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Servants of my people first : an examination of the political literacies of the Black Liberation Front International (BLFI), 1969-1973.

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AN EXAMINATION OF THE POLITICAL LITERACIES OF THE
BLACK LIBERATION FRONT INTERNATIONAL (BLFI), 1969-1973

By

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B.A., University of Kentucky, 2006
M.A., University of Louisville, 2008

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A Dissertation Approved on

April 11, 2014

by the following dissertation committee

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Bruce Horner
Dissertation Director

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Carol Mattingly

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David Anderson

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Keith Gilyard

DEDICATION

To

Chui Karega,

My father and the inspiration beyond this project

Min Zhan-Lu

Who has always believed in my abilities and challenged my thinking,

J. Blaine Hudson,

Who, despite a busy schedule as Dean and Professor, always kept his door open for me.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ABSTRACT

SERVANTS OF MY PEOPLE FIRST:
AN EXAMINATION OF THE POLITICAL LITERACIES OF THE
BLACK LIBERATION FRONT INTERNATIONAL (BLFI), 1969-1973

Joilynn Karega-Mason

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This dissertation is a multifaceted project. First, it is a historical work of

subversion and revision designed to do two things: (1) apply pressure to trends in rhetoric

and composition historiography that have left under-challenged a politics of

representation that historically and systematically marked Black college students of the

late sixties and early seventies as under-prepared, lacking in linguistic and rhetorical

resources and agency, and politically militant yet academically apathetic; and (2)

construct a more nuanced portrait of the writer agency of the Black college students of

the late sixties and early seventies by examining the political writings of members of the

Black Liberation Front International (BLFI), a Black-led undergraduate student

organization at Michigan State University from 1969 to 1973. Second, this dissertation is

an attempt to make use of the BLFI activists' experiences with political literacy to inform

and shape disciplinary pedagogical practice.

This dissertation is divided into six chapters with a concluding Epilogue. Chapter

One explains the impetus behind this project, establishes the BLFI activists' political

writing practices as the focus of this dissertation study, and introduces the analytic

framework for this project. Chapter Two introduces the research methodology that guided

this project. Chapters Three and Four reconstruct a comprehensive — though not

exhaustive — portrait of the BLFI activists' "traffic" experiences. Chapter Five presents

the findings of my analysis of the strategies the BLFI activists adopted for their positional

writing practices. Applying pressure to the politics of representation and trends in

rhetoric and composition which have left this politics of representation under-challenged,

I demonstrate the ways in which the BLFI activists negotiated and developed their literate

practices to not only construct themselves politically on a subjective and organizational

level, but also to intervene in campus and communal politics. Chapter Six continues my

efforts to construct a more nuanced portrait of the BLFI activists' writer agency by

discussing the stylistic aspects of a language practice Chui Karega, the BLFI's Minster of

Information, adopted for an editorial he composed as editor-in-chief for the *Mazungumzo*

Journal of African Studies. The Epilogue discusses the implications of and future work

for this dissertation project.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I explain the purpose of this dissertation project, contextualizing

its relevance and exigency in terms of rhetoric and composition historiography and

disciplinary conversations about language diversity and translingual approaches to

literacy. In the first section, I explain the impetus behind this project, and I examine what

I define as a politics of representation and its work in marking Black college students of

the late sixties and early seventies as under-prepared, deficient and in need of

remediation, and politically militant yet academically apathetic. With this examination as

a base, in the second section of this chapter, I argue for the production of disciplinary

historical work that applies pressure to trends in rhetoric and composition historiography

which have left under-challenged this politics of representation. To this end, I propose the

adoption of a translingual approach to literacy for this kind of revisionist historiography, I

establish the BLFI activists' political writing practices as the focus of this dissertation

study, and I introduce what I define as a traffic model analytic framework for examining

the agentive strategies the BLFI activists used in putting together and reconfiguring in

their political writing a range of linguistic, discursive, and cultural resources for their

own purposes and in light of the contexts, circumstances, and commitments informing

their work. I conclude with a mapping of chapters for this dissertation project.

"Failed Engagements" in the Writing Center and the Politics of Representing Black Students of the Late Sixties and Early Seventies

I began the professional development component of my graduate program as a consultant in the University Writing Center. Five days a week I counseled student-writers, helping them negotiate the demands of academic writing for their coursework. I read essays written by students for first-year writing courses — argumentative essays supporting or disavowing everything from abortion to affirmative action and proposing everything from the development and administration of feed-the-homeless campaigns to the implementation of a national health care system. I also reviewed papers for students composing for upper-level discipline-specific courses, and I worked with students charged with the task of critically analyzing various course readings. At least once a week, I assisted students in their efforts to dissect and textually articulate the rhetorical, linguistic, and thematic trends in Shakespearian prose. On occasion, I found myself sitting across from the first or second-year biology student, desperately in need a "quick-read" (translation—proof-read) of their three-page lab-report for grammar and spelling errors.

Needless to say, the day I was assigned to work with James,[1] I expected a similar kind of experience. But when James — an African American first-year student — greeted me at the reception area, thanked me for taking the time to work with him, and immediately handed me a ten-page text, adding a kind of apologetic disclaimer —"This isn't for a class, it's my own thing." — my curiosity peaked. In our initial session, I learned that James was on scholarship as a member of the university debate team, and his ten-page text was an article he wanted to submit for publication to the *Cardinal*, the

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[1] A pseudonym is used to protect the student's anonymity.

university student newspaper. Specifically, the article voiced his perception and criticism of what he described as the debate team's "racist practices." The article was polemical in content and argumentative and strategically angry in tone, as reflected in the rhetorical and language choices he made throughout the article.

But James was struggling with questions related to the labor of writing: negotiations of issues of language and discourse use, context, histories, traditions, commitments, and the potential consequences of his work. He was struggling feeling confidant with the choices he made in the article. Was it too much? Was the tone and language he used too aggressive? Did he sound academic enough but culturally identifiable and relevant? How would people respond to the article? These were the kinds of questions James raised in that initial consultation. As a new writing consultant, I wanted to address his concerns and questions, so I adopted what I believed was an unconventional but useful approach. I put his paper to the side and I started talking with James about the political writing my father generated as an undergraduate college student at Michigan State University (MSU) in the late sixties and early seventies. Like James, my father was an avid and skilled writer and his political leanings were also very clear. I grew up hearing the stories of my father's college activism as a member of an organization called the Black Liberation Front International (BLFI). I heard the stories of their activism, in particular, how my father and fellow members of the BLFI had initiated, designed curriculum for, and delivered instruction for a community-based academy that provided communication and literacy education to college and high school participants. I also heard the stories of how they used writing to advance the political agenda of the BLFI. In particular, I heard the stories of how my father, along with other

members of the BLFI, created, published within, edited, and distributed a journal of African Studies called the *Mazungumzo* (Swahili for "dialogue"). I knew my father had boxes full of copies of the *Mazungumzo* and his other political writing in our garage, and I retold everything I knew about my father's political literacies to an attentive James who appeared fascinated by the stories (taking notes on our conversations) and irritated when our session time had expired.

James scheduled eight additional appointments and I spent most of our time in those sessions talking with James about the experiences my father had shared with me about the political writing the BLFI generated during their tenure as undergraduates at MSU. It was my belief that those discussions were equipping James with a sense of empowerment, a sense of confidence, and a sense of direction for the article. At the end of the eighth and final session, I asked James if he was going to submit the article to the *Cardinal*. After what seemed like a minute of silence, James answered with a "We'll see." I never saw James again — neither as a client, nor outside of the Writing Center environment. For about three months after that final session, I periodically scanned the articles published in the *Cardinal*, hoping to locate his article. Although I never located his article, it doesn't mean that James didn't submit it for publication — I hold on to that optimistic thought.

