education, based on Jones’ (2011) assertion, is education that promotes Eurocentric histories and ways of being, whilst placing the colonial gaze on people of color by positioning them as deviant,
lazy, dirty, or primitive and continuously marginalizing them in terms of equity, identity, and language.

For language instruction, this points to a need for culturally and linguistically diverse students to be encouraged to sustain their cultures and home languages by receiving instruction through a culturally sustaining approach (Paris, 2012). Decolonization of formal education means exposing colonial ideologies and hegemonies in teaching and learning. In the context of postcolonial pedagogy, Jones (2011) notes that decolonization does not stipulate the absolute removal of colonial ways of knowing, but instead, fosters an ongoing critical engagement with the reproduction of power in educational spaces.

On the other hand, an anticolonial approach with respect to epistemology and pedagogy centers questions of oppression, race, and justice to counter new forms of colonialism. Although the terms are at times used quite similarly in meaning, this distinction is necessary as both terms carry with them different responsibilities for educators and learners. For educators, policy makers, and administrators who take an anticolonial approach, Dei (2006) suggests, “A school system, and particularly a classroom must provide the space for each learner to understand both her privileges and oppression, and to develop effective oppositional resistance to domination” (p. 6). This conceptualization of anticolonial approaches to pedagogy in formal education, then, requires that students are equipped with the ability to learn their own position in the social world, whilst simultaneously having their resistance to domination fostered.

Dei (2006) hints at the complex notion that individuals can be simultaneously privileged and oppressed, depending on context and circumstance. This notion can also
be found in other theories that employ intersectional analyses, such as Critical Race Theory and Black Feminist Theory. Therefore, anticolonial approaches to pedagogy must take into account the unstable and nuanced nature of the oppressor-oppressed dialectic, specifically, and European colonization, at large. In sum, anticolonial approaches to education call for the consideration of identity, language, and knowledge as they relate to dominant ways of knowing. Therefore, topics such as the loss of native languages through processes of schooling (Bird, 1993), racialization across contexts and its effect on identities, as well as the subjugation of knowledges and the fostering of counter-knowledges (Spivak, 1988) provide important avenues for the examination of larger structures that govern experiences at the intersections of race, gender, and migration.

Bird (1993), for example, writes: “I must recognize that I am also the product of colonization in that I speak only English though my mother is multilingual” (p.1). For anticolonial language instruction, this statement indicates that educational approaches must be more than mindful, but supportive of the maintenance of heritage languages if students are to be encouraged to foster multiple ways of knowing and expression and if they are to be protected from becoming colonized subjects.

hooks (1994) argues that despite its potential utility, Standard English remains the language of “conquest and domination” (p.168). Of course, romanticizing native languages and their maintenance is not productive in this context, particularly since

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7 Critical Race Theory and Black Feminist Theory both emerged in the United States a response to structural racism and sexism. Scholars, such as Derrick Bell, KimberléKimberle Crenshaw have shaped Critical Race Theory, while scholars bell hooks, and Patricia Hill Collins have deeply impacted Black Feminist theorizing.
language politics are often complex and depend on the local and global contexts and histories that shape them. However, the role and reclamation of language and literacy practices should be considered in anticolonial educational theory and praxis. This notion is also aligned with critical literacy studies because language and literacy are understood to be primary vehicles for the dissemination and development of knowledges and meaning. The next section will explore some of the implications of theorizing race and gender in anticolonial educational spaces.

Implications of Race and Gender in Decolonizing and Anticolonial Theories in Education

As discussed in the previous section, both postcolonial and anticolonial theories have been concerned with the production of identities through the enterprise of European imperialism and colonialism. Bhabha (1990) suggests that the colonial encounter produced hybrid identities that do not align themselves neatly along the colonizer-colonized binary, thus noting the multidirectionality of this encounter as well as the heterogeneity of the categories. This presents a direct critique of the school of thought developed by Memmi (1965) and Fanon (1967), who both base some of their theorizations on the binary relationships between the essential colonial subject and the colonizer. Similar to Hegel’s master-slave dialectic (1807; qtd. in Solomon 1983), the relationships between colonizer and colonized were one-way relationships, but mutually constitutive. As noted by Smith (1999), “the binary of the colonizer/colonized does not take into account, for example, the development of different layerings which have
occurred within each group and across two groups” (p. 27). Thus, she explains that the land from which African slaves were brought were lands already taken from other indigenous peoples. Further, the colonized differ(ed) substantially in terms of class, caste, gender, and race that they did not constitute a monolithic colonized subject.

Loomba (1998) and Sweet (1997) note that although the concept of race was shaped by colonial encounters and the transatlantic slave trade, it predates European colonialism. Although the concept of race itself was not produced by European colonialism alone, assumptions of the racial inferiority of non-European peoples was used to justify the paternalism that drove the taking of lands, the enslavement of peoples, and the exploitation of people of color in the colonies. The origins of race and racialization are important to contextualize and historicize in order to counter the ways master narratives of race are translated in different spaces. For the context of the United States, this master-narrative often involves a theorization of race that strongly focuses on the Black/White binary, in which White European Americans brought African slaves to the United States in the context of the transatlantic slave trade. However, by strictly adhering to this binary, important questions of indigeneity and the production of the category ‘White’ may be erased from the equation. Based on this dominant narrative, the abolition slavery and the Civil Rights Movement are supposedly defining endpoints of racial inequality and indicative of a liberal multicultural and colorblind era (Bonilla-Silva, 2013). This narrative is regularly used to obfuscate any legitimacy of discussions on contemporary racism and White Supremacy.

8 A more in-depth discussion on the Black/White binary is provided in chapter 2
Thésée (2006) provides numerous examples of how science and science education have contributed to the construction of Black bodies and other bodies of color as deficient, deviant, and inferior. These examples include the eugenics movement, IQ testing, discourses of failure as they pertain to Black youth in US education, as well as the criminalization of Black bodies, which continue to affect the educational experiences of non-White students of color in the United States. An anticolonial approach to science education and other content areas, then, must expose these inequalities instead of re-centering White Supremacy and Eurocentrism.

The pursuit of empire on the part of European nations produced racialized subjects that became ‘Other’ in the context of White normativity. However, colonialism and postcolonial nations also produced new normative masculinities, femininities and practices of hygiene. According to Boehmer (2005), “gendered, predominantly familial (patriarchal), forms have been invoked, paradoxically, to imagine postcolonial nations into being, and that, reciprocally, constructions of the nation in fiction and other discourses are differentially marked by masculine and feminine systems of value” (p. 4). Gendered relationships predate the (post) colonial nation and the impacts of the colonizers and settlers; however, one mode of imperialism was to normalize the gendered relationships of Europe, particularly those marked by Christian belief systems, and to mark everything else as deviant. Given this gendering of the postcolonial nation, both discursively and literally, anticolonial educational praxis must interrogate how gendered norms interact with the state. It is through this notion that postcolonial feminism intersects with transnational feminism in addition to their shared foundation of centering the raced and gendered identities as they intersect with the (postcolonial) state.
Racism, Gender, and Globality: What does a transnational framework offer to education and critical literacy studies?

Although almost absent in educational theory and critical literacy studies, the transnational has become a unit of analysis that is diffuse and highly dependent on its user. Khagram and Levitt (2008) distinguish between five intellectual foundations of transnational studies: (1) Empirical Transnationalism, which seeks to depict, outline, and categorize new or important transnational events and interactions; (2) Methodological Transnationalism, which seeks to re-evaluate existing data and histories to reveal their transnational nature; (3) Theoretical Transnationalism, which seeks to add interpretations of other theories into Transnational Studies; (4) Philosophical Transnationalism, which is based on the assumption that the world and all life is transnational; and (5) Public Transnationalism, which reveals new avenues of social change by abandoning any thought of social interactions as bound to the nation-state. These intellectual approaches to transnationalism themselves have produced a number of theories, studies, and arguments that further diversify the use of the word ‘transnational’. For example, the question of what makes work transnational has been of particular interest to transnational feminist scholars (Nagar & Lock Swarr, 2010; Grewal & Kaplan, 1994). Is it enough to work with individuals from ‘foreign’ backgrounds? Is it necessary to physically cross borders to call work transnational? Are ideas that travel and return transnational? What about the study of America and its engagements across the world?

I would argue that there exist a number of different approaches to the above questions. Grewal (2005) theorizes America as a transnational space by considering ‘transnational connectivities’, the various transnational networks in which dominant, new
concepts were formed through the dissemination of neoliberal ideologies. She uses the example of the Barbie, which was imported into Indian markets, and which has changed the local consumer culture. Scholars invested in the narratives of immigrant students and educators of color will encounter a dearth of literature that engages spaces (physical and/or metaphorical) outside of the United States.

U.S. educational theory has taken up feminist approaches from a number of standpoints, including a postmodern lens (Lather, 1991), Black Feminism (hooks, 1994; Stone & Boldt, 1994), and others. However, despite an explicit rhetoric of aiming to prepare students ready for the contemporary moment of globalization, this scholarship has lacked an explicit engagement of feminist theories that pursue anticolonial or decolonial praxis, whilst theorizing students’ engagement with the nation-state, or discourses of race, gender, and place. According to Jones (2011), “The west/rest divide creates a false sense of easily definable identities for women whose lives are hybrid and complex” (p.33). Jones’ quote, however, shows how analyses that engage the nation-state in discussions of gender and race are necessary for the project of decolonization, or anticolonial theory. Understanding that marginalized bodies produce particular knowledges by crossing the borders of nation-states, by migrating, and by inhabiting various spaces is one contribution of transnational frameworks for those who seek to think more expansively about literacy and knowledge.

In combination with anti-colonial theories, or standing alone, Transnational Feminism, with its explicit engagement of both the local/national and the global and racialized and gendered identities, could provide a useful theoretical framing for pedagogy and curricula that actively seek to decenter Europe as the primary site of
knowledge production. Further, it allows additional ways to interrogate this imaginary of Europe, by questioning where and by whom now canonical literacy works and histories were produced in particular. Alexander and Mohanty (1997) explain that transnational feminism marks a discursive shift away from Third World Feminism in order to better account for the materiality of experiences that plagued the image of the ‘authentic’ Third World Woman, who was depicted as being poor, lacking agency, and in need of rescue.

A transnational lens also allows for a reconfiguration of how, for example, ‘America’ can be theorized. For example, Grewal (2005) positions ‘America’ not only as an imperialist nation-state, but also as a nationalist discourse of neoliberalism “making possible struggles for rights through consumerist practices and imaginaries that came to be used both inside and outside the territorial boundaries of the United States” (p. 2). She suggests that America must be theorized from within its territories as well as from outside, and she calls for a postcolonial, transnational connection under consideration of migration and diaspora. Similarly, critical literacy scholars (Apple, 2000, Giroux & Giroux, 2006) are also invested in understanding how neoliberalism affects schooling and the educational experiences of historically underserved students (Apple, 2000). The positioning of America as a discourse opens up new questions about American educational theory and praxis. What, then, does ‘American education’ really look like? What are the cultures, histories, values, and identities produced through formal education? How does neoliberalism function in producing racialized and gendered subjects in the educational system? What are the implications for teaching and learning, particularly as these relate to literacy?
Despite the pertinence of the questions above, both transnational feminist theorizing and practice seem to primarily focus on the global South as a site of analysis, which, given its connection to postcolonial theories, is an important move. In terms of educational theory in the United States, however, there remains a dearth of education scholarship that engages ‘America’ critically and globally, and under consideration of students of color.

Reconfiguring the trope of the ‘American dream,’ which tries to convince people from other parts of the world to come to America to pursue material success, for example, through a transnational feminist lens would allow for questions to be asked about equity in former colonies. Such a reconfiguration would allow deeper analyses of contemporary neoliberal capitalist relationships between countries, of how ‘America’ as a discourse was taken up in the home countries of migrants, and of how these discourses may have produced new racial and gendered identities and expectations in (wo)manhood.

For instance, Alexander and Mohanty (1998) remark: “We were not born women of color, but became women of color here. From African American and U.S. women of color, we learned the peculiar brand of U.S. North American racism and its constricted boundaries of race” (p. xiv). This powerful sentiment can only be fully theorized when considering the numerous histories and macro-systems of oppression that shape the gendered and racialized identities and experiences of women beyond the boundaries of the nation-state, which, according to Herr (2014), transnational feminism sees as detrimental to feminist causes.

A transnational feminist framework, then, allows for analyses that transcend the nation state, particularly as it relates to knowledge production and organizing. It enables
students and scholars of language and literacy to contextualize their experiences as they relate to larger systems, such as neocolonialism and neoliberalism. It also encourages students and scholars to question how and why the nation states in which they live or with which they interact enforce neocolonial policies that affect their educational experiences in general, and literacy practices in particular.

Nagar and Lock Swarr (2010) contend that transnational feminisms were in part a result of postcolonial critiques, which they connect to the conflict that emerges through utilitarian approaches to a global ‘sisterhood’ that conflates the struggles of women without adequately theorizing difference and the disparity of experiences. Based on Lock Swarr’s (2012) definition, transnational feminisms are an intersectional set of understandings, tools, and practices that can “attend to racialized, classed, masculinized, and heteronormative logics and practices of globalization and the multiple ways in which (re)structure colonial and neocolonial systems of domination and subordination” (p. 5). In addition, they posit that transnational feminisms are inherently critical and reflexive, whilst providing a framework for theorizing the ways these systems of domination inform and are informed by subjectivities and collective agency through feminist organizing. Hence, transnational feminism can be an extension of colonial critiques, particularly as it relates to the identities that emerge in the current moment of globalization and neoliberalism.

Transnational feminist theory has failed to be taken up by educational theory, which may have to do with its lack of attention to the local/national level (Herr, 2014). Institutions of formal education, such as schools and universities, of course, are part of the nation-state and therefore seemingly outside the scope for such theorizing. However,
interrogating local school systems, curricula, and pedagogical practices as they relate to transnational feminist causes, and especially to knowledge production, has been largely relegated to Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies courses in higher education.

Herr (2014) calls for the reclamation of Third World Feminism that disrupts notions of authenticity with respect to the Third World woman, whilst simultaneously accounting for the local/national level as both spaces that push for the liberation of Third World people, but can also be a place at which global discourses of Whiteness are reproduced. In addition, I would argue that theorizations of racialized and gendered experiences at the national level, such as the effects of institutionalized violence on the part of the nation state (including police brutality, racial profiling, immigration policies) and on the bodies of migrant and immigrant women would benefit from a transnational framing. This framing could show how violence is oftentimes the result of neo-colonial ideologies that transcend the nation-state. Settler colonialism, in which “settlers come with the intention of making a new home on the land, a homemaking that insists on settler sovereignty over all things in their new domain” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p.5), in the United States has contributed to many of these state-sanctioned ways to exert control over and position bodies of color (internationally) as deviant. By understanding the logics of settler colonialism, then, people of color in the United States and abroad may be able to gain a better understanding of their own position within the nation-states in which they live, as well as the discourses they access.

Khagram and Levitt (2008) argue, “the destruction of the World Trade Center, one of the most potent symbols of global capitalism, by members of the cross-border Al Quaeda terrorist network is a striking example of the ‘transnational’ nature of the world”
They note that the United States government responded by reasserting the primacy of the nation-state, whereas the tragedy also brought to the light transnational engagements including, among others, “transgovernmental police coalitions, dispersed but linked diasporic communities” (p.2). I believe it also opened the door for a new understanding of the rhetoric of the ‘West’. In a recent online course on Business English and writing that I am teaching to Japanese students, one of the students discussed the recent 2015 attack in France by the Islamic State. The student referred to himself, to me, and to the nation-states in which we live (Japan, Germany, America) as “people from the West like us.” I found this to be interesting, particularly in light of Japan’s supposed position in the Far East. However, the student’s self-alignment with the West is indicative of his rejection of the ‘Middle East’ for its supposed birthing of terrorist subjects.

For scholars of race and gender in education, then, the question becomes how transnational feminist theory can be moved into praxis when it comes to better understanding the systems that impact the racialized experiences of girls and women in this moment of globalization, which, for Allen (2001), entails the globalization of White Supremacy. Simultaneously, discourses that reproduce colonial tropes of intellectual inferiority, particularly as it relates to people of African descent, are continuously reproduced through national tropes, such as the ‘Black male crisis’ (Kinloch, 2011), and the ‘achievement gap’ (Ladson-Billings, 2006), which insist that Black and immigrant students consistently perform inadequately on standardized testing.

Theorizing America through a transnational lens by viewing such discourses as part of a larger system of oppression that operates transnationally to pathologize the
bodies of Black people and other people of color in myriad ways helps to establish connections between individual experiences and global disparities.

**Black & Woman: Theorizing at the Intersections**

The epistemologies and theories that have emerged from Black women’s work are multifarious, diverse, and oftentimes distinct from or in critical response to one another. To name only a few, some of this theorizing includes Black Feminist Thought (Hill Collins, 1990), to Black Feminist Theory (hooks, 1989; Springer, 2002), to Endarkened Feminism (Dillard, 2000; Staples, 2016), to Critical Race Feminism (Wing, 2003), to Hip Hop Feminism (Morgan, 1999), Womanism (Walker, 1983) and African Feminism (Blay, 2008). Although diverse in their epistemologies, all of these theories and approaches were produced with the lived experiences of Black women in mind.

Nonetheless, using an umbrella term to describe them all, such as Black Feminist Theory, is dangerous because it elides the intense labor of Black women to name their particular approach to this work. In seeking to trace back a genealogy of Black women’s theorizing, some would argue that the struggle for liberation and Black women’s resistance against oppression has been part of Black women’s lives since they were taken from Africa and forced into White supremacist, heteropatriarchal nations. Patterson (2013) notes that in the United States of the 19th century, resistance on the part of Black women was threefold: through activism, through writing, and through an in-depth engagement with religious texts that foregrounded liberation.

Of course, this does not indicate that these three forms of resistance are mutually exclusive. For example, the writings of Ida B. Wells, Jarena Lee, Frances E. Watkins Harper, and Harriet Jacobs, which closely followed 19th century literary traditions.
(Patterson, 2013), the speeches of Sojourner Truth, and the tireless liberation efforts of Harriet Tubman, amongst many others, are all part of the same efforts of Black women to both support their communities and sustain and express themselves. The importance of writing in this process is also foregrounded in Alice Walker’s womanist book *In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens*, in which she beckons us to imagine those Black women who were unable to engage in these forms of expression, or in her words, “The agony of the lives of women who might have been Poets, Novelists, Essayists, and Short-Story Writers (over a period of centuries), who died with their real gifts stifled within them” (Walker, qtd. in Mitchell, 1994, p. 403). It is here that Walker (1983) and Hudson-Weems (1995) created an intervention in the discourse of feminism brought forth by Black feminist theorizing (although Walker recognizes the close relationship between the two).

Womanist scholars position womanism in particular as rooted in Black culture with a deep concern for the liberation of both Black men and Black women, rather than focusing its efforts on the discourses of patriarchy and gender-based oppression of 2nd wave feminism. Thus, one of the primary distinctions to be made between Black feminism and womanism is womanism’s commitment to pursuing the struggle against oppression in the Black community.

I will note here as well, that the term ‘Black woman’ to denote a woman of (non-White, non-Arab) African descent or ascent (Dillard, 2006) is highly contextual and contested, with ‘Black woman’ denoting women from all over the African diaspora. However, it is the work of African American women writers in particular that is being read widely across the world, as they have been at the forefront of producing texts, which argue that sexism and racism have historically contributed to the erasure of Black
women’s narratives in the United States. Therefore, both Black feminist approaches and womanist approaches (as well as the other aforementioned theoretical approaches) center Black women’s lives, experiences, and knowledges at the intersections of race and gender (as well as social class and geographic context). These approaches also take into consideration that many struggles toward racial liberation were predominately with Black men in mind, and first and second wave White feminist efforts often denied the importance of race (hooks, 1989). Yee (1992) notes that during the first wave of the feminist movement, particularly between 1830 and 1860, Black women abolitionists had established collective feminist thought that was embedded in their experiences of racialized oppression as well as sexism.

Taylor (1998) provides numerous examples of the erasure of Black women’s interests through White women’s efforts to achieve equality. She notes, for example: “African American women have struggled with White women on many political fronts. For example, in 1921, at the National Women’s Party Convention, Alice Paul received Black delegates’ complaints over disfranchisement with indifference” (p. 234). Thus, despite a 2nd wave feminist rhetoric of ‘sisterhood’ on the grounds of gender (Blay, 2008), the racialized and intersectional nature of social justice work moved to the forefront of Black feminist and womanist intellectual work. In the 1980s and 1990s, African American women (Hull, Bell-Scott, & Smith, 1982, Walker, 1983, hooks, 1989, Hill Collins, 1990) began to formulate theories that centered the lived experiences of African American women in the United States, oftentimes after having been educated in predominately White institutions, in which the work towards such theories was unwelcome (hooks, 1997).
Fleshing out Black Feminist Thought, Hill Collins (1990) identified four themes of Black feminism, all of which are based on the Black woman’s standpoint. The first theme describes Black women’s empowerment through self-determination, self-valuing, and the creation of positive images that ‘talk back’ (hooks, 1989) to negative portrayals of Black womanhood. The second theme relates to the interlocking nature of systems of oppression with which Black women are confronted. The third theme pertains to the interconnection of Black women’s intellectual thought and political activism, and the fourth and last theme describes Black women’s cultural history and knowledges, which provides them with the ability to resist domination (Hill Collins, 1990; Taylor, 1998).

These four themes can be used to historicize the political engagements of African American women (and Black women in White supremacist countries, such as the United Kingdom), as well as to provide a roadmap for Black women’s political engagements in the now. In educational research, Black Feminist approaches have been taken up by scholars who acknowledge that “because of racism, sexism, and class oppression in the U.S., African American girls are in multiple jeopardy of race, class and gender exclusion in mainstream educational institutions” (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). However, this is not always done through a Black Feminist framework, but rather through the employment of intersectionality as a theory, or Critical Race Theoretical approaches. The next section will provide some insight into some of the (epistemological) critiques that have been launched against Black Feminist Theory and Black Feminist Thought, in particular, and womanism.
Epistemological Critiques at the Intersections of Race and Gender

Audre Lorde (1984) reminds us “the master’s tools can never dismantle the master’s house” (p.112). This assertion certainly raises questions of epistemology, particularly when considering theories and practices that are steeped in Western thought, such as the Critical Theory approaches of the Frankfurt School that serve as a partial foundation of Critical Race Theory. Hill Collins (1990) work on Black Feminist Thought in particular has been critiqued for its explicit focus on the lives and works of African American women, thus truly making it African American Feminist Thought. Further, Blay (2008) notes that Hill Collins’ approach that includes global analyses of Black women’s experiences in order to better understand the lived experiences of Black women in the United States, presupposes a similar experience of gender and womanhood to that of White feminism, mainly one that is universal. In this way, Hill Collins’ theorizing normalizes U.S.-centric ways of experiencing gender and assumes it to be a universal one. Similarly, womanism has been critiqued for its U.S. centric view of gendered and racialized experiences (Blay, 2008), as well as the inclusion of Black men’s struggle into a framework that seeks to center the gendered experiences of Black women (Findlen, 1995). It seems, then, that Black feminist and womanist theorizing, despite its adoption by scholars in other countries, such as the United Kingdom (Young, 2000) inadvertently re-centers U.S. ways of being woman and Black, whilst at times pursuing internationalist claims.

The epistemologies of both race and gender, then, are deeply steeped within a U.S. context and historical frame of reference. Considering that race and gender work quite differently in other countries, this is
certainly no pitfall of the theory per se. However, scholars should be careful when applying these theories and the resulting practices to the lives of Black women from or in other countries, and must interrogate the ways their understandings of race and gender impact this work. Since Black feminist theorizing remains marginalized in educational research, I will next discuss Critical Multicultural Education as a theoretical and practical space in which this kind of theorizing may take place with a more pronounced emphasis on educational research and practice.

The Gist: Theoretical Frames

The goal of this dissertation study is to center both the voices of the participants, as well as the existing theoretical frames discussed at length above to explore the knowledge production at the intersections of race and racialization, gender, migration, and language and literacy. Each one of the theoretical frames that pertain to the study of these phenomena, including Black and Transnational feminism, Critical Literacy, and Anticolonial and Decolonial Theories, is useful, necessary, and productive with respect to framing the experiences of Black transnational women. Of course, applying a theory as a whole to one data set, let alone three theoretical lenses with their own complexities, approaches, and workings, is conversely counterproductive. Thus, this theoretical journey is as complex as the lives of women who operate in multiple languages, across multiple borders, and in multiple educational spaces.

In Chapter 2, I will outline those particular concepts—from the theoretical frames that I discussed in this first chapter—that lend themselves well to the exploration of the lives, complexities, and educational experiences of Black transnational women. This discussion will serve the purpose of developing a hybrid framework consisting of
anticolonial theory and Black/transnational feminism with implications for critical literacy.

In Chapter 3, I will discuss the methodology and methods used for this qualitative study. In particular, I will discuss the ways in which a transnational and decolonial methodology can be mobilized in educational research. With a focus on storytelling, inquiry, and writing, I will present the narratives of the participants through poetic transcriptions (Glesne, 1997) and Scholarly Personal Narrative writing (Nash & Bradley 2011), with the goal of illustrating the participants’ experiences without creating additional risks.

In Chapter 4, I will present and discuss my findings and data, as well as their implications for the hybrid theoretical framework developed in this study. The a priori themes that drove my study were the roles of racism, language and literacy, as well as the negotiation of identities in educational spaces with respect to the lives and narratives of the Black transnational women who participated in this study. These themes were complemented by those that emerged from the interviews, conversations, and observations: 1) The complexity of racial identity at the intersections, 2) the importance of community and its recreation, 3) the realization of an American dream that is rooted in educational access, and 4) the importance of language and literacy for making educational goals attainable. The findings of this study show that the knowledges of Black transnational women, particularly knowledges of race and racism are impacted by both the way race and racial hierarchies operate or do not operate in their countries of origin, as well as in the United States.
Finally, in Chapter 5, I addressed my research questions in detail, and offered conclusions and specific implications for theory and educational spaces that attend to the critical literacies and language pedagogies of Black transnational women.
Chapter 2 – Literature on the Specificity of Oppression: Contextualizing
Antiblackness, Misogynoir, and Black Immigrant Identity

Even a job as low as the service industry, you find it-
Like in the restaurant where I work,
I’m the only Black person in the dining room.
Everyone else is
working in the kitchen doing dishes, or doing prep or
something like that.
And times and after times,
you’ll see other Black girls or boys walk in trying to look for a job as a
hostess or as a server and they’ll tell them they’re NOT HIRING
but if a European or so walks in, then
all of a sudden a job opens up... [La’Naya, phone interview, September 7th, 2016]

La’Naya is cautious throughout the phone interview. She asks me, “Who else
is on the call,” right as I hit the record button on my laptop. I assure her that no one
but me is listening in, but I hear hesitation in her voice throughout our conversation. I
scribble what is she worried about? in my notes and later erase it, because, of course,
I know what she is worried about: Compromising her unfulfilled visa status. When I
ask her about her experiences with racism, she says it is “a daily occurrence, it is
everywhere” and ends it there. I follow up and ask if she would like to share
examples; she sighs deeply, pauses and says, “No, [pause] not really.” But then,
almost at the end of our conversation, she shares, concisely and astutely, the brief
insight into her experiences above, which, I argue, is indicative of racism as an
observable part of the everyday lives of Black women.
Although I will analyze this excerpt in chapter three (which is dedicated to data
analysis), I shared it at the beginning of this literature review because it is, indeed, a
perfect example of the everyday, systemic nature of racism, a conceptualization that I
will discuss in more detail later in this chapter. Before delving deeper into this chapter,
however, it is necessary that I provide a roadmap to explain why and how I have selected
the concepts I have chosen to discuss in the following pages. For one, I am strongly
borrowing from Critical Race Theory (CRT) because of the theory’s clear tenets that
have greatly impacted how race is discussed in the 21st century, particularly in the United
States, discussions that have found application beyond the borders of the U.S. Although I
have found the theory to be insufficient when it comes to addressing non-U.S.-based
contexts that shape the lives, identities, and educational experiences of Black
transnational women, some of its concepts are so central to and ubiquitous in
contemporary scholarship on race that any theorizing would be difficult and incomplete
without them.

For this reason, I am borrowing three concepts from CRT that I have found
particularly useful for understanding the workings of racism in the United States today:
(1) The idea that racism is systemic, endemic, and permanent; (2) The concept of
intersectionality; and (3) The idea that Whiteness and property are interconnected within
a capitalist system. After introducing and explaining these concepts, I will discuss the
concepts misogynoir and antiblackness in order to provide context for both terms, which
are becoming increasingly important for discussions of systemic oppression experienced
by Black women in the United States. I draw on these concepts by considering that the
participants in this dissertation study were selected due to their positioning within these constructs, rather than based on a shared experience with each other.

After the discussion of misogynoir and antiblackness, I will provide a discussion of the role of colorism in racial theorizing, as well as the proclaimed need of moving racial theorizing “beyond the Black/White binary”. In the sections to follow, I will also briefly write about the notion of epistemology as it relates to the knowledges of Black women. In so doing, I aim to frame Black women’s knowledges as produced at the intersections of racism, misogyny, and the crossing of borders. Finally, I will discuss the formation of a (diasporic) Black identity in relation to the United States as a national context. Overall, the goal of this chapter is to introduce concepts, terminology, and literature that will guide the process of understanding the experiences of the participants’ in this dissertation study.

**Conceptual Borrowings from Critical Race Theory: On Racism and Intersectionality**

The idea that racism is endemic and systemic is one crucial component of Critical Race Theory (CRT), which emerged from U.S. critical legal studies in the Post-Civil Rights era. While some scholars, such as Derrick Bell (1992) and Russel (1992), argue that racism is permanent and endemic, others believe that continuous critical race and social justice work may eventually lead to the erasure of racism and other systems of oppression (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002). However, most scholars of CRT agree that racism, still existing today, has merely changed its face. In other words, racism does not only materialize through overt practices, such as de jure racial segregation, lynching, and the racial cleansing of communities, as shown in the documentary *Banished* (Williams et
al., 2007), but it also manifests in subtle ways, such as in the hiring practices discussed by La’Naya in the data excerpt that opened this chapter. Overt race-based violence, including the brutal victimization of Black men and women by unjust police force (e.g., Freddie Gray, Tamir Rice, and Sandra Bland), is now only one (albeit perhaps the most terrifying) part of a larger more subtle, systemic construct. This construct is marked by verbal and/or physical micro-aggressions (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000), neoliberal practices (e.g., city zoning and resulting gentrification of neighborhoods of color), and discourses of meritocracy and colorblindness that elide the realities of systemic racism (Hill & Kumar, 2009).

