



Pulling Ourselves Together: Embracing Black Feminist Reparative Theory and Pedagogy in “Post-George Floyd” Higher Education

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ABSTRACT *This article considers how institutions of higher education participated in the national “racial reckoning” that followed the murder of George Floyd in May 2020. Using the work of Pan-Africanist jurist Motsoko Pheko, memoirist Sisonke Msimang, poet Audre Lorde, and Black queer feminist critics Tiffany Willoughby-Herard and M. Jacqui Alexander, the authors reflect on the principled research practices and ethos that catalyze sustainable repair. Durable forms of repair include reconnecting the feeling body with the knowing self, stillness, and tarrying. The authors (two doctoral students and a professor colleague) also consider repair through attention to the material conditions of knowledge production (collaborative writing, reclaiming the sacred, and questioning what it means to make something whole without reproducing a singular dominating episteme) to disrupt academic hierarchies. Arguing that repairing society, the planet, or the ways that questions are asked and answered requires ongoing wrestling with our current climate of racial terror in higher education, this article embodies the authors’ reparative principles and envisions paths towards educational justice.*

KEYWORDS reparative principles; Black feminist pedagogies; post-George Floyd higher education; cross-talk

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Dedication

In memory of Dr. Motsoko Pheko (Nov 13, 1930-April 19, 2024), a founding member of the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania, who has contributed much to the Pan African resurgence in contemporary youth politics and educational justice social movements in South Africa. Founder of Tokoloho Publishing, Dr. Pheko authored over 30 books and led as a member of the South African parliament representing the PAC. Dr. Pheko deployed his training in political science, jurisprudence, sociology, and systematic theology to advance Pan Africanist principles. He has left an immeasurable and treasured legacy to the fields of publishing, pedagogy, anticolonial studies of foreign policy and international affairs, and Pan African feminist thought and activism.

Introduction

In May 2020, Minneapolis police officers strangled George Floyd to death. Floyd's name was added to an ever-growing list of Black men and women murdered by police officers, but his death was different in that it sparked global protests against police brutality and anti-Black racism. Following Floyd's murder, many university campuses, including the University of California (UC) Irvine, began to enact policy measures aimed at addressing their legacies of anti-Black racism. Anti-Black racism refers to the institutionalized, juridical, social, economic, libidinal, scientific, and aesthetic phenomenon of racial terror that shapes the Black experience. We are particularly interested in how it shapes norms of educational belonging and exclusion as well as academic ideologies and pedagogies. Anti-Black racism appears as higher risks of police stops, prosecution, and in-custody deaths faced by Black individuals, all of which are violations of *habeas corpus*. Anti-Black racism also outlines the profligate and injurious relationship between anti-Blackness and captivity. It can present itself as:

...white supremacy; social death defined by gratuitous violence, natal alienation, spirit injury, physical abuse, and generalized dishonor; the existence of an anti-Black world predicated on slavery and its denial; an ontology that constitutes white civic life and subjectivity; the repressed long memory of enslavement and its present-day afterlife; and imperiled [B]lack life" (Willoughby-Herard, 2015, p. 226).

Our examination of anti-Blackness requires a reconsideration of what "racial reckoning" in higher education can be. It asks us to unpack the concept of "repair" itself. Our site of analysis is the University and its attempts to diversify future faculty. Through this article, we seek to destabilize institutional notions and methods of repair by comparing institutional efforts to efforts from the people most impacted by those institutional actions. Institutional-level policy changes intend to change the scope of humanistic inquiry; however, they often

leave power relations unchanged and violent legacies unquestioned. We argue for repair that is sustainable and addresses ongoing racial terror; for a repair that is candid about educational institutions' role in maintaining oppressive systems and ideologies. We come to something closer to repair by tracing BIPOC activism that inspires and is suppressed by institutional campus initiatives. We focus primarily on the Black Studies Cluster (BSC) initiative created at UC Irvine in the wake of Floyd's murder. BSCs were successful in recruiting and funding over two dozen Black Studies graduate scholars; something fought for long before May 2020. The BSC did not result solely from the generosity of institutional paternalism and philanthropy. The reparative potential of these clusters is diminished by narratives of a "moral" University responding to "racial reckoning," which ignore the legacies of organizing that scaffold their existence. Following an analysis of campus climate over the past four years that situates institutional attempts at repair, we arrive at a collaborative meditation of repair that centers a return to our own ways of being and knowing, one rooted in Black Feminist poetics, Black Feminist educational history, and Black Feminist cosmologies.

Methodology

Our method is a mode of autoethnographic assemblage. Meaning comes through our process of working together in a non-hierarchical, pro-egalitarian practice. We came to this project intending to write together, as Chasia and Mariel prepared for their Masters examinations and Tiffany prepared to depart for a residential fellowship. Chasia presented the opportunity to engage in the questions posed about reckoning and repair in this issue of *Studies in Social Justice*. Tiffany offered the model of parallel writing and assemblage as well as the prompts, as follows:

1. How have my experiences in the so-called "post-COVID" return to normal hindered my repair efforts?
2. What was it like to enter the BSC initiative after the murder of George Floyd?
3. Is this learning space going to let me think in my own way?
4. How do I share this institutional history without foreclosing this generation's freedom dreams?
5. What is the context that we share? How did we come to be in each other's lives?
6. Which theorist helps me define repairing in the work I am doing?
7. What am I most committed to repairing with my work?