But after my work with James, I began to question the methods I adopted for those sessions. In a seminar paper I wrote for one of my graduate courses, I described those Writing Center consultations with James as "failed engagements." In my efforts to address the questions James raised in that initial consultation, I was unaware of two kinds of tensions at work that Min Zhan-Lu and Bruce Horner describe in "The Problematics of

Experience": (1) tensions between "the desire to teach a particular understanding of literacy and the desire to learn about literacy from students' literacy experiences" (273) and (2) tensions between "the desire to change students' literacy experiences and the desire to grasp their existing experiences" (273). As I continued to reflect on those sessions with James, I realized that I had basically overwrote the range of experiences and practices James was attempting to negotiate by re-telling the stories of my father's political literacies and by expecting that somehow those stories would project a particular understanding of literacy and a particular kind of political literate practice for Black student-writers that James could adopt or use as a source of empowerment and a model for his own work. As I contemplated my methods, I realized that I wasn't sure why I had felt compelled to draw upon those stories during the consultations, and I realized that I didn't know how to make use of my father's stories to help James critically examine his own experiences and practices.

As such, I made the decision to devote much of my independent graduate work to mining scholarship in rhetoric and composition in order to locate and contextualize how the political literacies of Black students of the late sixties and early seventies have figured within disciplinary conversations and scholarship. When I speak of Black college students of the late sixties and early seventies, I am referring to Black college students associated with the Black Campus, Black Power, Black Arts, Pan-Africanist, and African Liberation movements who were — it's important to note — ideologically (Black cultural nationalists, political Marxists, socialists, etc.) demographically, and discursively diverse. In using the descriptive "political literacies," I am referring to these students' political engagements with literacy enacted outside of the traditional classroom

environment. More specifically, the descriptive "political literacies" refers to the prose, journalistic, scholarly, and essayist writings of these students, some of which functioned as position statements and action proposals for Black-led student organizations, and others which were published in independent academic journals, campus-based student newspapers, and community and political newspapers, journals, and magazines that emerged in the early sixties.

Before I began my inquiry within disciplinary scholarship, I initiated a survey of African American historical and literary scholarship,[2] discovering that some work has been done on the newspapers, journals, and magazines that helped radicalize Black Americans and Black college students in the sixties and seventies and functioned as discursive forums for participants of the Black Power, Black Campus, Black Arts, Pan-Africanist, and African Liberation Movements and organizations such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Black Panther Party, the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM), and the Nation of Islam. A review of the literature informed me that many prominent Black activists began their work as part of the Black radicalism of the sixties and seventies as college students; but many of these students also created, edited, distributed, and published within these organizational and campus-based newspapers and journals. For example, Stokely Carmichael (later Kwame Ture) was the outspoken leader of SNCC from 1966 to 1967, then Black Panther, and later Pan-Africanist; he was the voice behind the rhetoric of Black Power and a language arts instructor in the Mississippi Freedom Schools from June 1964 to March 1965, where he focused on helping African American participants negotiate the relationship between

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[2] I focused specifically on comprehensive studies and scholarship on the Black Campus, Black Arts, Black Power, Pan-Africanist, and African Liberation Movements.

African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and Standard American English (SAE). But as an undergraduate student at Howard University, graduating with a degree in Philosophy in 1964, Carmichael wrote position papers and action proposals for the Non-Violent Action Group (NAG) and published within and was a contributing editor to the Hilltop student newspaper.

From African American historical and literary scholarship, I also learned that the Black Student Union at San Francisco State College (now University) was the premiere organization of the Black Campus Movement whose platform was the reform of American higher education, particularly the creation of Black Studies departments on collegiate campuses. But these students did more than organize, demonstrate, and rally in support of their agenda. Both orally and textually, from 1966 to 1975 these students advanced their goals and theorized topics relevant to societal, political, and cultural reform. In addition, from African American historical and literary scholarship, I discovered that the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM) originated at Central State College in 1962 with a group of students, including Max Stanford (now Muhammad Ahmad), who had been expelled from southern schools for their participation in activism, the freedom rides, and radical organizations such as the Nation of Islam. Stanford and Wanda Marshall, to name a few, wrote position papers and published within RAM's *Black America*. Moreover, I discovered that students from the Student Organization for Black Unity (SOBU), formed in 1969, published in *The African World*, while the SNCC newsletter, the *Razor* (Afro-American Student Movement), *The Faith* (Black Allied Student Association of New York University), and the *Mojo* (The Black Student Congress) were important forums for students associated with these organizations. In

1969, a group of students from Wayne State University's Black student organization Uhuru (Swahili for "freedom"), which included notables such as Luke Tripp (A League of Revolutionary Black Workers), created, published within, and edited a newspaper called *South End*.

Despite this kind of work in African American historical and literary scholarship, my efforts throughout my graduate career to locate and contextualize in disciplinary scholarship the political literacies of Black college students of the late sixties and seventies exposed the lack of attention rhetoric and composition has given to this kind of writing enacted by these students outside of the classroom environment. Perhaps this disciplinary gap is due in part to a culture of professionalization in the teaching of writing and trends in rhetoric and composition research and scholarship which have upheld the classroom/community binary. Shirley Brice Heath and Anne Ruggles Gere have both critiqued what they describe as a culture of professionalization in the teaching of writing which emphasizes the merits of thinking about writing in terms of classroom-based production and reception. One consequence of this culture of professionalization — Heath and Ruggles Gere argue — is that conversations designated to address the extracurricular of rhetoric and composition have been framed around the classroom/community binary. This binary has traditionally posited the writing done in academic classroom contexts and the writing done in the "real world" as two distinct forms of writing with two distinct rhetorical situations and conditions of work. These disciplinary attitudes and practices have authorized trends in rhetoric and composition historiography which have delegated the study of the extracurricular political writing of

Black students of the late sixties and early seventies to scholars generating African American historical and literary research.

But this culture of professionalization in the teaching of writing and this classroom/community binary at work in rhetoric and composition research and scholarship are not the only plausible causes of the lack of disciplinary attention given to the extracurricular political writing of these students. I contend that this disciplinary gap in historical research and scholarship is also the result of a politics of representation that has traditionally defined Black collegiate students of the late sixties and early seventies as the products of open-admissions and basic writing programs. Scholars such as Jacqueline Jones-Royster and Jean C. Williams have critiqued trends in rhetoric and composition historiography which have created and reinforced what they describe as a "a deepening sense that African Americans entered the university during the sixties era and that, as students of color, they entered quite predictably as basic writers and only as basic writers" ("History in the Spaces Left" 571). This "deepening sense" Royster and Williams describe should be understood as an issue of representation. More specifically, this "deepening sense" is rooted in a historical understanding and representation of Black collegiate students of the late sixties and early seventies as under-prepared, lacking in linguistic resources and rhetorical agency, and politically militant yet academically apathetic.

Beginning in the 1960's there developed heightened cross-disciplinary interest in educational contexts in explaining achievement gaps between middle class students and students in poverty and Black and White students. For many U.S. psychologists and

educators, cultural deficient theories offered a plausible explanation.[3] Cultural deficient

theories posited an understanding of the achievement gap as one rooted in poor and

minority students' "depraved and deprived" social, cultural, and economic environments

which — these theories suggested —insufficiently provided them with what they needed

to academically succeed.[4]

In terms of language arts education, the deficit theory appeared as the notion of

verbal deprivation in the conversations and scholarship of many U.S. educators.

Sociolinguist William Labov, an opponent of the notion of verbal deprivation,

characterized it this way in "Academic Ignorance and Black Intelligence":

> …black children from the ghetto area are said to receive little verbal
>
> stimulation, to hear very little formal language, and as a result are
>
> impoverished in their means of verbal expression. It is said that they
>
> cannot speak complete sentences, do not know the names of common
>
> objects, cannot form concepts or convey logical thoughts. (63)

For many U.S. educators, this term verbal deprivation translated into the concept

of linguistic deprivation, which posited the pathology of non-standard dialects, suggested

nonstandard dialects inhibit the cognitive development of their users, and argued the

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[3] U.S. educators such as R.D. Hess, V.C. Shipmann, Siegfried Engelmann, Carl Bereiter, and Martin Deutsch are common names linked with cultural deficit theories.