In addition to the systemic, permanent, and endemic nature of racism referenced in the previous section, the concept of intersectionality is particularly important for the framing and analysis of the data in this dissertation study. Intersectionality is the understanding that identities are multiplicative, complex, and never limited to just one identity marker, such as race, class, gender, or sexual identity. Based on these multiple identity markers, individuals may experience oppression in certain contexts and benefit from privilege in others.

Legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw played an important role in the development of intersectionality, which has since been employed in a number of disciplines and contexts. In Mapping the Margins, which was published in 1991, she discusses the ways in which Black women were erased from discussions about race-based oppression, which centered Black men, as well as gender-based oppression, which centered White women. Attempts to protect Black men from stereotyping in the context of domestic violence erased the victimization of Black women as affected by domestic violence. In a letter to the Dean of
the Harvard Law School, Derrick Bell (2005) points out that as a Black man, he is not able to fully comprehend the specific challenges faced by women of color due to his positionality. Thus, despite his marginalization as a man of color, he acknowledges that his experiences differ from those of women of color.

Delgado and Stefancic (2001) define intersectionality as “the examination of race, sex, class, national origin, and sexual orientation and how their combinations play out in various settings” (p. 51). It should be noted here that most intersectionality scholars reject an additive model of how these factors interact and, instead, they prefer a model that shows the ways in which these factors interact in a matrix of oppression (Hill Collins, 1990). The notion of intersectionality helps to frame and understand the multiplicative nature of identities and allows for the examination of identities at the intersection of race, class, gender, ability, and nationality. According to McCall (2005), intersectionality is one of the most related concepts to women’s studies and other related fields. It has also influenced Black Feminists, such as Patricia Hill Collins.

By explaining oppression as a multi-layered experience, Hill Collins (1990) coined the term matrix of domination in Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and Politics of Empowerment. Opposing additive models and those that analyze oppression due to class, race, gender, or social status independently of one another, Hill Collins (2010) points out: “The significance of seeing race, class, and gender as interlocking systems of oppression is that such an approach that fosters a paradigmatic shift of thinking inclusively about other oppressions, such as age, sexual orientation, religion, and ethnicity” (p. 415). Despite its complexity, the concept of intersectionality can be used to combat essentialism, since it provides a model that no
longer forces analyses to center only one identity marker or experience, but rather looks at them relationally. Although CRT is not the theoretical framework taken up in this dissertation study, it does provide insight into important contemporary modes of analyzing and understanding racism at the intersections, particularly within U.S. contexts. Further, the theory emerged from epistemologies of race and gender that are particularly important for the study of Black transnational women’s narratives, identities, and educational experiences.

Employing Critical Race Theory to explore, analyze, and/or understand issues of race and racism that are not rooted in U.S. conceptualizations of race, however, can be difficult and oftentimes impossible. Despite its application in a number of fields and the usefulness of its individual tenets for understanding race and racism in a variety of contexts, the theory emerged from legal studies and remains deeply imbricated in the context of the United States. However, the idea that racism is systemic and that experiences and identities are intersectional (impacted by race, class, gender, language, immigration status, etc.), is one central epistemological underpinning of this dissertation study and the analyses to follow.

Sweet (1997) seeks to contribute to the debate of the emergence of racial superiority (and consequently racism) that predates chattel slavery and traces racist thought to precolonial Iberia. He notes that early Europeans used notions of culture to describe what initially evolved into 18th century and then contemporary concepts of race. Thus, he pushes back on Williams’ (1994) notion that racism was the result of slavery and primarily an ideological tool of capitalism. Rather, notions of superiority were contained in discourses about culture, which is why discussions on culture and race that
predate the 18th century could not be easily disentangled, yet reflect some of the same ideologies of White Supremacy that would later be taken up in the eugenics movement. This aligns with Ngai (2006), who notes that in intellectual discourse, race, people, and nation were often used interchangeably until the emergence of scientific racism, which considered race a biological fact, rather than a social construct. This was promoted, for example, through the development of social Darwinism after the publishing of The Origin of Species (1925) and the Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex (1981), as well as attempts of creating hierarchies based on evolution, such as the Great Chain of Being (Lesko, 2012). Despite the move toward a constructionist perspective, this type of “biologism” has also impacted racial discourse, as Black movements centered Africa as the place of origin for Blackness, and reified the discursive connection between Blackness and savagery (Rahier, Hintzen, & Smith, 2010).

Conversely, Smith (2016) argues that the concept of Blackness emerged as part of the logic of White Supremacy, based on which Black people are commodified through being rendered slaveable, either in the actual processes of slavery, or through other oppressive systems, such as the prison-industrial complex, all of which are rooted in capitalism. She notes: “The racial hierarchy tells people that as long as you are not Black, you have the opportunity to escape the commodification of capitalism” (Smith, 2016, p. 67). Without rendering Black bodies as commodities, erasing the Indigenous groups in settler states, and reproducing the discourses of Orientalism, White Supremacy would falter.

Although Smith’s (2016) discussion aims to highlight some of the issues that emerge with respect to women of color organizing and allyship, it also connects a few
key points that are crucial for considering transnational Black women’s educational experiences and narratives. For one, the notion that Blackness is inextricably linked to slaveability, which conversely means that Black identity only exists as a product of a global system of White Supremacy. According to Harris (1990), Whiteness, similarly connected to capitalism, has evolved “from color to race to status to property as progression historically rooted in White Supremacy and economic hegemony over Black and Native American peoples” (p.1714). Thus, within the U.S. capitalist system, Whiteness and Blackness are both directly linked to the notion of property, albeit on different ends of the spectrum.

While Blackness is linked to slaveability, Whiteness is linked to the ability to benefit from the slaveability of Black people and the erasure of Indigenous peoples. Given the linkages between Whiteness, (neoliberal) capitalism, and property, it is therefore no surprise that the desire to approximate Whiteness has also impacted communities of color. Research shows, for example, how skin-bleaching has developed into a billion dollar industry over the past decades (de Souza, 2008; Mire, 2001; Peltzer, Pengpid & James, 2016). Adopting the notion that Blackness is a concept directly linked to slaveability and the dehumanization of Black bodies, I will now delve deeper into the notions of anti-black racism and misogynoir as systems of oppression that affect Black women.

On the Specificity of Oppression: Anti-black Racism and Misogynoir

The term misogynoir was coined by Black, queer, feminist scholar Moya Bailey and has since been taken up by Black women, particularly in online spaces (e.g., blogs, online forums, etc.). According to Bailey (2013), she developed the term to center “the
specific violence of representational imagery depicting Black women” (p. 342). This is a particularly useful step toward deconstructing discourses that position, for example, “women of color” as an umbrella term for all non-White women, yet sometimes creates avenues in which anti-black racism is reproduced in these very spaces. Therefore, the term can be viewed as contributing to and extending the literature on intersectionality, as it centers Black women’s location at the intersections of anti-black racism and sexism.

Important in this discussion of misogynoir is a focus on colorism and skin-tone privilege, particularly as these concepts relate to the Black/White binary on which many scholarly U.S. discussions of race are organized. According to Trudy (2013), misogyny is systemic and institutionalized in the legal system and through rape culture, and, unlike sexism, can be proliferated by anyone. Misogynoir, operating similarly, works specifically to dehumanize Black women by reproducing racist and misogynistic tropes that, for example, explicitly normalize White women’s sexuality and bodies while positioning Black women’s sexuality and bodies as deviant and less than human.

Craig (2002), for example, notes that in the late 1960s, both Black and White women experienced misogyny or misogynistic representations; however, these experiences were racialized. With respect to events and venues that played a large role in developing beauty ideals, such as mainstream movies, beauty pageants, and advertising, for instance, Craig argues that while White women were objectified, Black women were excluded and thereby rendered as “non-beauties” (p. 5). Traces of this objectification continue to be carried forward in today’s discourses, especially in the media’s de-feminizing and dehumanizing comparison of dark-skinned Black women, such as Michelle Obama or Serena Williams, to apes (Lieberman, 2016). Thus, the term
misogynoir points to the specific oppression of Black women within larger discourses on race and gender, which makes it an important entry point into studying Black women’s lives, narratives, and experiences. Simultaneously, Black women’s specific positioning within the context of anti-black racism also points to the impossible nature of creating coalitions based on blanketeded notions of women’s oppression or racialized oppression that do not fully consider the logics of White Supremacy and how it infiltrates communities of color.

But what exactly is anti-black racism and what is the larger structure of antiblackness? As the term implies, anti-black racism is the specific form of systemic racism that positions Black people as less than human and as slaveable (Smith, 2016) because, as Wilderson (2010) claims, to be Black is to be “the very antithesis of a Human subject” (p. 9). Despite its global implications, much of the literature on antiblackness emerges from U.S. scholars and is grounded within research on U.S. American anti-black racism. Hence, antiblackness is steeped in the history of chattel slavery, in which Black people were rendered three fifths of a person and therefore quite literally regarded as less than human by the White dominant society, as well as minority groups (e.g., the Five Civilized Tribes of the Southeast) that benefited from chattel slavery (Krehbiel, 1993). This historical fact both cements the dehumanization of African descended people in the United States (along with the active participation of Africans who sold family members, community members, and friends; see Nunn & Wantchekon, 2009), and adds to the complexity of the history of slavery and the reality of the transatlantic slave trade.

9 I will discuss the concept of slaveability in more detail in the section on the Black/White binary and colorism.
According to Dumas (2016), antiblackness scholarship takes into consideration the following themes: (1) The suffering experienced by Black people; (2) The assault on Black bodies, both psychologically and materially; (3) The murder and surveillance of Black people; (4) The social death of the Black subject, with regards to the denial of humanity and full citizenship; and (5) The construction of Black people as a problem “for White people, for the public good, for the nation-state, and even as a problem for the (celebration of) racial difference” (p. 12). Scholarship on antiblackness, then, serves as a response to the efforts of liberal multiculturalism and multiracialism to celebrate difference, or sameness within difference, whilst simultaneously glossing over the histories of oppression and the totalizing forces, such as White Supremacy, that have shaped this difference.

However, giving scholarly consideration to the experience of Blackness is not a new approach. Fanon (1967) employed the term ‘epidermalization of inferiority’ to describe the internalization of White superiority, and conversely, Black inferiority, a process that, according to him, crushes Black self-esteem. One way this issue is expressed is through the preference of light skin or White features in communities of color. The next section will discuss colorism in more depth as well as the contented notion of seeking to move beyond the Black/White binary in racial discourse.

The Black/White Binary and Colorism

“Across cultures, darker people suffer most, why?” – André 3000 (2014)

A number of race scholars (Alcoff, 2003; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Perea, 1997) continue to lament the Black/White binary that dominates discussions (shaped by various CRT scholars) of race, privilege, and oppression in the United States. For
example, Delgado and Stefancic (2001) note that telling the story of race in the United States leads to the erasure of racialized questions that pertain to English only policies, immigration, and dual language education, which, they stipulate, “Asians and Latinos do not share with most Blacks” (p. 455). This notion indicates that the dominant narrative of race in the United States is one about chattel slavery and a struggle for civil rights, rather than one that accounts for a variety of racialized experiences of non-White citizens and immigrants.

Interestingly, in their attempt to create a more inclusive space for issues that pertain to non-Black people, Delgado and Stefancic (2001) all but erase the experiences of Black immigrants whose racialization is both rooted in anti-black racism and is important in discussions about English-only policies and immigration. Yosso (2004), on the other hand, notes: “By offering a two-dimensional discourse, the Black/White binary limits understandings of the multiple ways in which African Americans, Native Americans, Asian/Pacific Islanders, Chicanas/os, and Latinas/os continue to experience, respond to, and resist racism and other forms of oppression” (p.72). The limitation of “a two-dimensional discourse” with respect to the Black/White binary spurred the emergence of various outgrowths of CRT including LatCrit (Aleman, 2009; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001), TribalCrit (Brayboy, 2005; Haynes, 2008) and DisCrit (Connor, Ferri, & Annama, 2016).

In an effort to move beyond the Black/White binary and into more innovative scholarly engagements of race in the United States, critical race theorist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2004) asserted that contemporary race relations in the United States are moving toward a tri-racial model. He argues:
The U.S. is developing a tri-racial system with “Whites” at the top, an intermediary group of “honorary Whites”—similar to the coloreds in South Africa during formal apartheid, and anon-White group or the “collective Black” at the bottom. The “White” group will include “traditional” Whites, new “White” immigrants and, in the near future, assimilated White Latinos and other groups. The intermediate racial group or “honorary Whites” will comprise most White middle class Latinos (e.g., most Cubans and segments of the Mexican and Puerto Rican communities), Japanese Americans, Korean Americans, Asian Indians, Chinese, Americans, and maybe Arab Americans. Finally, the “collective Black” will include Blacks, dark-skinned Latinos, Vietnamese, Cambodians, Laotians, and maybe Filipinos. (Bonilla-Silva, 2004, p. 224)

Bonilla-Silva advocates for a re-imagining of racialization that operates along notions of skin-tone and other factors such as class and the ability to assimilate. He explores rather formalized categories of Black and White by adding ‘honorary Whites’ to this discussion. Although thought provoking, his assertion that the category Black should also include non-White Latinos and some Southeast Asian nationalities is interesting because, as seemingly echoed by André 3000’s quote that opens this section, it organizes oppression based on skin-tone, instead of ethnicity or nationality. Simultaneously, it contradicts Delgado and Stefancic (2013), whose aim of moving beyond the Black/White binary in CRT continues to adhere to traditional racial categories, as the assumption is that the kind of subjugation often connected with English-only policies and the immigrant experience is not something experienced by most Black people.

It is also aligned with Racial Formation Theory, which sees race as a fixed element of U.S. society, but considers race and racialized subjects as dependent on the political and historical landscape (Omi & Winant, 1995; Wun, 2016). Based on this notion, racialization is contextual and subject to changes and shifts over time. However, Bonilla-Silva’s (2004) discussion of future racial categories seems decontextualized, as it does not account for the longstanding history of antiblackness that is so deeply connected
with viewing Black bodies as slaveable. Wun (2016) argues that although analyses centering historical moments based on Racial Formation Theory are useful to provide context for contemporary scholars of race, they do not account for the specific nature of antiblackness, which consistently renders Black bodies as deviant, criminal, and slaveable, but is not hinged on a particular historical moment.

Further, as Smith (2016) points out, there are several flaws with the idea that analyses must somehow “overcome” or “move beyond” a Black/White binary. She notes that this idea elucidates analyses of White Supremacy, but rather centers a multicultural approach that seeks to include more voices in hopes of making it less racist. Meanwhile, however, the system of White Supremacy remains unexamined. Smith (2016) points out that in addition to Indigenous genocide and Orientalism, slavery and the slaveability of Black bodies is a central logic of White Supremacy, albeit not the only one. This notion is echoed by Sexton (2008), who notes that the desire to move beyond the Black/White binary is not only often rife with antiblackness; in addition, it also positions Black identity in what calls an “antiquated state of confinement” (Sexton, 2008, p. 6) to be overcome by the “multiracial imagined community” (Stephens, 1997, p. 175). Thus, attempting to move beyond the Black/White binary instead of providing analyses in conjunction with it automatically means moving beyond one of the ways of analyzing White supremacist ideology.

Outlining the dominant approaches to the study of race, Harris (2009) argues that currently, there are three approaches that dominate the scholarship: (1) The prejudice approach, which takes into consideration interpersonal dimensions of racism; (2) The White Supremacy approach, which considers the institutionalized and structural
implications of racism; and (3) The constitution of racism through economies of difference, which accounts for economies of color and skin-tone privilege. She argues that for some countries, such as Mexico or Brazil, discussions of skin color are more productive than discussions of race because of specific historical and cultural contexts. For this reason, she sees colorism and racism as independent of each other, albeit linked.

I would argue, however, that all three approaches are directly connected to each other. Thus, structural racism impacts interpersonal ‘prejudices’ as they are circulated discursively. Similarly, economies of color are impacted by White Supremacy, culminating in a system of colorism, which Glenn (2009b) defines as “the preference for lighter skin and social hierarchy based on skin tone” (p. 166). The concept of colorism is particularly important for analyses that focus on intra-racial relations in communities of color, or on communities that are predominately made up of people of color.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2013) also takes this notion up in her novel *Americanah*, which follows a dark-skinned Nigerian woman, Ifemelu, on her path through navigating education, life, and relationships in the United States, after which she eventually returns home. During her journey, she undergoes the process of becoming a Black woman, as she hails from the majority Black country of Nigeria. Her friend, Ginika, whose skin is lighter in hue, argues that skin tone affects how she, and Ifemelu, a dark-skinned Nigerian woman, are perceived by White people in the United States. She notes: “I was telling them about back home and how all the boys were chasing me because I was half-caste, and they said I was dissing myself. So now I say biracial, and I’m supposed to be offended when somebody says half-caste” (p. 151). Thus, although race may operate differently in other spaces, such as postcolonial Nigeria, access to
Whiteness through skin-tone privilege is viewed as desirable and as capital. Further, the above stated quote also shows the discrepancy in self and other forms of identification in relation to racial labels and identity markers, given that the center of analysis is race, generally, and skin-tone, particularly.

As the data will reflect in Chapter 4 of this dissertation study, concepts of U.S. racism may not have been the predominant mode for understanding oppression within the home communities of the participants, yet the majority of them shared experiences with colorism. Although the participants’ only point of commonality was their racialization in the U.S., they all did have common experiences, which connects to Allen’s (2001) argument that White Supremacy has impacted humanity so deeply that “[e]ven in countries where few Whites live, the influence of Whiteness and its inseparable tie to capitalism can be seen in the higher status that is placed on lighter skin” (p. 474).

Viewing White Supremacy as a globalizing and totalizing force that has permeated many societies across the globe highlights the important connection between colonialism and imperialism, on the one hand, and the belief in White superiority, which renders Black bodies as slaveable, on the other hand. As Leonardo (2004) notes:

> The literal reduction of Blacks to three-fifths invokes the parasitic figure of Whites, the representation of masculinity, and the specter of the bourgeois class. It is easy to see that the White supremacist, patriarchal, capitalist subject represents the standard for human, or the figure of a whole person, and everyone else is a fragment. (p. 139)

Although skin-tone privilege is an important point of analyses, it oftentimes shifts the center of analysis from White Supremacy to its consequences, keeping the root of the issue unquestioned and intact. The idea that light skin makes a person of color more valuable can be seen as directly linked to Smith’s (2016) belief that within White
Supremacist logic, Blackness equals slaveability and consequently dehumanization. Thus, distancing oneself from Blackness, or aspiring to do so, is one of the ways that people of color in many communities internalize White Supremacy and seek to mitigate their own oppression. Conversely, skin tone is perceived not independently, but in relation to an individual’s appearance, clothing, age, gender, etc., as well as histories of colonialism, subjugation, and domination (Harris, 2009). Colorism operates globally, yet relative to the histories and realities of place.

For example, someone considered to be a light-skinned Black person in the United States could be considered White in certain parts of West Africa, and the darkest person to be encountered in Germany. This idea follows Harris’ (2009) economies of color in which stratification is place-specific, and notions of “light” and “dark” are relative to the dominant group of the society under consideration. As previously implied, these notions are central to many communities of color, as skin-tone is oftentimes directly linked to upward mobility and status. Glenn (2009a) asserts that light skin can be conceptualized as “a form of symbolic capital, an asset that furthers one’s life changes” (p. 166). Thus, Whiteness, or distance from Blackness, is once again directly connected to property (see the discussion, above, on race and property).

After my effort of outlining the specific types of oppression faced by Black women (anti-black racism and misogynoir), I will now take a brief detour to discuss the concept of epistemology, particularly as it relates to Black women’s knowledges.

**Epistemology and Black Women’s Knowledges**

In her biomythography *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, Lorde (1982) writes of her mother:
She knew exactly how many of the imported goodies could be sucked and rolled around in the mouth before the wicked gum arabic with its acidic british teeth cut through the tongue's pink coat and raised little red pimples. She knew about mixing oils for bruises and rashes, and about disposing of all toenail clippings and hair from the comb. About burning candles before All Souls Day to keep the soucoyants away, lest they suck the blood of her babies. She knew about blessing the food and yourself before eating, and about saying prayers before going to sleep. (p.10)

I use this paragraph to open this section on epistemology and Black women’s knowledges to solidify Hill Collins’ (1991) assertion that “placing Black women’s experiences at the center of analysis offers fresh insights on the prevailing concepts, paradigms, and epistemologies of the [Eurocentric masculinist] worldview” (p. 221). Thus, centering Black women’s everyday cultural knowledges is a way of radically disrupting prevailing, dominant ways of what counts as knowledge and which knowledges are important. Lorde’s mother *knew* how to educate, heal, and raise her children in a culture that was not her own. Her knowledge of ‘mixing oils for bruises and rashes’ may not have been valued in academic spaces, but was of the utmost value in a household with children.

According to Koch (2005), “cultures tend to represent a dominant form of knowledge construction. This shapes the political and social conditions for its own dissemination” (p. 3). What counts as knowledge, then, is not only dependent on the cultural and societal context, but also on who holds the power within such contexts. Therefore, knowledge does not simply exist in the minds of knowers, but is constructed through social processes that are dictated by the power relations at play. Thus, scholars who subscribe to a constructionist perspective (Gergen, 1999; Koch, 2005) consider knowledge to be the result of a social process through which particular forms of
knowledge are validated and accepted by particular groups in society. The study of epistemology enters this conversation by seeking to understand these processes.

Gray (2013) argues, “ontology embodies understanding what is, epistemology tries to understand what it means to know. Epistemology provides a philosophical background for deciding what kinds of knowledge are legitimate and adequate” (p. 19). Theories, such as Critical Race Theory and Black Feminist Thought, as well as postcolonial and anticolonial theories, then, all have epistemological underpinnings that determine which knowledges count, how they are validated, and who is able to validate them. However, in addition to what knowledges count, the term epistemology may also signify “how we come to know things” (Bettez, 2010), and “why we believe what we believe to be true” (Hill Collins, 2008, p. 247). Therefore, epistemologies of race are the underpinnings of how we come to know our racialized identities and those of others, as well as how these identities are constructed across numerous socio-historical contexts.

In educational studies and research, the epistemologies that drive race and gender-based research mostly center the constructs racism, sexism, and heteropatriarchy and how they affect the formal schooling experiences of students, educational policies, and teacher education. At this point, I would like to explain what I mean when I speak of racism, sexism, and heteropatriarchy. For the discussion of the philosophical underpinnings of racism, I turn to Memmi (2000), who notes that although no one wishes to be known as a racist, racist discourses continue to be disseminated and repeated throughout numerous societies.

Memmi (2000) explores three basic assumptions that underlie racist discourses and beliefs, and therefore epistemologies: (1) The assumption that pure races exist; (2)
The assumption of biological superiority of pure races over races that are not pure; and
(3) The assumption that “these superiorities both explain and legitimize the dominance
and the privilege of the superior groups” (pp. 5-6). In short, Memmi, debunking these
three assumptions by illustrating that pure races do not exist, renders a moot point the
notion of superiority of certain races and the resulting system of privilege and dominance
afforded to particular racial groups. Of course, this analysis of how race should be seen
does not necessarily translate into the ways in which many societies socialize their young
people into reading biological traits, such as phenotypes, in conjunction with regional
origin to re-assert this dominance, even if it is founded on faulty assumptions.

On the other hand, Memmi (2000) does drive to the heart of the fallacy of racial
superiority: The instability of the concept of race, due to its contextual dependency; the
assumption of purity of any one race; the fallacy regarding regional distinction between
racial groups (as they interact and intermingle in most spaces); and the assumed
biological foundation of difference (despite its re-enforcement through contemporary
medical discourses, see also Smedley & Smedley, 2005). Thus, I adopt Memmi’s (2000)
explanations of the philosophy of racism and speak of racism as a system of oppression
that is steeped in the assumption that racial groups may dominate others based on
biological superiority of particular pure races. This assumption, then, has numerous
consequences for what constitutes knowledge and reality.

According to hooks (1989), “patriarchal domination shares an ideological
foundation with racism and other forms of group oppression” (p. 22). She positions
sexism as part of patriarchal domination, which, in turn, is only one part of “interlocking
systems of oppression” (hooks, 1989), and which means that sexism interacts with racism
and classism in such a way that we cannot work against one without also fighting the other. It is this intersectional approach that distinguishes Black Feminist approaches from 2nd wave White feminist approaches to combating sexism. This discussion of interlocking systems of oppression, particularly as they relate to race and gender, is further expanded by considerations of heteropatriarchy, which Arvin, Tuck and Morril (2013) define as “the social systems in which heterosexuality and patriarchy are perceived as normal and natural, and in which other configurations are perceived as abnormal, aberrant, and abhorrent” (p.13). Thus, the term heteropatriarchy expands the notion of patriarchal oppression by its heteronormative nature, thus rendering heterosexuality as non-deviant and all other ways of being as deviant.

The concept of heteropatriarchy is also indicative of the social construction of masculinity and femininity within a system of oppression that renders certain bodies and performances as acceptable and normal, and others as deviant. Scholars who consider systems of oppression to be interlocking (hooks, 1989; Hill Collins, 1990) thus call for contextual analyses of race, gender, and sexuality (as well as class and other factors) that consider their relation to each other. Thus, the belief that systems of oppression are interlocking (hooks, 1989; Hill Collins, 1990), intersectional (Crenshaw, 1993), and intercentric (Solórzano and Yosso, 2000) is part of many epistemologies of race and gender.

According to Espino (2012), epistemologies are deeply engrained into our cultures. She notes, “how we know what we know and what we value as knowledge is often predicated on who determines what knowledge is and how knowledge is shared” (p. 36). In other words, epistemologies drive what counts as our truth, reality, and
knowledge, as well as whose knowledges count and who does the counting. Researchers, particularly in the social sciences, should examine which epistemologies underlie their work, the theoretical frameworks on which they draw, and the methodologies and methods they employ. Epistemology as a term, then, denotes what people know and hold as knowledge, and how this knowledge is constructed. It is in this contentious space that some people are able to claim that they know racism and sexism no longer exist in society, while others can claim to know that they have experienced racism and sexism in numerous ways. Therefore, epistemologies are not only imbricated in culture, but also in the positionality of the knower.

Scheurich and Young (1997) and Tyson (1998) note that epistemologies themselves can be racist, which is part of the reason why historically the knowledges that were validated in institutions of higher learning and schooling were those of White men, who laid claim to being the holders of a singular Truth. On the other hand, and in part because White Supremacy has produced Otherness in the form of Blackness, or ‘being of color’, communities of color have always produced their own knowledges and lived their own truths through their lived experiences.

For example, W.E.B. (1964) writes, “[i]t is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (p. 3). Peeling back the layers of Du Bois’ statement reveals numerous thought-provoking notions. For one, it speaks to the ways in which epistemologies function. Du Bois uses double-consciousness to describe the conscious knowledge of Black people in the United States regarding how their bodies, lives, and experiences are viewed in the larger society:
with “amused contempt and pity” (p. 3). However, this is only one part of consciousness. On the other hand, this same person knows of her or his existence in an unjust society that is marked by structural racism and violent histories. At its core, the concept of double-consciousness hints at the existence of at least two epistemologies: One constructed by the White center, which positions people of color as deficient and inferior, and one that drives the resistance.

Similarly, Espino (2012) notes: “Scholars of color carry the burden of being ‘epistemologically bicultural’ while White scholars may never have to consider how Eurocentric epistemologies emerge from White contexts and culture” (p. 40). This epistemological bicultural existence of scholars of color, then, resembles the existence of double-consciousness in that it requires marginalized groups to do the double duty of knowing and understanding dominant epistemologies, as well as their own. As Gloria Ladson-Billings (2000) argues, “there are well-developed systems of knowledge, or epistemologies, that stand in contrast to the dominant Euro-American epistemology” (p. 258). Of course, the historical contexts of the settler colonial encounter in the United States, chattel slavery, and the resulting struggle for liberation have produced many of these epistemologies. Many people of color who analyze their experiences realize that racism continues to exist in their everyday lives. This constitutes a knowledge that is at contention with colorblind and post-racial epistemologies. As Hill Collins (2009) argues, “In producing the specialized knowledge of U.S. Black feminist thought, Black women intellectuals often encounter two distinct epistemologies: one representing elite White male interests and the other expressing Black feminist concerns” (p. 247).
If epistemologies differ depending on one’s standpoint and experiences, then, how knowledges are validated also depends on the epistemological standpoint of those who validate. According to Hill Collins (2008), knowledges in the U.S. academy and other institutions of formal education are validated based on the values of elite White men, knowledges that conflict with Eurocentric and androcentric values are often devalued and invalidated. It is through these processes of (in)validation that U.S. curricula can choose not to include the histories of Indigenous peoples, African Americans, Japanese internment camps, civilizations that pre-date European civilizations and others. This is the case simply because the knowledge of these histories and the oppressive experiences that are connected with them are not valued in educational spaces that center Europe and the decedents of (Western) European people as the site of valuable knowledge production.

(Im)migration, Racialization, and Black Identity

After the above discussions of (anti)Blackness and misogynoir, epistemologies, and the knowledges of Black women, I now return my focus on Black immigrants by providing a brief discussion of who is considered a Black immigrant in the United States, the interconnected history of race and immigration, as well as conceptualizations of identity, particularly Black identity. The goal of this section is to provide a contextualization for the data collected from Black transnational women.

As I am in the process of writing this section (Friday, January 27th, 2017), one of the participants reaches out to me after president Donald J. Trump’s announcement of an executive order that bans Muslim refugees from entering the United States. Naima’s husband has gone to Somalia to bring her mother and two sons back home. A staccato of
her frantic text messages lights my phone in the late evening hours, as she writes to me: “I am so confused and stressed”, “I can’t sleep”, “Please help me, I am so worried about my mother.” I read everything I can find about the executive orders, and try to calm her. Yet, part of me acknowledges that yes, her mother and family might be affected by these recent developments. Although I am not a Muslim woman, I understand that I, too, might be affected due to my student visa. As I consider how history is repeating itself and I seek information on Black immigrant/transnational women, I once again find that research that centers the voices of Black transnational women does not currently exist. Our voices remain largely absent from scholarly and media discourses about immigration and race.

Illustrating the intricate ways in which the social construct of racial categories impacts the lives of people of color in the United States, Ngai (2004) demonstrates the interconnectedness of 20th century immigration policy and contemporary discourses of illegality, race, and difference in the United States. In her book, Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America, she argues that the emergence of racial categories was a systemic process that was highly influenced by the sociopolitical context. She notes that before the 1920s there were no restrictions based on numbers and race when it came to immigration flows into the United States, which was a remnant of colonial mobility. Considering Smith’s (2016) assessment that the logic of White Supremacy requires the erasure of Indigenous peoples, the notion of freely accepting new settlers seems aligned with the colonial project in more ways than one. Thus, “[f]reedom of movement was a right acquired in Europe and North America with the emergence of capitalism, as peasants became unshackled from their places of birth and servants from
the authority of their masters” (Ngai, 2006, p. 17). Visa and quota systems, then, are both relatively new ways of regulating who could enter the United States, as numerical restriction was not introduced until 1921.