As a research method, parallel writing relies on articulation. We are bridging interpretive techniques and theories to approach common social phenomena from a range of perspectives while holding a common conversation. This

articulation is the theoretical work that can be done through sustained meaning-making across canons, categories, and research practices. Where institutional responses to “racial reckoning” emphasized symbolic and short-term interventions while claiming a long-term commitment to Black Studies, we instead argue repair is something that requires collectivity, requires our slow writing together.

After answering each prompt, we read our answers aloud, edited them, and stitched them together. Amid the material conditions of knowledge production that bring us together (the BSC, graduate examinations, and fellowships), we intended to braid our ideas into something like baby locs, trusting that some new thing will emerge as they mature. Thinking about humanistic inquiry this way is an embodied creative process that allows us to move toward repair.

Because Chasia’s research focuses on Black womxn’s knowledge production and interiority, Mariel’s on Black Feminist teaching across time, and Tiffany’s on the habit of defaming youth-led political movements, we committed to collaborative thinking work to bring our ideas together into a meaningful conversation. For us, this is the most essential creative reparative practice. The ethos of repair has provided us with an opportunity to stage a sustained writerly conversation and has enabled us to navigate and transform the constraints of the University. We transformed a temporary BSC, a milestone examination, and a Black womxn faculty advisor being away for a year, into a reparative space through our collaborative writing practices.

By advocating for a Black Feminist approach to repair, we can historicize the University otherwise. Our storytelling enables us to say that institutional short-term fixes are not reparative. As such, we seek to emphasize the transformative potential of advocacy work and political organizing by many different individuals, collectives, and coalitions who unite to create otherwise worlds. A Black Feminist approach to repair allows us to look towards a reworlding within higher education. We can embrace and encourage the creative possibility of envisioning “whatever it takes to build a society that does not continuously rearrange the trappings of annihilation and bondage while calling itself ‘free’... to make peace with our own fears...[seek] active amends and accountability” (Kaba, 2021, p. 71).

This article results from our collective engagement with one another, allowing us to creatively contribute to what Cynthia Dillard (2012) calls “endarkened feminist epistemology” and what S. R. Toliver (2021) calls “endarkened storywork.” Working together disorients us from our individual life experiences, scholarship, and spiritual and ethical commitments, resituating us in community. By writing together, we also engage with Amrah Salomón’s (2015) “telling to reclaim.” For us, telling to reclaim through endarkened storywork and feminist epistemology meant sharing histories of our resistive cultures that refuse commodification, branding, and short-term solutions to create something new. Salomón’s insistence that research be engaged, that it be a sacred ceremonial practice, grounds our stories and writing. This collective experience has required us to craft a cross-talk and

language on the page. Writing together allows us to care for one another, learn how to invest in each other's voices and experiences, and tap into different ways of knowing. Through this cross-talk, we recognize that the presence of the BSC is not what is keeping Chasia and Mariel in academia. Instead, it is learning how the BSC came to exist in the first place – the care, intentionality, and organizing that produced it – that keeps us imagining how we might refresh and sustain such a project. Further, what we bring, our lived experiences, creates opportunities for lasting repair within these spaces. We are learning to pick up our puzzle pieces of Black liberation through our thinking, research, and creative work.

*We
meet each other
have reclaimed our time and writerly voice
in a place that did not mean for us to be here*

Historiography of Higher Education “After” George Floyd

We arrive at the question of reckoning through an acute attention to the location we share, which is a workplace at a public research-one university in the United States, UC Irvine. We have come to share this intellectual space and to be in each other's company through the machinations of “Post-George Floyd” higher education. By “Post-George Floyd” higher education, we are referring to the drastic uptick in institutional changes in response to Floyd's murder and the uprisings it sparked. We hope to make clear that we are still mourning Mr. Floyd's murder and its aftermath. We are still mourning the racial dynamics that allow Black lives to be viewed as disposable and portrayed as worthy of death by the State and its actors. However, we employ the terminology of “Post-George Floyd,” to focus on a prevalent institutional response to his murder. Though they appeared and claimed to meaningfully address anti-Black racism, violence, and systemic discrimination through transformational and reparative policies and initiatives, institutions instead maintained the status quo, mirroring Western nations' desire to return to normal following the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Just as COVID-19 is still present and lethal, so is anti-Black violence.

Further, this call for a return to normal is not a call for repair or racial reckoning. Instead, these initiatives are a request to return to the social order of Black subordination that preceded the chaos. The lingering specter of anti-Blackness in ideas of normalcy appears in Lewis Gordon's studies on white supremacy. He argues, “white supremacy measures political and social maturation by the willingness to participate and remain entrenched in and used for the benefit and maintenance of the system” (Willoughby-Herard, 2015, pp. 80-81). As such, our invocation of a Post-George Floyd higher education uses institutional language while also embracing Christina Sharpe's (2016) methodical critique of an “after racism” as a temporal break that has been

achieved. We evoke this paradox of a temporal progression, in which the “post” we are calling upon has yet to arrive despite the material changes in resources to recruit Black students. Sharpe (2016) cautions that people who hunger for the era “after racism” dream of an end to accountability for the ongoing and historical harm of “the disaster” (p. 5). They seek to deny the consistent likelihood of Black people being killed by the State, those working for the State, and vigilantes.