[4] For more on cultural deficit theories see R.D. Hess and V.C. Shipmann, "Early Experience and the Socialization of Cognitive Modes in Children," *Child Development*, 36, (1965): 869-886; Hess and Shipmann, "Maternal Influences Upon Early Learning: The Cognitive Environments of Urban, Pre-school Children," In R.D. Hess. and R.M. Been (Eds.), *Early Education: Current Theory, Research, and Action*, Chicago: Aldine, (1966): 91-103; Martin Deutsch, "The Disadvantages Child and the Learning Process; In Passow, A.H. (Ed.), *Education in Depressed Areas*, New York: Teachers College press, Columbia University, (1963): 163-179; Carl Bereiter and Siegfried Engelmann, "Teaching Disadvantaged Children in the Pre-School," NJ: Prentice Hall, (Dec. 1966).

inadequacy of nonstandard dialects in comparison to Standard English.[5]   Here's how

educational psychologist Carl Bereiter, operating from the linguistic deprivation theory,

understood the language practice of inner city kids: "The language of cultural deprived

children…is not merely an undeveloped version of Standard English but is a basically

non-standard logical mode of expressive behavior" ("Teaching Disadvantaged Children

in the Pre-School" 104).

These language deficit theories also figured prominently in the conversations of

U.S. educators and scholars focused primarily on college-level language arts students. In

terms of rhetoric and composition — a burgeoning discipline in the sixties — many of

these discussions posited a causal relationship between these students' language and

dialect differences and cognitive and cultural deficiencies. For this reason, many scholars

in the period leading up to CCCC's adoption of the Students' Right to Their Own

Language Resolution (SRTOL)[6] were calling for the eradication of minority students'

native languages in order — they argued — to promote their social, economic, and

academic progress. In terms of Black students, many scholars called for the eradication of

their use of Black English Vernacular (BEV), characterizing oral and written

communication using BEV as devoid of intellectual rigor. For example, outlining his

strategies for initiating "linguistically and culturally deprived" college students into

academia, compositionist William Pixton issued the following warning to college-level

language arts instructors: "Students unable to remove these deficiencies through learning

to write standard English may not complete college successfully because they are not

---

[5] For a comprehensive discussion of the concept of linguistic deprivation, see Fredrickson Erickson. "F'get you Honky!": A New look at Black Dialect and the School," In Molefi Asante (formerly Arthur Smith (Ed.) *Language, Communication, and Rhetoric*, New York: Harper and Row, (1972): 18-28.
[6] See the SRTOL: CCCC. (1974). Students Right to Their Own Language. Special Issue. CCC 25, 1-32.

literate enough to absorb information in books or lectures" (248). In a similar fashion, compositionist J. Mitchell Morse (1968) argued that BEV "lacks the vocabulary and syntactic resources for thought of even modern complexity" (841).

At the heart of these arguments was the belief that the languages and dialects of Black Americans were to blame for their social, economic, and political marginalization. According to compositionists such as Pixton and Morse, eliminating this "language deficiency" was the first step in social, economic, political, and economic progress and uplift. For Pixton in particular, empowering Black students had to involve informing them that BEV is "linguistically different and deficient" (252). Pixton explained: "If students are taught to retain the dialect of their nurture under the delusion that it is as effective as Standard English for their attaining higher education and business success, then they are being denied that right" (252).

Countering these assumptions and pedagogies, proponents of the Students' Rights movement advanced a rhetoric of rights which affirmed students' right to their own linguistic and discursive patterns, varieties, styles, and identities. The SRTOL resolution states:

> We affirm the students' right to their own patterns and varieties of language -- the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style. Language scholars long ago denied that the myth of a standard American dialect has any validity. The claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another. Such a claim leads to false advice for speakers and writers, and immoral advice for humans. A nation proud of

its diverse heritage and its cultural and racial variety will preserve its

heritage of dialects. We affirm strongly that teachers must have the

experiences and training that will enable them to respect diversity

and uphold the right of students to their own language.[7]

However, in spite of this rhetoric of rights, several disciplinary responses to the SRTOL

reinforced rather than complicated a developing tradition of marking poor and minority

college students as the products of open admissions and in need of remediation. For

example, for *Errors and Expectations*, Mina Shaughnessy drew upon nine years of

teaching writing to CUNY open admissions students and analyzed about four-thousand

placement essays for college freshman in order to decipher the logic of errors in the

academic writing of minority students and help teachers in their instruction of these

students. Although Shaughnessy didn't make race the focus of her analysis, she made

clear that most of her students were from "one of New York's ethnic or racial

enclaves…[and] had spoken other languages or dialects at home and never reconciled the

worlds of home and school" (3).

    To her credit, in her study and instructional manual, Shaughnessy seemingly

responded in part to the rhetoric of rights undergirding the SRTOL by affirming minority

students' cognitive abilities and by attributing their poor performance in the writing

classroom to their unfamiliarity with the standards and conventions of academic

discourse. For example, Shaughnessy, talking about the basic writing students at CUNY,

suggested they "write the way they do, not because they are slow and non-verbal,

indifferent to or incapable of academic excellence, but because they are beginners and

must, like all beginners, learn by making mistakes" (5). This was a departure from the

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[7] SRTOL Resolution. Special Issue, CCC 25, (Fall 1974).

cultural deficit theories promulgated by educators and scholars in the period leading up to CCCC's adoption of the SRTOL in 1974. For Shaughnessy, characterizing non-mainstream students in this way made student empowerment an issue of initiation into the standards and conventions of academic discourse communities. Moreover, it made student empowerment contingent on both teachers and students acknowledging that the process of becoming bilingual — adopting a new kind of language and discourse — would involve students' experiments with error.

What's important, however, in terms of representing these students is the assumption throughout Shaughnessy's Errors and Expectations that these students were basic writers, composing errors in their academic texts because of their "beginner" status. As Min Zhan-Lu points out in "Conflict and Struggle," Shaughnessy's essentialist view of language — that differences in language and conventions do not change the essential meaning communicated —compromised her ability to consider the social and political circumstances that impacted students' linguistic and discursive choices in their writing. By default, for Shaughnessy — and compositionists who aligned themselves with her work — the only logical conclusion explaining these students' errors was their unfamiliarity with academic language and discourse conventions. In other words, though Shaughnessy did not characterize the basic writers of her study as cognitively or culturally deficient, the study and instructional manual did reinforce a view of these students as non-traditional and under-prepared.

This kind of politics of representation integral to Shaughnessy's work was not restricted to marking students as under-prepared and in need of remediation. In "The 'Birth' of Basic Writing," Bruce Horner examines historical discourses surrounding basic

14

writing — in particular, the historical discourses surrounding open admissions at the City

University of New York (CUNY),[8] the institution he identifies as "most closely

associated with shaping much of Basic Writing Discourse" (4). As Horner points out,

within these historical discourses two schools of thoughts were at work. First, despite

enrollment records that identified most open admissions students as demographically

White and working-class, conversations surrounding higher education and open

admissions programs characterized ethnic minorities, in particular, Black American and

Puerto Ricans, as prototypical open admissions students. Since the open admissions

policy was viewed by many as a quota system, these conversations also described

prototypical open admissions students — Black American and Puerto Ricans — as

"unqualified." Second, as Horner argues, the notion of student activism was pitted against

the notion of academic excellence, "the former [identified] with lack of academic

preparation and the latter with political disinterestedness" (7). In other words, within the

discourses of open admissions and basic writing, student activism was often equated with

illiteracy and inadequate academic preparation as demonstrated by the comments of

CUNY administrator Lewis Mayhew:

> [d]issenting youth…all too frequently seem unable to say or write a simple
>
> English sentence. Their concerns are expressed…in a…flow of words
>
> Possessing neither syntax or grammatical effectiveness…So pronounced
>
> are these linguistic features that I have begun to wonder whether or not