The Johnson Reed Act of 1924, which excluded immigrants from a number of Asian countries and eventually even required a literacy test that sought to reduce the number of uneducated and unskilled immigrants from European countries, was the first step toward monitoring immigration based on race and class (Ngai, 2006). Thus, immigrants were divided into “desirable” and “undesirable” categories (Wheeler, 2014) in terms of education, race, and religion. Impacted by chattel slavery and colonialism, the history of immigration, then, played a crucial role in the production of racial categories and hierarchies, by, for example, employing a quota system that “constructed a White American race, in which persons of European descent shared common Whiteness distinct from those deemed to be not White” (Ngai, 2006, p. 25). Today’s discourse on immigration in the United States is largely dominated by the desire to control the Southern borders, for example, by building a wall between the U.S. border and Mexico.

However, the notion of who is a desirable immigrant (educated, preferably White, documented visa status), and who is not (lacking formal education, non-White, undocumented visa status) remains intact. According to president Trump’s (2016) proposed immigration reform, “[t]he influx of foreign workers holds down salaries, keeps unemployment high, and makes it difficult for poor and working class Americans – including immigrants themselves and their children – to earn a middle class wage” (https://assets.donaldjtrump.com/Immigration-Reform-Trump.pdf). Thus, the assumption that incoming migrants contribute to keeping salaries low and unemployment high for
poor Americans operates on the assumption that the vast majority of incoming migrants are competition, not necessarily for middle class Americans, but also for ‘poor and working class Americans.’

With respect to immigrants from Africa, Konadu-Agyemang and Takyi (2006) note that paired with racism, the difficulty of obtaining a visa used to be the primary reason as to why the numbers of African immigrants were rather low in the 1990s. This indicates that one must take into consideration both the systems at play (policies, laws, discourses) as well as race and racialization at the individual and community level. Ngai’s (2004) work is also indicative of the importance of context. Hence, any analysis that concerns itself with race must also take into consideration the spatial, political, and cultural contexts that impact the ways racial categories are constructed. According to Clark (2003) and Moore (2013), the primary reason people immigrate into the United States is to improve their lives. Of course, this improvement is often necessitated by histories of colonialism and neocolonialism, which continue to impact the economies of many of the countries from which large numbers of migrants hail. According to Massey, Mooney, and Torres (2007), “The number of Black immigrants has more than doubled over the past decade, and Afro-Caribbeans (persons from non-Spanish-speaking islands in the West Indies, such as Jamaica and Trinidad) now comprise around 70 percent of a foreign-born Black population of 2.1 million” (p. 245). This development raises questions about identity formation, educational spaces, and the discourse of immigration that often erases Black immigrants.
Research on Black Immigrants and Identity

The population increase of Black immigrants in the United States from 80,000 in the 1980s to roughly 3.7 million in 2014 (Morgan-Trostle & Zheng, 2016) has prompted a small number of studies and books dedicated to Black immigrants as a population. These studies use both qualitative and quantitative approaches and they employ a variety of theoretical frameworks. The population increase has also necessitated ongoing engagements with the notion of diaspora and Black identity, as they are at the center of these studies. Rahier, Hintzen, and Smith (2010) employ the concept of Black consciousness in order to theorize Black identities and knowledges as flexible and not bound by place. They note:

Someone is “Black” not on the basis of being West Indian, or Jamaican, or African American, or African, or Black British but by the virtue of Black consciousness embedded in the materialities of the social, political, and cultural geography produced out of the universality of hegemonic ruling ideas of Supremacy inscribed through the violence of White commandment. (Rahier, Hintzen, & Smith, 2010, Introduction, p. xix)

This Black consciousness-based and diasporic approach to understanding Blackness avoids the conundrum of theorizing Black identities and experiences through the nation, or country, of origin. Diaspora, then, constitutes a metaphor that creates a space in which identities and movement can be considered across the boundaries of nation states. A diasporic Black identity is produced by the experiences with antiblackness and White Supremacy, whilst allowing the flexibility of difference. It allows for the recognition of the diversity of experiences with respect to social class, gender, and location, whilst centering a common place of origin (the imaginary of Africa) as a point of connection for organizing, resistance to systems of oppression, and
understanding.

Konadu-Agyman, Takyi, and Arthur (2006) also employ a diaspora-based approach in their edited volume entitled, *The New African Diaspora in North America*, which centers what they call the ‘new African diaspora.’ The volume considers both the United States and Canada, and employs a theoretical framing that is rooted in the concept of diaspora. They consider the concept of returning home, spiritually and physically, as well as the understanding that migration is based on patterns by Africans that are shaped by “push forces” (unfavorable conditions in home country) and “pull forces” (other countries attract migrants from those countries).

The circumstances that prompt migration, according to Konady-Agyman, Takyi and Arthur (2006), include “the lack of jobs, extreme poverty, political instability, military coup d’états, ethnic conflicts, deteriorating socio-economic fabric and natural disasters” (p. 14). They also note the role of the Structural Adjustment Programs of the World Bank and IMF as economic push factors that impacted Africa in the 1980s, particularly as they affected African economies. Their description of the new African diaspora in relation to African immigrants who were prompted to come to the United States between the 1970s and today, excludes the descendants of former African diasporas and those whose ancestors were brought to the Caribbean and South America as part of the transatlantic slave trade, who are now also immigrating to the United States.

The central paradigm of “push-pull” factors is also echoed by Moore (2013), whose study of the American Dream from the perspective of African immigrants found that although research suggests that maximizing income through migration is a primary reason to leave one’s home country, none of her participants cited economic reasons as
their reasons for coming to the United States, many of whom sought to further their education. This idea disrupts dominant notions of the American Dream, or America’s attractiveness as a country that primarily has to do with economic benefits. Thus, the American Dream extends beyond the desire to attain economic advantages.

Considering the small number of studies that take into account Black immigrant lives and experiences, even fewer studies focus on Black immigrants from the Caribbean or South America. However, a recent report entitled State of Black Immigrants (Morgan-Trostle & Zheng, 2016) highlights the challenges experienced by this population. The report defines a Black immigrant as:

…Any person who was born outside the United States, Puerto Rico or other U.S. territories and whose country of origin is located in Africa or the Caribbean. Where Census data is available, the definition of “Black immigrant” is any person who was born outside the United States, Puerto Rico or other U.S. territories and self-identified as “Black or African American alone” in 2000 and later U.S. Census Bureau surveys. (Morgan-Trostle & Zheng, 2016, p. 7)

Based on this definition, the institutional identity marker of “Black immigrant” is primarily related to birthplace or to self-identification based on U.S. notions of Black identity in the census. It also highlights some of the complicated relationships among the nation, race, and citizenship, a point that is echoed by scholarship on antiblackness (Dumas, 2016). Rahier, Hintzen, and Smith (2010) contend that the concept of diaspora can serve as a space of exploration with respect to how Black people engage their relationship with the nation state and its ideological underpinnings. They argue that “diaspora was forged through the history of movement across local and national boundaries, giving rise to the need for flexible accommodation in the face of “place-bound” fixity (Introduction, p. xvii). Diaspora, then, allows for considerations of
connections based on a Black consciousness that moves beyond the borders of the nation-state, whilst remaining within its borders or crossing them. It centers the common origins and culture from a shared homeplace, Africa, as well as from shared experiences with violence, White Supremacy, and oppression (Rahier, Hintzen, & Smith, 2010). Additionally, the notion of diaspora does not make connections based on a Black identity, per se (as posited by Smith (2016) Blackness is connected to slaveability), but rather based on a movement that centers a shared homeland, cultural heritage, and identity, despite the diversity that may reside within experiences.

Waters (1999) argues that “[a]rriving as a stranger in a new society, the immigrant must decide how he or she self-identifies, and the people in the host society must decide how they will categorize or identify the immigrant” (p. 44). Based on this assertion, identities are not only self-inscribed, but also institutionally imposed by government agencies. Employing a conceptual approach that draws on the notion of the rhizome, Ibrahim (2014) stipulates that Black immigrants undergo the process of becoming Black in North America. This process is mediated by the immigrants’ appropriation of African American cultural expressions (e.g. rap music, African American Language), which may occur in partial and decontextualized ways, and is always performative (Butler, 2004) and mediated by language.

The decontextualization may stem from the lack of a race-based identity in the home country (meaning that race is not a defining factor, while class, tribe, or region may be at the forefront), or the dominance and impact of Black American music, culture, and fashion across the media from around the world. Following Deleuze and Gattari (1987), a rhizomatic approach to identity, or “assemblage”, recognizes its fluid, complex, and
dynamic nature; therefore, people are always in a constant state of becoming. Based on this conceptualization, there is no “core identity” that has traceable origins, but rather a rhizome with “a middle (milieu), from which it grows and which it overspills” (p. 21).

Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) poststructuralist approach to theorizing identity, however, is not the only one. Grounded in symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969; Stryker, 1980), identity theory, for example, focuses on social behavior, and explains it as constituted through the relation of the self and society. Based on this notion, the self is a product of interaction (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995), or as Norton (2000) describes it, “how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (p. 5). This conceptualization differs from structuralist understandings of identity, which stipulates that there exists an inner or core self (Hall, 1996); such understandings have been critiqued for not centering social interaction and ideologies as primary impacts of how identities are developed and/or imposed.

Gee (2001), on the other hand, provides a four-way model of identity, or being “a certain kind of person” (p. 100). He notes that this model focuses on: (1) Nature identity; (2) Institution identity; (3) Discourse identity; and (4) Affinity Identity (important to note here is that affinity identity is emergent in contemporary capitalist societies). Employing a model that takes into consideration process, power, and the source of power, Gee positions “nature identity” or “our nature” as a conceptualization of identity that is shaped by natural forces and “institution identity”, on the other hand, is regarded as a position within an institution. “Discourse identity” is an individual trait recognized and reproduced through discourse, and “affinity identity” is based on shared experiences. He
goes on to note that while these are not discreet categories, but are interwoven, they may all be at play in a person’s actions or interactions. Additionally, while Western thought once placed more value on the concept of nature identity, it shifted to institution and discourse identity, respectively, which coincides with notions of the post-structuralism. Finally, (2002) employs the concept of ‘translocational positionality’, which moves away from the notion of “‘categories’ of gender, ethnicity, and class, which then intersect... and instead pays much more attention to social locations and processes” (p. 5). Employing a translocational lens of studying migrant’s experiences, then, allows for the understanding that they are not bound to one location or positionality, but rather, that belonging and identification are both contextual and situated.

Although there are other approaches to the notion of identity and identity formation, the focus of this dissertation study is on how the lives, experiences, and narratives of Black immigrant women necessitate a conceptualization of identity as imbricated in language, as fluid, performed, and dependent on the contexts we navigate (see Ibrahim, 2014). However, I also utilize Gee’s (2001) approach to understanding the various systems at play in developing identities, and I pay attention to the institutions that ascribe certain identity markers (student, professor, English Language Learner) and the discourses that shape how people see themselves. Together, these conceptualizations raise questions about the meanings of identities when people leave their homes and become Black women in the United States. In other words, these conceptualizations help me to think about what it means to become Black in a settler colonial state whose history has positioned Blackness as connected to slaveability.
Studies on Black immigrant adults and youth (Coleman-King, 2014; Ibrahim, 2014; Waters, 1999) that take into consideration first and second generation immigrants have shown how problematic racialization can be when it comes to entering the cultural context of the United States, in which Black culture is generally synonymous with African American culture, and Blackness is so closely tied to dehumanization and slaveability. Given the impact of American film and media abroad, these messages about Blackness and the position of Black people in the system of White Supremacy are often subtly, but firmly circulated before travelers or immigrants ever set foot onto U.S. soil.

Waters (1999) notes that the West Indian participants in her study often used the qualifier of being West Indian, Jamaican, immigrant, or Black in order to highlight that they are different from African Americans. Thus, despite identifying as Black, they did not center their racial identity as a place of solidarity with African Americans; rather, “for most of them assimilation to Black America was downward mobility” (p. 63). This subtle distancing of Black immigrant identity from African American identity, particularly in order to elevate oneself, is a recurring theme in research on the identities of Black immigrants (Coleman-King, 2014; Rahier, 2003).

Indeed, research has shown that Black immigrants who come to the United States are generally successful in educational and professional spaces when compared to their African American peers (Massey et al., 2007; Waters, 1999; Sakamoto, Woo, & Kim, 2010). However, as Coleman-King (2014) notes, this success usually declines in the second generation as “[t]heir increased integration into the U.S. social milieu stymies immigrants’ optimism, work ethic, and ability to thrive within a system deluged by social barriers” (p. 21). Thus, the very process of becoming a Black American, including the
oppressive forces that shape this particular identity, impact Black youth of Caribbean
descent. The efforts of first generation Black immigrants to distance themselves from
Black Americanness as they seek to resist Black people’s positioning as inferior in the
face of White Supremacy, usually falter in the face of the next generation. This
discussion necessarily requires that I revisit, briefly, the concept ‘transnational’ as an
identity marker that provides the space for a wider range of experiences that the term
‘immigrant.’

From Black Immigrant to Black Transnational

This final section revisits the notion of “transnational” as a way to describe the
notes that much of U.S. immigration theory has produced and reproduced a “hegemonic
narration of U.S. immigration and national belonging” (p. 23). Based on this hegemonic
narration of history, European immigrants came to the United States, remained here, and
built a successful nation-state. She points out that this dominant narrative erases the large
number of European immigrants who returned home, and also that those who stayed did
not necessarily give up their ties to their home countries, but remained involved in them.
The logic of U.S. citizenship when regarded this way, then, requires the erasure of that
which does not align with American exceptionalism, or the desire of those who come
here to maintain their own identities, which may or may not be tied to other nation-states
or cultural perceptions of their ethnicities, race, or identities overall. A transnational
framework, as discussed more at length in Chapter 1, challenges this mono-directional
way of conceptualizing immigration and migration, as it allows for considerations of the
ties, cultural practices, and identities that are maintained, contested, imported, or muted in the context of analysis.

Coleman-King (2014) argues that “a transnational perspective allows us to move away from deterministic and static notions of Blackness to incorporate a wider array of diasporic realities” (p. 10). I would argue that by replacing the term ‘immigrant’ with the term ‘transnational’, possibilities for considering identities, experiences, and erasures are opened up that are often limited by who an immigrant is based on the law. For example, a college student on a student visa who resides in the United States for years is not an immigrant, yet may be required to reckon with similar issues of racialization and social positioning as a green card holder. Thus, I will henceforth employ the term transnational as an identity, rather than immigrant, in order to accommodate a wider range of experiences.

**Conclusion**

This chapter aimed to provide an overview of the central theoretical and scholarly considerations related to the lives of Black women who come to the U.S. from other countries. The review of literature sought to synthesize work on the epistemologies, identities, and contexts of oppression experienced by Black transnational women, particularly as it relates to anti-black racism within the contexts of education. The effort of this review was to provide a solid foundation and context for the subsequent discussion of data. Central to this discussion were the notions of diaspora as an imagined concept that lends itself to understandings of contemporary Black consciousness. In the next chapter, I will outline my methodology, which is rooted in the idea and framing of
decolonization, in order to further expound upon the concepts discussed in this literature review
Chapter 3: Methodology: Toward an Anticolonial, Black, Transnational Scholarly Personal Narrative Methodology

I can count the times I physically reacted to writing on one hand. I read Americanah by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in a lonely hotel room in Eastern Anatolia (Turkey) and held my breath at the descriptions of isolation and pain. I did not desire food while reading Yaa Gaazi’s (2016) novel Homegoing, because it was intellectually nourishing. Additionally, I felt anger and repulsion rise and remain in my body when I read Malinowski’s (1922) Argonauts of the Western Pacific. In his text, he writes:

[i]magine yourself then, making your first entry into the village, alone or in company with your White cicerone. Some natives flock round you, especially if they smell tobacco. Others, the more dignified and elderly, remain seated where they are. Your White companion has his routine way of treating the natives, and he neither understands, nor is very much concerned with the manner in which you, as an ethnographer, will have to approach them. (p. 4)

Heralded as a seminal piece of early ethnography, the volume from which the above excerpt stems is also a glaring example of the White gaze in research, which renders “natives” as nothing more than an undignified flock attracted to the researcher because of the smell of tobacco. In this case, the ethnographer’s role is to travel to foreign lands to study “the natives” by using observations, a detailed researcher diary, maps, and other artifacts. Given this history of ethnographic endeavors, Smith’s (1999) assertion, which is appropriate to note, is that “from the vantage point of the colonized...the term ‘research’ is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism” (p. 1).
And, although the goal was to understand ‘the native’s point of view’ (Malinowskki, 1922/1950), this was done to aid Western understandings at best, and to seek further evidence of Western superiority at worst. Upon reading Malinowski’s work, I knew that I wanted to avoid emulating this kind of qualitative research at all cost and to be mindful of its traces in contemporary work. Smith (1999) reminds us of the deep interconnection of early European imperialism and ethnographic research. She argues: “Travellers’ stories were generally the experiences and observations of White men whose interactions with indigenous ‘societies’ or ‘peoples’ were constructed around their own cultural views of gender and sexuality” (p. 8). Thus, Malinowski’s work, which includes volumes such as *The sexual life of savages in North-Western Melanesia: An ethnographic account of courtship, marriage, and family life among the natives of the Trobriand islands, British New Guinea* (Malinowski, 1929/1957), contributed to these one-sided and biased constructions of gender and sexualities through the eyes of European researchers. Of course, ethnography has come a long way since then. Ethnographers of color (Abu-Lughod, 2008; Madison, 2006), White feminist ethnographers (Stacey, 1988), feminist ethnographers of color (Boylorn, 2013), and other minoritized ethnographers invested in disrupting the power imbalance that originated from these early approaches have reshaped what it means to conduct ethnographic research.

In this dissertation study, then, I consider both the context of colonialism and imperialism that has affected and that continues to affect many communities of color across the world. I also consider the gender dynamics that were created by these contexts. Doing so allows me to adequately address the research questions by utilizing methods involving audio taped conversational interviews, participant observations, and the
collection of artifacts that reflexively address and disrupt the above-discussed histories of research in the name of domination. It is in this effort that I turn to methodologies that were created in response to European imperialism and White Supremacy. Intentionally, I sought methodologies that explicitly aimed to humanize instead of dehumanize (Paris, 2013), methodologies that were anti-racist, anti-oppressive, anticolonial, and feminist. In short, I sought methodologies that would allow me to center the experiences of Black transnational women and represent their narratives while considering the contexts that shape them. Before discussing these methodologies in further detail, I will provide a foundation for this discussion by positioning myself as a researcher-participant-friend.

The following section serves two purposes: (1) To engage in a reflexive process required by the critical qualitative methodologies discussed; and (2) To clarify epistemological leanings, subjectivities, and understandings that have impacted both the methodology and the methods of this dissertation study.

**Researcher Positionality**

At its core, this dissertation study is a womanist, Black/Transnational Feminist, anticolonial endeavor. It may seem as though I struggle to identify adequate terms, because I do. I am aware of Womanism’s and Black Feminisms primary investment in the particular experiences of African American women. As a biracial Black woman, and temporary visa holder from Germany, I am rarely comfortable claiming these identities for myself; however, I do subscribe to the beliefs, approaches, and epistemologies. I am hesitant to claim what is not designed with me in mind, because Black and Indigenous peoples already have so little that is not being appropriated and cannibalized by “mainstream” culture. I was never fully able to claim German citizenship due to my race
(El-Tayeb, 2011), or Jamaican identity because I was mostly raised in Germany. I have never identified as White, but after coming to the United States I began using the disclaimer ‘biracial’ in front of my Black identity. I say this because I believe that my both/and instead of either/or approach to my own identity allows me claim particular strains of feminism and anticolonial theorizing to guide my research without feeling the need to identify myself.

In this dissertation study that seeks to center the educational experiences, identities, and knowledges of Black transnational women through qualitative and narrative approaches, I position myself as a participant-researcher, an outsider within (Hill Collins, 1986), and as family/friend. Hill Collins (1986) contends that Black women are outsiders within academia because U.S. academia typically normalizes White male experiences. She derives this notion from sociological standpoint theory used to describe both the researcher’s position within a community as well as in institutions. At the same time, those who are part of a community have access to collecting data and interpreting them in ways that may not be accessible to those who are outsiders (Brown, 2012).

As a biracial Black international student and ESL teacher, I believe that I inhabit insider and outsider status among the participants, although my insider status is more salient. While the participants do not all know each other or maintain relationships with each other, I have been maintaining long-term relationships with all of them for years. I have encountered some of them in a professional capacity as an ESL teacher, doctoral student, or in formal educational spaces; others are family members and friends, or both. I live in the same neighborhood as some of my participants and I share a visa status with others. At the same time, our experiences with Black womanhood and education vary
depending on other intersections, such as country of origin, region, social class, or religion.

I share with them my privileges as cisgender women who lead heterosexual lives. On a larger scale, I share with them the complicated positionality as “people of color who enter/are brought into the settler colonial nation-state [and] also enter the triad of relations between settler-native-slave” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 17). As I will discuss in more detail later, I am by virtue of my positioning as a biracial Black transnational woman from Germany, a settler (at least for the moment) in the United States. Therefore, a methodology, meaning the theory behind the methods employed, that corresponds to the theoretical frameworks of this dissertation study requires the consideration of: (1) Transnational methodologies; (2) (Women of color) feminist methodology; and (3) Critical approaches to narrative inquiry. I selected these methodological approaches in correspondence with the theoretical framework that undergirds this study.

**Notes on subjectivity, reflexivity and the Self.** Central aspects of all methodological considerations in critical qualitative research are subjectivity and reflexivity. This is in stark contrast to a positivist paradigm, in which the goals are the objective generalizability of findings to the larger population and the attainment of Truth (Hill Collins, 1990). In a positivist paradigm, then, researchers must be detached from the object of their study and they must by neutral. Hill Collins (1990) argues that “such criteria ask African-American women to objectify ourselves, devalue our emotional life, displace our motivations for furthering knowledge about Black women, and confront in an adversarial relationship those with more social, economic, and professional power” (p. 256). However, as Abu-Lughod (1993) points out, generalization has also driven parts of
ethnographic and qualitative research, as it sought to explore cultures and societies in order to create general understandings of different cultures. Making an argument for the particular, rather than the general, she notes: “Generalization, then, can make these ‘others’ seem simultaneously more coherent, self-contained, and different from ourselves than they might be (Abu-Lughod, 1993, p.7). Conversely, qualitative research conducted by, for, and/or with Black women\(^\text{10}\) that seeks to validate our experiences with both racism and sexism should center our subjectivities, be guided by ethics and values, and be considered valuable, even without having to defend itself through ‘adversarial debate’ from those who engage in the production of dominant knowledge.

Hence, subjectivity is a central aspect of contemporary qualitative research, and it opens up to the co-existence of multiple truths and realities. Callaway (1992) views reflexivity in research as “opening the way to a more radical consciousness or self in facing the political dimensions of fieldwork and constructing knowledge...reflexivity becomes a continuing mode of self-analysis and political awareness” (p. 33). Based on this assertion, reflexive research both acknowledges the self and the political dimensions, or larger contexts that impact the epistemologies, methodologies, and theories on which it is based.

Qualitative researchers are therefore not objective, detached observers, but implicated in the process and subjective interpreters of the data. Reflexivity, then, is both about the self, as well as its relation to others. Distinguishing between 20 different selves

\^\text{10} I am aware of Hill Collins’ specific use of African-American women and understand that Black Feminist Thought is specifically designed to center the experiences of African-American women. However, since the U.S. context also impacts this research study, I believe that the consideration of positivist criteria also applies here.
that emerged from her ethnographic inquiry, Reinharz (1992) argues, the researcher-self is both brought to the field, as well as newly constituted by the field and situational.

In this dissertation study, the selves I brought to the research process included researcher, international student, non-immigrant visa holder, friend, English tutor, neighbor, colleague, family member, intersectional feminist, academic, and mother. These selves were all, of course, only relevant in relation to the other participants in the research and they impacted the development of the study, the data collection process, my ethical considerations, and the process of re-presenting the data.

Based on this reflexive process, I also drew on decolonizing and transnational methodologies, women of color feminist epistemology/methodology, and critical narrative inquiry/scholarly personal narrative writing to design this study and collect, interpret, analyze, and present the data. I came to the conclusion that all of these methodological approaches would be necessary for me to consider if I wanted to adequately explore Black transnational women’s experiences from a perspective that is rooted in anticolonial, (women of color) transnational, critical literacy and narrative approaches. While the bringing together of large methodologies may seem unwieldy, many of them do share one goal: to prevent the dehumanization of participants and to critically engage their narratives whilst situating them within larger contexts. I will discuss each of these frameworks in relation to this study and in relation to each other in the following sections.

**Decolonizing and Transnational Methodological Approaches**

Conducting educational or other social scientific research in a settler colonial space such as the United States and seeking to employ methodologies that interrogate,
reject, or counter colonial practices, requires a number of theoretical, methodological, and epistemological considerations. For one, it requires consideration of the complexities of the (settler) colonial encounter, especially since decolonization has different goals based on the context of the colonized space. Tuck and Yang (2012) discuss these goals by first distinguishing between external colonialism and internal colonialism. External colonialism requires the seizing of foreign land and peoples for military purposes, the creation of borders, and the exploitation of natural resources, including people. Internal colonialism, on the other hand, focuses on the colonial efforts within the imperial nation, including modes of control that ensure the security and success of the nation. Settler colonialism, then, has both external and internal characteristics, since the colonizer, or settler, is present in the same space as the colonized.

Thus, in a settler colonial space, anyone who is not Indigenous, even if they were brought to that space or ended up there due to the effects of external colonialism in their own countries, can be deemed a settler. Settler colonialism, then, works both internally (by erasing Indigenous peoples, appropriating and exploiting land, etc.) and externally (neo-colonial, militarized efforts of the nation-state to secure foreign resources). Tuck and Yang (2012) thus invite us to critically engage the term ‘decolonization’, as it has been frequently used as a metaphor in recent educational discourse. They note that scholars often “make no mention of Indigenous peoples, our/their struggles for the recognition of our/their sovereignty, or the contributions of Indigenous intellectuals and activists to theories and frameworks of decolonization” (pp. 2-3). Decolonization as a term, then, is often used in ways that are divorced from those who developed it
(Indigenous peoples) and employed simply as synonymous with anti-racist or anti-oppressive scholarly pursuits.

The effort of pursuing decolonization on the part of non-Indigenous people, then, requires thoughtful action and responsibility, particularly for people of color who are required to reckon with their position within the colonial relations that have produced natives, settlers, and slaves. Hence, anyone who enters a settler colonial space, such as the United States, is implicated as either a settler (by buying into the modes of the nation-state and Whiteness) or as a criminalized intruder by remaining undocumented (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

Conversely, Dei (2006) notes that the very effort of “decolonization” invokes a notion of colonialism as a past grievance that is now sought be undone. He uses the term ‘anticolonial’ to denote the kind of theorizing and research practice that rejects colonial practices and engages the situated knowledges of colonized subjects without imposing a Eurocentric lens onto their knowledges. Therefore, exploring the best ways to represent the voices and knowledges of people whose lives continue to be impacted by the historical and contemporary implications of imperialism should be a central part of decolonizing and anticolonial approaches to qualitative research.

Thus, anticolonial and women of color feminist approaches to qualitative research (Carlson, 2016; Patterson et al., 2016) must inadvertently aim to consider both empire and Indigeneity, as well as the geopolitical and socio-historical contexts that have shaped contemporary spaces of knowledge production, such as curricula, educational policies, and the ways educational institutions operate. What also must be considered, however, is
the knowledge production that emerges from the absence or presence and visibility or invisibility of bodies of color in predominately White spaces and institutions.

Although this circumstance is highly contextual, it is very much shaped by chattel slavery, European imperialism, and migratory flows that were shaped by the latter. Finally, an anticolonial or decolonial methodology requires the engagement of the complexities outlined by Tuck and Yang (2012), particularly with respect to the scenarios that render immigrants and those with transnational engagements either as settlers or as criminalized subjects. For this dissertation study—whose goal is to center the experiences of Black transnational women with consideration of the contexts of European colonialism and White Supremacy that shape them—the methodological implications are primarily rooted in the acknowledgement of the specific context that renders us temporary or permanent settlers, colonized subjects, and people who are implicated in, as well as victimized by, White Supremacy.

Carlson (2016) outlines eight principles of an anti-colonial methodological frame for settlers under consideration of Indigenous, feminist, anti-racist, Critical Race Theory (CRT), and participatory action/activist research approaches: (1) Resistance to and subversion of settler colonialism; (2) Relational and epistemic accountability to Indigenous peoples; (3) Land/Place engagement and accountability; (4) Egalitarian, Participatory and Action-Based methods; (5) Reciprocity; (6) Self-determination, Autonomy, and Accountability; (7) Social location and Reflexivity; and (8) Wholism.

Although it may not be easy to attend to all of these principles evenly and equally well, they will drive my inquiry both in terms of its design and the analytical processes engaged. In addition to the implications of decolonial and anticolonial methodological
approaches, transnationalism also has implications for the methods employed for the study of experiences, lives, and identities that are not only shaped by the crossing of borders, but also by maintaining potential allegiances, roots, and connections in different nation-states and cultural spheres. According to Amelina and Faist (2013), transnational approaches should refrain from centering the nation-state for empirical analysis. Instead, they argue, “methodological transnationalism encompasses various research methods that correspond to current epistemological approaches to the relationship between space, the social and mobility” (Amelina & Faist, 2013, p. 2).

These approaches require a consideration of multi-sited research endeavors, which must be self-reflexive, particularly with respect to the dichotomization and categorization of participant groups, and attention to the larger contexts that impact migration. Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2003) have noted that there exists ‘methodological nationalism’ in migration studies and transnational research. They argue that researchers must refrain from positioning nation-states as natural entities, yet they are often positioned as such. Indeed, this same argument can also be made about the dissertation study at hand. The nation-state, in this case, the United States, significantly shapes the experiences and narratives of the Black immigrant women who participated in the study. After all, it is the U.S. government that determines who is allowed in this space in the first place (by issuing visas and greencards) and which consequences face those who do not have them.

One final concept that has proven itself to be particularly useful for this study is the notion of ‘methodological cosmopolitanism’ (Darieva, Glick Schiller & Gruner-Domic, 2011). This approach employs a ‘both/and’ approach with respect to the identities
of transnational research participants and seeks to move beyond the strict distinctions of “the global/local and national/international spatial levels” (Amelina & Faist, 2014). Thus, it creates a space for multiple perspectives with respect to the participants that can affect and be linked to all of the aforementioned spatial levels simultaneously.