In the period that is allegedly after racism, “Black subjection was and is planned” but denied (Sharpe, 2016, p. 5). Democracy still “require[s] our death” because death-dealing is baked into our civil, legal, and juridical norms (p. 7). We are living in a time after Floyd’s death, without the societal changes and racial reckoning that a “post-George Floyd” university would require. Thus, by Post-George Floyd higher education, we refer to the policy shifts made by public research universities following the 2020 uprisings, which offered unsustainable token and symbolic attempts at repair. Such policy measures often build upon experimental reparative practices led by Black and BIPOC scholar activists among faculty, staff, alumni, administrators, and students from below and at a great personal sacrifice.

We offer a provisional meditation on the notion of repair. Our definition is not a closed one. Durable forms of repair include reconnecting the feeling body with the knowing self, stillness, and tarrying. We also consider repair through attention to the material conditions of knowledge production (collaborative writing, reclaiming the sacred, and questioning what it means to make something whole without reproducing a singular dominating episteme) to disrupt academic hierarchies. We argue that repairing society, the planet, and the ways that questions are asked and answered requires ongoing wrestling with the existing climate of racial terror in higher education (Federal Bureau of Investigations, 2024). This article embodies reparative educational justice, which disrupts loneliness and isolation. Reckoning with racial violence in higher education requires, not a return to normal, but implementing and engaging with the ways of being in community with one another that Black womxn have created. Student and faculty-led initiatives differ greatly in design, outcome, and impact, compared to institution-led responses.

Reparative Efforts at The University of California

By the Summer of 2020, there had already been nearly 10 years of organizing against anti-Black racism at the University of California. Within Black Studies, there were pushes to examine the implications of documenting and ameliorating Black suffering and to challenge the personnel disparities that hindered the advancement of highly trained and qualified African, Black, and Caribbean professionals in multiple fields. There were also calls for a commitment to desegregating professional and graduate schools that have failed to retain and graduate African, Black, and Caribbean students. Protests

were organized to pressure the UC to re-assess policies and graduate school admission, re-examine retention and graduation rates, and consider overall experiences of belonging among Black graduate affiliates.

Following Floyd's murder, dozens of universities called for a commitment to increasing access and opportunity. Efforts included pathway and pipeline programs that gathered significant momentum toward fairer admission of students focused on research in Black Studies. While *de jure* segregation has ended, and since the 1972 *Equal Employment Opportunity Act*, we have had federal legal anti-discrimination regimes, there is global concern regarding the *de facto* discrimination that prevents institutions of higher education from substantially changing their hiring and admissions practices.

A decade of organizing at the University of California created conditions that were a ready-made roadmap for campus-wide initiatives in Black Thriving following Floyd's murder. UC Irvine's Office of Inclusive Excellence launched a three-year program that involved voluntary education about the historical significance of federal higher education anti-discrimination legislation, more robust coordination of symposia, and more training for faculty and administrators to ensure compliance with federal hiring law. This UCI Black Thriving Initiative cited Floyd's murder as what:

...spurred UCI to aspire to be the nation's foremost destination for Black people to thrive as students, faculty, staff and members of our community [with a] whole university response that relies on each campus member and community partner to contribute to building a culture where Black people thrive. (Haynes, 2021, para. 1)

Repair Through Black Studies Clusters

BSCs were an additional initiative in the wake of Floyd's murder intended to address anti-Black racism by creating pathways for future faculty in the arts and sciences on three University of California campuses. The Berkeley, Riverside, and Irvine campuses sought to recruit competitive graduate students through creating BSCs. UC Riverside focused on the Global Black Diaspora in Anthropology (see Figure 1). Though they did not produce a BSC, UC Riverside's faculty efforts and advocacy illustrate the nearly invisible faculty labor.

UC Irvine funded a BSC for three academic years, starting in 2021 through 2024 (see Figure 2). UC Berkeley hosted The Black Studies Collaboratory, supported by foundation sources, primarily the Mellon Just Futures Initiative, from 2021-2023. These programs aimed to convince applicants that earning a doctorate in the UC system would not be an experience of hyper-isolation. They attempted to show these students they would not be the *only one* or the *first* Black student or *first* student studying Blackness. UC campuses had to address their legacies of creating harmful academic experiences for the BSC to be effective. This was done with varying levels of success.

Nevertheless, researchers have consistently demonstrated that challenging “solo status” for underrepresented persons in higher education is a best practice for retention, academic achievement, and graduation (Pollak & Niemann, 1998; Sekaquaptewa & Thompson, 2002a, 2002b). We agree with this research.



Figure 1. UC Riverside Anthropology 2020 Call for Applications for Global Black Diaspora Cluster. (Source: UC Riverside Anthropology Department)



Figure 2. Press Release for the Inaugural 2021 Black Studies Cluster at UC Irvine. (Source: UC Irvine School of Humanities)

With three campus proposals, UC Irvine was the only campus successful in recruiting significant numbers of funded graduate students. This points to not just a lack of financial resources but also the UC’s lack of understanding about the multiple kinds of support Black Studies graduate students need to flourish. Consider this hypothetical situation. A university wants to become world-renowned in diabetes care, so it recruits 45 students for its doctoral program. However, this same university lacks advanced research in the field. It does not have the necessary equipment to run trials and perform the research. It is in danger of having its one research-active medical doctor leave for another university. Further, it has a history of saddling graduate students with student loan debt. These students would face precarity that may lower their chances of graduating and certainly would have implications for their research outputs.

While extreme, this hypothetical scenario illustrates that simply recruiting Black Studies students is not reparative. The UC Irvine BSC students have devised a wide range of innovative ways to create and sustain learning environments in the face of being under-resourced. We have pursued our education in a context that holds the paradox of the institutional justification for the BSC, its tangible net-positive impact on students, and legitimate claims that more needs to be done for there to be actual repair. The labor required to carry these contradictions has been made invisible, limiting its reparative potential.