---

[8] See David Lavin, Richard Alba, Richard Silberstein *Right Versus Privilege: The Open Admissions Experiment at the City University of New York* for a detailed presentation of the open admissions phenomenon at CUNY. The CUNY open admissions program is often viewed as a response to the activism of Black of Puerto Rican student organizations of CUNY.

they might represent a pathology worthy of some further study. ("The

'Birth' of Basic Writing" 8)

This positing of student activism as synonymous with political militancy, remediation, and illiteracy was not exclusive to CUNY administrators. As Min Zhan-Lu discovered in her research of open admissions and basic writing at CUNY, in the beginning stages, educators and teachers whom Lu characterizes as "gatekeepers" voiced their opposition towards open admissions and basic writing programs by forwarding a non-academic view of basic writing programs and a view of open admissions students as incapable of academic endeavors because of their preoccupation with non-academic interests (racial, economic, and political) and their indifference to academic learning. For example, in "Conflict and Struggle," Lu cites and explains the descriptors used by City College English Professor Geoffrey Wagner[9] to describe basic writing programs and open admissions students:

> To Wagner, open admissions students are the inhabitants of the "world"
>
> outside the sort of scholarly community he claims existed at Oxford and
>
> City College. They are dunces, misfits, hostile mental children, and the
>
> most sluggish of animals. He describes a group of Panamanian "girls"
>
> taking a Basic Writing course as "abusive, stupid, and hostile." Another
>
> student is described as sitting in a half-lotus pose in the back of the class
>
> with a transistor strapped to his Afro and nodding off every two minutes."
>
> Wagner calls Basic Writing courses offered at City a form of political
>
> psychotherapy, a welfare agency, and an entertainment center. (34)

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[9] These descriptors Lu references are taken from Geoffrey Wagner's discussion of CUNY basic writing programs and open admissions students in his book entitled *The End of Education*, published in 1976.

From this kind of rhetoric amongst administrators, educators, and teachers in the late sixties and early seventies, a discourse of difference emerged, positing and polarizing notions of two types of students: open admissions students "associated with politics and minority activism [and traditional students] assumed to be interested in and capable of pursuing academic excellence because they were not distracted by political interests" ("The 'Birth' of Basic Writing" 8). But absent from this discourse of difference were representations of students who, as Horner suggests, "crossed the division between political activism and academic excellence: those students who had met traditional admissions requirements but who were politically active" ("The 'Birth' of Basic Writing" 8).

Adjusting Our Historical Lens, Shifting Our Gaze

As I have argued thus far in this chapter, rhetoric and composition as a discipline has limited the scope of historical work on the extracurricular political literacies of Black college students of the late sixties and early seventies because of three distinct phenomena: (1) a culture of professionalization in rhetoric and composition geared towards the teaching of writing, (2) the privileging of the classroom/community binary in rhetoric and composition theory and research, and (3) a politics of representation that has not only defined these students as the products of open admissions and basic writing programs, but also marked them as under-prepared, deficient, and politically militant yet academically apathetic. For this reason, we need alternative historical work in rhetoric and composition historiography that emphasizes the extracurricular political writing of these students, critiques this politics of representation, and challenges viewpoints which

characterize Black college students of the late sixties and early seventies as lacking linguistic resources and rhetorical agency and power.

This dissertation intervenes in this politics of representation and subverts its work by returning to where this project began — with my father's stories — and by initiating an investigation of the political literacies of the members of the Black Liberation Front International (BLFI), a Black-led student organization at work at MSU from 1969 to 1973. By directing our attention to the study of the extracurricular political writing generated by the BLFI during their tenure as undergraduates at MSU, I am taking up Royster and Williams's suggestion that we as researchers "move outside of conventional boundaries of historical work in rhetoric and composition to include evidence that may currently reside in other disciplines" ("Reading Past Resistance" 133). Moreover, I am adopting Anne Ruggles Gere's understanding of the extracurriculum in rhetoric and composition as a legitimate area of study that "undertakes its own projects" ("Kitchen Tables and Rented Rooms" 84).

My efforts to contextualize a more nuanced portrait of the writer agency of Black college students of the late sixties and early seventies by examining the political literacies of the BLFI activists also allow me a point of departure from Ruggles Gere's version of the extracurriculum. Ruggles Gere asks us as rhetoric and composition researchers and scholars to "consider the various sites in which the extracurriculum has been enacted, the local circumstances that supported its developments, the material artifacts employed by its practitioners, and the cultural work it accomplished" (90). Specifically, she looks at sites outside of the academy where writing instruction took place such as literacy societies, self-help groups, and African American clubwomen literacy groups. Whereas

Ruggles Gere maintains a focus on communities of literacy instruction, or what she calls "self-sponsored pedagogically oriented writing activities outside the academy" (80), this dissertation's privileging of the study of the BLFI activists' extracurricular political literacies affords me the opportunity to extend the notion of the extracurriculum in rhetoric and composition historiography beyond where scholars for the most part have been willing to go. It acknowledges the importance of researching historical extracurricular sites of writing instruction for Black college students. But the work of this dissertation also advocates for rhetoric and composition to take a more expansive turn by including in our historical work the study of Black college students as extracurricular readers and writers and the study of the nuanced ways in which they used writing as a site for social, cultural, and political engagement.

In this regard, I'm aligning the work of this dissertation project with the work of scholars such as Carmen Kynard. In her dissertation project, *Runnin with the Rabbits But Huntin with the Dogs: Race, Literacy Instruction, and Black Protest from 1969 to 1977*, Kynard, among other things, stresses the importance of exploring the impact that discourses of Black radicalism had on Black college students before, during, and after their participation in the CUNY Open Admissions programs of the early seventies. Undergirding this aspect of Kynard's work is the assumption that there was engagement amongst these students with knowledges that were different from college norms and literate activities that were not institutional in context that nonetheless shaped their rhetorical and discursive practices and helped them make sense of themselves and their relation to the world.

This turn to the extracurricular political writing of the BLFI activists, however, is only one side of the coin. I contend that we can initiate the kind of revisionist historiography I have argued for here in this chapter by re-envisioning writing and literacy through the translingual lens. Scholars such as Sinfree Makoni and Alastair Pennycook argue that the initial cataloguing of languages and the defining of language boundaries was a process of invention. In other words, Makoni and Pennycook believe that many current understandings of languages and language systems were constructed inventions of social, cultural, academic, and political movements, or to say it differently, "meta-discursive regimes," fore- grounded by specific socio-cultural-political-institutional agendas. This process of invention, the authors posit, codified and constricted languages and how we understand language practices. For example, one thing Makoni and Pennycook suggest we have derived from this process of invention is a perception of Standard English as a fixed, autonomous system and a language with a presumed status as a "code of power." On the other hand, what we have also derived from this process of invention are categories of home languages/discourses/dialects, characterized in this same fashion as well, but assigned the status of non-standard/ non-academic and regulated to the sphere of illegitimacy.

Not surprisingly, what the Standard English/home dialect binary has nurtured is a culturally embedded impulse to link race, language, and identity. These tendencies have encouraged and maintained social, political, and institutional attitudes which reify and objectify identities(s), languages and discourses, and language and discourse practices. In particular, as Vershawn Young argues in *Your Average Nigga*, this reification has established intellectual and cultural practices which posit Standard English and

"standardized" conventions as signifiers of "Whiteness," a kind of race-less norm and a resource for class-climbing, and Black English and vernacular practices as signifiers of "Blackness" and evidence of participation in and solidarity with a kind of larger Black American cultural community.