Amelina and Faist (2014) note that an approach rooted in methodological cosmopolitanism allows us to consider multiple ways of belonging, for example, in terms of religion, politics, or social circles, or how they relate to multiple locations. Spatiality, according to this approach, then, is not a blank slate that is simply affected by social contexts; rather, it regards space as a relational construct that is dependent on histories, material artifacts, and social contexts. Amelina and Faist (2014) argue that based on this approach, “researchers profit if they do not pre-define the existing territorial container, but study actors’ strategies of space formation and space appropriation” (p. 8). While this may be beneficial to some researchers who study migration, or social geography, this notion conflicts with the principles of an anticolonial approach, which requires us to keep at the forefront that the land we are on (if in the U.S.) is stolen land that brings with it responsibilities to be considered. However, the notion that participants maintain and develop identities that shift depending on spaces, or exist at the same time (e.g. Black, Muslim, woman) and require us to consider different meanings, is particularly useful for this study. All participants maintain connections and organize their lives across different spaces, nation-states, and identities, which at times requires that their identities or identity markers take on different meanings. This is important to consider when exploring the narratives and stories of those who live between spaces, cultures, and social systems. In
the next section, I discuss the role of narratives and stories as they relate to anticolonial approaches.

**Narratives, Stories and Anticolonial Approaches**

Dillard (2000), hooks (1994), Ibrahim (2014), and others have argued that language itself is epistemic and that it “has historically served—and continues to serve—as a powerful tool in the mental, spiritual, and intellectual colonization of African-Americans and other marginalized peoples” (Dillard, 2000, p. 662). Produced, represented, and circulated, narratives and stories are central to this dissertation study, both conceptually and as vehicles of knowledge production and theorizing. Although some use the terms ‘narrative’ and ‘story’ interchangeably, considerable efforts have been made on the part of philosophers (Bakhtin, 1984; Derrida, 1978) to distinguish the two. However, Georgakopoulou (2007) notes:

> Narrative remains as elusive, contested and indeterminate in meaning a concept as ever, variously used as an epistemology, a methodological perspective, an antidote to positive research, a communication mode, a supra-genre, a text type; more generally, as a way of making sense of the world, at times equated with experience, time, history and life itself; more modestly as a specific kind of discourse with contentionalised textual features (p.13)

Thus, the notion of narrative remains useful for a number of contexts and approaches, which makes it difficult to determine an exact definition. Georgakopoulou (2007) further notes that scholars often employ narratives either as a means to an end (expressivists, who focus on what can be achieved using narratives), or as something that is done (productivists, who focus on the processes of telling). However, I distinguish between stories and narratives by following Bakhtin (1984) and Derrida (2004) whose assertions of Western narrative styles are marked by linear structure and often privileged
storytelling that is multi-voiced, open-for-interpretation, and ‘polyphonic’ (Bakhtin, 1973, p.63). Drawing on Derrida’s notions of deconstruction and narratives in Western theatrical practice, Jørgensen and Boje (2010) outline the concept of the ‘living story.’ Living stories, they argue, are ever becoming, can develop into narratives by taking a linear form, and impact how we see ourselves. Thus, “[w]here narrative seeks to be retrospective, and suppresses and marginalizes these living stories in favour of linear subjectivity, as one path, one truth, one rationality, one ethics, etc., storytelling ethics adopts a more dialogic path” (Jørgensen, & Boje, 2010, p. 253). Narratives, then, are dominant stories, which can only be disrupted by counternarratives.

Counternarratives (Delgado & Stefancic, 2011) about one’s ways of being and knowing are important for the construction of the self within marginalized contexts. From the time a person enters a classroom, a faculty meeting, or encounters an immigration officer, this person’s body is read based on pre-defined narrative scripts. Ibrahim (2014) more eloquently notes that even before we open our mouths to speak, we “produce and perform complex languages on the surface of our bodies: in and through our modes of dress, walk, and talk; in our hair, maquillage, lip-gloss; and in architecture, photographs and so on” (p. 7). In addition to the choices in hair style, dress, and language, however, we are also read based on the ways in which racial, gendered, and linguistic identities are constructed in the particular spaces we navigate. Combined, these factors determine whether our bodies and selves fit into the master-narrative or, in other words, “stories drawn from the cultural store that circulate widely within a society and embody its shared understandings” of who belongs (Nelson, 2001, p.152).

In *Betweener Talk* (2009), Claudio Moreira notes that Gloria Anzaldúa’s work
taught him that his body poses a threat in the U.S. academy because he does ‘not fit’. He argues, “her theory brings the body into place...the body that does not fit...does not fall in the binaries of colonization ... It’s the story of the body told through the body” (p. 22). Anzaldúa theorizes the ‘betweenness’ of bodies that do not fit, bodies that do not reflect normative ways of being, but Otherness (of color, queer, disabled, etc.). Questions of belonging, authenticity, and competence are raised when bodies do not fit into the master-narratives of race, which often refers to subjects who are believed to hold valuable knowledges that are mostly White, male, cisgender, and heterosexual. African American women, Black transnational women, and other women of color are dismissed from the narratives about race to varying degrees, because their bodies and narratives do not fit into White spaces. As Hill Collins (1996) contends, Black women’s literatures and knowledges are often more welcome in academic spaces than their bodies.

Telling one’s story, or stories of women who have been erased, whose voices have been silenced, of those who do not fit is an act of resistance that is deliberate, political, and risky. By carefully engaging these everyday knowledges that are crucial to the survival of her family through the medium of storytelling, Lorde (1982) presents her mother’s knowledge, which she has gained through her experiences with finding a place in the United States for herself and her family. Simultaneously, she consistently draws on her traditions, spirituality, and experiences from her home. In many ways, the knowledges produced by and through Lorde’s queer Black female body and her mother’s Black body did not fit into many U.S. spaces. The narratives about her mother in Zami is instructive insofar as it provides a glimpse into the experiences of a Black immigrant woman’s life, mediated and translated by her daughter’s understandings. Lorde’s writing,
here, is not fiction and is not classified as an autoethnographic or autobiographic rendering of her experiences. Rather, it is her way of talking back to dominant discourses that position Black women as lacking education and knowledge by erasing their experiences. Zami also reckons with the fact that the ways in which race, or particularly, Blackness, and gender function in the United States (especially in the 1940s) differs from the ways they functioned in predominately Black spaces, such as in many parts of the Caribbean. Coming from another country, then, made for a different experience and reckoning with race and racism on the part of Lorde’s family, which is clearly captured by her writing.

However, merely injecting the presence of bodies that represent ‘Otherness’ into predominately White- normative spaces certainly does not suffice to disrupt and alter the ways these bodies are perceived, or how the institutions in which they are present function. Rather, what is required is a fundamental interrogation and shift in the discourses that circulate about those who are part of the center, and those whose bodies, experiences, and lives are marginal in many contexts, or in short, those who do not fit.

Smith (1999) notes that in the social sciences, “indigenous researchers have begun to address social issues within the wider framework of self-determination, decolonization and social justice” (p. 4). In order to work toward an elimination of colonial thinking, actions, and ideologies from research and educational praxis, both veteran and emerging researchers must deeply interrogate which methods they engage to collect, analyze, and disseminate their data. They must consistently question for whom they are producing the research, with whom they are engaging in this process, and by whom it should be read and to what end.
Educational research that encourages educators and students of color to critically engage with nuanced understandings of the heterogeneity of racialized, gendered, and migration experiences is difficult to locate. But it is not only important to consider *which* narratives are represented, but also *how* they are represented. Discussions of the ‘achievement gap’ (Ladson-Billings, 2006), for example, point to the need for action when it comes to educating Black children, but then such discussions too often get appropriated by those who need more ammunition for the dissemination of deficit narratives about Black bodies that simply do not seem to fit into the ‘hidden curricula’ (Apple, 1971) of an educational system that prides itself on being the great equalizer. Therefore, work that seeks to pursue social justice must not only keep in mind when, why, and whom we represent, but also, how we represent the diverse voices and narratives of those who should be at the table. The next section will outline how this will be taken up in the work that lies ahead.

Goodall (2008) notes, “narratives are our way of knowing” (p. 15). Bodies that ‘do not fit’ inevitably produce narratives, stories, and consequently knowledges that do not fit. The conflict that is created by female bodies that ‘do not fit’ into male spaces, bodies of color that ‘do not fit’ into White spaces, or foreign bodies that ‘do not fit’ into ‘native spaces’, is a site of knowledge production. According to Benham (2007), “stories illuminate knowledge in such a way that it connects us to the roots of who we are as individuals and as a community. [...] They are detailed and contextual, recognizing the importance of community and place” (p. 512). Stories told by and of those who are marginalized to counter deficit-driven perspectives of them, then, is a way to resist and change the landscape of the stories to which we have access.
Stories that center marginalized voices are multifaceted, yet speak in powerful ways to dominant perceptions of race, gender, and place. Goodall (2008) argues, “telling a story as a story was a quest for knowing that became the act of knowing itself, that was what I needed, and that story is what I found” (p.16). Analyzing narratives and stories to frame data from the perspectives and beliefs of marginalized people allows for their stories to be presented in ways that may reach numerous audiences. It also supports the telling of their stories with much more complexity than by only reducing them to numbers and percentages. The act of telling the story, Goodall (2008) posits, becomes an analytic process that allows the reader and the writer entry into ways of knowing and being that might otherwise be foreign to them. Writing, then, becomes its own ‘method of inquiry’ (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). However, considering writing a method of inquiry also requires us to consider how we inquire and how we (re)present what we find.

**Representing Stories, Voices, and the Self**

Over 35 years ago, Gloria Anzaldúa writes in *This Bridge Called My Back* (1983), “Because White eyes do not want to know us, they do not bother to learn our language, the language which reflects us, our culture, our spirit. The schools we attended or didn’t attend did not give us the skills for writing nor the confidence that we were correct in using our class and ethnic languages” (p. 165). Today, educators and educational researchers continue to struggle to create spaces in which multiple languages, voices, and experiences are valued instead of erased. In the previous pages, I have argued that it is crucial for qualitative researchers and women of color feminist scholars who aim is to employ anticolonial, reflexive methods of data collection and representation to think deeply about the best ways to disseminate the findings of their work.
Telling one’s own story bears an authority to which many participants in qualitative research do not have access, as their stories are filtered through the researcher’s mind, and then re-assembled in ways that fit the enterprise. Although, of course, the researcher’s mediation is desirable in many ways—how else is one able to grasp the context, dialogue, and interactions without having been present—one should consider which ways lend themselves to rendering the complex meanings, the value of what was learned, and the voices of participants, whilst allowing multiple entry points for interpretation.

Richardson (1990) notes, “No matter how we stage the text, we—as authors—are doing the staging. As we speak about the people we study, we also speak for them. As we inscribe their lives, we bestow meaning and promulgate values” (p. 12). Thus, as much as researchers may work toward diffusing the power imbalance between themselves and those with whom they conduct research, they must always bear in mind that this imbalance will most likely persist due to their position as researchers, writers, and academics who hold the power to showcase their (and, possibly, others’) stories.

However, finding ways to do this work in authentic, loving, and respectful ways that do not harm the communities with whom we conduct this work is at the center of considering experimental forms of representing research. According to Boylorn (2013), “It is not surprising that when Black women document their own lives and experiences they do so through stories, superstitions, sayings, metaphors, poems, parables, and thick descriptions, for that is the way they live life” (p. 3). Transcribing and representing these multiple linguistic and semantic devices for what they are—creative, rich, and central to communication—in ways that reflect this creativity can add additional layers to
representing the knowledge production in which Black women are engaged in their everyday lives.

**Women of Color Feminisms and Representation Through Narrative Writing**

As previously discussed, another framework that lends itself to contextualizing and analyzing the educational experiences, narratives, and knowledges of Black transnational women is what I refer to in this context as ‘women of color feminisms’. Of course, the phrase ‘woman of color’ has been both embraced and contested in the United States, given its development from denoting Black-identified women, to including other non-White people, although both usages continue to be employed (Vidal-Ortiz, 2008).

Thus, I understand that the umbrella term ‘women of color feminisms’ may seem reductive in light of efforts that were made on behalf of the various strains of feminist and womanist theories to differentiate themselves from others, or to point out erasures, lacks, and invisibilities in each other. However, each of them has contributed further to my understanding of the impact of gendered, classed, and racialized experiences from various standpoints and perspectives.

One of the concepts that captures the multiplicity, complexity, and situatedness of experiences with different systems of oppression is that of intersectionality (discussed in Chapter 1), based on which racialized experiences are also gendered, classed, and affected by our sexual orientation, country of origin, and, I would argue, our location within the world in the aftermath of European colonialism and the current state of neocolonialism.

Hill Collins (2008) argues, “because elite White men control Western structures of knowledge validation, their interests pervade the themes, paradigms, and
epistemologies” (p. 247). She continues, “As a result, U.S. Black women’s experiences as well as those of women of African descent transnationally have been distorted from what counts as knowledge” (p. 247). This Black feminist assertion is central to my study’s approach, since it is aligned with my emerging research goal of better understanding the role of knowledges that are created through the experiences, narratives, and stories of women of color in general, and Black immigrant women in particular.

Although Hill Collins’ (2008) aforementioned quote includes ‘women of African descent transnationally’, most of Black feminist theory, as with Critical Race Feminism (Wing, 2003), is centered on the specific experiences of U.S.-born Black women in the United States. Therefore, it is not always suited to contextualize the knowledges that emerge from crossing the borders of this nation-state and having experiences that may be shaped by America’s dominant position in the world and by one’s own subjugated position within America. As Alexander and Mohanty (1998) assert: “We were not born women of color, but became women of color here. From African American and U.S. women of color, we learned the peculiar brand of U.S. North American racism and its constricted boundaries of race” (Introduction, p. xiv).

Thus, Black Feminist Theory is explicitly for African American women, many of whose ancestors were directly affected by chattel slavery, segregation, and the struggle for civil rights. These are some of the contextual circumstances many Black immigrant women from other countries must first learn in order to fully understand contemporary disparities, narratives, and perceptions of Blackness in the U.S. However, Black Feminist Thought does offer so much to all Black women that it cannot be dismissed simply because of its focus on a specific demographic. Complemented by transnational, Third
World, and hip hop feminism, it is possible to both contextualize anti-black racism as a specific form of racism, and understand how the discourse of the ‘Third World woman’ is in part constructed by White feminists in ways that continue to be of relevance, particularly in the contexts of migration, religious missions, and human rights discourses. Insofar as Third World feminists are concerned, Herr (2014) argues that they have mostly focused on the multiple resistances and oppressions experienced by women in their local contexts, while transnational feminists seek to expose the particular ways nation-states interact with feminist goals.

Even though it is not useful for this chapter on methodology, it should be noted that Black Feminist Thought (Hill Collins, 1990), Black Feminist Theory (hooks, 1989; Springer, 2002), Endarkened Feminist Epistemology (Wright, 2003; Staples, 2016), Third World Feminism (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002), Critical Race Feminism (Wing, 2003), Transnational Feminism (Mohanty, 2003), Hip Hop Feminism (Morgan, 1999) and African Feminism (Blay, 2008), all serve as important reference points for researchers and scholars who seek to center the racialized and gendered experiences of women of color.

Although there may be others, the following assumptions emergent from all of these feminist approaches can be seen as central to this work: (1) The lived experiences of women of color, although they are neither monolithic nor homogeneous, often differ from those of White women; (2) Immigrant/transnational women of color, including Black immigrant women from outside the United States, undergo a process of racialization that often differs from their previous experiences and is affected by European imperialism, neocolonialism, and other geopolitical factors; (3) The
experiences of Black women (and other women of color) are valuable sites of knowledge production and worthy of being heard and examined; (4) Discussing our experiences as intersectional allows for a complex analyses of the impact of privilege and systemic oppression on individual bodies; (5) Centering our voices helps to disrupt dominant discourses, which have produced essentialist views of women of color through their representation in stereotypical ways; (6) Researchers who approach this work from these epistemologies must work reflexively to best represent the voices, experiences, and stories of the women with whom they work so as to pursue a decolonization of their research practice.

In *Sweetwater*, Boylorn (2013) provides an impressive blueprint of what the kind of work that incorporates storytelling, poetry, and thick description might look like from a womanist and Black feminist perspective. She tells stories of her family and herself that are deeply personal, yet reflective of the multifaceted experiences of Black womanhood in the rural U.S. American South. She fictionalized the characters by creating composites of their experiences and creating pseudonyms for her characters that are reminiscent of character names employed by Black women writers, such as Zora Neale Hurston. The book is both poetic, yet deeply entrenched in theory and careful considerations of the language and culture of the rural South. Boylorn (2013) has created a research project that she has read to her mother, who stated that it “sounds like a real story” (p.11). Her storytelling is powerful and seeks to authentically follow the conventions of the communities she is seeking to represent. Her work is important to my study and connects to the methods of representing data that I have drawn on for the presentation of interview data, which I discuss below.
**Narrative Vignettes.** Kinloch (2012) employs evocative descriptions of her participants’ words in narrative vignettes, which she interweaves with her notes from the field. She allows readers entry into her thought and composition process, whilst simultaneously allowing for her data to be instructive on their own. The vignettes are paired with more traditional ways of representing data in dialogic and block forms, but also complemented by Black-and-White images of the participants and their words, filtered through the researcher’s understandings. I decided to introduce narrative vignettes (written by drawing on a Scholarly Personal Narrative approach) and block forms of data throughout this dissertation. These snippets of data are incorporated because I allowed the data and participants to drive my theoretical and methodological approaches.

**Poetic Transcription.** Qualitative researchers who advocate for the use of experimental methods in representing data have long made the case that poetry allows for the integration of art and science, and thereby opens up potential avenues for meaning-making that were previously untapped. Glesne (1997) notes, “poetic transcription approximates poetry through the concentrated language of interviewee, shaped by the researcher to give pleasure to truth. But the truth may be a “small t” truth of description, re-presenting a perspective or experience of the interviewee, filtered through the researcher” (p. 213). Data-derived poetry in this study is being used alongside artifacts, narrative vignettes, and Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN) writing, in order to allow for multiple avenues into understanding, meaning making, and insights into the complexities of living transnational lives. In writing these poems, I followed Glesne’s (1997) approach of reading transcripts multiple times, generating themes, and sorting by themes.
However, I also allowed myself to include snippets that simply stuck out to me during the interview process, or that stayed with me during data analysis.

Thus, educational research that positions itself as anticolonial and women of color feminist must do so across all aspects of participant sampling, framing, data collection and analysis. The next section will discuss Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN) as an emergent genre of writing and storytelling that drives the writing process of the findings and the discussion of data. It also contributes to how artifacts as well as experiential and observational data are represented during the interview process.

**Narrative Inquiry and Scholarly Personal Narrative Methodology**

Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN) methodology is an approach to scholarly writing, particularly dissertation writing, that is rooted in, and that is an extension of, narrative research and autoethnography. According to Bochner and Ellis (2003), work that falls under the rubric of narrative inquiry consists of stories “that create the effect of reality, showing characters embedded in the complexities of lived moments of struggle, resisting the intrusions of chaos, disconnection, fragmentation, marginalization, and incoherence” (p. 509). Centering the lived experiences by considering the past, present, and future enables us to better understand the human condition. Further, as Evelyn (2004) notes, “[n]arrative form allows for the expression of individual, personal stories, as well as the knowledge that individual stories also represent shared elements of collective experience, which in turn interact with and modify our individual and collective knowledge” (p. 105). Thus, individual stories create and contribute to the development of collective understandings of our social world. Telling stories of experiences with racism or misogyny does not only serve the potential purpose of catharsis, but it provides an
echo for the hundreds of years in which certain truths were denied and rejected as false.

In this vain, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) highlight three dimensions of narrative inquiry, based on which looking ‘backward’ or into the past may take the storyteller or narrator to the re-telling of past events, while looking ‘inward’ would center the description of the emotions experienced. This process may provide avenues for the future. Similarly, stories told by others may evoke autoethnography, on the other hand, enables writers to draw on their lived experiences, in order to connect their personal experiences to the cultural context (Bochner & Ellis, 2016) by following social scientific methods.

Although autoethnography has been examined and criticized for its perceived lack of validity and rigor, others have found that it allows “me/us to speak the truth to the people about the reality of my/our lives and equip me/us with the tools I/we need to resist oppression and move me/us to struggle, to search for justice” (Collins, 1998; Diversi & Moreira, 2009). Therefore, qualitative researchers who are invested in social justice and storytelling for the purposes of empowerment have long been using the genres of critical narrative inquiry and autoethnography. Due to its alignment with Black Feminist Thought’s centering of Black women’s narratives, Griffin (2012) similarly advocates for a methodological approach through which Black Feminist Theory is married with autoethnography to “highlight and challenge U.S. American society’s failure to fully reckon with racism and sexism” (p. 139), further showing the usefulness of the methodological approaches, one to another.

In many ways, SPN is closely related to both genres, as it can take shape by allowing the author to move back and forth between the Self and the cultural context, and
follow a rigorous social scientific method, as required by autoethnography. However, SPN is purposely kept more open for creative expression and requires self-disclosure on the part of the author, as well as finding connections between “universalizable themes and beliefs to both the non-academic and academic writings of authors in order to provide important background ideas for readers (Nash & Bradley, 2011, p.17).

Nash and Bradley (2011) and Unger (2014) present ten principles that guide SPN methodology: (1) Writers must claim their distinct, and personal writer voice; (2) SPN writers must identify and follow key themes, both by analyzing their own stories and by analyzing themes that emerge from the stories of others (gathered in interviews, writings); (3) SPN research writing focuses on the Self, or the ‘subjective I’, but “is further stimulated by the expansion of the author’s personal connection to, or in some cases, disconnection with the content or data being studied” (Nash & Bradley, 2011, p. 14); (4) The starting point of SPN is me-search, which is ultimately extended to re-search and we-search; (5) SPN researchers strive to balance the particular and the generalizable, the concrete and the abstract, the practical and the theoretical, therefore I will seek to follow Unger (2014), who seeks to engage in storytelling in a way that “will not always be chronological and will be interrupted by moments of transformation, illuminating theory, and application to the broader community” (p. 26); (6) Literature cited in SPN should be deeply connected to the identified themes), rather than added as “ritualized padding” (Unger, 2014); (7) SPN allows authors to take risk in writing; truth claims are tied to self-disclosure, the centering of themes, and the thoughtful engagement of existing writing; (8) SPN writers should be comfortable in the telling of their own story; (9) SPN writing should be creative, readable, and present a “seamless combination of showing
and telling, despite the contrary advice of some creative writing teachers who warn us that to write a good story, you need to show, not tell” (Nash & Bradley, 2011, p. 69); and (10) SPN requires both academic rigor, and “academic vigor” (Nash & Bradley, 2011, p. 28).

SPN allows writers to deeply engage with their topics at hand without having to write themselves out of the text. I heeded the ten principles outlined above not only for my writing, but also for my considerations of which focal participants to select, which data to include and how, and how much to disclose of my own thoughts, emotions, and experiences. However, this type of research also raises questions about how to define concepts such as validity and/or trustworthiness with respect to the implemented research.

Catalytic Validity, Reliability, and Trustworthiness

Questions of validity and reliability are deemed relevant for both qualitative and quantitative researchers. According to Kirk and Miller (1986), both terms emerged from the positivist paradigm. In fact, they argue: “‘Reliability’ is the extent to which a measurement procedure yields the same answer however and whenever it is carried out; ‘validity’ is the extent to which it gives the correct answer” (p. 18). However, considering the impact of postmodernism on many aspects of qualitative research, which also means that claims of Truth were replaced by understandings of multiple situated and/or socially constructed truths, the idea that there only exists one “correct answer” has been questioned and critiqued. Nash and Bradley (2011) note that narrative research methodologies are inherently shaped by a perspective that views social worlds as subjective, socially constructed, and interpretive. Therefore, SPN notions of validity may
require both evidence, factual proof, perceptions, impressions, and emotional ways of engaging the data.

Lather (1986) outlines the various approaches to viewing validity in the social sciences. These include construct validity, which requires reflexive processes and the study of lived experiences in order to circumvent the imposition of the theoretical onto the data, face validity, which includes member checks, and catalytic validity, which she argues is “the degree to which the research process re-orient, focuses, and energizes participants in what Freire (2000) terms "conscientization," knowing reality in order to better transform it” (p. 67). In order to do these constructs justice, I have considered how to incorporate member checking into this inquiry. Therefore, I shared parts of my analysis both in written and oral forms with the focal participants and asked them for their insights.

However, I considered catalytic validity to be my main goal, and I followed A’Hearn (2014), who notes: “[c]atalytic validity forces researchers to think about our impact on research participants: Did we provide any thing of benefit?” (p. 138). In the next section, I discuss the notion of reciprocity, as I believe this is quite deeply tied to the idea of catalytic validity.

**Reciprocity and Exploitation**

In designing this study, I thought extensively about exploitation and reciprocity. I believe that this is a requirement both in terms of my critical qualitative methodological approach (by ‘critical’ I mean taking into consideration power dimensions), as well as my feminist and anticolonial theoretical underpinnings. I did not want to engage in a research study that would require me to take data from participants without providing anything in
return, particularly as it would reiterate dehumanizing (Paris, 2013) and colonial approaches to research (Smith, 1999). As Plummer (1983) notes, participants are often shrouded by anonymity, while researchers benefit from their data to gain status, publications, or, in my case, to complete a degree. However, thanks to my pre-existing relationship with participants, I was able to minimize the risk of exploitation. For example, even before I engaged in the research process, I was involved in providing certain participants with ESL tutoring, support with English-language paperwork, providing peer mentoring and support, and other activities, all of which carried over into the data collection process.

I still encountered dilemmas that stemmed from my desire to counteract the power dynamic of exploitative research. For example, I realized quite frequently that I made myself available to some participants up to the point of my own detriment, because I wanted to continue my role as their neighbor or friend without being affected by my researcher role. Ironically, it was my researcher role and the thought of using the data they provided that put me in a position in which I never said no, even if it required time, energy, and money on my part. I will address specific examples of this throughout the discussion of the data.

**Methods and Procedures**

For this dissertation study, I interviewed 7 Black transnational women between the ages of 28 and 37 about their experiences of race, language, literacy, and identity. The interviews were audio recorded and lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. I conducted follow-up interviews with 2 of the focal participants, which each lasted 30-45 minutes. Unfortunately extenuating circumstances (hospital stays, the Muslim ban, and moving)
did not allow me to conduct follow-up interviews with the other participants. However, much of what would have been contained in the follow-up interviews was communicated via text messages or in informal debriefing conversations. I collected roughly 25 text messages and wrote 20 in-depth field notes, both after interviews and face-to-face encounters that were not recorded, and I included one personal narrative that I was asked to write by a participant, and one exam from an ESL class.

I employed qualitative methods that emerged from and are aligned with an anticolonial, feminist, transnational methodology that centers personal narratives in order to explore the research questions: (1) What lessons about the construction of race and gender can be learned from Black transnational/immigrant women? (2) What larger contexts impact the lives, identities, and educational experiences of Black transnational women? (3) What hopes, fears, and/or goals drive the educational pursuits of Black transnational women? (4) What specific struggles do these women face when trying to access sites of formal education and negotiate identities within and outside of educational spaces? Given the transnational nature of the lives of the participants, I conducted interviews in their homes and in my home, but also online (using conferencing software) and over the phone. The locations and interview times were solely determined based on the availability and comfort of the participants, while the artifacts (text messages, written documents, images of testing materials) were acquired when they seemed relevant.

**Place.** Keeping up with Black transnational women to conduct this research project required the employment of a transnational methodology that would account for the multi-sited nature of this approach. Paired with narrative research, a transnational research methodological approach allows for the fluidity required by a project that is not
place bound. Therefore, I conducted interviews using browser-based conferencing software with 4 of the participants I met 2 participants in their home, and conducted one interview in my own apartment. I also took extensive notes on other encounters, including in the hallway, on the floor of my apartment complex, driving in the car, meeting participants in their homes, and meeting them in my own home. One participant moved away in pursuit of a better academic life during the course of the study, which is why all of our communication was limited to cellular devices and Skype (except for one face-to-face visit).

**Language.** As previously mentioned, language is one of the central aspects of this study, because, as Anzaldúa (2002) notes, “language reflects us, our culture, our spirit” (p. 165). All of the participants are fluent or almost fluent in English, but speak at least one other language or variety. Two of the seven participants therefore chose to conduct the interviews in German. At another point in time, one participant asked me to write her story for the purposes of submitting it as part of the required documentation for the refugee process. I heard her tell the story a number of times, but on this occasion we recorded it and she told it in French, detailing the political violence she experienced. Although my French was rusty, I was able to tell the difference in her telling of the story after encouraging her that telling it in French would be okay. She seemed relieved, almost as though the burden of English had been temporarily lifted, and she moved through the description of the events at ease, despite the emotional nature of the content.

**Participants, Sampling, and Friendship.** The participants selected for this study are exclusively women with whom I have had a longstanding connection (a minimum of 2 years and a maximum of 20 years), a reason why I would describe the sample as
‘opportunistc’ (Seale et al., 2004), which in this case means that I drew on my existing network of Black transnational women for data collection. I met participants through my teaching of ESL, tutoring for GED classes, family ties, or simply because we shared multiple identity markers (transnational, female, Black). I believe that my longstanding relationships facilitated the collection of data, but also raised some ethical concerns. I took extra steps to conceal the women’s identities, as I have more knowledge of their lives than someone who may have encountered them for research purposes only.

Therefore, I employed SPN writing method that placed me at the center of the inquiry. By making hard choices on which stories to tell and how to tell them, both in ways that illuminated my inquiry and avoided re-inscribing stereotypical tropes that further add to the marginalization of Black transnational women. Two participants in particular have referred to me as their best friend on numerous occasions. Usually, however, this happened after I provided them with some sort of support (filling out paperwork, providing rides in my car) and is not necessarily reflective of our relationship across time. However, I do believe that it is indicative of the rapport that was established with participants before and during the research process.

According to Ellis and Orleans (1971), researchers from minoritized backgrounds are likely to ask different questions about race than their White counterparts would, due to their own lived experiences within systems of oppression. Although this may be mitigated slightly if the researcher is from a minoritized background, I engaged in reflective action throughout the entire process. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) argue that friendship has been found to adversely impact two aspects of the research process: (1) Sampling; and (2) Overidentification of the participant with the researcher. Thus, in
ethnographic research, emerging friendships between researcher and participants may lead to a subconscious preference of certain participants over others, or the researcher’s allegiance to one group of participants may deny her access to those she did no befriend. In addition, participants may excessively identify with the researcher and alter their behavior due to this friendship.