One way we've created reparative spaces within the university is by writing together. Collaborative knowledge production and meaning-making allow us to learn how to share each other's individual, personal, and research-specific idioms. By writing together, we replicate what Desireé Melonas (2022) calls "cultivating habits of assembly." We are bringing together our singular writerly voices and individual capacities to illuminate forgotten labors, revealing a Black Feminist undercommons of voices holding the BSC and other institutional measures in place.

Calling on the work of Stephan Harney and Fred Moten (2013), we invoke the terminology of an undercommons to describe the hidden and forgotten socially reproductive, intellectual, and affective labor done in the University's shadows to create spaces for Black existence (p. 37). These undercommons are practices of fugitive relationality and a mode of being with others that are antagonistic to normative institutional power structures, like the University (Harney & Moten, 2013, pp. 112-142). By occupying and calling attention to these undercommons, this "maroon community of the university... where the work gets done, where the work gets subverted, where the revolution is still [B]lack, still strong" (p. 26), we argue these Black Feminist undercommons are the site at which reparative efforts are actually possible. We aim to illuminate the labor that breathed life into possibilities that were simply not supposed to exist and to prevent them from being erased from institutional memory. Below, in Figures 3 to 12, we present a small sampling of alternative practices of care and responsibility through the creative programming and political organizing that Black womxn at UC Irvine have conducted, which makes clear why the University's present attempt at reconciliation fails. Reckoning with racial violence in higher education in California requires, not a return to normal, but an implementation of ways of being in community with one another. Black womxn have created these spaces and practices outside of the campus regime of diversity, equity, and inclusion.



Figure 3. UC Irvine 2015 Black Student Union Demands Team. (Source: UC Irvine Black Student Union)



Figure 4. 2019 Black Visions Conference Poster. (Created by Myrna Rosales)

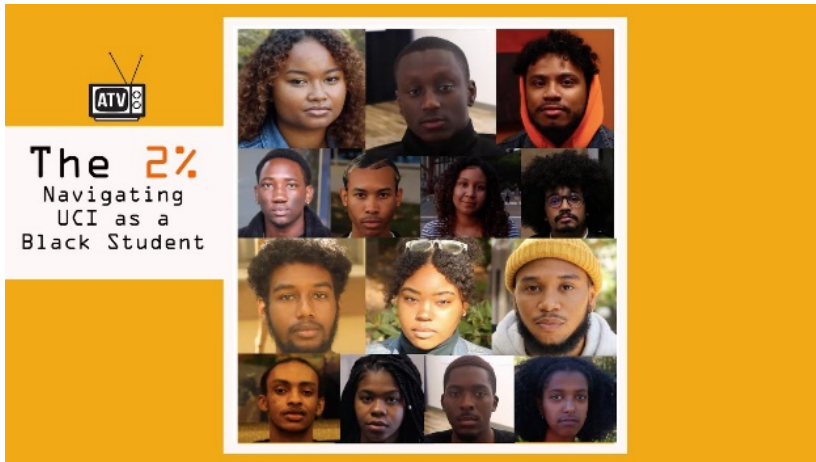


Figure 5. 2020 graphic created for the documentary, *The 2%: Navigating UCI as a Black Student*, for Anteater TV. (Created by Iyyana Blackburn)



Figure 6. Dr. Kaosoluchi Enendu and Dr. Carol Major at the 2020 White Coats for Black Lives Demonstration at UC Irvine Medical School's Orange County Campus. (Source: Dr. Kaosoluchi Enendu)

5 OCT 2022

BREAKING NEWS



TWO ARTICLES, SAME STORY, DIFFERENT SOUND.

February 2020, on the University of California Santa Cruz campus, graduate students were organizing a response for the administration about the cost of living adjustment for graduates. Unfortunately, an alumna of the school wanting to retrieve transcripts for personal matters was caught in the crosshairs between an authoritative response from the UCIPD to the rally. The alumna was forced to the ground, arrested, and then detained.

The campus' official newsletter covered this story Feb. 29th; here are some excerpts from their article:

"UCI alumna Shikera Chamndany was taken into custody while trying to obtain her transcripts from Aldrich Hall amid a lockdown initiated by UCIPD on Feb. 20. Chamndany was taken into custody and to the Orange County Women's Jail by UCIPD despite denying reports that she attempted to assault a police officer while getting her transcripts from UCI administration."

The former student's name was misspelled in the article after the initial introduction it was not spelled correctly thereafter.

"Students attempted to access Aldrich Hall in order to speak directly with the administration, namely Chancellor Howard Gilman, about their own concerns with COLA. UCIPD responded by putting Aldrich Hall on lockdown."

"That day, UC Irvine students held a protest in solidarity with graduate student strikers at UC Santa Cruz, fighting for a cost-of-living adjustment to their wages, which meant there was more security on campus than usual. Chamndany was unaffiliated with the protest, but according to a Facebook post by campus police, "forcibly entered" Aldrich Hall – a building on lockdown because of the student rally – and was arrested for "assaulting a police officer." Campus police reportedly tackled and handcuffed Chamndany and took her to jail, where she stayed until her release the next morning."

"A petition was created by the Black Student Union and United Students Against Sweatshops calling for Chancellor Gilman to acknowledge and act on their list of demands following the incident."