Along these same lines, several scholars have posited the limitations of practice theories in terms of studying the language and literate practices of minority individuals and groups. The work of Pierre Bourdieu is often referenced in these scholars' critiques. Bourdieu develops in his writings a way of reading social practice which examines the relationship between social space and its respective governing structures, but also analyzes the dispositions which shape how social agents think, act, and feel in the social world. In other words, Bourdieu's interests lie in developing a theory of practice for understanding how social practices become sedimented and are regulated. In short, in Bourdieu's framework, speech acts are a form of practice and should also be understood in terms of the interdependent relationship between the linguistic habitus and the linguistic market. The linguistic market functions as a specific kind of field[10] where language exchanges take place. The linguistic habitus is a "sub-set of dispositions acquired in the course of learning to speak in particular contexts (family, peer groups, school, etc.)" (Thompson 17); it shapes how language users conceptualize and understand their own positioning and engagement in communicative practice. The nexus between the two — the linguistic habitus and the linguistic market — generates an individual's

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[10] In *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Bourdieu argues that everyday life consists of many fields which represent the various spheres of life—art, science, religion, the economy, education, politics, and so on. Each field maintains its own rules, regularities, worldviews, practices, and forms of domination, as well as its own way of structurally positioning all individuals who enter into the field. For this reason, Bourdieu often characterizes the field as the social space where ongoing power struggles between social agents, competing for the same stakes, take place. The stakes at the center of these power struggles are the accumulation of various forms of social capital-- economic, symbolic, cultural, political, and, for the purpose of this discussion, linguistic.

language practices. In Bourdieu's framework, language users always take into account market conditions, assessing how their language practices will be received and valued, and they modify their language practices in light of these assessments.

This is where Bourdieu's notion of symbolic power factors in, which he defines in *Language and Symbolic Power* as a "power of constituting the given through utterances…an almost magical power that enables one to obtain the equivalent of what is obtained through force" (170). But this "almost magical power" can only be exercised if it is "recognized," or as Bourdieu suggests, "misrecognized as arbitrary" (170). As Bourdieu explains, symbolic power is "defined in and through a given relation between those who exercise power and those who submit to it, i.e. in the very structure of the field in which belief is produced and reproduced" (170). Institutional mechanisms play a central role in this work of symbolic power: "Acts of social magic…can only succeed if the institution—meaning to institute in an active way someone or something endowed with this or that status or property—is guaranteed by the whole group or by a recognized institution" (125). Therefore, as Bourdieu explains, "the belief of everyone, which pre-exists ritual, is the condition for the effectiveness of the ritual" (126). In other words, it is "the belief in the legitimacy of words and of those who utter them," Bourdieu explains, "which creates the power of words and slogans, a power capable of maintaining or subverting the social order" (170).

It is, however, the functioning power of words and slogans in terms of subverting social orders that many scholars argue is not readily transparent in Bourdieu's theory of practice. In particular, for Judith Butler, Bourdieu's theory of practice is ineffective for positing a theory of agency which makes room for locating subversive ideologies and

language practices. As Butler argues in *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, this limitation is a direct result of what she describes as the theory's positing of the distribution of power in language and languages as a static reflection of the distribution of power at work in social fields: "By claiming that performative utterances are only effective when they are spoken by those who are (already) in a position of social power to exercise words as deeds, Bourdieu inadvertently forecloses the possibility of an agency that emerges from the margins of power" (156).

Forwarding a similar critique, Ellen Cushman takes issue with what she describes as the notion of "false consciousness" undergirding Bourdieu's theory of practice. In particular, Cushman argues that Bourdieu's framework for representing agents, structure, and power does three things: (1) suggests that the subordinate view social order as fixed and static; (2) "assumes the idea of ideological domination where people unconsciously, unstrategically, consistently make choices that perpetuate their own living conditions" (8); and (3) overlooks resistance in the everyday language practices of the subordinate by mistaking "accommodation for quiescence, placation for false consciousness, [and] silence for submission, subtlety for passivity" (4).

As an alternative, scholars conceptualizing language as localized practice have given us a way forward. When we theorize language as localized practice, or to say it differently, languaging as relocalization, we are affirming a view of language as action, or as Alastair Pennycook explains in *Language as Local Practice*, "an activity rather than a structure, as something we do rather than a system we draw on, as a material part of social and cultural life rather than an abstract entity" (2). Moreover, when we theorize language as a localized practice, we are moving beyond deterministic and fixed

assumptions about the nature of social contexts by positing a notion of locality where language is understood as both "part of the physical environment" (67) and part of the production of meaning in place. As Pennycook explains, space is "a central interactive part of the social" (55), neither fixed nor immutable. This understanding of space in terms of movement extends beyond the notion that space is a static location made up of acting linguistic agents, but rather, gives us a way of thinking about language practices as the everyday activities that produce time and space and function as an integral part of the ongoing struggles between social agents over the ways in which places are imagined, created, and defined.

An emphasis on time and space in terms of movement also draws attention to the ways in which subjectivities are not the "precursors of our language practices [and the] fixed and stable attributes of individuals" (*Language as a Local Practice* 125), but rather constituted in space and time through language practices. In this sense, in the same way that a theory of language as local practice gives researchers and scholars a way of viewing locality and languages as fluid and emergent from the social practices engaged in, a theory of language as local practice gives us a way of understanding identity as a work in process, but always emergent from the social activities individuals engage in. In other words, just as individuals and groups doing language in a particular place at a particular time construct, redefine, refashion, and articulate that space, individuals and groups doing language in a specific place at a specific time construct, redefine, refashion, and articulate identities and ways of being.

So with the infusing of issues of space and time into the theoretical frameworks for understanding the relationship among language, identity, writing, and power, our

research on the language and literate practices of individuals and groups should therefore emphasize writer agency. In "Metaphors Matter: Transcultural Literacy," Min Zhan-Lu discusses this notion of writer agency this way: "Agency means to engage in proactive deliberation over the actual sense of each instance of learning and writing and the why of writer's options and decisions" (290). In other words, it's the "why to tinker, or not," with a particular usage of language and discourse, "given the specificity of the contexts, commitment, and consequences of their work" (290). These contexts, commitments, and consequences of writers' work that Lu describes function as the basis for their motivations for engaging in the writing process in the first place.

For Min Zhan-Lu and Bruce Horner, a translingual approach to literacy gives scholars and researchers a way to engage this shift to matters of agency. With its adoption of a temporal-spatial framework (language as activity) and its view of language as emergent from as well as informing interactions and contexts, this approach focuses on what the authors call "languaging" — that is, "how we do language and why" ("Translingual Literacy and Matters of Agency" 27). It also conceptualizes writer agency "as both always in operation and always in development as writers shape themselves and language forms through recontextualization" (27). This notion of recontextualization is an important aspect of Lu and Horner's translingual approach to literacy. Disciplinary scholarship has tended to codify translingual approaches to literacy as associable with the production of recognizable difference in writing. Emergent from this codification process are scholarly initiatives in research and teaching to theorize code-meshing practices[11] and translanguaging competence and translate these phenomena into pedagogical practice.

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[11] Code-meshing practices involve the mixing of different linguistic codes within a text. The terms have been used by scholars such as Vershawn Young, Aja Martinez, and Suresh Canagarajah.

But Lu and Horner's ceonceptualization of writer agency through recontextualization widens the scope, enabling researchers and teachers to recognize agency at work in both writing that approximates and deviates from standardized languages and conventions. Lu and Horner's notion of recontextualization — understood in light of Pennycook's theory of language sedimentation[12] and Anthony Giddens theory of language iteration[13] — emphasizes the degree to which every instance of language use "is a potential modification of that language at the same time as it acts to reproduce it" (qtd. Giddens 22). From this perspective, as Lu and Horner point out, even repetition in language and discourse is understood as acts of recontextualization where new meanings, purposes, and contexts are created. In this regard, a translingual approach to literacy, understood in terms of recontextualization, resists an interpretive framework which focuses on language users' choice of specific code-based strategies: code-switching, code-meshing, translanguaging, approximating the "standard," privileging alternative discourses, etc. Instead, a translingual approach to literacy is structured around an interpretive framework that attempts to "ask how, when, where, and why specific language strategies are deployed" ("Translingual Literacy and Matters of Agency" 27) in light of writers' emergent and mutually constitutive relations of language, context, identity, and power relations.