Although these considerations were taken into account for this dissertation study, I approached the issue of friendship from the opposite direction. I did not enter the “field” like a traditional ethnographer who is seeking to explore an issue by first entering the field and identifying “key informants” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1997). Rather, my existing relationships with Black transnational women, the recurring themes in the conversations throughout our shared moments, and the changing political climate prompted me to pursue my line of questioning and draw on a “sample” of women I already knew. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) note, narrative inquirers “must ‘fall in love’ with their participants, yet they must also step back and see their own stories in the inquiry, the stories of the participants, as well as the larger landscape on which they all live” (p.81).

I took this notion seriously, as I was already ‘in love’ with my participants. I used the research process to reflect not only on the larger contexts that shape the stories we tell, but also how my own stories relate to theirs. The questions I posed were new to the participants and responses were surprising to me as a researcher. At times, I found myself in conflict, because glaring differences between our beliefs would be illuminated, for example, when Naima talked about her fear or rejection of gay men, both for religious reasons and due to her perception that they would “prey” on her sons.
I found myself wanting to just listen without pushing back due to my new role as a researcher, but found myself pushing back on her statements rather vigorously. I recognized that in order to be my full researcher self, I would seek to listen over talking, but as an advocate for social justice, I would still speak up if I felt it was needed. However, our existing rapport allowed me to delve into difficult questions without first establishing trust.

Conversely, I was very worried about violating that trust, or damaging my relationships, as they are vital to me far beyond this study. In the table below, I represent the participants, ages, countries of origin, languages, and educational backgrounds. The participants selected their own pseudonyms, unless they asked me to select a name for them. Participants whose names are represented in bold were selected as focal participants. Because contextualization is necessary, I will also very briefly discuss how each country of origin was shaped by European colonialism and/or its relationships with the U.S.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Nationality and Country of origin</th>
<th>Languages</th>
<th>Educational level /Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ama</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>German; Ghanaian</td>
<td>English (native), German (native), Twi</td>
<td>Doctoral student in the Southwest of the United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chrisette</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Haitian</td>
<td>Kreol, English (intermediate learner)</td>
<td>Some College in Haiti, ESL courses in U.S.; does not claim employment due to visa status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haki</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Kenyan</td>
<td>English (native), Swahili (native), Kikuyu (native)</td>
<td>Doctoral Student in the Midwest of the United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maya</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Jamaican</td>
<td>English (native) Patois (native) Spanish</td>
<td>Master’s degree in teaching; Teacher in the South of the United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marisha</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Jamaican</td>
<td>English (native) Patois (native) Spanish</td>
<td>High-school diploma, seeking to access College in the U.S. works in the service industry in the South and Northeast of the United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naima</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Somali</td>
<td>English (intermediate) Somali (native) German (native)</td>
<td>ESL student seeking to complete GED;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tee</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>German; American</td>
<td>English (advanced/native)</td>
<td>Business student in the South of Germany; works in Germany and the U.S.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Participants

Note: Focal participants indicated in bold font.
Ama. Ama and I met when my supervisor in the English as a Second Language program in which I was working at the time told me that somewhere at the Midwestern University at which I studied, there was another Black German whom he met during intake testing. He had written down her department and handed it to me. I desperately wanted to meet her, as I was experiencing the isolation that comes from leaving everyone and everything behind and starting a new program. After our first meeting, Ama and I immediately became friends. Chatting a mixture of German and English, we were able to connect and develop a friendship that has been sustaining us until today.

Ama’s parents are from Ghana and settled in Germany, where she grew up until pursuing her Master’s degree and doctoral studies in the United States. Of course, Ghana is quite important to many scholars of the Black diaspora, since the Gold Coast Colony, which was established under British colonial rule in 1874, was a primary hub of the transatlantic slave trade. The British, French, and Germans amicably drew demarcation lines in 1889 and 1899 between the Northern Territories (which became a British protectorate) and the surrounding areas, which were colonized by the French and Germans (Berry, 1995). Thus, Germany and parts of today’s Ghana share a colonial history. Schmelz (2009) notes that migration of Ghanaians to Germany increased after the country gained independence in 1957, with reasons for migration primarily including the pursuit of education, and most recently, climate change. According to the U.S. Department of State (2016), Germany conversely remains one of the United States’ strongest allies (although the countries share a complicated history). I selected Ama as a focal participant for two reasons: 1) Her interview data were particularly rich; and 2) As
a Black woman from Germany, whose parents are Ghanaian, she is engaged in the maintenance of numerous transnational linkages.

Chrisette. Chrisette and I met in the foyer of my apartment building in early 2015. She complimented me on my jacket and when we struck up a conversation, she burst into tears and told me she had just left the hospital, where her newborn had just passed away. We exchanged numbers but did not contact each other until a few months later when she called me to say that she saw me in a dream. We have been friends since then. Chrisette does not have valid documentation and is from Haiti. In my capacity as a volunteer at an organization that provides services to immigrants, I tried to help her initiate her refugee process, since she experienced politically based violence in Haiti according to her own accounts. In Haiti, she was a journalist who worked to support her region by communicating its needs to the government. In the U.S. she does what she can to survive financially. During this research project, Haiti was greatly affected by Hurricane Matthew, rendering Chrisette’s mother, sister, and two young boys, who are staying with their father temporarily displaced.

I selected Chrisette as a focal participant, because we spent several days a week together in the time frame of data collection and her stories and ways of encountering daily life as an undocumented Black woman, were often as mystical, heartbreaking, and upsetting as they were funny, life-giving, and full of love. When I gave birth to my daughter, she appeared at my door with several presents. “From my baby who passed away”, she said. “He would want you to have them”. I often did not know how to feel and will do my best to present her story as she asked me to.
Haiti, Chrisette’s place of birth, is often presented as a place of tragedy, poverty, and a place that is subject to natural disasters, such as a devastating earthquake in 2010 and Hurricane Matthew in 2016. According to James (1963), today’s Haiti was Christopher Columbus’ second stop after arriving in the New World in 1492. The Spanish settled, renamed it Hispaniola, and brutally decimated the Indigenous population from half a million to 60,000 by the Spanish who settled there within only 15 years. Spain ceded the western third (Saint Domingue) of Hispaniola to the French in 1697, who brought African slaves there. Offsprings from White planters and African enslaved women later became a light-skinned ruling class\(^\text{11}\) (Corbett, 1995). The Haitian Revolution made the country one of the examples of successful Black resistance against European colonialism.

**Haki.** Haki and I met in the context of our doctoral studies. One day in 2014, we struck up a conversation and realized that we lived across the street from each other. On one cold Midwestern night, Haki invited me to her home, and I walked through the knee-high snow to her apartment to chat with her and her two sons for hours. I learned that she had come to the United States while her husband pursued his doctoral studies. Since then, we have remained in close contact.

Kenya was a British territory for twenty-five years (1895-1930), after which it became Kenya colony and gained independence in 1964 (Wolff, 1970). According to the Migration Policy Institute (2015), approximately 102,000 Kenyans and their children now live in the United States. Although Kenyan emigration between 1950 and 1970 was

\(^{11}\) I am discussing these particular historical facts because of their salience in the data. The interconnection of lighter skin, privilege, and their contemporary ramifications were an important theme that emerged across data sets, but particularly within Chrisette’s storytelling.
usually temporary, and mostly for the purposes of pursuing higher education, this has changed due to the unstable conditions in the country, causing most Kenyans to remain in the United States.

**Maya and Marisha.** Maya and Marisha are sisters and my older cousins. I met them when I was in Jamaica to meet my mother’s side of the family for the first time when I was three years old. Because we are relatively close in age, we never seized to be in touch. Every other month, we wrote each other letters and sent cards containing pictures. When I would visit my family in Jamaica each summer, I would see the pictures in their rooms, stuck to the mirror, as reminders that we were apart, but still close. Maya came to the United States in 2005 on a visa that allowed her to work in the service industry for 5 years. Her goal has always been to go to College. When I first came to the United States in 2009 as an exchange student, Maya came to stay with me for a few weeks during winter break; she came back to visit again in the spring. Because visa issues did not allow her to leave the country, I have not seen her since then.

Maya’s older sister Marisha, on the other hand, is a mother of two sons and graduated from a Teacher’s College in Jamaica. She came to the United States in 2015 and has been working as a middle-school science teacher ever since. She was recently married and she purchased a home with her new family. Previously, she acquired higher education, which has allowed her to become upwardly mobile in ways her sister was not able to.

Christopher Columbus landed on Jamaica on May 5, 1494, and was immediately met with resistance from the Indigenous inhabitants (Arawaks). Only 15 years later, the first Spanish colonists came and settled there and established the slave trade. In 1655,
the British attacked the Spanish and seized the island, cultivating the sugar trade, which captured and enslaved a large number of African people. After several slave rebellions, the slave trade was finally abolished in 1808 (with freedom granted in 1838). Jamaica became independent of the British crown in 1962 (Jamaica Information Service, 2017).

According to Thomas (2012), 706,000 immigrants from Jamaica reside in the United States, and they primarily settle in the states of New York, New Jersey, and Florida. As other Caribbean immigrants, most Jamaicans are mostly employed in the service sector and sales force.

**Naima.** Naima is a mother of three and expecting her first child. She has been working on her GED since I have met her in 2014. Since then, we have become quite close. It was my experience with her, a Black woman and Sunni Muslim from Somalia that inspired this study. Since we met in the lobby of the community college she was attending in the Summer of 2014, she has drawn on me as a resource for tutoring (for which she paid me in food, and sometimes money), but most of our interactions were about handling issues of daily life, including anything from purchasing make-up in a retail store in which she never received adequate service before I accompanied her (according to her own account), setting up credit cards, and making appointments that can be facilitated by an “American”-sounding voice. At times, I have grown fatigued by her requests, which, usually come in the form of stacks of paperwork to fill out, phone calls to make, or research to do online, even when our primary purpose is tutoring. However, I have generally been very happy to support her in any way possible.

I selected Naima as a focal participant for two reasons: For one, our frequent interactions have produced a wealth of data from which I can draw. Secondly, some of
the experiences we shared were crucial in my understanding of the intersections of citizenship, religion, race, and gender. Naima told me that because of the civil unrest in the Somalia of her childhood, she did not have access to formal education until she came to the United States at age 21. Indeed, Somalia has had a complicated colonial history, with Italy and Britain as its primary colonizers (Njoku, 2013). The decades of domestic unrest and the most recent flares of extremist attacks conducted by the militant jihadist group Al-Shabbab has contributed to the ‘migration crisis’, which have rendered many Somalis as refugees in a variety of countries (Sa’Da & Bianchi, 2014), including the United States.

**Tee.** In 2008, I met Tee in my home town in Germany while she was working in the hair salon I frequented. She was the only other Black/biracial woman I had met in my hometown since my childhood. We tried to reconstruct our first encounter, but could not quite remember how we started our friendship. However, we have been friends since then. Tee still lives in Germany, but had moved to Bavaria. After we met she told me she had become motivated to return to school and finish coursework that would allow her access to a technical college. She is now in her B.A. program in Business Administration and spends several months of the year in the United States. In our interview, Tee has shared with me her truly transnational history, as she has lived in both Germany and the U.S. her entire life. Her father was stationed in Germany in the 1980s and met her mother during this time; the couple got married and had Tee, their only child together.
After her parents’ divorce, her father kidnapped her and brought her back to the United States, where she started her schooling\textsuperscript{12}.

According to Höhn and Klimke (2010), roughly 250,000 American troops and their dependents (also roughly 250,000), and tens of thousands of American civilians, who were employed with the U.S. Department of Defense resided in Germany (primarily the South and Southwest) were deployed in Germany during the Cold War. Although this number significantly decreased under the Obama administration, a number of military bases remain fixtures in the German communities of the South and Southwest and significantly impact the local cultures.

**Confidentiality & Ethics**

Working with women who are currently in the United States, or moving back and forth between spaces, only some of whom have American citizenship, requires ethical considerations with respect to confidentiality and trauma. Considering that visa statuses can change and being undocumented individuals are particularly vulnerable, issues of legality and citizenship are particularly important to consider. For this reason, I am using pseudonyms to refer to the women (unless explicitly otherwise requested) and omit any references from the written product that may identify them. I stored the interview files and written data safely on an external hard drive and in a password protected cloud.

The interview questions and follow-up questions emerged from the initial interviews and centered the women’s lives, narratives, and experiences. Worried that such questioning could trigger trauma, I engaged literature about reducing harm in

\textsuperscript{12} This is a very common narrative in the area of Germany I was raised in, due to the large number of American soldiers, whose stays are temporary by nature.
interviewing people who have undergone trauma. However, in many instances, the interviews did not seem to be triggering, but rather cathartic. However, unforeseen ethical considerations emerged that required extensive consideration on my part. For example, although I understood that in this study I was a researcher as well as a family member, friend, and/or neighbor, these roles came with a set of differing responsibilities. For example, as a neighbor, I was used to lending Chrisette money or giving her and her little daughter food, if her undocumented status made it impossible for her to pay bills, or drive her to job agencies, or watch her daughter. Conversely, she lugged baby furniture, toys, and wipes across the hall to me after my daughter was born. I understood that as a traditionally trained researcher, any of these things would be considered unethical, as they may skew the research process. However, after reflecting on each instance, I realized that it would be unethical not to support the participants just because I was conducting a research study. I evaluated each situation based on my training as a researcher, past events, and acted accordingly.

**Researcher Role & Interviewing**

I do not see myself as the sole researcher in this project, as the participants and I co-constructed the narratives that will be presented in the chapter to follow, although they are filtered through my understandings. The participants actively took part in the process of meaning making. However, I am a gatekeeper in many ways, as it is my ultimate goal to protect the participants and their identities from being revealed. For this reason, I have taken on the role of narrator and mediator among the oral interviews, text messages, written letters, etc. and the written products that are to follow. I withhold information that may cause harm and I tell stories through my lens. I decided on
interviewing as one of the formal methods of data collection for this study because it allowed me opportunities to ask participants questions in a more structured manner than merely engaging in a conversation. Relatedly, it allowed me to draw on our existing relationship to engage in a semi-structured, interactive, conversational interview process.

I designed the interview protocol for this study by relying on Ellis, Kiesinger and Tillmann-Healy (1997), who highlight the following considerations when conceptualizing interactive interview and interpretive processes: 1) Interviews are a collaborative process; 2) Both respondents, the researcher and the participants, share personal and social experiences in the process; 3) Researchers must acknowledge their interests and sympathies; and 4) The collaborative interview process is as important as the outcome (or the words spoken during the interview).

Other central points include that interpretivist scholars also encourage the researcher to disclose information about themselves, as opposed to following a model that reinforces a power dynamic, based on which the researcher controls the interview, yet does not reveal any thoughts, emotions, or experiences, while the participant is required to self-disclose, provide information, and has no control over the process. Indeed, in the interviews that were conducted, participants felt comfortable asking my opinion or answering the questions from my perspective. Hill Collins (1990) argues that dialogue is an important method in validating knowledges in a Black Feminist paradigm, as it is humanizing and a method rooted in African cultural heritage. Thus, I welcomed these invitations from participants, as they both were evidence for the trusting relationship that existed between the participant and me, in which the power was shared,
as well as potential catalytic validity (which I will discuss later), as we engaged in a shared learning process.

Based on this feminist interpretive approach (Reinharz, 1992; Roberts, 1981), I also did not subscribe to a conceptualization of interviewing in general, or research in particular, that is objective; rather, I considered the notion of ‘double subjectivity’, that requires us to ask: “How each participant’s attitudes, feelings, and thoughts affect and are affected by the emerging, reciprocal relationship” (p.123). Similarly, I considered Dunbar, Rodriguez, and Parker’s (2002) assertion that: “Although there is always an envisioned subject behind an interview respondent, this subjectivity – the subject or agent who produces meaningful, contextualized interview responses – becomes especially problematic when the respondent is a member of a nonmainstream group or population (p.280). Thus, in order to continuously pursue a methodology that pursues an anticolonial and decolonial approach, interview processes deserve attention both in terms of methodology, as well as in terms of power.

In order to address power differentials in the interview process, Schwalbe and Wolkomir (2001) propose the following strategies, of which I also employed in my approach: a) Inviting to ask participants the first question in order to create comfort and give up some of the control; b) Using language strategically to encourage participants to assert their position as experts. The selection of participants with whom I have longstanding relationships, as well as the aforementioned strategies and others, such as allowing the conversation to develop as organically as possible, will hopefully contribute to removing as much imposition of institutional power on participants as possible.
Mills (2001) notes that key factors, in interactions, such as the people involved, the location, the time of day, and the function of the interaction should be noted to contextualize interviews. I propose to engage participants in semi-structured conversational interviews that are guided by an interview protocol (Appendix). On the other hand, Riessmann (2001) argues that interview participants often resist structured interviews by producing narratives that do not seem to address the questions directly. She notes, “although dehumanizing practices persist, feminists and others in the social sciences have cleared a space for less dominating and more relational models of interviewing that respect participants’ ways of organizing meaning in their lives” (p.696). I believe that this notion should also be included into an anticolonial, feminist approach, in order to avoid the domination of particular knowledges and academic forms of organizing thought over others.

The interviews were recorded with a small audio recording device. After each session, I listened to the recorded interviews, added field notes and immediate observations, and created potential follow-up questions. This way, I primed the data to begin coding and analyzing data, but also to ensure that I captured my responses in the moment and for future reference. Mills (2001) notes that interviewing in qualitative research requires flexibility, sensitivity, and delicacy, because interviews provide access to previously inaccessible social worlds. These aspects are also important because of the highly personal nature of interviews that aims to discuss individuals’ engagements with racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression.
Data Collection, Coding & Analysis

As previously noted, I collected 7 interviews from Black transnational women with whom I have had ongoing relationships. The interviews were audio recorded and lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. I conducted follow-up interviews with 2 of the focal participants, which each lasted 30-45 minutes. Unfortunately extenuating circumstances (hospital stays, the Muslim ban, and moving) did not allow me to conduct follow-up interviews with the other participants. However, much of what would have been contained in the follow-up interviews was communicated via text messages or in informal debriefing conversations. I collected roughly 25 text messages and wrote 20 in-depth field notes, both after interviews and face-to-face encounters that were not recorded, and included 1 personal narrative that I was asked to write by a participant, and one exam from an ESL class.

Coding. In my coding and data analysis procedures, I followed Mills (2001), who suggested transcribing interview data using punctuation as for a drama script (noting sighs, facial expressions, etc. when needed). Mills (2001) proposes the following procedure to engage interview data: (1) Reading transcripts several times; (2) Noting key themes in the margins; (3) Expanding key themes through further reading; and (4) Categorizing and grouping themes into major and subsidiary themes using visual representations and colors. After using these coding processes for each individual transcript, I then compared transcripts to find themes that were particularly salient across interviews.

The overall process of data analysis was divided into three phases: Phase One was Transcription of Data; Phase Two was Organization of themes as outlined above;
and Phase Three was Triangulation of transcripts, researcher diary, and field notes, followed by Coding. According to Yin (1984), the most compelling aspect of using multiple methods to view one subject, or to engage in triangulation, is “the development of converging lines of inquiry. Any finding in a case study is likely to be much more convincing and accurate if it is based on several different sources of information, following a corroboratory mode” (p. 91).

Notes, Researcher Diary, and Artifacts

Due to the deeply personal and professional connections I have with many of the participants in this study, I found that field notes became a site of ethical and emotional tension. I wrote conceptual memos after interviews and wrote in-depth notes during interviews and other interactions, which were even more detailed if no recorder was used. The ethnographers Heath and Street (2008) recommend writing field notes that provide a running account of events, utterances and phrases from interlocutors, changes in audience, routine, etc. while interactions were happening, e.g. during tutoring sessions, at Not for profit organizations, over coffee, and not through observation. I also wrote weekly conceptual memos to chronicle the research process, which became part of my researcher’s diary.

Timeline

It is difficult to adequately describe an actual timeline, because the participants were not randomly selected, but have been a part of my life between 3 and 30 years. As far as the study goes, it was approved by the Internal Review Board (IRB) at The Ohio State University as part of a larger research project on race, education, and the African diaspora. Phase One, which included IRB approval, review of literature, as well as
drafting and re-drafting of the research proposal, was concluded in May 2016. Data collection, which is Phase Two, began in July of 2016. Data were pre-analyzed, coded, and finalized until March 2017.

**Conclusion.** The goal of this methodology chapter was to present methodological approaches that matched the theoretical framing, and methods that corresponded to and emerged from the methodological approaches employed in this dissertation study. I brought together anticolonial theorizing (Dei & Kempf, 2006), Black Feminist approaches (Hill Collins, 1990), and Narrative approaches, including Scholarly Personal Writing (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Nash & Bradley, 2011), in order to set the stage for the next chapter. In the presentation and discussion of my data, I employed a variety of methods of representation, including poetic transcription, vignettes, and SPN writing to present the narratives of the participants and me. In this chapter, I made the case for positioning myself as a participant-researcher, whose experiences are deeply entangled with those of the other participants. Finally, in briefly introducing each participant and providing relevant historical contexts about their countries of origin, I sought to create the space for contextualization of the narratives presented in the next chapter.
Chapter 4 – Findings: Between Horror and Hope: Transnational Experiences at the Intersections

“And then I came here and I found out that it wasn’t so hard, and it was even accessible. Now I’m thinking, “Why not go further?” [Marisha, Interview on educational goals]

“And this, this White woman was driving. I couldn’t see her, because she was in my blind spot and she called me “Nigger Bitch”...”NIGGA BITCH”... I think it’s from that time I started feeling. Oh my goodness, I think I’m Black.” [Haki, Interview]

“One day, I left my classroom. I basically just walked out and stood outside just to breathe, when the students were so mean and racist, and I was like, I don’t know anything about race, you know about racism.” [Marisha, Interview]

“Also sind das net¹³ nur Sachen, die ich erlebe, sondern das ist einfach universal?¹⁴
“So I’m not the only one, who experiences these things, but they’re universal?” [Tee, Interview]

In presenting this most important chapter of my dissertation study, I am both worried about misrepresentation, as well as eager to tell some of the stories and anecdotes that the participants shared with me. The data excerpts above all refer to experiences inside and outside of classrooms made by Marisha, Haki, and Tee. Like the other four participants (Maya, Chrisette, Naima, and Ama), they shared with me the range of experiences that marks transnational Black women’s lives as they navigate multiple

¹³ Literal transcription reflects Southern German variety
¹⁴ Translations are represented in italics.
identities and spaces, sometimes at the same time. For example, Naima holds American citizenship, but continues to see Somalia as her home and hopes to return once the political climate there settles. The stories often emerged during interviews and unscheduled conversations with little to no prompting. Many of the themes that emerged could be connected between women who hailed from different continents and have experienced a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, educational levels, religious beliefs and worldviews.

As Tee asked me about the experience of micro-aggressions during our interview—“So I’m not the only one who experiences these things [...]?”—I was reminded that despite our vast differences in religion, upbringing, and socio-economic status, Black transnational women have no way to escape experiences that are rooted in racism and misogyny specific to the U.S. context. However, despite the systems of oppression they face, they largely remain encouraged to pursue education and careers, to give back to their home communities, and raise their children in ways that both honor their cultures of origin, as well as the spaces they navigate now.

Before delving into the narratives of three participants, Chrisette, Naima, and Tee, I will discuss some of the unifying themes that emerged from my inquiry. The goal of presenting these themes is not to make generalizations about Black transnational women, but rather to show how the contexts of U.S. racism and narratives of the American dream are not only circulated by the women, but also reconfigured as the reality of home sets in. This part of the discussion largely includes the results from my a priori themes, which emerged from my questions about (transnational) Black women’s identities, their educational and professional access and goals, including potential obstacles in the way,
and the role of language and literacy in these pursuits. Of course, this study also larger lessons about Black transnational women’s experiences and lives, particularly as they are shaped by their particular, individual experiences, which will be presented in the final chapter.

Thus, this discussion makes no claims of a unifying Black transnational woman’s experience; rather, it highlights the circumstances and complexities that make these experiences instructive. While I do not seek to make generalizations, it is my goal to contextualize the narratives within the larger systems at play and understand the impacts of colonialism, racism, and misogynoir on the educational experiences and identities of the participants. The chapter is made up of three components: (1) A general discussion of the themes that emerged from the data; (2) The presentation and discussion of artifacts as part of the narratives of the focal participants written through Scholarly Personal Narrative writing, and (3) poetic transcriptions that break up the text and bring together the voices of the participants based on themes that emerged. I use the term ‘poetic transcription’ (Glesne, 1997) to describe short excerpts from the data that represent the themes that emerged in ways that seek to draw together bits and pieces of language in the cacophony of hours upon hours of interview data.

**Racism, Misogynoir and Colorism**

Although questions about systemic racism (e.g. the interview question, “How would you describe the climate around race and racism in the United States?”) were a central a priori theme, many of the stories that seemed to tumble out of the participants were unexpected and not prompted. Although I will address the research question, “What lessons about the construction of race can be learned from Black transnational/immigrant
women?” in more depth in the final chapter, I will now provide a brief overview of the women’s stories on race and racialization and explore them more deeply through the narratives of the focal participants.

In the opening paragraph, I also present Haki’s words, who identified the story about the White woman calling her a “nigger bitch” while she was driving as the pivotal moment in which she realized she was racialized as Black in the context of the United States. The story came up after I asked her whether her identity had changed since coming to the U.S. While she did not see herself as a Black woman in Kenya, because, as she states, there was no need to, since almost everyone in her community was Black, it was this moment that made her identify as a Black woman. She notes, “I think it's from that time I started feeling ‘oh my goodness, I think I'm Black.’ I had not internalized it. It was not a concern to me, but I mean, there are instances where I feel like...oh my goodness are they doing that because I'm Black.”

Haki’s identity as a Black woman in the United States, then, is not primarily rooted in a pan-African identity and based on shared cultural values or traditions, but rather the histories of colonialism and chattel slavery that created a space in which a White woman driving would simultaneously draw on racialized and gendered epithets to express her displeasure with a Black woman. This is also reflected in her assertion that “she did not internalize it”, “it” most likely denoting the gendered racism she experienced. Thus, Haki’s emerging identity as a Black woman did not exist in this configuration before she came to the United States, due to her experiences of growing up in a predominantly Black space, as she notes: “In Kenya I didn't see the need of identifying as a Black woman, because all-- most of us are Black. I mean, the majority of
us are Black. Like in my community, we're all Black. So there's no need of those categories. But here, now it's so different.” Although Haki is not a focal participant in this study, I chose her narrative about race to illuminate some of the ways racial is re-constructed through experiences that are both connected to “home” and racialization in the United States.

Although she did not identify as Black in Kenya, Haki notes that social class and skin-tone were defining factors that impacted her identity in her Kenyan home community, along with ethnicity. In Kenya, lighter skin, she argues, is of importance for people who are represented in the media, such as news anchors. As a Kikuyu woman (from the largest ethnic group), she says “Kikuyu’s [...] are perceived as people who are from rich backgrounds, people who hold high offices in the state, [...] it’s the largest – it’s the group that has produced the majority of presidents in Kenya. I don’t think it matters, but people will differ with me.” Interestingly, her husband, who came in during the latter part of the interview and is not part of the same ethnic group, overheard her statement and immediately told me that to many members of other ethnic groups, there indeed is importance on whether or not one belongs to the largest group, and that the Kikuyu indeed dominate the political landscape and hold privilege.

Finally, Haki shares with me that she does not identify as African, but Kenyan, and highlights the importance of specificity. She notes that specificity is important to her particularly because she has never traveled before coming to the U.S. In this, she echoes Naima’s sentiments, who also tells me that she saw herself as Somali, rather than African or Black, before she came to the United States. However, while Haki continues to reject “African” as an identity, because she “prefer[s] to be specific”, Naima does embrace
African as an identity label in the United States. It is important to note here, that while Naima has been naturalized as a U.S. citizen, Haki remains on a non-immigrant visa. These ways of identifying, in some ways, also can be connected to the women’s desire to continue schooling in the United States and then return to their home countries. Both Naima and Haki express their desire of returning home to give back to their communities; this sentiment is also echoed by Maya, who is building a home in Jamaica for when she returns.

**Educational and Professional Aspirations**

The word cloud on the next page is a visual representation of the participants’ educational and professional goals. While the importance of learning and improving their English in order to achieve their educational goals was a recurring theme for Chrisette and Naima, all of the other women expressed that they felt proficient enough to pursue their educational goals, since they spoke a variety of English natively (Maya and Marisha), or had it as the language of instruction in their K-12 schooling experiences. Ama engagingly describes how her father, a Ghanaian immigrant in Germany has always solely spoken in English with her, even though she was born and raised in Germany. However, some the women expressed that their home languages and varieties suffered because of their increased English proficiency (as pointed out by Ama, Haki, and Maya, who said they felt their proficiency decline in the languages of their places of origin. Although the women don’t all know each other, one recurring theme was the desire to pursue a career in a healthcare or social-sciences based field.

Chrisette states that her dream is to become a nurse specialized in OB/GYN in addition to pursuing her already existing career as a journalist, Naima wants to become a
nurse to return to Somalia and help victims of the local fundamentalist attacks, Marisha wants to become a respiratory technician due to her own experiences with asthma. On the other hand, Haki, Ama, and Maya all pursue the dream of becoming professors and completing PhD programs. Tee is the outlier, and notes that she is not interested in pursuing a career in the social sector, as it does not offer the kind of income she envisions, which is why she is seeking to finish her Bachelor’s degree in business, and potentially a Master’s in logistics the future.

Figure 1. Educational dreams and goals

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15 I created this word cloud by using the generator on https://tagul.com/create in order to illustrate the similar dreams of the participants with respect to educational and professional goals. The image used is entitled Dream by EvelynGiggles and was retrieved from flickr.com and altered/shared based on the owner’s Creative Commons requirements.
The word cloud (Image 1) is reflective of the similar desires that drive the participants’ pursuit of education: Six of the seven participants wish to give back to their communities, or society, by becoming nurses or professors. In some way or fashion, they cite access to educational spaces, from GED or ESL classes, to technical and community colleges, online colleges, to Research 1 institutions as the pivotal factor that will advance their lives or facilitate their self-actualization. All women, except Tee, who states that she truly feels a sense of in-between-ness in terms of belonging to a country, state that they work hard on upholding their national identities. For example, Chrisette notes “even if I get naturalized, I will always be a Haitian”, while Maya notes about her identity upon coming here: “I saw myself as a Jamaican. And I also saw myself as a young, Black woman in Jamaica”, adding “there is racial stuff everywhere.” Today, she adds, she still identifies as “a Black woman from Jamaica.”