The BSU had a list of demands that stated:

"A petition was created by the Black Student Union and United Students Against Sweatshops calling for Chancellor Gilman to acknowledge and act on their list of demands following the incident. In addition to financial support for Shikera's legal fees, the petition demands that she get psychological support, for the officer who tackled and handcuffed her to be fired and for the abolishment of the UCIPD."

The second article released was by Diverse Issues in Higher Education. This article gives a more forward approach to the perspective of the students. This article was released on March 4th, 2020.

"Shikera Chamndany, a Black alumna in biomedical engineering at UC Irvine, went to campus to collect her transcripts on Feb. 20. She ended up spending the night in Orange County Women's Jail."

"The university claims to be a 'safe' place, a place for all students to excel academically," the petition reads, "But instead, the university engages in a range of practices and policies which reaffirm the message that we, Black people, are undeserving of safety and are dispensable."

"Because of the ongoing investigation, Liz Griffin, chief of the UC Irvine police department, declined to comment on the incident, but she wrote in an email to Diverse: "We are working closely with campus counsel, administration and leadership here on campus to do what is best for our community and those involved."



This is a picture of Shikera Chamndany above.

The University of California Alumna was traumatized by and detained for charges she did not commit, excessive force was used to de-escalate a situation. This unarmed black woman experienced UCIPD policing in a brutal form.

VISIT OUR WEBSITE FOR INFO ON OUR NEXT EVENT AND SALE!

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA IRVINE

Figure 7. Infographic about UC Irvine's case against Shikera Chamndany. (Created by Tisha Lane)

X: Black Women Daily

"X: Black Women Daily" celebrates the diverse and dynamic black women on and off of the UC Irvine Campus

UCI

BLACK WOMEN DAILY

Facebook icon: @BLACK WOMEN DAILY UCI

Instagram icon: @BLACKWOMENDAILYUCI

Email icon: XSWDCOMES@GMAIL.COM

QR code: SUBSCRIBE FOR UPCOMING EVENTS

Figure 8. 2018 graphic for "X: Black Women Daily, a digital community for Black womxn" at UC Irvine. (Designed by S. Ama Wray)



Figure 9. Graphic for a five-year UC-HBCU partnership between UC Irvine and Delaware State University for a Summer Institute in Neuroscience in 2021 through UCI's Center for Neurobiology of Learning and Memory with Principal Investigators Autumn Ivy and Manuella Yassa. (Designed by Manuella Yassa)



Figure 10. Tiffany Willoughby-Herard, Jessica Millward, and LaShonda Carter, educators for the Activist Studio West Program in 2020, a collaboration between UCI professors and HBCU students to archive the work of living Black activists. (Source: Steve Zylus / UC Irvine)



Figure 11. Ella Turenne, educator for the Activist Studio West program.



Figure 12. Photograph of members of the LEAD-ABC & PRIME-LC programs at UCI's medical school. UCI faculty fought for these pathway programs that support pre-health sciences and medical students who are committed to exposing and healing the endemic and lethal health disparities facing African, Black, and Caribbean peoples. (Photo by Michael Dennin)

Repair via the Sacred

The status of being Black and gendered interstitial subjects does not just happen to inert objects (Spillers, 2003). Rather, that status is etched onto psyches, bodies, and spirits. It is pressed into nonconsenting flesh through harsh exercises of power and dripped down lovingly by ancestors waiting for people to come into themselves. What the ancestors see when they see us is a future they both bemoan and cherish. In such a context, we are Black and comely to those invisible ones and to each other. Knowing that the Ancestors regard us is the first step towards something like repair.

If the first principle of repair regards us as always being in communion with the divine, then the second principle of repair must be working our way toward dreaming together to build new forms of relation. The social relations built over a decade of intentional survival at UC Irvine were fed by ethical nutrients. The people who were wooed, recruited, and have begun to build community in the BSC are animated by the same ethical nutrients. By ethical nutrients, we mean the intentional labor of individuals and collectives to create opportunities for future students to pursue graduate education in Black Studies that prioritizes community and support. While some doctoral programs might allow students to conduct research in this field, the BSC enables a learning environment where one does not have to justify this line of inquiry. Building community together has allowed us to do ethical reparative work. What follows is our collective theorization of what this repair could look like and the values, principles, and ethos that undergird it.

*What there is not-- is a critical mass
that can recognize in each other
a whole field of operation and action
and decisive difference and continuity ...*

On my back I carry a croker sack full of cotton and juju

That you may carry silk or talismans or wampum or feather or honey

(Willoughby-Herard, 2024; excerpt from "Mentoring is
Not an Excuse for Bringing in One Negro at a Time")

Repair via Quiet Black Reflection

When considering Black Studies theorists and their creative and analytical works defining the work that we are doing, Motsoko Pheko's work, specifically *Rediscovering Africa and Her Spirituality* (2013), is vital for me, Tiffany. Pheko argues that African spirituality is far too often overlooked as a feature of anticolonial struggle and the decolonial education accompanying it. According to Pheko, we, as African people, are not meant to live with the idolatry of white supremacy. Our sacredness and belief need not make us second guess how we pray (2013, p. 17). Features of white supremacy include caricatures of African people (Continental and Diaspora) as savage,

uncivilized, lacking a conception of the sacred, and hopelessly wedded to a lower form of religion deemed “practices” and “polytheism.” These false assessments have not been seriously excavated and leave a legacy of self-doubt, self-hatred, and anti-Africanness in Black people worldwide.