Drawing upon Horner and Lu's translingual approach to literacy, to initiate the kind of revisionist historiography I have argued for in this chapter, I am privileging a kind of intellectual work that emphasizes issues of writer agency. To examine the writer agency of the BLFI activists, composing politically for the BLFI, I am adopting a lens of

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[12] For more on Pennycook's theory of language sedimentation, see *Language as a Local Practice* (2010).
[13] For more on Giddens theory of language iteration, see *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure, and Contradiction in Social Analysis* (1979).

interpretation that acknowledges that the BLFI activists made choices to write in particular ways for particular audiences and focuses on understanding what it is that the BLFI activists were actually *doing* in and through language, discourse, and text. Instead of parsing the BLFI activists' composing strategies into compartmentalized code-based categories, this kind of lens of interpretation analyzes their generic, discursive, and stylistic practices in terms of Pennycook's notion of relocalized forms of doing. In *Language as a Local Practice*, Pennycook makes the following argument:

> If we view language practices as a set of social activities that are always bound up with other practices, as mediating between the activity of language and the larger social sphere, we can see how social practices are relocalized in language and language practices are relocalized as other forms of doing. (136)

From this perspective, the lens of interpretation I'm adopting for this dissertation project analyzes the BLFI activists' generic, discursive, and stylistic practices in terms of what they were trying to *do* in and through these practices.

I call this lens of interpretation a traffic model analytic framework. As the name suggests, an important aspect of the traffic model analytic framework is an examination of how the BLFI activists adapted their language and literate practices according to their "traffic" experiences. In terms of this notion of "traffic," we can conceptualize it in the material sense of the word — a "constant coming and going of people, bikes, rickshaws, cars, trucks, ferries, tuktuks, ships, planes, trains" (*Langauge as a Local Practice* 141). However, we must take this notion of "traffic" further, understanding that it is the "traffic in meaning," or as Pennycook explains, "a passing to and fro of ideas, concepts, symbols,

and discourses" (141), which is important to the study of the language and literate practices of individuals and groups.

Therefore, in terms of the BLFI activists, an understanding of what it is they were actually *doing* in and through language and an analysis of how they adapted their language and literacy practices according to their "traffic" experiences requires, as Pennycook suggests, an examination of political, historical, epistemological, spatial, social, and textual considerations. In other words, it's the BLFI activists' engagements with a continuum of social, political, historical, epistemological, and material ideas, symbols, concepts, and discourses which become important in the traffic model analytic framework. Appropriating a traffic model analytic framework, my goal is to examine how the BLFI activists, in and through their "traffic" experiences, "construct[ed] realities through discursive practices, form[ed] temporary regularities to get things done through generic practices, and perform[ed] social meanings with different effects through stylistic practices" (*Language as a Local Practice* 122).

In this regard, the traffic model analytic framework involves an examination of how the BLFI activists enacted what Suresh Canagarajah describes as "processes such as recontextualization" (*Translingual Practice* 6). Complimentary to Lu and Horner's notion of recontextualization, Canagarajah's notion of recontextualization speaks to the agentive strategies writers adopt for putting together and reconfiguring a diverse range of linguistic, discursive, and epistemological resources for their own purposes and in light of the contexts, circumstances, and commitments informing their work. Working from this perspective and drawing upon the kaleidoscopic concept that Jacqueline Jones-Royster adopts for her study of the essayist writing practices of Black women, the traffic model

analytic framework merges three points of inquiry: (1) the contexts for literacy production (e.g. material conditions, power relations at work, motivations for writing, etc.); (2) the BLFI activists' "traffic" experiences (e.g. a reconstructed network of the rhetorical and literate activities influencing and shaping the BLFI activists' ideological, political, and discursive development); and (3) linguistic, generic, and discursive patterns identified in the BLFI activists' political writings.

By analyzing through the traffic model analytic framework the recontextualization strategies the BLFI activists adopted for their political writings, we can better understand the situated contexts, layers of meanings, and productive effects tied to their composing practices. Specifically in terms of the kind of revisionist work this dissertation project attempts to create, a traffic model analytic framework that focuses on the BLFI activists' recontextualization strategies for their political literacies, yields answers to the following questions: In what ways and to what end did the BLFI activists put together and reconfigure in their extracurricular political writing a diverse range of linguistic, discursive, and cultural resources for their own purposes and in light of the contexts, circumstances, and commitments informing their work? How and to what end did the BLFI activists adapt their political writing practices to their "traffic" experiences in order to establish a sense of voice(s), set the tone, prepare their readers for textual negotiation, and even pressure or cajole their readers into performing the kind of effective reading of their texts intended for the targeted readership? Why might the BLFI activists have found these recontextualization strategies meaningful to the political work they were doing as undergraduate students? More specifically, in what ways did their adoption of these recontextualization strategies not only enable them to critically engage with

power and difference, but also provide them with a kind of rhetorical agency and power that aided them in their efforts to intervene in and transform university and communal politics? As these kinds of questions suggest, the deeper social, political, cultural, material, spatial, and subjective potentials of the BLFI activists' political writing practices are realized as a result of the application of the traffic model analytic framework. Moreover, the sharp boundaries between literate practice and social identity which characterize traditional approaches are rejected.

But as I posited in the introduction of this chapter, this dissertation is a multifaceted project. In particular, in the opening paragraph of this chapter I presented this dissertation as a disciplinary pedagogical project. In section one of this chapter, I identified the contributing factors to what I described as my "failed engagements" with James during our Writing Center consultations. In my efforts to help James with his extracurricular political writing and address the questions he raised in that initial consultation that dealt specifically with the labor of writing, I basically overwrote the experiences and practices James was attempting to negotiate by re-telling the stories of my father's political writing practices and by expecting that somehow those stories would project a particular kind of political literate practice that would provide James with a sense of empowerment and a model for his own political writing practices. I didn't know how to make use of my father's stories to help James critically examine his own experiences and practices.

Hence, in the opening paragraph of this chapter, I framed this dissertation as an attempt to make use of the BLFI activists' experiences with political literacy to shape pedagogical practices. In this regard, in addition to the revisionist historical work this

dissertation generates, the traffic model analytic framework also provides insight into three points of inquiry that I contend are exigent to the theorizing and implementation of translingual writing pedagogies in the classroom and beyond: (1) the social, cultural, and political circumstances and contexts that motivate students to use writing not just as a site for negotiating academic coursework, but as a site for negotiating their political sensibilities; (2) the ways in which writer agency and motivations for writing function in the writing process; and (3) the nuanced ways in which writers actively engage in the practices of carving out discursive space to construct identities and perform a range of diverse social, cultural and political meanings and effects.

Mapping of Chapters

      The chapters of this dissertation are dictated by and structured around the traffic model analytic framework. Chapter Two introduces the research methodology that guided this project. By performing a theorization of my politics of location as a researcher for this project, I attempt to bring to light how the intersection of the personal, cultural, political, and scholarly aspects of a researcher's life functions as a crucial site for the creation of knowledge and the production of scholarship. Working from this theorization of my politics of location, I discuss what I describe as the labor of research. In other words, I discuss the ways in which the theorizing of my politics of location translated into the research practices I adopted for this dissertation project. To this end, I construct a narrative that paints an active picture of this act of translation. In particular, I discuss the ways in which my critique of the methods Suresh Canagarajah adopted for analyzing Geneva Smitherman's translanguaging practices has informed and shaped the

decisions I've made for this project in terms of methodology design, the application of the traffic model analytic framework, and the writing and revising of each chapter.

As I argued in the previous section, critical to the traffic model analytic framework is an examination of how writers adapt their language and literate practices according to their "traffic" experiences. Hence, Chapters Three and Four reconstruct a comprehensive — though not exhaustive — portrait of the BLFI activists' "traffic" experiences. Chapter Three examines the BLFI activists' pre-MSU engagements with what Vorris Nunley in *Keepin' It Hushed* describes as hush harbor spaces. My argument in this chapter contends that it was the kinds of hush harbor spaces Nunley describes — kitchens, living rooms, churches, mosques, and barbershops — that functioned as important sites for the BLFI activists to first encounter Black speakers and rhetors doing three things: (1) discursively questioning and critiquing power and dominant ideologies and practices; (2) discursively enacting resistance to dominance and power; and (3) discursively performing alternative conceptions of the world and their relations to it.