Marisha, who teaches 7th grade science at a middle school in South Carolina, notes that in order to connect with her students, she has been seeking out more ways to learn about their culture, which has in turn led to a loss of her own culture, particularly in terms of accent and language, she notes. Marisha shared with me that she experienced racism from her students when she first started teaching in the United States. It was because of her students, she argues, that she had to learn how racism and race in the United States function. This understanding includes knowledge of racial profiling by the police, as Marisha notes

[N]ot to sound racist, but if a Black person here gets stopped by the police, they’re more likely to get a ticket. [...] You can’t help but wonder ‘why does it have to be like that’? But I just learned to accept that this is how it is, and there's really nothing-- I don't know if there's anything I can do to change it, but I still stay out of harm's way. You kind of see it like you're staying out harm's way, in a
sense where if you stay away from it, you won't be affected, you won't be hurt, you won't be victimized. You know what I mean?"

Thus, Marisha is aware that Black people in her area are often racially profiled by the police. However, she believes that she is able to “stay out of harms way”, in order to stay safe. The idea that keeping out of harms way ensures that “you won’t be hurt”, seems to connects to the killing and injury of unarmed Black people, which have been circulating the media, more so than receiving a ticket. However, Marisha’s statement indicates her belief that staying out of harms way, perhaps by not allowing onself in situations in which one would be “victimized”, seems to indicate that complying with police could protect Black people from victimization. Shortly thereafter, she interjects in our interview that she has personally experienced racial profiling while looking for a home:

**Marisha:** What it has really done was open up my eyes that race is actually seen differently and so it's not-- we are the same because we're all flesh and blood, but that we are really not the same because with my skin color, I'm a minority and your skin color, you're not the minority and then you really do end up start identifying with that. We're not the same and so me thinking before, we're all the same people. Now I'm thinking, well, we're not the same. I'm in the minority group and for some strange reason, started to accept that I'm in the minority group. So when something happens, so I'm in the minority group, so I don't feel bad if this doesn't happen, you know what I mean?

**Tanja:** Right.

**Marisha:** And it's terrible because just to share something personal that just recently happened in the process of buying a house. Prior to getting the house and only to find and why I couldn't get the contract signed off on to get the house was my race. You know what that means?

Here, Marisha explains part of how her understanding has changed by being racially profiled. By accepting that she is in the minority, she accepts the racial hierarchy and context of anti-black racism in the United States, based on which she experiences
hostility (from her neighbor), and racial steering\textsuperscript{16} practices of realtors, who tried to force her to move to an all Black neighborhood, in which the schools lacked resources and funding schools by removing other neighborhoods from their offering. It took the threat of a lawsuit on the part of a Black realtor for Marisha to be able to buy the house she wanted. This practice impacts Black transnational and immigrant populations in the United States as a whole. According to Coleman-King (2014), “the integration of Black immigrants into low-income communities plagued by under-resourced, low-performing schools contributes to increased poverty levels in subsequent generations” (p.33). Thus, even though Black transnational and immigrant families are often more upwardly mobile than African Americans, their experiences with U.S.-based anti-black impacts these families, causing this upward mobility to decline in the next generation (Zhou, 1997; Vickerman, 1999).

The poetic transcription below is an amalgamation of sentences taken from Haki, Chrisette, Marisha, and Naima. In it, I brought together what these three women shared about education in their home-countries, which, I would argue, shares similar themes of lack of access, which in some ways is gendered and in other ways deeply tied to the economic deprivation of Haiti, Kenya, and Somalia. Haki shared with me that because education in Kenya cost money, many parents decided and still decide to educate their sons rather than their daughters.

Chrisette’s idea that “technology in her country sleeps” emerged during our recorded interview, while she attempted to log onto Facebook to show me pictures that

\textsuperscript{16}Galster (1990) defines racial steering as “behaviors by a real estate agent vis-à-vis client that tend to direct the client toward particular neighborhoods and/or away from others.
related to our discussion. Interestingly, she sees Blackness and writing as deeply interconnected. She tells me that “In Haiti, the Black country, we had to write”, as she struggles to navigate the Web browser to access her Facebook account. Thus, while education in Haiti is “asleep” when it comes to technology, Chrisette notes that academic success there requires writing by hand.

**Education**

*Technology in my country sleeps.*

They never wake up

I don’t know nothing about the Internet

In Haiti, the Black country, we had to write—

We couldn't even afford to buy books,

our libraries were not good.

We didn't have books

the books that were there were very old ones.

If your professor wanted you to read notes or an article

you go and photocopy.

So you pay

you pay money to get notes

I don’t think there is quality in girls’ education—

To actually get into a university

You have to be 100% perfect

The payment plan was nowhere near easily accessible—

In my country

Civil war began when I was five years old.

My mother taught me how to read my language, and how to write—

[Here]I decided to go back to school

I started with a Master’s in African Studies

Yes, I was from Africa

But I had very little information about Africa—

Based on the transcription above, it becomes clear that the educational spaces the participants navigated in postcolonial Haiti, Jamaica, Somalia (no actual educational space was navigated) and Kenya, were economically deprived. At the same time,

17 Changes in speaker are indicated by --
academic rigor, for example expressed in the requirement of writing by hand, or extreme selectiveness on part of universities, are likely to be connected to this deprivation and make the United States more attractive for educational purposes. However, the reality of this attractiveness becomes more relative to the women as they actually navigate the educational spaces in the U.S. Marisha thus notes in our interview that she did pursue a Master’s of education in Jamaica, because of the schools’ selectiveness and lack of an affordable payment plan, but mostly, because the pay increase she would have received after completing her degree would have been marginal. Later in the conversation, she admits that the pay increase in the United States is also not significant, but that she felt the program was more accessible at the university she attended.

The idea of access, particularly with regards to educational spaces and facilities, is a re-emerging theme that also shows itself in the other poetic transcriptions and narratives. Considered in the contexts of countries that still adhere to colonial systems (e.g. Jamaica continues to operate based on the British system of A-levels and O-levels), these narratives help us understand how the deprivation of these educational spaces, along with a discourse of superiority, contributes America as a desirable place for the pursuit of education.

**America**

The construction of America and home also emerged as important themes as conflicting and complex concepts. The next poetic transcription entitled *America* takes this notion up and presents data that loosely correspond to the research question “what hopes, fears, and/or goals drive the educational pursuits of Black transnational women?”
The words stem directly from Marisha’s, Naima’s, Haki’s, and Chrisette’s interview data and were interspersed thematically, but not altered in terms of verb tense or expression:

**America**

*The U.S. is good.*

*It has all these things*---

*Opportunity*---

*I get a job.*

*I got married*---

*Everything is so convenient*---

*There is water*---

*when you want it*---

*There is electricity*---

*There is everything*---

*The sky’s the limit*---

*But there’s still something*---

*that is missing*---

*We have income*---

*We have jobs*---

*And we still have stress*---

*That busy lifestyle is not so good*---

*I feel like I’ve lost*---

*a lot of my culture*---

*That humanness is not there*---

*You’re suffering*---

*by yourself and*---

*nobody cares*---

The common themes discussed by the participants were access and opportunity as they relates to being in America in general, and education and work in particular.
Marisha, for example, points out that pursuing a Master’s degree in Jamaica, her home country, was difficult due to the competitiveness of programs that resulted in a payment plan offer that she could not afford and being placed on a waiting list, because at the University of the West Indies, “they wanted the best of the best.” She cites the shortage of jobs and resulting brain drain as reasons for the competitiveness. While she felt alienated in her process of trying to access a program in Jamaica, because “they weren’t working with you to get in” (Interview 2), while American enrollment officers courted her and made her feel welcome when she expressed interest in pursuing her Master’s degree in the United States. Interestingly, when the programs are compared, the program in Jamaica cost roughly half of the program she eventually completed\textsuperscript{18}

Naima similarly notes that without coming to America, she would not have been able to pursue her educational goals, since Somalia did not have formal education when she was a child. America, the women agree, does provide levels of access and opportunity on various levels that are denied in other places. However, all participants except for Tee, who has been spending time in both countries pointed out that the downside to America is the sense of isolation, or, as Haki remarks that “you’re suffering and nobody cares”, whereas she felt cared for and connected in her home community.

Of course, the process of uprooting one’s life and moving into a community in which one is less connected can be isolating no matter where one lives. However, the type of isolation the Haki, Marisha, and Naima talk about is presented in stark contrast to

\textsuperscript{18} Compare a price of 459,559 JD (roughly 3,600 USD) annual tuition for the Master’s of Education degree at University of West Indies (https://www.mona.uwi.edu/sites/default/files/uwi/2016_17-Postgrad-Fees-Final.pdf), whereas Walden university costs roughly 9500 USD (https://www.waldenu.edu/masters/ms-in-education/tuition-fees)
the various amenities that are present in the United States. Thus, as the poetic transcription on the previous page reflects, even though there may be water, electricity, and access to education that promise pay increases, what is missing is the humanness, caring, and ability to hold on to one’s culture. Thus, the only time that Marisha notes during the interview that she feels welcome is when she talks about meeting a fellow Jamaican woman in the grocery store, and when she talks about the recruiters who were helping her to access graduate school. She notes:

I had an adviser call me every week, “how are you in this process, how are you?” It’s like they want me to get in. The motivation was like-‘Okay, so and so is going to call me, let me make sure this transcript is here’. They made me feel like ‘oh you’re so welcome. I want you here.’ And then, I’m trying to get in but there’s that barrier that’s preventing that from happening.

Although the advisors made Marisha feel welcome in terms of supporting her in entering a program, barriers remain that keep her in the same place. The program she would truly like to pursue for her doctorate degree (curriculum/instruction & administration) is out of her reach, because she has resettled in South Carolina and does not want to uproot her family to pursue her own goals. In many ways, Marisha reproduced the rhetoric of the American Dream: “If you work hard and play by the rules you should be given a chance to go as far as your God-given ability will take you” (Clinton, qtd. in Hochschild, 1995, p.18). With respect to education and home ownership, she notes that the opportunities in the United States empowered her to change her thinking from, “It’s going to be too expensive, it’s too hard”, to “why not go further” and “the sky is the limit.”

A stark contrast to the narrative of America as rich in opportunity and amenities, but lacking in humanity, community, closeness, and an overall sense of wellbeing was the
notion of home. Marisha, Haki, and Naima in particular constructed home as a place that not only felt familiar, but a place that did not invoke stress. The three of them described missing their families, but also the atmosphere of familiarity, superior food, access to childcare, and a feeling of being connected. Home, then, for these three participants in particular, is the place that may offer fewer economic advantages, but is rich in emotional fulfillment. An important aspect of thinking through home was also the recreation of spaces in the United States that provided a semblance of the home community they left behind. However, Haki notes that she tried to be part of the local diasporic Kenyan community, but that her advanced educational level alienated her from the rest of the community. She argues:

I know people and I have attended one of the Kenyan community churches, but I also feel like they also start to isolate you and especially if you decide to be different from them. Most Kenyans – I mean the ones I know, maybe others are different – but the ones I know they come and get stuck. People want to work the nine dollar job, the ten dollar job, those shifts, where you work like three shifts in a nursing home. Those low jobs and maybe at home, you were working a very well-paying job, but you come here and you get stuck. You decide to advance your education, you become different and people start looking at you like “Oh, she is...she thinks she is special. [...] I don’t feel like I belong there.” [Interview 1]

Thus, the paragraph indicates that her educational level is the reason for being isolated by the rest of the community she tried to recreate, mainly due to her pursuit of upward mobility. Therefore, home is...

*When you go outside*
*You’re not looking at strangers*
*You’re not looking at empty buildings*
*And people who don’t even say hi*
*Home really is Jamaica*
*When you feel woozy and homesick*
That’s where I want to go--
Home is where the heart is and my heart
   Is in Kenya
   It’s the food
Going to the market
Getting people to laugh with you
The small things
There is a sense of community
If there is a wedding, people will come
   They’ll help you cook
   Prepare for visitors
   When my grandpa died
   A school that was nearby
Had to close for that afternoon
So they could attend the burial
We did not even go there--
   My mother’s cousin
      has eight kids
      They are happy
      They are smiling
      They are talking
When she wants to cook the tea
   She goes to the neighbor
   “Maybe I can borrow sugar”
   She doesn’t have any stress--
      I think I miss the warmth-
      The warmth of the people

Despite attempts of recreating a sense of belonging, Haki, Naima, and Marisha
agree that home is in the place they left behind. Similarly to Haki, Marisha says she tries
to recreate home by trying to become more involved in her husbands family, who is not only U.S. American, but was also born and raised close to where they decided to settle.

She says:

\begin{quote}
What I thought of trying, since now I have family here – what I did this summer was try to bring families together just to have that family thing. We had cookouts and family gatherings and everything. Just to get that kind of atmosphere where we would all gather in one place and eat and talk and drink. [...] It made me feel a little bit more comfortable that, even though these are families that are inherited, somewhat, I still felt that little family thing. But even then, after all that, I’m like “Oh, my mom, my dad, my sisters.” And you still think: “They should be here too.”
\end{quote}

Thus, Marisha and Haki both seek to recreate community in their new locations by drawing on networks that are based on ethnicity (Haki) and familiarity (Marisha).

However, in Haki’s case this creation of community is difficult because of the class difference, which she perceives to be rooted in her own educational advancement. Marisha’s attempt to create community with her husbands family, on the other hand, is impacted by the absence of her parents and siblings. Thus, the ability to create or recreate a community that feels like ‘home’ is difficult, albeit desired by all participants, except Tee, who argues that she enjoys and prefers anonymity to community.

\textbf{Chrisette & I}

I met Chrisette in front of the mailboxes in the apartment building in which we both lived two years ago. Truthfully, I didn’t know what to make of this woman at first, who so eagerly struck up a conversation with me about my winter coat. The apartment complex is quite large, looks a bit run down, and within the price range of a graduate student (me), or an undocumented immigrant woman with a toddler (Chrisette).
Even though a group of neighbors enjoy sitting outside, the conversation’s I have had with other tenants usually never went beyond a greeting. Thus, when Chrisette spoke to me and her conversation so quickly moved from fashion to the devastating death of her newborn, I became so uncomfortable that wanted to run. Certainly, this woman would want something from me, and I figured it was money. There we stood, shivering, while tears streamed down her face, and the story about her baby began to tumble out of her. The coat she had complimented me on was purposefully large, because I knew a few months from then I would have to hide my not-yet-visible pregnant belly.

“If you ever get pregnant, don’t allow anything to stress you,” Chrisette said. “It was stress that killed my baby.” I couldn’t bring myself to tell her that I was already expecting (and quite stressed out), even though she had disclosed so much of herself, it seemed beyond inappropriate to disclose this information, dangerous even. She asked if she could ever talk to me and I told her I was happy to lend an ear. We exchanged numbers and I did not hear from her, and even though I thought of her quite often, I didn’t feel comfortable to contact her.

In the spring, she called me and told me that a woman, who she claimed had identified herself as my grandmother, visited her time and time again in a dream and told her to contact me, because I was all alone. One day, she found the piece of paper with my phone number that I had given her on the floor behind her TV and decided to call me. Even more uncomfortable, since my grandmother passed away in 2009, I had initially decided not to keep in contact, but promptly saw into her in a grocery store just a few days later. Since then, she we have shared successes (e.g. finding employment), and pitfalls (e.g. employers taking advantage of Chrisette’s undocumented status by not
paying her). Chrisette tells me that she is married, but that her husband was angry and spiteful because her entry visa was approved, while his was denied. On numerous occasions, she shares with me his angry voice messages recorded in a furious mixture of French, Creyole and English, in which he threatens her. Their relationship worsened over time as he expected a child with another woman and Chrisette pursued new relationships. In addition, he did not allow her to be in contact with the children that live with him, which was another source of anxiousness and sadness for Chrisette.

Chrisette’s message below “life it’s hard when you don’t have document in America”, despite its simplicity, stayed on my mind since the day I received the message, even I interviewed other participants, or felt anxious about my own fears or employment limitations as a migrant on a student visa. Each time I talk to Chrisette, I am reminded of how true her sentiment truly is.

Figure 2. Text message exchange with Chrisette (White background)

The absence of documentation does not only generate fear, or limit which jobs an educated and skilled person like Chrisette can actually obtain, it makes Chrisette the most vulnerable of the participants to potential deportation, which, according to her, could very well have lethal consequences, due to the violence to which she would return in Haiti. During our interview, I asked Chrisette about her current work situation, a question that was included in my interview protocol. Her eyes narrowed as she firmly pressed her lips
together and looked at the recording device. I realized that I had made a mistake. I reassured her then that the purpose of the question was not to expose potential illegal activity, but merely for the purposes of understanding her professional and educational trajectory. In a nutshell, in order to survive, Chrisette worked the kinds of jobs that would allow her to feed her toddler and allow her to survive.

**English as a dream**

Each time I have seen Chrisette since we have met, she has stressed that she wanted to learn English or become more proficient, particularly in grammar. In the interview, the following exchange unfolded when I asked Chrisette about her professional goals:

Chrisette: I don’t like when I talk and like blah, blah, blah, blah, it’s like somebody doesn’t have education. Sometimes I want to go to the dictionary to learn new – do you understand?

Tanja: Yes!

Chrisette: When I talk, if I say hi, I can say it differently, like somebody who have education. I would like to say I’m education. You understand? When you go to school, you have some big difference. And when somebody sees you, you’re not going to say you’re educated. Somebody’s going to see. She’s educated. She have the good communication. She know how she can explain. She know how she can talk and then she is a good person.

Thus, the importance of English for Chrisette is not only linked to her goal of eventually becoming a nurse who specializes in gynecology, or re-entering the field of journalism, but also to how she is perceived by others. According to Chrisette, she would be perceived as a good person, if she appears to be well educated and is able to express herself clearly and can communicate well. Thus her desire to increase her vocabulary,
and improve her grammar (Interview), is both to change how she is perceived by people in the United States, as well as her professional goal of becoming a nurse.

Unfortunately, her status as an undocumented student made it very difficult for her to be consistent in her pursuit. Chrisette would need documentation to obtain a driver’s license, which means that she has been limited to public transportation. She enrolled in a free ESL course offered by a church twice, but had to quit it each time due to the difficulty of accessing class by bus. “It’s too much right now”, she told me with that same tight-lipped look I’ve come to know when I last asked about her English classes. Thus, Chrisette’s dream of becoming more proficient in English and studying to be a nurse has been once again been deferred, because life is hard in the United States without documentation.

The Complexity of Color

Chrisette describes herself as by saying “I have light skin. I am a Black woman.” [Interview]. Considering the history of Haiti, this distinction certainly makes sense, since biracial (mulatto) Haitians have historically been afforded upward educational access, social privileges, and institutional power (James, 1938).

Indeed, Chrisette tells me:

No, in Haiti, they don’t see me like Black. They see me like White girl. Yeah, even you have this color they tell you, you have money, you have to share (laughs). I have nothing. I have nothing and they’re going to kill you. [...] They’re always thinking they’re sorry from éclavage (slavery). It was like they think like – they’re racist. Even you’re White, they’re telling ‘Look at her. They take every money from the government. They’re so pretty. Look at us. Us so ugly.”’ [Interview]

The paragraph above both reflects Chrisette’s position in Haitian society, as well as the complexities of skin-tone and social class in Haiti. A lighter skinned person, based on her assertion, is regarded with suspicion, not seen as Black, and expected to have
access financial means to share. At the same time, she did not have access to this kind of wealth, which created positioned her in conflict to the story that was told about her, or people like her. “I have my father’s skin”, she says. “My mother is dark-skinned.”

However, her ability to pursue education and a career as a journalist were tied to her skin-tone. She says “Even when you go to school. The teachers see you. If you’re light, they can see your future.” It was in part her skin-tone that drew the attention of the manager of a radio station, who employed her when she was 17.

In Haiti, Chrisette argues, she was not rich, but “able to survive” [Interview] despite her upbringing in an economically deprived area thanks to her position as a journalist and connections with the government. But this kind of visibility was a double-edged sword. Chrisette’s pro-government work and efforts of seeking economic empowering for her impoverished home region also made her the target of anti-governmental violence from what she calls gangs. Chrisette left two of her children behind to escape this violence and give birth to her fourth child in the United States. She is convinced that the death of her baby was directly linked to the violence and related “stress” she experienced in Haiti.

After hearing that her visa was going to expire soon, I brought Chrisette to an appointment with an organization for which I used to volunteer. The organization had just started a new program that would support individuals who qualified for the refugee process. According to United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (2017), a refugee must meet the following requirements to qualify for asylum: (1) Be located outside of the United States; (2) Be of special humanitarian concern to the United States; (3) Demonstrate their persecution due to race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or
being part of a social group; (4) Not be resettled elsewhere; and (5) Be admissible in the U.S. (https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/refugees-asylum/refugees). Filing for asylum and requesting “withholding of removal”, meaning not being deported, on the grounds of being persecuted based on the criteria presented under point 3 is possible for applicants who are located within the U.S. by filing form I-589 (https://www.uscis.gov/i-589).

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**Figure 3. Section 2 of USCIS Form I-589**

The local organization that took on Chrisette’s case had to prove that she met all of the requirements of the asylum process, particularly by focusing on the narratives of harm and violence (Figure 2.). Members of the organization shared with me that this writing should be a compelling and eloquent plea containing detailed accounts of harm experienced.
Life of a story. I heard the harrowing accounts of Chrisette’s experiences at least 6 times under different circumstances; she told it to me several times, its emphasis placed on different parts of the story; I heard her tell it to my mother when she visited, as well a the professional working at a non-profit organization that agreed to support her. The story of why she needed to be in the United States was first something she disclosed to me as we sat drinking hot tea and eating fried plantains prepared by the woman she called “auntie” at her kitchen table. She showed me bite marks on her arms and told me of a family member who suffered a gunshot wound to the leg because of her involvement with the media. I noticed then that her storytelling was not chronological, but rather marked by shifting back and forth between months and years, incidents, conversations, and emotions, mostly to illuminate the ways that the violence she experienced resulted in the death of her baby 21 days after she gave birth.

Even though doctors cited a heart defect as the cause of death, Chrisette is convinced that it was the trauma and anxiety that ended her babies’ life. She told me the story a few times, always animated and with tears pooling in her eyes. Ultimately, she can’t go back. She tells me that she would be picked out by those who mean harm to her; her light skin would immediately notify her tormentors of her return. I hear the story again, in the office of a case worker whom I have come to know quite well during my months of volunteering. This time, Chrisette is telling the story slowly, with measured terms. The case worker asks questions that arrange the story along a timeline, such as “was this before or after...?”, “what was the month and date of this incident?” Chrisette does her best to provide answers, but the re-formatting based on months, years, and days translated from French contort her storytelling, as she draws attention to dates, instead of
events and experiences. Slowly, the story becomes a product, still recognizable, but no longer belonging solely to her. One requirement of the paperwork required to file for asylum is to demonstrate that the applicant personally experienced violence, which means that it is not enough to show that the environment in a particular country is marked by violence or civil war, but one must prove that one personally experienced violence.

Shuman and Bohmer (2004) note:

> Each culture has its own concepts of courage, victimization, dignity, and persecution as well as different concepts and practices of bureaucracy. Whether trauma victims understand their plight as personal or as part of a larger situation of political persecution is also culturally specific. Each of these concepts is, to a degree, translatable, but they are also embodied, cultural constructions further differentiated by local understandings of age, gender, and other identity markers. Further, both the genres of the applicant’s homeland speech community and the cultural experience of being a refugee have an impact on the construction of asylum narratives. (p. 402)

To do so, it must become a narrative that follows acceptable conventions that demonstrate that Chrisette’s experiences of trauma, violence, and pain are somehow severe enough to qualify her to be here. During our interview, Chrisette argues that Haiti is no longer her home, because she can’t go back. She notes “I can’t go, and then – every friend I have – I know five people do the same job with me, they kill them. Shoot them. Shoot them like dog on the street because of a job.” While she says this she shows me a picture of the baby that passed away on her phone, and continues by saying “this is my baby’s eyes. Let me show you.” At the time of the interview, I was struck by the fact that our discussion of ‘home’, which I put into the title of this project and deemed to be central to my inquiry, could be so easily interrupted by seemingly unrelated photos and videos, as we went off track by discussing the birth weight and length of our children.
However, when I analyzed the data it became clear to me that for Chrisette, the notion of a home that dissipated was also directly linked to her losing the child due to the violence she experienced. Home no longer exists for Chrisette, because she can’t go back without being pointed out and finding herself in danger, but also, because her friends and colleagues were murdered, which would cut her off from her source of income. A few months after our interview, Hurricane Matthew destroyed her mother’s house and left her estranged husband and other children displaced. The narrative of the violence she and others experienced, then, became both the reason for why Haiti no longer was her home and the reason her presence in the United States would be justified. Thus, one afternoon in July and months after her initial appointment with the organization that has agreed to helping her, Chrisette tells me that she needs me to write her story for her. I wrote the following note into my researcher journal:

Chrisette told me that she wanted me to write the story for her weeks ago, yet waited until this moment to give me the documents. I didn’t know why she needed this at first, but from the documents I can glean that it is for her asylum process. A process we had initiated together, when I brought her to the nonprofit organization for which I volunteer. But also a process she disrupted when she thought she was getting married to a man she now says she doesn’t remember.

[Field note, July 23]

I am sharing this excerpt, not to anchor this narrative chronologically, but to illustrate how so many of my interactions with Chrisette played out throughout the year and a half we lived next to each other; there would be months during which nothing seemed to move ahead with respect to her efforts of pursuing visa documents, then there would be a sudden flurry of action, a kind of pressed immediacy during which she would call me, send several text messages, and expect me to respond to her requests of filling out or printing paperwork or giving her advice within hours. Often, she abandoned goals
she had vigorously pursued before, for example, she missed several appointments with her lawyer when she began communicating with an American man who indicated that he would marry her. Only a few weeks after she told me she didn’t need the asylum narrative because of this union, I asked her about the man and she said she wasn’t sure who I was talking about. In a way, this inconsistency and erratic approach to certain issues was very much evidence of the uncertainty that characterized her situation.

When she asked me to write her story, we met that same afternoon. She retold the story in French, telling me that it made her feel much more comfortable. I recorded her and crafted her story based on the recording. The following excerpt stems are from the narrative we co-crafted speaking, listening, and writing for the purposes of asylum. The organization that would file the request for asylum for her provided an informative sheet that asked for a detailed description of events, dates, and the trauma experienced. The first paragraphs of the narrative describe just that. Finally, Chrisette’s asylum narrative concluded as follows:

I am afraid for my life. I changed my phone number and address, but they always found me. I am easily recognizable because of my light skin and work in the public eye. I am convinced that these gangs will kill me if I return to Haiti. Since I left, 5 more journalists have been killed. My husband remains in Haiti with 2 of our children. Someone has recently sought them out with the intention of killing them, but they were observed by a neighbor and didn’t succeed. Nevertheless, they have caused my husband and children to live in fear and move constantly. My newborn died in a hospital in (city). I know that the violence and fear I experienced during my pregnancy caused my child’s untimely death. I bear the scars of the violence— and one particularly hideous bite mark— as a reminder that I am not safe. If I have to return to Haiti, I know I will experience more violence, all because I supported what I believe is right — a democratic government, freedom of speech, and support for those who need it most. Thank you for considering my case. [Text Data, July 27, 2016]

A number of things could be noted from the process of telling the story and crafting a written product intended to gauge whether or not an individual had experienced
“sufficient” personally experienced violence to remain in the country: 1) It requires that a political asylum seeker tells the most harrowing parts of their experiences, aligns them chronologically (even if this is not the structure of telling that feels the most authentic to them); 2) The crafted narrative no longer solely belongs to the person who experienced it, but changes hands, is evaluated, and ultimately plays a deciding role in whether a person is allowed to remain in the United States or not. According to Shuman & Bohmer (2004), the Bureau of Naturalization and Citizenship Services (the entity that reviews the asylum seekers’ narratives and conducts interviews with them) requires that these narratives represent experiences of oppression and persecution in a style that is specific to U.S. culture.

Thus, the asylum seekers must craft a narrative that is credible according the standards of the Bureau of Naturalization and Citizenship Services, which requires those who write them to operate in a cultural code that presents the experiences of those who were persecuted in a way that follows its conventions. Although Chrisette had been primed to tell her story in this way by having to retell it time after time to different employees at the organization that agreed to help her, she was unable to write the narrative in a way that would have been convincing. Chrisette and other asylum seekers are expected to know and understand the writing conventions for this specific piece of writing, and be able to write it in English (or find access to someone who is able to do so in their best interest).

Thus, crafting this narrative requires a particular kind of literacy that requires knowledge of a particular set of writing conventions. Usually it does not suffice for the applicant to write the narrative by themselves. Rather, Shuman and Bohmer (2004)
contend that the process usually depends on the processing officers’ knowledge of the political situation of the applicant’s country of origin and requires the involvement of lawyers or other experts, “who provide assistance to claimants fill a crucial role in reframing the claim not only to be consistent with the law, but also, to correspond with current Western social values, regardless of the merits of any particular claim” (p. 398). However, these social values are not consistent across Western culture, or even region, and therefore require localized knowledges. Consequently, undocumented immigrants who do not have access to legal support risk not being aware of the cultural constructs that drive the selection process.

After I finished writing the narrative, I dropped the envelope containing the three single-spaced pages off in front of Chrisette’s apartment. A few days later she knocked on my door to tell me that she was extremely pleased with the narrative stating: “This is how I would write it if I had the words. I love it when I give someone a job and they do really well.” Chrisette submitted the narrative along with other documents to the organization, but only a few weeks later abandoned the process of seeking asylum.

She told me that the organization did not move swiftly enough with respect to her case. Instead, she asked me to help her fill out the paperwork to request a greencard based on family ties, since her brother is a U.S. citizen, a plan she also abandoned within weeks and finally asked me to write a letter to help her apply to the U.S. army, who, she assumed, would sponsor her greencard. However, after a few minutes of research I found that undocumented immigrants are not eligible to enlist in the U.S. military. Then, Hurricane Matthew struck Haiti and Chrisette sent me the following message:
The text message above further illustrates Chrisette’s economic hardship, which is directly linked to her status as an undocumented immigrant. Her feeling of emptiness is caused by her sick child and inability to be as mobile as she would like to be. On multiple occasions, Chrisette has shared with me how much she would like a car, since she usually drove where she wanted to go in Haiti (she has proudly told me about her Jeep on several occasions). Not only was the bus inconvenient at times due to its routes. Chrisette was also harassed on the bus twice. The police never showed up when she called them, despite the proximity of the bus stop to the police station, further adding to her feeling of being racially and economically deprived.