A central logic of colonialism’s racial regime has been the reprobate and false claim that we ought to disavow our history, our ancestors, and our beliefs and instead subject ourselves to the history, ancestors, and beliefs of those who wish to harm us. But what if those beliefs did not contradict the monotheism of Europeans who were invested in colonizing African people globally? Through a discussion of African sameness to (and origins of) European precepts about the cosmological and sacred world, instead of discussing African difference, Pheko (2013) launches a rhetorical salvo to dislodge barriers in embracing African religiosity. To the extent that one can embrace African religiosity, one can more easily reject the external and internalized colonial thinking that results from being subjected to the idolatrous regime of white superiority (pp. 17-19, 22).

Pheko teaches that people of African descent are meant to celebrate the many different names of The Highest God, which have always abided with us and which we have pursued in every effort of living and dying. We are meant to greet our ancestors, who are heroic and lived great lives, with humility. We are to acknowledge their capacity to go to the divine on our behalf. One must remember, speak to, and tarry in devotion to them without shame. Their achievements and lives are worth studying and learning from. But this cannot be done if one internalizes shame about having come from and being connected to ancestors.

African-descended people are meant to celebrate the significance of purification in their lives and make strong determinations between what is clean and what is unclean. They are to remember who socialized and provided sanctuary to Moses, Jesus, and Socrates and who tarried with Solomon – it was our African ancestors. According to Pheko, African Traditional Religion and Christianity have monotheism in common, and they ought not to forget the church fathers named at the earliest Christian churches, those African people who are the pillars of the faith of humans. Pheko offers an intellectual reservoir to repair the spiritual breaches that have been made, to claim all of who we have been dreamed into being as.

There is a link between Pheko’s model of repairing spiritual breaches and Sisonke Msimang’s caution that we are not heroes; we are simply people, and yet we owe each other time, respect, and the ability to craft our own story. Msimang (2021) calls this act a “duty of care feminists owe the women who populate the archive – and those who may yet enter” (p. 15). Pheko and Msimang help me understand the egalitarian ethos necessary to enter history’s archives and the place where this paper’s authors met. Without prescribing meaning or determining how that history is handled or responded to, these African thinkers help me perceive caring for this history as a sacred task. It is as hallowed and sanctified a duty to remember the global protests against Mr.

Floyd's murder as it is to remember the vision and practice of recruiting people who would come to Orange County, California, to help African, Black, and Caribbean people do the work we were pursuing for at least a decade. It is as sacred as building with the people who come to Orange County, California, deliberately and intentionally, with a new way of being, researching, and writing. The stories Chasia and Mariel craft are as much part of the sacred work as anything I might remember.

We see how Tiffany's thinking upends the colonial dislocation between African and European cosmology to draw closer to their history. They write of finding identity outside of white supremacist beliefs and standing boldly in that space of assuredness, in all that it offers and asks of them. But to be able to "tarry in devotion," to have the time and space to do so, is something that colonial education has tried to make impossible. Mariel addresses the quiet that Black feminist educators have long fought to secure, a quiet that makes such tarrying possible.

For me, Mariel, repair is a strange word because it usually follows what has been broken and needs fixing, but it does not always *question what it means to make something whole*. When we are constantly shifting and resituating only to find ourselves in the same social order, an order that drives some people closer to death than others, what has repair done and for whom? I ask myself how my work can contribute to a type of repair that does not require allegiance or submission to a singular dominating episteme, one that has been secured and upheld by ideas of normalcy and rests on premature death. This dominating episteme is created by making Black womxn's flesh the material ground of difference from which a confining knowledge of being can spring. In the chapter "Anatomically Speaking: Ungendered Flesh and the Science of Sex," C. Riley Snorton (2017) explores the medical and research abuse of Anarcha, Lucy, Betsey, and many other enslaved womxn whose suppressed histories have been the mode through which gender and race are made. I read this happening in the words of Emma Brown, a Black woman, educator, daughter, and friend who attended Oberlin in 1860 through an initiative akin to a BSC, where institution-led repair enters higher education through a series of colliding economic and political interests. Oberlin only began accepting Black students in 1835 due to financial desperation. Emma was invited to attend, only to be squeezed through the halls built from the disregard for her life. There was no repair for her there. I stay with her story because she does not stop there. Emma exits the school in 1861, a move triggered by survival but one that reveals life beyond these structures (Sterling, 1984, pp. 192-202, 286-294). In her absence from the graduation record, I ask questions about how her pain was translated into a type of reasonable progress under democracy and what her exit opens up. Her exiting engaged a different form of repair that doesn't shore up the school and its desire to consume her life. Therefore, I ask us to consider how Black world-building and meaning-making have always been reparative and in conflict with the mending of normalcy. What kind of repair

does the repeated interruption of the order of things (Robinson, 2000, p. 177) in educational institutions offer us?

In class on August 30th, 2022, Chasia and I asked Dr. Tiffany about the expectations of our writing over the course of our graduate program in Culture & Theory at UC Irvine. “What are the requirements, and where was the space of our own design?” Dr. Tiffany, a title that signals both deep respect for their experience and expertise as well as love and appreciation for their caring and careful mentorship, said that Culture & Theory is a program hard fought for. A space where students would not be “sabotaged for not following a particular philosophy” (Willoughby-Herard, personal communication, August 30, 2023). Placing this within the larger context of Black Studies programs, Dr. Tiffany explained that these programs “create space and time that does not exist” in an environment where “they don’t want us to have enough quiet to be able to think” (Willoughby-Herard, personal communication, August 30, 2023).