Drawing upon Jacqueline Jones-Royster's definition of literacy and Shirley Wilson Logan's work on sites of rhetorical education in nineteenth-century Black America, Chapter Four introduces The People's House as an important site of knowledge construction and negotiation for the BLFI activists during their tenure at MSU. The People's House functioned primarily as an African diasporic spatiality where African and Black American students met and discussed various socio-political issues. On the one hand, this chapter argues that the BLFI activists were reading, interpreting, listening to, and discussing at The People's House the speeches and writings of individuals and groups that identified themselves as Black Nationalist or Pan-African in theory, politics,

and practice. These texts served as exemplars, instructing the BLFI activists on how to take a theory of Black resistance and translate it and bring it to life textually on an organizational and practical level. On the other hand, this chapter identifies The People's House as a site where the BLFI activists worked through their understandings of the functioning purpose and power of language for Black revolutionary struggle. Even though they were encouraged to use "standard" conventions as part of their journalistic writing for *The Westside News*, a Black-owned community newspaper distributed in Black communities in Lansing, the BLFI activists never bowed to or internalized the notions of correctness that scholars and activists such as Geneva Smitherman were countering during the period. It was their reading, interpreting, and discussing of Frantz Fanon's writings on language and colonization, I argue, that helped the BLFI activists understand how language can be used as a systematic and pathological tool of oppression against the subordinate, but also helped solidify their commitments to using the reproduction of "standard" languages and conventions as a political strategy, a tactic of dissent for subverting oppressive social and political systems and their respective structures. It was their work with Kamuyu Kang'ethe's work on African naming practices that also strengthened their belief that languages communally privileged by Africans and people of color mediate their histories, positionings in society, and their constructions and performances of culture and identities.

Chapter Four also examines what the BLFI activists were reading, interpreting, listening to, and discussing through their engagements with The Malcolm X Communication Academy. Organized and coordinated by the BLFI activists, the Malcolm X Communication Academy was a community-based educational initiative that

offered communication and literacy classes for lower-income Black residents in Lansing communities. In 1970, the BLFI activists expanded the work of the Malcolm X Communication Academy to include regularly scheduled seminars conducted by several Black scholars and activists, including Stokely Carmichael, Walter Rodney, Robert Williams, and C.L.R. James. In this chapter, I argue that it was the academic and political education the BLFI activists received from C.L.R. James, whom they called their own personal Professor Emeritus, which proved significant in enhancing and shaping their ideological, political, and discursive development during their tenure at MSU. In particular, it was James's real-time instruction on rhetorical and discursive versatility and their comparative analyses of James's writings that helped the BLFI activists work through the functioning purpose and power of the revolutionary speaker and writer and understand how the context, commitments, and potential consequences of a revolutionary writer's work informs and shapes the literacies produced.

Turning to their political literacies, Chapter Five presents the findings of my analysis of the strategies the BLFI activists adopted for their positional writing practices. Applying pressure to the politics of representation and trends in rhetoric and composition which have left this politics of representation under-challenged, I demonstrate the ways in which the BLFI activists negotiated and developed the literate practices they used to not only construct themselves politically on a subjective and organizational level, but also to intervene in campus and communal politics. Contrary to the politics of representation that characterized Black college students of the late sixties and early seventies as under-prepared, lacking in linguistic resources and rhetorical agency, and politically militant yet academically apathetic, I demonstrate how and to what end the BLFI activists engaged in

the repurposing of practices and processes involved in textual invention and production. More specifically, drawing upon Rebecca Nowacek's work on writing transfer and Kevin Roozen's work on writer agency and the repurposing of extradisciplanary practices and processes, I demonstrate the ways in which the BLFI activists, as a community of writers, adopted the practice of composing discursively hybrid position papers populated by the theoretical and practical discourses of Black radicalism by repurposing and recontextualizing the knowledge they acquired through their engagements with C.L.R. James's discursive practices and Stokely Carmichael and Michael Thelwell's work with the position paper on Black Power. I also show how and to what end the BLFI activists, composing collaboratively for the BLFI, developed a blueprint for the discursive, stylistic and generic character of the narrative report they used as part of their positional writing practices. I argue that this work was enacted when the BLFI activists established a connection between the knowledge they acquired from their engagements with James's and Kwame Nkrumah's discursive practices and the contextual factors driving their intent to compose each text.

In Chapter Six, I continue my efforts to construct a more nuanced portrait of the BLFI activists' writer agency by discussing the stylistic aspects of a language practice Chui Karega, the BLFI's Minster of Information, adopted for an editorial he composed as editor-in-chief for the *Mazungumzo Journal of African Studies*. The *Mazungumzo* was created, edited, distributed by the BLFI activists and representatives from MSU's chapter of the Pan African Students Organization in the Americas (PASOA). Drawing upon stimulated recall and member checking ethnographic practices, I discuss a languaging practice Karega adopted for the article that he describes as "making it plain for the

masses." My argument for this chapter is twofold. First, the discussion and analysis of

this stylistic aspect of Karega's languaging practices for the text provides insight into the

ways in which writers composing from the margins assign a level of political agency to

languaging acts that both approximate and deviate from "standard" conventions. But this

process is not initiated indiscriminately. A writer's assessment of the communicative

context (audience, material conditions, purpose, potential productive effects and

consequences, relevance of their "traffic" experiences) informs and shapes the political

agency they imbue to various languaging practices. Second, the discursive understanding

that Karega gives to this stylistic aspect of his langauging practices emphasizes the

importance of theorizing and talking about a writer's generic, discursive, and stylistic

practices in terms of Alastair Pennycook's notion of relocalized doing (*Language as a*

Local Practice 136).

CHAPTER TWO

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In "Beyond the Personal: Theorizing a Politics of Location in Composition Research," Gesa E. Kirsch and Joy S. Ritchie discuss what they describe as a politics of location for composition research. Kirsch and Ritchie contend that a politics of location allows researchers to claim the legitimacy of their experiences, but it also requires that researchers theorize their locations:

> In addition to acknowledging our multiple positions, a politics of location must engage us in a rigorous on-going exploration of how we do our research: What assumptions underlie our approaches to research and methodologies? And a politics of location must challenge our conception of who we are in our work: How are our conflicting positions, histories, and desires for power implicated in our research questions, methodologies, and conclusions?

But as the authors further explain, this theorization of location "is always a culturally and politically charged activity" (10), making this a challenging but necessary endeavor that proves beneficial to the researcher willing "to be unrelentingly self-reflective" (10).

In relation to the work of this project, both my work as a researcher and the theorizing of my politics of location have been culturally and politically charged activities. In chapter one, I presented the exigence for my research work as multifaceted.

First, I presented this project as a historical work of subversion and revision. In this regard, my positioning as a researcher in rhetoric and composition has constructed this project as more than just a product of scholarly inquiry. In my role as researcher, I'm acting as an agent in a kind of work that has cultural and political importance and significance. More specifically, I'm constructing what's often described as "history from below." In "Remapping Revisionist Historiography," David Gold argues that work generated from this tradition shares common tendencies: Ideologically, it focuses on the voices of historical subjects traditionally absent from historical narratives; methodologically, it focuses on a local scene to illuminate larger historical questions; epistemologically, it "typically assume[s] a two-way interaction between individuals and cultural forces" (26). While Gold's description is comprehensive in nature and particular to traditions of historiographical research, for Black researchers, the construction and writing of history from below has a more political dimension. Black researchers engaged in this kind of historical work have an axe to grind that they wield with will in their efforts to contest power relations, challenge distorted representations, and bring to life history's marginalized, in this case, peoples of African descent.