After the text message above, Chrisette goes on to tell me that Hurricane Matthew destroyed her mothers’ and sisters’ homes. She says “I don’t have the energy to do nothing.” Thus, she has to process through the experiences and incidents that take place in her current life, but is also unable removed from her children and other family members in Haiti, because going back would put her in danger. Although she argued that home is no longer Haiti, because it signifies danger to her and remains a place she cannot go back to, the U.S. is also not constructed as a comforting home for her, since her life is in a constant state of limbo and transition.
Chrisette’s experiences of being in the U.S. as an undocumented immigrant, then, truly embody the meaning of existing between horror and hope. While she knows that her life is in danger in Haiti, both due to natural disaster, as well as political persecution, she is not exactly safe in the United States either. Positioned at the intersections of Black womanhood, undocumented legal status, limited English proficiency, and the resulting lack of economic opportunity, Chrisette now knows that the police do not show up when she calls them (which has happened twice over the course of 3 months), that any chance of being exposed to the authorities as an undocumented immigrant, or failing to provide a convincing narrative can lead to her deportation, which most certainly means that she will experience more violence. Her light skin privilege, which has been a theme of discussion for all participants in this study in some way or another, may advantage her in the United States in some ways.

Since I have met Chrisette, she has always been employed, for example. However, she knows that her same light skin makes her a target in Haiti, thereby putting her in more danger. Thus, although lighter skinned people have systemically afforded privilege in many cultures, Chrisette’s story also indicates how complex skin-tone privilege is when viewed transnationally and intersectionally. While light-skin was a theme discussed by all participants (either as a systemic privilege in Black communities, often tied to upward mobility and class status, or a way to distance oneself from harmful representations of Black identity), how this privilege manifests itself is quite context dependent. For Chrisette, her light skin may continue to afford her being heralded as an attractive Black woman, which may have economic benefits, but at the same time it is a
marker of privilege that places her in direct danger of being identified should she have to
return home voluntarily or by force.

“I am a racist now” – Gendered transnational Black identity. Chrisette’s
identity as a Black woman is not only impacted by her skin tone and the discrepancy
between her perceived and actual socioeconomic status in Haiti. Although she identifies
as a Black woman, she has much to say about Black people in the United States. The
following excerpt, which is rather lengthy, Chrisette shares with me some of her thoughts
about Blackness in America, which she had repeated to me before and after this incident,
despite my attempts to challenge some of her perspectives, which I read as problematic in
their classed and gendered nature.

Tanja: Do you feel like your identity has changed since you came to the
United States?

Chrisette: No.

Tanja: Because you said, before you didn't see yourself as a Black woman
necessarily. Or did you see yourself as a Black woman in Haiti but
people said you weren't, or how was that?

Chrisette: No, I explain you. Some poor people, they're angry. They see me
like White.

Tanja: But you yourself—

Chrisette: For myself I know I'm Black. My mom is Black. My dad have the
same color, light skin. If that say-- I'm a Black girl. That's it.

Tanja: Right. So here, when you look at America and racism in America,
how do you negotiate your Blackness, or how do you think about
being Black now?

Chrisette: I can see I'm different. If I'm going to say-- I'm not going to say I'm
Black. Because, when I see like-- when I dress, I took a shower. I
change my look. I can say, I look like Spanish girl or Chinese girl
[laughter], stuff like that. But I don't see-- I see something different
about the Black people and me, when I see them.

Tanja: Really?
Chrisette: Yeah, yeah. Because it's like, I see a little bit different. It's like, the smoking. And then I see a really big different, big different. It's not like I'm racist. I'm trying to tell the truth, what I see. And I see sometimes these person, I see they don't go to school.

Tanja: Here in the complex, you mean?

Chrisette: Yes.

Tanja: The people here, in the--

Chrisette: Yeah. They don't go to school. They're just staying on Facebook, drugs, sex, store. That's what I see. But me, I can say-- I can sort of told you, I'm different with some people I see. But for other people, they're nice. Even their Black skin is nothing for me. I can see we're the same.

This paragraph highlights several points. For one, it shows that Chrisette, as a light-skinned Black woman resists others’ perceptions of her Blackness or identity. She quite clearly states “I’m a Black girl. That’s it.” However, her self-definition is one that is closely connected to her perceived class identity. She notes that it is “poor people” who impose a White identity onto her, even though she says she is no different from those poor people (in terms of socioeconomic status) earlier on in the discussion and that it is her skin-tone that marks her perceived wealth. She notes “when I was in Haiti, I can survive. I don’t have money. I try my best to survive. But because of my color, they think I’m a rich people. And then I have friends from the government, they know me.” Interestingly, when I asked whether her estranged husband was also light-skinned, she notes that he is Black, and that, “they always said my husband, I don’t love him. I just
stay with him because of money, because he was [athlete]\(^{19}\), stuff like that.” Although it is unclear who exactly ‘they’ is, presumably the same people who were darker skinned and identifying her as White, the complex and contradictory nature of Chrisette’s racial identity becomes clear: Although she identifies as Black, she points out that her husband “is Black”, when asked whether he is lighter-skinned or not.

Further, as the longer paragraph above indicates, these perceptions are classed, as it is “Black poor people” who both impose the racial label onto her, threaten to kill her if she does not share her perceived wealth, and assert that her love for her dark-skinned husband must be driven by money. At the same time, she notes her potential of racial ambiguity as she can change her look to “look like a Spanish girl” or “Chinese girl”, which may invoke stereotypical images of non-Black women of color. Although she does not explicitly state that the benefit in this racial ambiguity is to navigate spaces that are marked by anti-black racism, particularly the assumption of deviance as it relates to Blackness, this interpretation is not a leap, since she follows her statement up by describing herself as different from the Black people around her.

Thus, she describes the Black people she encounters in our neighborhood by describing stereotypical behaviors, such as poor education, smoking, sexuality, and going to the store. This is the type of Black person she would like to distinguish herself from. Interestingly, she prefaces this notion with “I am not a racist” when describing the kinds of Black people she does not align herself with. Poor Black people and the behaviors and circumstances associated with them in Chrisette’s description are different from “other”

\(^{19}\) I replaced the type of sport with the term ‘athlete’ so as to make it less likely that her husband is looked up.
Black people, who are educated, presumably do not smoke, and with whom she can align herself.

Despite her assertion “I am not a racist”, only a few months later I invite Chrisette to my apartment after having missed several text messages and phone calls, some of which sounded quite serious. As soon as I open the door, she argues: “I needed you yesterday! My world was ending.” A sense of guilt sweeps over me, I was simply too focused on my own work and life to respond to her messages, particularly since they usually required some sort of labor on my part. However, she notes that all she needed from me was moral support, because her relationship, which had only begun a few months before, had ended in heartbreak. This relationship was the second relationship she had pursued in that year, much to the chagrin of her husband. Both men were Black from different parts of the diaspora, who were both naturalized citizens. After the second break-up, Chrisette decided that she was now “racist.” I wrote down her words as she was talking, but did not record our exchange:

Black men can no longer talk to me. I realize that he was able to treat me this way because of my situation. He says he is an American, but I told him, even if they naturalize me, I will always be a Haitian. I will better myself by going to school. Learn English first. I am now a racist. I told my boss at work: I know Black people were here, there is no tip and too much work.²⁰ He asked if it was all Black people and I told him yes. They are uneducated and rude and they will call you a bitch for no reason. He asked why I said that. I told him: My boyfriend mistreated me. So he said: Ok, one messed up. That means all of them are bad? I said all. [laughs]. I don’t have a problem with Black women at all. But Black men. From now on, I am racist. [She touches her child]: You are no longer Black baby. I will change your color.” [Notes, August 25, 2016].

²⁰ This sentence was slightly altered to obscure the exact type of work Chrisette was engaged in.
I remember this exchange as a pivotal point in my perception of Chrisette, because she repeated them quite frequently after this exchange. Chrisette repeated her mantra of “I am now a racist” (always pronounced as French ‘raciste’) over and over again. Although it was usually said accompanied by laughter and thereby presented as a joke, I was surprised to hear some of her sentiments about Black people, such as associating messy surroundings and the absence of a tip with Black people’s behavior.

Another interesting point Chrisette makes is about education: She believes that by improving her English and pursuing more education would shield her from being mistreated in relationships with Black men, particularly those who are protected by their American citizenship, while she inhabits the vulnerable sphere of the undocumented visa status. Although she earlier proclaimed that Haiti is not her home, she now holds on to her Haitian national identity by noting that she will always be Haitian, even if she was naturalized. She shares this sentiment with other participants, which will be represented in the poetic transcription (Glesne, 1997) that follows.

Naima & I

Naima and I have been maintaining our tutoring-relationship-turned-friendship for three years. Since then, I have seen her try to access and navigate various educational spaces, including English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, GED classes, and courses at a technical College. As I discussed in previous chapters, I met Naima through a colleague of mine whose ESL course she was taking. After meeting in a public place for the first few weeks of our tutoring arrangement, I started coming to her home. ESL tutoring turned into a request for tutoring in math and social studies, in addition to ESL. With it came visits to Colleges, test preparation, emailing teachers to ask them for more
tutoring when I wasn’t available, and ordering books through my Amazon.com account.

To this day, I often forget that Naima did not have access to formal education until she came to the United States at age 20. She is simply brilliant and grasps linguistic and mathematical concepts in very little time. Despite her outstanding abilities, I have watched her struggle and fail when it comes to completing courses to complete her GED, particularly as the lack of a highschool diploma requires her to cram 12 years of schooling into a few courses. I have watched her make plans in frustration to move to India alone, leaving her family behind for one year, to complete a computer science course in India that one of her friends from her GED class told her about, only to abandon these plans when she finally passed the test to advance to the next level in her class.

She is a wife, a mother of four small children, and an advocate for her family in the United States and Somalia. Her husband drives trucks across the state all day to enable her to stay at home, which is why she has often relied on me for day-to-day tasks that require accent-free English in her mind. In the beginning, I was mildly annoyed that my hours of preparing math problems (including the various ways to explain them) and texts for reading would be barely touched, while we spent 2 hours on Internet searches, paperwork, and phone calls (for which I generally did not accept the 10 dollar per hour remuneration on which she insisted). However, I quickly caught on that Naima was indeed right. My neutral accent provided her with access to information and/or kinder treatment that she did not otherwise have.

**Accentuated Difference**

I admit that despite my advanced degree in linguistics and sound theoretical knowledge of linguistic profiling, I was ignorant about what having a strongly
identifiable accent, along with other markers of difference, means in the day-to-day lives of those who experience marginalization because of this difference. I was raised in a household with a mother who initially spoke English, but quickly learned German. I refused to speak English to her until I was a teenager, and much to her annoyance, always reminded her that in Germany, we have to speak German. However, during my adolescence I and most people around me where so impacted by Hip Hop culture that I spent hours emulating American speakers, and my weekends trying to make American friends around the countless U.S. Airforce and Army bases that surrounded my hometown. I had carefully cropped the German corners and edges off of my own accent even before I ever came to the United States in my early 20s. I remember blushing with pride when a professor proclaimed in front of class how “amazing” I was as a person who spent her formative years in Germany, because he couldn’t perceive a hint of accent in my voice during my exchange year in Tennessee. Now, almost fully assimilated in terms of speech sounds, I recognize this as a privilege, as I have never experienced the kind of treatment that is associated with linguicism (Harushimana, 2013).

One summer afternoon, Naima asked me to call a DNA testing center, from which she had obtained a quote to conduct DNA testing on her mother as part of the family reunification visa program. Our planned two-hour “tutoring” session had already exceeded three hours and I was reluctant when she asked me to call the same agency pretending I was her because she believed it would lessen the quoted amount of $720. I told her that I did not like to lie and pretend to be her, since I could only imagine the discomfort I would experience if I was asked identifying information about her mother, but she insisted that I did not identify as a proxy, or friend, as I usually did. “Don’t say
you’re calling on behalf of Naima this time”, she said with a stern expression. I tried to hide my annoyance, mostly because I thought that it would be a waste of time. After all, a quotation from a government-affiliated agency certainly would not change, just because I called with my assimilated accent. But I conceded, because I know that every cent counts, especially for a family of five, whose expendable income also supports numerous relatives in Somalia.

The verified quote they sent to me after a 10 minute conversation was priced at $500, two hundred and twenty dollars less than the quote she was sent when she called A part of me continued to believe that certainly there must have been a logical explanation as to why the two different quotes were provided, but there is no explanation other than a mistake at best, and a deliberate practice that takes advantage of immigrant families, whose English proficiency is perceived to be limited, at worst. Naima firmly believes in the power of my accent, and is painfully aware of how hers is perceived by some people. She describes their reaction as follows:

Some people when they see your accent, they prefer you to have a conversation like a real American. ‘What? What? What do you mean? What?’ My English is not good. My husband English is good. So when we walk, me and my husband together, some people, they act you don't know English. And they say, "What do you mean by that? What is that?" They kind of confuse you and they talk loud. They want to embarrass you.

Thus, although she notes that some people positively comment on her English proficiency and seek to accommodate her, others seem to want to embarrass her by speaking more loudly. This is not only uncomfortable, but also has educational and material consequences. For example, Naima often argued that although she truly liked most of her teachers, who were supportive of her, she perceived one of her teachers in
particular as racist. In our discussion from September 25, I noted the following in my researcher journal:

Naima asked me, after reading the consent form again and again: “what are the benefits that immigrants will have from your work?” I don’t know what to say, mostly because I don’t know if my dissertation will benefit anyone but me at this point. She probes if I am writing a book. I said I would like to. She says: “good, my teacher can read it. She is racist.” We discuss how her GED class teacher, whom she perceives to be racist has been treating her unfairly (scolding her, making up rules as she goes and striking parts from her test). She notes that this treatment only applies to female students, in her opinion. [Researcher notes, September 5, 2016]

I am presenting my spur-of-the moment notes here because they speak to intersectional racism Naima experiences due to her status as a Black woman, immigrant, and Muslim, who speaks accented American English. She highlights her experiences with this teacher in contrast with teachers who are “good” from her perspective, which means that they treat all of their students fairly. Further, I found this moment to be compelling, because she clearly articulated the necessity that her teacher would have to undergo further training or education (reading a book about Black immigrants) to learn about her own biases.

Educational access

Naima also discussed the intersectional nature of her oppressive experiences in the classroom during our interview:

**Tanja:** How do you identify yourself in terms of race or ethnicity, or other ways, such as nationality?

**Naima:** I'm a citizen right now. But it depends. Some people still are racist here. For example, the first school I was starting the GED, the teacher was teaching us is so racist. And every time I ask a question, she has attitude or she doesn't want to answer really clear, or maybe sometimes I say she doesn't like you because my skin, my religion, and one time I took the test and I passed it, and she repeat it again. She say, "I didn't see your folder." I don't know if you remember. I told you that. She said, "I didn't
see your folder, and I think you're going to fake your test. You have to take again." And I was so angry and nervous, but I'm willing to take again, because I did last time really good. So I take again and my points become, wow, very, very, very, very high!

In this example, Naima clearly articulates her experiences with being othered by her teacher and sees them as connected to “her skin, or her religion.” Based on her description, the teacher was suspicious of Naima and believed that she would cheat on her exam and therefore made her retake it. However, Naima excelled at the test, thus proving her teacher wrong. A few months later, Naima failed the course, even though the teacher told her that she would round points up for those students, who attended class and did their homework regularly. Naima did just that, and invited me to her home for tutoring twice per week.

It was the exit score sheet below that sparked Naima to consider moving to India alone, instead of completing her GED, because one of her friends told her no diploma was required to enter a computer science degree program in certain regions. She asked my opinion, and I cautioned her to do extensive research before pursuing a degree program that may or may not result in a high income. The exit score required to move on to Math 2 was 5.5. Naima was convinced that the teacher allowed other students to move on, who were not Black immigrant\textsuperscript{21} women. As the image shows, Naima’s score is a 5.2, which is why her teacher recommended that she retake the course.

\textsuperscript{21} I am using “immigrant” here instead of transnational, because it is the identity marker Naima uses to refer to herself.
Naima’s intensified pursuit of the GED came on the heels of a long series of ESL courses, and an acceptance into a technical college only a few months before, which failed when she was unable to provide a verified high-school transcript. I had agreed to drive to the campus, which is about 1 hour from Naima’s house, one early Thursday morning, so that she could take the entrance exam. She felt uncomfortable driving that far, and felt better knowing I was there to help her fill out potential paperwork. After spending 3 hours in a small waiting area, Naima returned from her placement test and immediately found out that she was accepted into the college, only requiring the prerequisites that would prepare her for her nursing major. As we filled out the stacks of paperwork to formally enroll Naima into College, I asked for her high-school diploma and transcripts, which I knew would need to be translated, or notarized.
The school’s informational sheet clearly stated that foreign transcripts must be professionally evaluated. Naima produced a colorful diploma that presented grades in the middle and the name of a Kenyan school on top. The seal was not embossed, but part of the copy, and some of the words seemed fuzzy. She said something to the effect of “you know we didn’t have school in my country due to the civil war. My uncle had this made for me. I couldn’t believe him, look at the grades. All this money, for what?” - although I was shocked, I couldn’t help but laugh at the mediocre grade point average on the sheet. In my mind, it would be obvious that we could not send the diploma to an evaluator, since Naima’s uncle had indeed bought the diploma from a ‘diploma or degree mill’, a global billion-dollar business (Brown, 2006).

However, Naima asked me to find an evaluator regardless and paid the 300-dollar fee to have it sent to him, against my advice. Maybe Allah would fix it, and the serial number will check out, she responded to my opinions. Three weeks later, the diploma was returned to Naima with an evaluation that classified it as a fake document and she had to decline her acceptance into the college program. I experienced conflicting emotions, because I knew that Naima was qualified and able to complete the courses at the college, especially since she took the placement tests and passed them with flying colors. But a part of me, perhaps the privileged part of me that held onto ideas of a meritocratic America, felt great discomfort when it came to the possibility of her entering a program with a bought diploma. Mostly because my own diplomas were evaluated with a fine-toothed comb, even after I had provided certified translations and sealed copies and completed a Master’s degree in the United States. I experienced this moment as personal growth, because instead of considering the “unfairness” of someone entering a degree
program with bought diploma, I began thinking about the unfairness of a system in which a person, who had proven herself capable of being educated at the College level through rigorous placement tests would have to defer her dreams, and prospective income, because she did not have access to formal education in her home country. Thus, while “diploma mills” are a billion-dollar-a-year business, there is very little public discourse on the inequitable circumstances that allow them to flourish, or the double-burden on migrants, who are then required to pay for evaluation services.

Although Naima tried to keep going after her setback, I received a message stating that she had dropped her courses in November (below). She had lamented before that she needed support with math, which I could no longer provide as frequently due to my own intense schedule. I shared her sadness because after years of courses, Naima still had nothing tangible to show for her efforts.

*Figure 6. Text message from Naima*

However, other successes made up for her treading water in the educational realm. Despite the executive orders that kept her mother from entering the country after 1 ½ years and thousands of dollars worth of effort to bring her here, Naima’s mother was finally able to enter the country after federal courts appealed the orders, which had rendered her mother stuck and missing connecting flights en route to the U.S.
Race and skin-tone

Race and skin tone have been topics of conversation since the first conversation I’ve ever held with Naima. During that first conversation she had asked for pictures of my family, and concluded that if her husband were White, her children may have looked like me after reading my mother’s skin tone as darker than her own. “I thought you were White, or Mexican”, were her words that clung to me for months after she said them, and reopen and close questions about my own phenotype and hair texture. The topic came up a few times more, especially since Naima often asked me to help her make sense of her own racialized or intra-racial experiences. For instance, I recall feeling shock when she asked me why there were so many African Americans in her GED classes. Shouldn’t this be beneath them, since “they” know English and have access to education? She asked why her African American classmates huddled outside to smoke during breaks in the bitter winter cold. “Don’t they know it’s unhealthy and disgusting?” I grasped at words, concepts, and ideas, trying to explain the interconnections of racial inequity and education in the United States.

We talked for a long time, yet I felt I was asked to speak on an experience that was not my own and defended her classmates, whom I did not know, primarily, because I had read the research on Black immigrants (Moore, 2008; Waters, 1999) that pointed out how they excelled in terms of upward mobility when compared to their African American peers, without ever questioning the privileges and contexts that create these possibilities. During our interview, race and skin-tone privilege re-emerged, of course, due to my questions about racism and identity, but also in ways I did not expect. Similarly to Haki, Naima did not identify as African, or Black when she lived in Somalia, but as Somali.
The exchange that follows shows, however, that to Naima the identities of Black, African, and Somali were all not only contextual, but also her identity as “African” was tied to skin tone.

Tanja: Would you say your identity has changed since you came to America? Did you see yourself as a Black woman before you came to the United States?

Naima: Ask me again? I don't understand.

Tanja: Did you see yourself as a Black woman before you came to the United States?

Naima: When I was my country, I think I'm Somali and I'm [inaudible] and I didn't see any different, but when I came here and I see different colors, and different people, I see I'm Black, right now. I believe that, so you're going to get-- when you live in your country you don't know really the Black or White, or if you're different, or if you same because it's your country, and nobody going to treat you different. But when you come another country that's the time you're going to get experiences with the different people, and different colors, so right now I'm see I'm Black.

Tanja: And in Somalia did you think of yourself as African?

Naima: [laughter]. No.

Tanja: No? Just Somali. What about now? Do you see yourself as more African, or Somali, or equal, or ...?

Naima: I see right now I'm an African and I see right now I'm Black. When we live in Somalia I just see I'm Somali, but I think I'm not African because I'm a little bit light skin, and Somalian people have-- what do you call?22 So we think we're not African but right now I see I'm African and Black one.

22 Here, Naima is talking about the shape of her nose, which could be described as narrow.
Based on the exchange above, then, Naima’s racial identity changed when she came to the United States, and she began identifying as Black after encountering people from various backgrounds. More interestingly, however, she notes that she did not see herself as African in Somalia, not necessarily due to a lack of knowledge of the rest of the continent, which was Haki’s reason for wishing to be specific, but because she saw phenotypical features, such as light skin tones and narrow noses as indicators that Somalis are not Africans. Later on in the interview, I ask her about racism and Somalia, which she initially notes is not truly about race, but about the oppression of smaller clans. Then, she argues that it is ‘racist everywhere’, after noting the following:

People like me, we have a little bit of light skin, and our nose and our hair is kind of soft. That's the majority of people, they thinks they're cute and they're good. That's majority. And all of the presidents become that kind of people. But we have people have big nose, like Western African. They look like more Western African, and they're minority. So that people doing down jobs like janitor or something like that, and maids. [Naima, Interview]

Thus, Naima points out that while ‘racism’ in the form that she would identify it does not exist in Somalia, colorism does exist and works to oppress West African people, or those who look like them (identified by darker skin, broader noses), and also impacts social stratification. After attempting to continue the interview, Naima ignores my next question and tells me with urgency: “Even they don’t marry each other, you know”, by whom she means lighter skinned East Africans and those who are identified as West African due to their darker skin. She notes that intermarriage is frowned upon, and provides the example of one of her cousins, who was not able to marry her darker-skinned spouse until they moved to the United States. “Here it doesn’t matter”, Naima notes. Thus, despite the colorism and racism that exists within the United States, the
particular racial (or intra-racial) issues that exist in Somalia are not of importance here and create a space for relationships that would have otherwise not existed.

**On Extremism.** On November 28th, 2016, at roughly 10 a.m. I received an email and text message from our university system identifying an active shooter on campus. I was in my car, pulling out of the parking lot, ready to head to campus, when I opened my phone and saw a text message from my friend inquiring whether I there, since she was locked in the basement of a building without much knowledge of what was happening. As the hours went by, the developing story revealed that there was no active shooter, but that Abdul Razak Ali Artan, a Somali-American student had driven his car into a crowd, stabbed several people, and been shot dead within one minute of the attack. On the next day, I heard from Naima the next day, as the following text message exchange occurred between her and I:

![Text message exchange](image)

*Figure 7. Text message exchange between Naima (light gray) and Tanja (dark gray)*
Three days later, Naima invites me to her home, because we haven’t seen each other and want to catch up on how things are going. I find her emotional and upset, because, as she asserted in the text message above, she felt that the attack made it worse for Somalis and Muslims. She says she is afraid to leave the house, because she does not want to be attacked in retaliation. I ask if I can record her, as she powerfully explains that if he had been a White man, she believes the FBI would have called him mentally ill, but because he is a Muslim man, he was considered a terrorist. She asks me not to record her voice, because she doesn’t want to go on a recorder talking about terrorism, as it could later be misconstrued.

Tee and I

The first time I saw Tee, I was getting my hair straightened to a glossy bone-straight style by one of her colleagues at a chic salon. It was the only recommendation hairdressers in Germany, both Black and White had for doing my tresses. Her own straightened hair fell fair down her back and was highlighted with golden blonde streaks. To this day, we cannot recall how we struck up an initial conversation, whether it was at the salon, or someplace else. However, we both know for a fact that it we sought each other out because we identified each other as (biracial?) Black women in an almost all White town. Tee is two years younger than me and from a few towns over from my hometown, where she used to work. When we first met, I was a 21 year-old undergraduate student and she was a licensed hair stylist.23

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23 Based on the German educational system, students can graduate after 9th, 10th, or 12th (in some cases 13th) grade and pursue careers either on an apprenticeship model (school + work in a
I remember sitting on the couch in her mother’s home, where she told me how inspired she was about my educational pursuit and her goals of returning to school to add qualifications that would allow a change in her career. She stopped hairdressing and returned to school and is now in the fifth year of her Bachelor’s degree in Retail and Service Management and is planning to pursue her M.A. in logistics, which she would like to complete in Germany. She notes that she would prefer to complete her graduate education in Germany for financial reasons.

**Transnational Black/White identity.** I selected Tee as a focal participant, because she disrupted so many of the consistent themes that emerged from the data I collected from the rest of the participants. Tee is biracial, bicultural, and bilingual. Her mother is a White German woman, and her father is African-American from Florida. She spends half of her life in Louisiana, where her fiancée is currently stationed, and the other half in the Southern part of Germany, where she is attending school. In Germany, lives with two roommates and says she enjoys the anonymity of being away from home. Whereas all other participants highlighted the importance of community, Tee notes how important anonymity is for her. Where she lives now, she argues, she has been able to reinvent herself and move away from the constraints of how others perceived her.

At home, she says, people still see her as the young woman, “who is unable to achieve anything” (“die nichts auf die Reihe kriegt”). The paragraph below reflects how Tee constructs anonymity as more desirable than community: “Ich geniesse eigentlich in

company), or through an institution of higher learning. The training to become a hairdressers requires a 9th or 10th grade diploma + 3 years of apprenticeship and examination.
Bayern meine Anonymität, also das ich in [Heimatstadt] nicht hab. Wenn ich jetzt in [Heimatstadt] bin kenn ich nen Haufen Leute, ich muss ‘hallo’ sagen, naja ich muss halt in Landau ständig mit jemandem reden, oder jemanden sehen, was machst du denn gerade” (Translation: I am enjoying anonymity in Bavaria, which I don’t have in [hometown]. When I’m at home, I know tons of people, I have to say hello, well, I constantly have to talk to people, or see them, and they ask what are you doing?”).

Tee thus enjoys anonymity, because she is able to live in her current space without the low expectations of her home community, which included the expectation of academic failure. She says these expectations result from her upbringing in a dysfunctional environment, which was created by both of her parents.

Although she was born in Germany, her parents moved to the United States when she was 6 months old and stayed there until she was 7 years of age, when her parents ended their relationship. In our interview, which we conducted in German, she describes the day she was kidnapped by her father as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>German</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tee:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Ich bin in Deutschland geboren, bin dann mit einem halben Jahr rüber und war da bis ich sieben war. Bin dann wieder zurückgekommen dann hat mein, bis ich 12 oder 13 war, dann hatte mein Vater mich entführt</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was born in Germany and went over [to the U.S.] when I was six months old, until I was seven. Then, I returned and then my, well until I was 12 or 13, then my father kidnapped me –</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Interview exchange with Tee

24 City removed for purposes of anonymity
25 I am using italics to express translated text.
This story is significant for two reasons; on the one hand it illustrates the transnational nature of Tee’s life: She spent her early childhood and adolescence on two continents, which she continues to do well into her adulthood. More importantly, however, when I asked why her father went to the great lengths of kidnapping her, after which she lived with him for 9 months and was enrolled in school in the United States, she noted (original):

I mean, it was kinda like, he wanted me to be under Black people. Er wollte mich eigentlich unter Schwarzen aufziehen. Er meinte ich soll zu meiner, wie soll ich das sagen, ich sag es jetzt mal ein bisschen krass ausgedrückt, ich soll zu meiner Rasse gehören. Ich würde meine schwarze Seite einfach ein bisschen verlieren. ”

(Translation: “I mean, it was kinda like, he wanted me to be under Black people. He wanted to raise me among Black people. He thought I should - I’m not sure
how to say it, I’ll say it in a crass manner – I should belong to my race. That I was losing my Black side.”).

Thus, Tee’s father noted the potential loss of her racial identity, which he believed would be inevitable, if she had been raised by her mother in Germany, as the reason he took her from the airport when she was supposed to be on her way to visit family members. As she notes, he wanted Tee to be raised among Black people and Black culture and found it important to develop a Black racial identity. However, Tee’s racial identity is quite complex. In the interview, she mostly used “Hautfarbe” (skin color) to talk about race, mainly because the German word for race (“Rasse”) is quite negatively connoted due to its usage during national socialism (Guillaumin, 1992).

Tee argues that in Germany, she does not see herself as mixed, or light-skinned, but “hunderprozentig schwarz” (one hundred percent Black). In the United States, however, she sees herself more as White than as Black. She notes on the one hand, that this place-based experience of racial identity is due to the type of “severe racism” (“krasser Rassismus”) that exist in the United States and is difficult for her to grasp, which makes her feel out of place. On the other hand, she notes that outside of her family, she feels more comfortable among White people in the United States for the following reason:

Weil ich aber auch oft mit dieser ratchedness, und dieses Ghetto – weisst du, ich kann mich damit nicht identifizieren und das heisst nicht, ok, I’m not trying to, you know, this is not stereotyping, that’s not what I’m trying... – aber es ist oft so, dass wenn du unter Schwarzen bist, its getting real ratchet real fast, and its ghetto real fast, und das, das hast du bei weissen natürlich auch, aber das sehe ich bei schwarzen ganz, ganz viel.

(Translation: Because I can’t identify with this ratchedness, and this ghetto – and that doesn’t mean, ok, I’m not trying to, you know, this is not stereotyping, that’s not what I’m trying... – but often, when you’re among Black people, it’s getting
real ratchet real fast, and it’s ghetto real fast, and that – of course, you also see this among White people – but I see it among Black people a lot.)

Taken together, then, Tee constructs her racial identity not only in relation to place, but also to the contexts at play. For example, her assessment that she cannot fully grasp U.S. racism (she cites police brutality, and the rhetoric that undergirds Donald Trump’s election as reasons), she also identifies more with White identity in the United States, because of what she describes as “ratchetness”, or “ghetto” behavior from which she is distancing herself. In the same vain, she notes that while the label “ratchet” neither applies to her fiancée’s friends and family, nor her own family, she notes “when I’m among ratchet people, I feel weird.”