I left this class feeling a restored clarity on where I was and why I had chosen to take up the study of Black womxn educators in such an environment. I came to UC Irvine looking to make a *space within a space* – a space to study space makers who have been creating folds in the curtain for hundreds of years. When I say a space within a space, I account for Harney and Moten’s (2013) “undercommons” described as a space of hiding that is needed to survive, but not a place of safety because it is made use of and needed as the surplus to make the University productive. This undercommons is made out of impossible positions of institutional maintenance, described as an outside, a non-place (pp. 30-42). And while it may take this non-form in the University, I also am referring to what comes from an elsewhere that we bring in. A space that is carried in with us, that internal zone maintained through our loving and supporting networks outside of the University, and that we carry with us as a way to move in and out of it because, after all, the University is not all that we are. What are the spaces that love us, and how do we hold them inside of us and return to them?

The space makers I study are people who know that the spaces we have been given to learn in are not meant to allow us to think, so they continually find elsewhere. They are the educators who believe what one is told is solid, never is. And it was only through their work that I felt and imagined school could be a place to think. It was through their pedagogy that I knew school meant more than isolation, belittlement, and being indoctrinated into normative behavior.

Tiffany saying this could be a program where I could “get enough quiet to think” resonated deeply with me. Getting quiet is something that my mom, Shelley Perkins Rowland, would tell me to do when I was feeling sick. I have always known getting quiet as a way to repair. My mom taught me that getting quiet is what you do to find a way back to yourself when you feel trapped in the despair of pain, and I always return to it.

M. Jacqui Alexander (2006) echoes this idea of quiet strength in her conversation with Ekundayo, a priest and devotee to Oya, the Goddess of the wind and fire. In the chapter “Knowing Who Walks with You: The Making of

Sacred Subjectivity,” Alexander (2006) writes, “The challenge with which we are confronted here is how to move between death’s clutches, and what Ekundayo suggests is that we do so by living in a particular way, by becoming still within Oya’s multiple manifestations. It is no simple task” (p. 333). She writes about her own and others’ journey to a cosmological understanding of self and what it feels like to “ground one’s consciousness in the idea and practice of Sacred accompaniment, Sacred guidance, and Sacred identity” (p. 328). In this conversation, Ekundayo uses the language of the storm to share how Oya has offered her the ability to see in the midst of intensity and to move through tumult with clarity.

Seeing with clarity is the act of listening to oneself, that my mom practices and taught me. It is a spiritual accompaniment that requires internal quiet. Inside this quiet, there is time for connection with and between the material and the metaphysical, which is often forced apart. This connection is what we, through this writing practice, have been writing back together for ourselves. In doing so, there is a possibility of changing our relationship with everything and everyone rather than mending what we have and don’t want.

We conclude with Mariel that stillness is what these moments of quiet connection provide. It is where we can find the things we have been looking for. The in-between space made through stillness has allowed Mariel to be in school, to experience joy in school, and to think. Chasia furthers this discussion of what this quiet offers us when she speaks to her experience of accompaniment. She writes of how she was held through Lorde’s words, which offered her access to a space within herself for repair.

For me, Chasia, the wisdom of Audre Lorde guides my repair work, both in my life and my research. My heavily annotated, broken-spine copy of *Sister Outsider* (1984) sits prominently on my shelf. It is frequently reached for, either to read in whole, yet again, or to flip through highlights for a specific quote that’s been ringing in my head, whose final word I can’t place, or whose cadence is perfect for the argument I’m drafting. I first reached for it in the days after the murder of my close friend, who was reading *Sister Outsider* at the time of his killing. I carried it with me on the train to my internship, through the staircases and streets Vic and I traveled together, and I almost felt just as safe. Though incomparable physically, both created spaces where I, Chasia, felt fearless, valuable, brilliant, and loved, where I was free to think. I then turned to Lorde’s poetry, which I believe to be just as theoretical, meaningful, and insightful as Lorde’s speeches and writings that live in my bright green copy of *Sister Outsider*. Lorde’s voice in each printed word lets me be alone, but not alone. It allows me to sit in between reparative stillness and generative reworlding. The insights I find each time I open its pages make clearer things I’ve experienced or ideas that have piggybacked in seminar classrooms. Lorde is a window through which I feel seen, a warm and familiar voice that guides my theorizing and navigation of the world, a comb that untangles my many thoughts and ideas, and a manifesto for a world I’d like to live in. Lorde guides

my work of repairing myself after Vic's passing, of repairing my words to fit spaces just right, of repairing relationships, intentions, and desires.

We know that Chasia is not the only one who finds comfort in the cadence of Lorde and the stanzas of other Black poets after losing loved ones. We all draw from Stephanie Batiste (2007), Ruth Nicole Browne (2015), and Jessica Millward (2016), who allude to Black feminist mourning work, reparative writing of those few able to capture those feelings onto the stage and the page to remember friends, siblings, cousins, and kin, some of whom we only feel in the archive (though they may have eluded its ink), all taken too soon by an ever-present, dynamic, anti-Black racial terror. Knowing far too intimately how archives fail to document Black life, Black being, Black being alive, we look elsewhere. Batiste finds and tells our stories in theater and playwriting. Browne traces our breath through praise songs. Millward holds our hands through the graveside gathering. These rituals of remembering, of living with our dead, are necessary components of repair work.