I wondered who exactly Tee was talking about, since she was sure to differentiate between “non-ratchet Black people”, such as her own relatives, and her fiancée’s family and friends. Of course, the notion of “ratchetness” is also raced, classed and gendered. According to Brown & Young (2016) the term “ratchet” is deeply connected to the lived experiences of working class African Americans in the South, and particularly used in reference to poor women of color, who do not behave in ways that are deemed respectable. When I ask Tee what she means by ratchet, she describes it as following:

Eine mit fünf babies und schon wieder mit dem nächsten schwanger, mit sechs Baby-daddies, collecting five welfare checks and five child support checks, and is acting ratchet. Weisst du so, die loud, and looking like a hot mess, and the pink hair and the weaves and wigs and the, you know what I’m saying? Einfach dieses ghetto. Und ich find wenn du schon schwarz bist, dann musst du, you need to look decent, if I go to a job interview, trust me, I got my polo on, and my boat shoes, and some Michael Kors jeans, or whatever, I’m looking decent. Why? Because you need to let these people know, hey, my skin color might be different, But I’m still the same. Es geht halt viel über Kleidung. Das ist halt leider so.
(Translation: A woman with five babies, pregnant with the next one, with six baby daddies, collecting five welfare checks and five child support checks, and is acting ratchet. You know, she’s loud, and looking like a hot mess, and the pink hair and the weaves and wigs, and the – you know what I’m saying? Just ghetto. And I think if you’re Black, you have to, you need to look decent, if I got a job interview, trust me, I got my polo on, and my boat shoes, and some Michael Kors jeans, or whatever, I’m looking decent. Why? Because you need to let these people know, hey, my skin color might be different, but I’m still the same. That’s done with clothing. That’s how it is, unfortunately.)

In the paragraph above, Tee offers an explanation of who is “ratchet” in her eyes. A loud-mouthed, welfare and child-support collecting woman, who styles herself in wigs and weaves in a way that is undesirable in the workplace. Thus, Tee evokes negative discourses about Black womanhood, such as the imagery of the “welfare queen,” from which she seeks to distance herself. According to Hancock (2004), “the public identity of the ‘welfare queen,’ is grounded in two discursive themes about Black women traceable to slavery: their laziness and their fecundity” (p.6). Thus, the welfare queen is a Black woman, usually a mother, who takes advantage of the benevolence of the social state by refusing to seek work outside of the home.

Tee’s discussion of what it means to be “ratchet” and “ghetto” (or not) is further embedded in a larger context of respectability politics, as she notes that it is especially important to look “decent” if you are Black. The ideology behind respectability politics is the notion that marginalized people, particularly African Americans, must present themselves in ways that are acceptable in White spaces, by maintaining hairstyles that are deemed professional, such as straightened hair for women, and men “pulling their pants up”, as President Obama famously required of Black men (Montopoli, 2008). These efforts, then, should facilitate upward mobility and assuage the negative stereotypes connected with Black people.
Although Tee code-switches throughout the paragraph, she begins the sentence in “Wenn du schon schwarz bist...” in German, which carries meaning beyond “if you are Black”, and that indicates something to the effect of “if you already have being Black working against you”, it is even more important to look ‘decent’, particularly in the workplace. Harris (2014) points out the interconnection of respectability politics and neoliberalism, noting:

In an era marked by rising inequality and declining economic mobility for most Americans—but particularly for Black Americans—the twenty-first-century version of the politics of respectability works to accommodate neoliberalism. The virtues of self-care and self-correction are framed as strategies to lift the Black poor out of their condition by preparing them for the market economy (p. 33)

Based on Harris’ (2014) explanation of how neoliberalism and respectability politics are entwined, it is no surprise that Tee continues her discussion of appropriate interview clothing by naming name-brand items, such as Michael Kors jeans, and Polo shirts, which also carry a type of symbolic value.26 Tee concludes her point by noting “on the issue of racism, I always tell my boyfriend: Black people need to work on themselves first, before they can complain about anything. We need to get our shit together first. We have to start by helping each other, instead of working against each other.”27 Thus, Tee places the onus of responsibility of working against racism on Black people. She clearly situates herself as a Black woman in this explanation, by using the collective “we.”

26 I situate this idea of symbolic value within Crane & Bovone’s (2006) discussion on fashion and values, in which they assert: “Material goods express values; consumption of these goods is a means for the consumer to communicate messages about the values she holds” (p. 320).

27 The original: “Zum Thema Rassismus, ja, ich sage immer zu meinem Freund: schwarze müssen erstmal an sich selbst arbeiten, bevor sie sich über irgendwas beschweren. We need to get our shit together first. Wir müssen uns erstmal gegenseitig helfen, ja nicht gegeneinander arbeiten.”
Tee constructs her own racial, gendered, and classed identity not only based on space and place, for example, by identifying as Black in Germany, and White in Germany, but also in relation to and opposition of the negative stereotypes that exist about Black women. She notes that her mother and father raised her in an environment that was not stable or desirable, as her mother continues to draw financial support from the German government, even though her parents were professors. Tee’s relationship with her parents remains troubled as she continues to pursue education for the purposes of upward mobility. According to her, it is for this reason that she excluded careers in the social sector, and decided to focus on business and management.

**National identity and allegiances.** Tee’s national identity is also within an both/and space, as she identifies as both American and German equally, but says she feels divided, as she constantly draws comparisons between Germany and the United States. She argues that she misses the U.S. when she is in Germany, and Germany when she is in the U.S. Thus, her ideal situation would be live in Germany, but on a military base, which would provide her with access to American food options, English speakers, as well as affordable German groceries and a sound social system.

In Germany, she says, she has never felt at a disadvantage due to her skin color, while she worries about the racial climate in the United States, particularly with respect to men. She points out, however, that the German service culture there has created a host of negative experiences for her with salespeople, who talk to her as though she is stupid, or do not pay attention to her. Of course, she notes, this, too, varies by region. Bavaria, her current region of residence, she notes, is a lot less accommodating to other cultures than her hometown in the Rhineland Palatinate.
Conversely, she argues that White people in Germany often touch her hair without invitation or permissions. She also points out that professors often make decisions that count against her, such as requiring her to re-take courses when they could allow her to retake the test. As one of the three people of color in the school, she finds that she stands out.

Tee initially argued that racism was more extreme in the U.S., as well as gendered and therefore much worse for Black men. However, she notes that after thinking more deeply about these experiences during our interview, she begins to understand her father’s desire to raise her in a Black community. In this context she notes:

Wenn ich dann sowas, dann wieder sehe, dann denke ich mir, ok, vielleicht verstehe ich irgendwie schon was mein Vater gemeint hat, mit sei unter deines Gleichen, ja. Aber ich bin einfach strikt gegen Rassentrennung. Ich hatte schon immer ausländische freunde, deutsche freunde, schwarze freunde - as long as you're not ratchet.

(Translation: When I see this kind of thing, I think, ok, maybe I understand what my father meant by “be amongst your own kind”, yes. But I am simply against separating races. I have always had friends who were foreigners, German friends, Black friends – as long as you're not ratchet.)

This comment also reveals a subtle hint toward German identity. By nothing that she has always had foreign friends, German friends, and Black friends, Tee separates Black identity from German identity. El Tayeb (2011) calls this “invisible racialization”, a process of racialization that persists in Europe. Invisible racialization, then, “is the peculiar coexistence of, on the one hand, a regime of continentwide recognized visual markers that construct non-Whiteness as non-Europeanness, with on the other a discourse of colorblindness that claims not to “see” racialized difference” (El-Tayeb, 2011, p. xxiv). This theme emerged also in one of my own recent experiences, which I had shared
A few weeks ago, in early March 2017, I went to take passport pictures for my daughter and myself. The professional who helped me processed my pictures, when an older White man approached, standing at the counter. He started becoming visibly restless, and rang the bell, even though the clerk was working on my images only a few feet away. While I was paying for my pictures and waited for the clerk to put them into envelopes, he asked if I was “planning on taking little one out of the country”, and I said, yes, maybe Germany. That’s when his questioning became more intense. Why Germany, he wanted to know, which part, and were my parents in the military? The clerk shared a brief story about a friend who grew up in Germany, but the old man was relentless after I had identified as German without any military affiliation. He began speaking German at me, and pretended not to understand me when I responded. I told him we had to go, said goodbye to the helpful clerk and made my way to the parking lot. After strapping my baby into her car seat and getting into the front, I could see that the man’s gaze had never left me. This wasn’t my first experience, in which language, national identity, and a reading of my body seemingly conflicted so much that it caused my being bombarded with questions by White Germans. I shared the moment with Tee, in a text message, which is reflected below.

My message to Tee reads, “Ein alter deutscher Mann bei CVS hat mich grad ausgefragt und angezweifelt, ob ich wirklich deutsch bin” (An old German man at CVS just questioned me and doubted that I’m really German).
I found it curious to that my German national identity was challenged in the United States, which is a racialized experience usually reserve for German spaces in the United States. Tee makes the connection that this identity is tied to language, as she asserts that White Germans “just don’t expect German to come out of our mouths” (original above). Full German citizenship, based on the experience discussed above, as well as in Tee’s experience on the cruise ship, then, is only accessible through Whiteness. This moment was significant for this study, because it highlights some of the ways that
Whiteness and racialization occur transnationally, yet are very closely linked to national identity (even if they occur outside of the nation-state, such as on a cruise ship).

The Themes (Re)visited

Although there were more, the most salient themes that emerged from my interviews and interactions with Black transnational women included the complexity of racial identity at the intersections, the importance of community and its recreation, the realization of an American dream that is rooted in educational access, and the importance of language and literacy for making educational goals attainable. It is my argument here, that of course, all participants experience being and becoming Black transnational women in their own way. Visa status, religion, and nationality play a role in how these identities are perceived, developed, and assessed. However, the findings of this study show that the knowledges of Black transnational women, particularly knowledges of race and racism are impacted by both the way race and racial hierarchies operate or do not operate in their countries of origin, as well as in the United States.

Haki pointed out that everyone in her Kenyan home community was Black and that racial stratification was along skin tone and class. Interestingly enough, she uses ‘Black’ as an identity marker to refer to a community that does not use it. One country over, Naima notes that Blackness was considered a trait of West Africans, who made up the lower rungs of society in her Somali community. These are indicators that “there is racial stuff everywhere” (Maya, Interview), and that the constructions of race are often quite similar, as they are organized around skin tone and privilege, which in turn impacts educational access.
America, for many of the participants, is indeed a place of access and opportunity, particularly when it comes to education. However, almost all of the participants expressed the desire of returning \textit{home}, into communities in which they felt welcome, valued, and familiar. In the next and final chapter, I will show how these themes interact with the research questions, as well as moving toward a theory that
Chapter 5- Implications and Conclusion

“The child in each of us
Knows paradise.
Paradise is home.
Home as it was
Or home as it should have been.

Paradise is one's own place,
One's own people,
One's own world,
Knowing and known,
Perhaps even
Loving and loved.

Yet every child
Is cast from paradise-
into growth and new community,
into vast,
ongoing change.”
(Butler, 1998, p. 101)

I open this final chapter with Octavia Butler’s (1998) words because they reflect the theme of home that emerged from my data. “Paradise is home,” she asserts, and, as the women in my study described their respective concepts of home (as presented in the previous chapter), it became clear that home is indeed a place with “one’s own people, one’s own world”, from which we are to find “new community.” In many ways, all of the women that participated in this study were faced with the idea of leaving the home that is “paradise” in so many ways (community, familiarity, and being loved) to pursue their own version of the American Dream through education. Therefore, I write this chapter with the understanding that the women and I currently live on stolen land to which we
were not invited. Many of us have come here because the complex enmeshment of European colonialism and racism, as well as a neoliberal global educational marketplace, in which America continues to play a leading role, have beckoned us to leave our home communities in pursuit of something that was missing.

In this final chapter, I revisit my research questions in an effort to show how my findings connect to and enhance anticolonial theories, women of color feminist theories, and critical literacies. Finally, I discuss the implications for these theories and methodologies, and offer a conclusion. Generally, findings showed that the Black transnational women who participated in this study inhabit multiple, sometimes contesting identities and spaces. They each experienced gendered racism and shared stories for which I was never truly prepared, stories about experiencing racism in classrooms, in hospitals, or while driving. Other stories reflected the isolation and vulnerability that often comes with trying to create roots after being uprooted. In spite of it all, the women are hopeful, continue to work to achieve educational goals, to raise families, and to serve their communities as teachers, nurses, professors, and service specialists.

Three specific points emerged from the data in response to the first research question, “What lessons about the construction of racial identities can be learned from Black transnational/immigrant women?” (1) The importance of particularization; (2) Black identity is connected to histories of enslavement and colonialism; and (3) Black identities formed or altered through migration are often in contention with local discourses about Black identity.
**Particularization.** In her essay *Writing Against Culture*, Lila Abu-Lughod (1991) notes that working to describe culture, even in an attempt to de-essentialize, “retains some of the tendencies to freeze difference possessed by concept like race” (p. 56). Thus, anthropologists and other researchers who seek to understand phenomena, such as race, culture, and identity often struggle to explore the terms without at the very least creating the grounds for generalizations. Abu-Lughod (1991) also shows how this conundrum affects anticolonial scholarship. For the case of Orientalism, the epistemological and ontological “West” and “East” divide, she notes that “some anticolonial movements and present-day struggles have worked by what could be labelled reverse Orientalism, where attempts to reverse the power relationship proceed by seeking to valorize for the self what in the former system had been devalued as other” (Abu-Lughod, 1991, p. 52). However, by seeking to reconstruct the former self based on pre-colonial cultural values, the actors in this scenario reconstruct a rigid, often essentialized mode of culture and identity.

Abu-Lughod’s (1991) intervention, here, is an argument for focusing on the particular, along with considering the centrality of discourse and practice, and drawing of connections between history, the contemporary and the researcher (in her case, anthropologist), and community that is being written about. Focusing on the particular, then, seeks to undermine the process of othering that may emerge through the research process focused on generalizations. In practice, this means that we must also consider the contradictions, differences, and conflicts that emerge from people’s words and contextualize them.

For the stories and narratives of Black transnational women, particularity helps us understand the contradictions within and challenges of the concept of race. After all,
Black identity is an identity that is often constructed in relation to Whiteness, but also impacted by the negative constructions of Blackness, Africa, and Africans through the media and dominant discourses (Allen, 2001). However, as all of the stories reflected, there are unifying contexts, such as skin-color privilege and hierarchies on which all of the women remarked. Although colorism is present in all of the communities the women navigate, its impacts and consequences are individual. For example, although Chrisette benefits from her skin-tone in Haiti, which has facilitated her upward mobility and success in journalism in the past, her skin tone is now the identifying marker that puts her in harms way if she returns to Haiti. Thus, she is somewhat stuck as an undocumented immigrant and unwanted in both countries. It is this particularized complexity that we must consider when discussing racism and colorism from a transnational perspective.

**Transnational Black Identity.** As already mentioned, the data revealed that many of the women described their racial identity in relation to Whiteness, rather than based on a pan-African shared cultural identity. However, this does not mean that discourses on Blackness and Black inferiority do not exist in the women’s countries’ of origin. I am reminded of Naima, who explained that in her experiences in Somalia, Blackness was definitely connected to understandings of inferiority and undesirability. As she explained, Blackness was seen as a West African trait and had direct consequences (e.g. job opportunities) for those whose skin-tone and facial who looked Black in this context. This colorism also had a direct impact on who could be married. Coming to America both created a Black identity for Naima, but it also created a space for those of her friends and relatives who could not have married their partners, because of the racial hierarchies in Somalia.
Thus, becoming Black in America, or seeking to understand racism in the America, means reckoning with becoming marginalized, minoritized, and often dehumanized. However, it also created small avenues of freedom and escape from racialized oppression in other places. Overall, this conceptualization of Black identity aligns with Smith’s (2016) idea that Blackness is constructed to equal slaveability and therefore serves White Supremacy by rendering the Black bodies as less than human. This notion is undergirded by the participants’ discussions of police brutality and racial steering, as well as the stories they told of their reckoning with racism and racial identity. Most of their stories are rooted in an understanding of Blackness, and particularly Black womanhood as deviance (e.g., Tee’s discussion of “ratchetness,” and Chrisette’s perception that the deviant behavior of her neighbors, such smoking, laziness, listlessness, all have to do with their Blackness).

Concerning her father’s desire to make her more conscious of her race when she was a young teenager, Tee explained: “By now I see it as something positive. For me, it’s almost like a form of racism. When you have to walk through the world, always knowing that you have a different skin color. This can’t be the point, that I have to walk through the world thinking I’m different from others, when we’re all supposed to be equal.” (German original: “Mittlerweile sehe ichs eigentlich fast mehr als positive. Weil das ist für mich auch eine Form des Rassismus. Ja, es ist für mich eine, es ist für mich, wenn jemand ständig durch die Welt laufen muss und sich bewusst sein muss, dass er ne andere Hautfarbe hat, ist das nicht der Zweck—also das ist doch nicht der Sinn der Sache, dass ich durch die Welt laufen muss und mir die ganze Zeit denken muss, ich bin anderst wie andere, wenn wir doch alle gleich sein sollen.”). Here, Tee describes her father’s
insistence on teaching her about her own race in what Du Bois (1964) refers to as “double consciousness”:

This sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness-aNegro two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. (pp. 16-17)

Tee echoes Du Bois’ (1964) sentiments with respect to the existence of inner strife and if racial knowledge requires oneself to be reminded of difference, and perceived inferiority at all times. However, what becomes clear of Tee’s explanation is that she sees Black identity as constituted in opposition to Whiteness or White identity; thus, she perceives her father’s desire to teach her that she is Black as focusing on difference in a way that she perceives as a form of racism. I use this example because it shows that although Tee was raised both in Germany and the United States, she sees Black identity as entangled with White identity and the experience of racism. In similar ways, Haki pointed out that she realized she was Black when the White woman called her a racial slur while driving.

Maya and Marisha, on the other hand, saw themselves as Black women in Jamaica well before coming to the United States. Maya points out that she cannot think of a time she did not identify as a Black woman. She goes on to describe the skin-tone-based system of Jamaica that not only renders darker skinned women as inferior, but also often goes hand in hand with social class.

Thus, the contexts and histories of the home countries matter if we seek to understand Black transnational women’s racial identities, even if these identities shift,
change, or are in contradiction with each other (e.g., Tee’s varying racial identification based on place). The contexts and histories of home countries also matter as Black transnational women seek to make sense of their own racial identities and the institutionalized nature of racism in the United States.

Guinier (2004) and Rogers and Mosley (2008) argue that this understanding requires a conceptualization of race and racism as “an instrument of social, geographic and economic control of both Black and White” (Guinier, 2004, p. 114). This framework views racism as structural and racial literacy as a tool of engaging in public debate about race, which can be viewed as productive for building a nuanced understanding of racialized experiences. For Black immigrant women, part of developing this racial literacy requires an understanding of the particular discourses and histories of race and gender in the United States and positioning themselves within these contexts.

**Contentious identities.** A transnational approach requires us to think beyond the nation-state to study migration (Amelina, Faist, & Nergiz, 2013). However, for transnational Black women, the nation-state is not a mere unit of spatial analysis. Instead, how the nation state framed migration directly impacts the lives, experiences, and educational opportunities of the Black transnational women. Furthermore, their national identities, even if they were as difficult and contention-laden as Chrisette’s, remained intact. Home, to Haki, Naïma, Marisha, Chrisette, and Maya, will always be the nation they are from. On the other hand, Tee and Ama reflected a much more contentious and complex construction of home, much of which was mediated by the interconnection of Whiteness and European-ness/Germanness.
It is this complexity that made Tee identify as White in the United States and as Black in Germany. However, within this both/and space of identifying, she frequently reproduced discourses that are steeped in misogynoir, or antiblackness (e.g., the discourse of ratchedness and the connected respectability politics). Thus, Tee admits that she is unable to fully identify how racism works in the United States, even though she has made her own experiences with it. It is this dangerous space of having limited access to the full understanding of racism in the United States and having gaps in her racial literacy (Guinier, 2004) that allow her to default to anti-black discourses. These are similarly taken up by Naima (about African Americans in her GED course) and Chrisette (about the Black people in her neighborhood).

**Contextualization**

It should be noted that theoretical frameworks that seek to address race must always be intersectional and take into full consideration gender and social class. However, for Black transnational women, in particular, scholars must also consider visa status and their home communities, education, and languages. Undoubtedly, the women who spoke English in their home communities and/or in their families had the advantage of not having to acquire and function in another language. Studies that seek to understand identities, literacies, and educational experiences within the larger contexts must consider the particularities, rather than focus on generalizability. Inevitably, then, educational researchers and scholars will see that Black transnational women experience misogynoir in particular ways that are embedded in the larger contexts of colonization, as well as in the local contexts of racism, which in the U.S. are connected to chattel slavery and settler colonialism.
Thus, my second research question, *What larger contexts impact the lives, identities, and educational experiences of Black transnational women?*, was not only addressed by turning to data that emerged from participants’ sharing with me a range of horrific stories about their experiences with racism, most of which I did not share. However, a larger contexts that impacted their lives and educational experiences was racism as well as the remnants of colonialism in their home countries.

The women experienced interpersonal racism in educational spaces, such as the micro-aggressions of Naima’s teacher, or unexpectedly in traffic, such as experienced by Haki while driving. They also encountered institutionalized racism with personal impacts, such as Marisha’s experience with racial steering. Each experience contributed to and further cemented the women’s own Black identities as minoritized and less than human. These identities were usually developed through the experience of racism and not based on a shared commonality. Thus, Smith’s (2016) assertion that Blackness in the United States was constituted through slaveability and racism rather than primarily a shared cultural identity, seems to hold true and continues to raise questions for engaging in anticolonial work and work that seeks cultural connections rooted in the diasporas.

In response to my third research question, *What hopes, fears, and/or goals drive the educational pursuits of Black transnational women?*, it was revealed that all of the women I interviewed were driven by self-actualization through education. Marisha captured this sentiment by saying, “For some reason, I’m driven to pursue higher education. So I’m actually thinking about going further, and it's more about a self-fulfillment thing, where I feel like I need to be fully qualified in whatever area I'm going.” In some way or another, this sentiment holds true for all of the women. From
GED courses, ESL classes, to doctorates, all of the women value education as part of their own journey and they seek to access higher education despite the adversity they face. In the United States, Black transnational women truly inhabit the space within horror and hope, defined by the American dream and the nightmare of racism and isolation. A lot of these efforts were also driven by the women’s desire of returning home and giving back to their communities in some form or fashion.

Naima wishes to return to Somalia as a nurse, while Haki notes that she will give back to her community in any way possible. Ama argues that she has always had the desire of adding to the scholarship on Black German Studies in Germany, in order to create more spaces for Black Germans. Tee, who did not express a desire of giving back to her community, still notes that she prefers living in Germany, but wants to be surrounded by American culture, ideally by living on or near a military branch. However, before a return is possible, most of the women have been engaged in building community in the now.

The fourth and final question, *What specific struggles do Black transnational women face when trying to access sites of formal education?*, can only be answered by first considering the dimensions of access with respect to formal education. Buckland (2011) notes that for children in developing countries, barriers to schooling include the following:

- Physical access (lack of infrastructure);
- Economic barriers (inability to cover educational costs);
- Regulatory barriers or inability to meet enrolment requirements (lack of documentation: birth certificates, immunisation records, report cards).

In addition there are barriers to receiving quality education, which affect individual progression and drop out rates. These include: quality of teaching and learning and social exclusion as a result of the language of
instruction, sexism, racism, xenophobia, teenage pregnancy and harassment. (p. 367)

Certainly, these barriers also emerged from the data of the adult women who participated in this dissertation study. Naima’s lack of physical access to schooling in her youth has rendered her at a disadvantage compared to the women who were able to complete primary and secondary education in their home countries. As she sought to complete the General Educational Development test to finally access College after years of English as a Second Language coursework, the racism she experienced from her teacher contributed to her dropping out of school for the past 5 months.

The economic barriers outlined by Buckland (2011) affect the educational decisions of almost all of the women, particularly Chrisette’s, whose status as an undocumented immigrant has made it difficult for her to physically access educational spaces, but also unable to pay for quality education, since missing work means missing income. Marisha completed her Master’s Degree after experiencing barriers in Jamaica, which were mostly related to extreme selectiveness and a culture of exclusion, as well as low pay that made it impossible to pay back loans. Maya notes that her struggles with accessing educational spaces are related to “visa stuff” (Maya, Interview), which, she has shared with me, has entailed an ongoing legal battle with visa issuing authorities. She did not complete any College in Jamaica. Thus, educational access in the women’s home countries as well as the barriers they experienced often shaped their access to education in the United States.

However, the idea of access paired with deprivation of educational spaces in other countries is not limited to physical and economic barriers. As Haki stated, she decided to pursue her Master’s Degree in African American and African Studies because she had
received very little knowledge of Africa in her education in Kenya. Following Jones’ (2011) call of having to consider postcolonial and colonial education in various ways, Haki’s assertion reflects deprivation in a way that is not related to materials (although she notes the lack of access in this arena as well). Rather, the postcolonial condition of the Kenyan educational system has created a space in which English is taught comprehensively, while African history, geography, and politics are neglected. It is this condition that has propelled her to pursue studies of Africa in the United States.

Similarly, Ama notes that the German educational system has rendered her deprived of knowledge with respect to race, racism, and theorizing with respect to Black Germans, which is why she is pursuing various lines of inquiry about Black German Studies in the United States.

**Implications for educational theory and praxis**

Educational theory that seeks to better understand how racism and colonialism impact the lives of adult Black educators and students in the African diaspora should take into consideration the narratives of Black transnational women. Each theoretical framework that contributed to the framing of these narratives (anticolonial frameworks, women of color feminisms, and Critical Literacies) has proven to be crucial to understanding not only the role of education in the women’s live, but also how their narratives outside of educational spaces can be deemed instructive with respect to understanding the impact of racialization.

In describing diaspora, Campt (2009) notes: “For although it begins with migration and displacement from a home elsewhere, diaspora (and the African diaspora in particular) is not necessarily an endless trajectory that perpetually suspends an eventual
arrival somewhere” (p. 73). Thus, studies of diaspora should not only consider migration, but also “how Black diasporic communities are also thoroughly emplaced and practice complex forms of homing and dwelling” (Campt, 2009, p.73). This assertion has implications for future research as well as for theory. As shown in this dissertation study, home and community, both imagined and tangible, are important aspects of Black transnational women’s lives and pursuits. The mothers (Naima, Haki, Chrisette, and Marisha) among the participants each shared their fears and worries with respect to their children’s identities, education, and trajectories, particularly as they relate to racism and xenophobia, as they face a different set of challenges in their current communities.

Anticolonial theorists and educational practitioners in the field of education must consider these implications and seek to disrupt the colonizing and harmful ideologies and discourses about people of African descent, Muslims, undocumented (im)migrants, and Indigenous peoples that continue to be reproduced through the media, but also in educational spaces. Critical literacy teachers and researchers, particularly those engaged in critical English as a Second Language teaching, must consider the contexts and histories that impact students’ access, understandings, and ways of moving toward conscientization (Freire, 1970/2012). As the example of Naima’s teacher suggests, teaching English as a Second Language also requires that teachers interrogate their own biases, leanings, and stances so as to not marginalize the most vulnerable of their students.

Implications for Women of Color Feminisms. Despite its goal to unify, the term ‘women of color’ remains contentious, as it simultaneously brushes over difference. However, I am using the term because understandings of Black transnational women’s
experiences from a feminist perspective require intersectional approaches that consider the specific forms of anti-black racism and misogynoir, as well as the othering and the process of becoming a racialized being that sometimes go hand in hand with leading transnational lives. Finally, decolonizing approaches (Tuck & Wang, 2012) require us to consider our position as migrants and potential settlers who are capable of further erasing Indigenous peoples’ histories, knowledges, and presence. Further, Black transnational women are required to develop racial literacy and deep understandings of the contexts and histories of racism, race, and misogyny in the United States, so as not to subscribe to and reproduce anti-black racism. Such understandings open up spaces in which Black transnational women can collectively resist colonizing thought and practices that continuously dehumanize all Black women (e.g., the trope of the ‘welfare queen’).

Educational researchers working from an intersectional feminist perspective, then, must therefore consider both the local and global contexts that impact educational spaces as well as their interactions. In other words, if it is our goal to create critical interventions in heteropatriarchal and colonizing ways of teaching and learning, we must consider ways to foster racial literacy (Guinier, 2004), and deep understandings of the experiences, contexts, and histories that impact the teaching and learning of our students.

**Limitations.** Of course, there were several limitations to this dissertation study. One limitation was that of time, as I was only able to collect approximately one year’s worth of data, which included a finite set of scheduled interviews. The study truly represents a snapshot of the experiences and thoughts of some of the Black transnational women that participated in this study. Another limitation is that of language. I recognize that there is an unmatched richness in the data I collected from Ama, which I was unable
to present because it was in the German language and would have gone beyond the scope of this project. Finally, the study was limited in its practical engagement of settler colonialism. Its engagement was not an a priori theme, and no discussion emerged from it in the data. I plan on remedying this issue, by continuing to do this work by thinking more deeply about the implications of understanding transnational lives and experiences to better understand the responsibilities of transnational researchers with respect to decolonizing their research.

**Conclusion**

As Black transnational women, we constantly occupy the space between horror and hope. As the political landscape shifts in favor of discourses that continue to devalue our presence in and contributions to America, we continue to pursue our hopes and dreams in the hopes of eventually returning to Octavia Butler’s (1993) description of paradise, the place in which we are loved, valued, and appreciated. In the process of writing this dissertation, I have witnessed devastation and elation. Naima’s husband, sons, and mother spent days in airports, not knowing when a plane would be able to return them to the United States, while Naima was in the United States, 9 months pregnant and crying in desperation. Elation came when the family was reunited while the executive order was temporarily blocked. I think of the hundreds and thousands of women who come to the United States only to experience a similar sense of uncertainty. It is for them that this work must continue in order to work against the sense that “you are suffering and nobody cares” (Haki, Interview
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Appendix: Interview Protocol

1. How do you identify yourself racially and in terms of nationality?

2. Has your identity changed since you have come to the United States? If so, in what ways?

3. How would you describe the contexts of race and racism in the United States?

4. Did you see yourself as a Black woman before coming to the United States?

5. How did you identify racially before you came to the United States? Has this changed?

6. Which sites of formal education are you currently accessing?

7. What, if any, is the importance of the English language in the pursuit of your goals?

8. What are your short-term and long-term educational goals and why?

9. What educational experiences in your home country stand out to you?

10. Which language(s) do you speak in your home?

11. Is it important to you to teach your children the language of your home country?