Repair Through Mending the Feeling Body and the Knowing Self

For me, Tiffany, one of the things that surfaced through our collaborative writing was our individual and shared commitments to repair. Our daily practices remind us of these commitments. Practices like honoring embodied knowledge are where our ideas are felt and guide our actions. Our commitments enable us to study histories of struggle toward educational justice and make our writing an offering of community care. More and more, I am committed to repairing discrimination in higher education and the seemingly normal processes that result in all-white faculties, graduate admission cohorts, and short-term programs trying to "repair" deliberately conceived institutional forms of bias.

We have witnessed how Tiffany unsettles the idea that all-white recruitment is natural. Mariel picks up on this thread to consider how pedagogically informed student interactions are a critical part of a sustained interruption of violent normalcy. The classroom becomes a site of study for Mariel because it is from here that she can follow the paths of Black Feminist pedagogy that destabilize understandings of what is meant to happen inside of them.

In my work to find resonances between Black womxn's pedagogical visions over time and space, I, Mariel, am most committed to contributing to knowledge on our connectedness and the continuity of a political vision against knowledge regimes. I aim to strengthen existing work by contributing to theoretical conversations in our ongoing collective pursuit. When I say connectedness and knowing, I build on Amari, a student in Cierra Kaler-Jones's dance class.

In her article "Coming Home to Ourselves," Cierra Kaler-Jones (2022) cites a conversation with her students Amari and Tori, asking them why they don't think they learn African history in school. Amari answers, "I think they don't

want us to know our history. They don't want us to be connected" (p. 14). Kaler-Jones picks up this statement and holds it, saying, "This is such an important point, Amari. What do *you all think* it means to be connected?" (p. 14; emphasis added). Tori responds, "I think it means to know our history, but it also means that we understand it, and it becomes a part of us" (p. 14).

By Kaler-Jones picking up Amari's comment, she allows the word "connected" to linger and expand in the room long enough for students to join in conversation with one another. This is not a normative schooling experience for the same reason that Amari offered, "They don't want us to know." In Amari's expression of a desire for connection, she also shares her awareness of the systemic forces attempting to determine her relationships with her peers, family, ancestors, and self. Tori describes connection as embodied knowledge, as not only knowing something but feeling that it is everywhere you are, that it is a part of you, and that its growth and sustenance come through your living. Schooling aims to destroy this embodied knowing. But as we can read in this exchange, it has not been successful. Connectedness is traveling. Kaler-Jones offers her students a reparative space where their embodied knowledge is valued.

The creation of this type of open exchange and critical inquiry that Kaler-Jones made in her dance class, stands out to me just as much as what Amari and Tori shared. I study Black womxn's pedagogy not only for what they are able to do, their immense capacity for growing uncertain future life (drawn from the concept of m/othering as theorized by Caesar and colleagues (2022); Carter & Willoughby-Herard (2018); Gumbs (2016, p. 23); Isoke (2018)), but how it is done and in the context of what strictures.

We take seriously Mariel's concern with how Kaler-Jones' classroom exchange affirms what Amari and Tori already knew about ancestral connectedness and the requirement to remember. What is taught and not taught, where it is taught, and in what way it is taught are deeply tied to the knowledge regimes that patrol our entire being. Chasia writes through these forceful separations. Chasia's work in poetics and community care grounds her process of mending.

I, Chasia, am most committed to repairing relationships with others and myself. I am repeatedly drawn to these relationships between people, institutions, and ideas. These relationships produce meaning and experiences in unique ways; for example, the relationship between Blackness and the world, Blackness and the University, or Blackness and knowledge. Further, I look to repair artificial epistemological divides and mend the relationship between *my feeling body* and my thoughts as I perceive the world, to repair the relationship between *my knowing self* and the knowledge that has been deemed such by institutions and universities. Lorde's work is a bridge that ties these together for me. Lorde connects and repairs, and allows for the creation and validation of meaning within our knowing selves and other knowing beings. Lorde's work allows me to articulate the created and unnatural divide while imagining ways to repair this violent tear.

In Conclusion

We conclude, repair work is careful *work from below* that people do for themselves and their communities. It cannot be done or secured alone. It cannot result from the branding and symbolic practices of institutions like public research universities. We have theorized a set of meaning-making relations to pursue gendered racial justice from below. The BSC and how we've made it a space of self-possession, self-regard, and opportunity result not only from policy measures but also from persistent demands made by people committed to collective organizing, repair, and reworlding.

We have brought our *disciplines and ways of knowing together*. Our disciplines have been transformed and deepened beyond feminist poetics, feminist educational history, and feminist cosmologies, becoming newly shared practices of learning from the knowing body and the feeling self. These shared practices have allowed us to make something whole without reproducing a singular dominating episteme. By bringing these methods and analytical strategies into a single conversation, we have created a new set of shared experiences and a new language that will gird each of us up and enable us to meaningfully contribute to a canon of Black feminist thought unbound from academic standards, *a la* the "ex-academic" in Venus Evans-Winter and Bettina Love's (2015) *Black Feminism in Education*. In this canon, we are expanding the conditions under which knowledge and meaning are produced so that more people can do the work that is needed in the world.

We wrote this article together to embrace a newly built, *collective and shared sense of responsibility* because people worked for us to be here. We seek to sustain our intellectual community and to envision even more for its well-being. While the public research university is engaged in its own political forms of reckoning, a need for repair requires us to conduct a different community assessment. We are charged to work towards repair, towards otherwise worlds, because of where we have landed and the community that has recognized our potential. Many things happened to produce the BSC, but more importantly, people fought for us to be here. They wanted each of us here. We fought for us to be here, too. We want to be here. So we must do the work of repair.

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