This was the work of W.E.B. Dubois who in texts such as *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States of America 1838-1870* created a frame of reference for studying the African Diaspora, authorizing its legitimacy as a field of historical study and a counter to European and Western scholarship on Africa and the African Diaspora. This was also the work of C.L.R. James who wrote histories from below that directly challenged what he described as European and Western historians' "established fictions" about the revolutionary history and potential of Black laborers. In

The Black Jacobians, James constructed and brought to life Black laborers in the San Domingo Colony by narrating the development of their racial and class consciousness that propelled their collective resistance and attack on the bourgeoisie. This tradition continues with the work of contemporary Black historians writing history from below. In *Race Rebels*, Robin D.G. Kelley wields his axe with will, constructing a history of unconventional resistance by twentieth-century Black Americans to racial, class, and sexual oppression. In rhetoric and composition, Jacqueline Jones-Royster's work in contextualizing the literate practices of Black women is a politically and culturally charged endeavor designed to construct these women as "agents of change rather than simple victims of oppression and dominance" (*Traces of a Stream* 253).

With this project, I'm positioning myself in relation to the work of these kinds of Black scholars whose historical research has performed (and continues to perform) subversive and revisionist purposes and effects. As I argued in chapter one, trends in rhetoric and composition historiography have left under-challenged a politics of representation that historically and systematically marked Black college students of the late sixties and early seventies as underprepared, lacking in linguistic resources and rhetorical agency, and politically militant yet academically apathetic. By examining the strategies the BLFI activists adopted for composing their political writings, my work as a researcher applies pressure to these disciplinary trends, constructing a more nuanced picture of the writer agency of Black college students of the late sixties and early seventies. This work has cultural and political significance as I affirm the necessity and exigence for this kind of disciplinary historical work for peoples of African descent.

But there's also personal significance tied to my role as researcher. The narrowing of scope to a site where my father was an active participate requires that I acknowledge how I unapologetically identify with the "subjects" of my research. That is, I have familial and personal relationships with several participants in this study which heightens the cultural and political importance and significance of this project. These participants' commitments to projecting to general and scholarly publics a more nuanced picture of their agency as political writers are also my own commitments because of my role as a Black researcher constructing history from below, but also in part because of these familial and personal relationships. In other words, the ways in which their writer agencies are perceived, discussed, theorized, and historicized matters to me on a personal level. During the initial meeting when I first introduced the idea behind this project to several BLFI activists, it was evident that they shared the same kinds of questions, concerns, and critiques I had (and continue to have) about representational politics and power relations which have authorized for scholarly and general publics an understanding of Black college students of the late sixties and early seventies as politically militant yet intellectually and academically apathetic. Their enthusiasm for participating in a project that uses scholarship to intervene in and challenge these representational politics and power relations cannot be underscored.

In short, what I'm arguing here is that I have a sense of vested personal interest in this project, and there is a sense of shared commitments among myself and several of the participants in this study. As such, I unapologetically claim this affective dimension of my research as an appropriate and valid basis for scholarly inquiry. This is what Wendy B. Sharer characterizes as the "scholarly standing of the affective domain" (55).

Researchers in rhetoric, composition, and literacy studies are increasingly acknowledging that our research agendas often emerge from our lived and affective experiences. As Sharer explains in "Traces of the Familiar: Family Archives as Primary Source Material," it was the discovery of her grandmother's personal archives that led her to investigate the ways in which international relations' study groups and letter-writing campaigns to improve schools fostered a sense of empowerment for women and mediated their participation in political affairs from 1915 to 1930. Through her research, Sharer aims to "foster a desire in future scholars to explore the rhetorical practices of family members and friends, and, at the same time, to counteract the restrictions and assumptions that place family and friends —"personal relationships" and the affective domains that surround them — beyond the boundaries of valid research" (55).

But in chapter one, I also presented my research as a disciplinary pedagogical project. In the opening sections, I identified the contributing factors to what I described as my "failed engagements" with James during our Writing Center consultations. In my efforts to address the questions James raised in that initial consultation — questions dealing specifically with the labor of writing (negotiations of issues of language and discourse use, context, histories, traditions, commitments, and the potential consequences of their work) — I was unaware of two kinds of tensions at work that Lu and Horner describe in "The Problematics of Experience": (1) tensions between "the desire to teach a particular understanding of literacy and the desire to learn about literacy from students' literacy experiences" (273) and (2) tensions between "the desire to change students' literacy experiences and the desire to grasp their existing experiences" (273). As I also explained in chapter one, I basically overwrote the range of experiences and practices

James was attempting to negotiate by re-telling the stories of my father's literate practices and by expecting that somehow those stories would project a particular understanding of literacy and a particular kind of activist literate practice for Black student-writers that James could adopt or use as a model for his own work. I wasn't sure why I felt compelled to draw upon those stories during the consultations, and I didn't know how to make use of my father's stories to help James critically examine his own experiences and practices.

In this regard, in chapter one I framed this project as an attempt to make use of the BLFI activists' experiences with political literacy to inform and shape pedagogical practice. More specifically, I located this project within disciplinary conversations surrounding students' extracurricular literate practices and disciplinary conversations about language diversity, equity in writing pedagogy, and best practices for transforming writing pedagogy in light of translingual approaches to literacy. I posited this project as disciplinary work that will give compositionists insight into the following: (1) the social, cultural, and political circumstances and contexts that motivate students to use writing not just as a site for negotiating academic coursework, but as a site for negotiating their activist sensibilities; (2) the ways in which writer agency and motivations for writing function in the composing process; and (3) the nuanced ways in which writers actively engage in the practices of carving out discursive space to construct identities and perform a range of diverse social, cultural, and political meanings and effects.

By performing a theorization of my politics of location tied to this project, what I've attempted to bring to light here in the opening sections of this chapter is how the intersection of the personal, cultural, political, and scholarly aspects of our lives often functions as a crucial site for the creation of knowledge and the production of

scholarship. Working from this intersection, throughout this project I've had to negotiate and define the tensions among and the areas of convergence between these aspects of my life in terms of values, purposes, and epistemological and methodological practices. In particular, I've had to negotiate and develop research practices that attend to the personal investment I have in this project — my investment in assisting the participants in this study in their work to challenge power relations and distorted representations of their writer agencies as Black activist students of the late sixties and early seventies. In other words, I've had to consider the kinds of practices that would not only create space for participants to assume the role of co-researcher for this project, but also create space for them —as co-researchers — to engage similar kinds of critical research practices that I've adopted for myself throughout this project.

What I'm describing here is the labor of research: the ways in which the theorizing of my politics of location translates into research practice. It's what Royster describes when she discusses how the four sites of critical regard of Afrafeminist approaches to research — careful analysis, acknowledgement of passionate attachments, attention to ethical action, and commitment to social responsibility — translate into practices "forged in light of critical ways of doing that are also capable of being touchstones for critical ways of being" (*Traces of a Stream* 279). In the following sections, I construct a narrative that paints an active picture of this act of translation and outlines the ways in which the theorizing of my politics of location has informed and shaped the decisions I've made for this project in terms of methodology design, the application of the traffic model analytic framework, and the writing and revising of each chapter.

From Theorization to Practice: Designing the Methodology

In chapter one, I argued the need for an alternative interpretive lens for examining the writer agency of the BLFI activists. This alternative lens, I explained, needs to do three important things: (1) move beyond the confines of their performances of literacy in classroom environments, (2) acknowledge that the BLFI activists made choices to write in particular ways for particular audiences, and (3) focus on understanding what it is that the BLFI activists were actually *doing* in and through language, discourse, and text. I concluded the chapter by introducing the alternative lens I adopted for this dissertation study which I defined as a traffic model analytic framework. This interpretive framework, I explained, draws upon Lu and Horner's translingual approach to literacy which "asks us to consider how, when, where, and why specific language strategies might be deployed" (27). An important component of the traffic model analytic framework, I argued, is an examination of how writers such as the BLFI activists adapted their language and literate practices according to their "traffic" experiences. In other words, the traffic model analytic framework involves an examination of how writers such as the BLFI activists enacted what Suresh Canagarajah describes as "processes such as recontextualization" (6). Recontextualization speaks to the agentive strategies writers use in putting together and reconfiguring a diverse range of linguistic, discursive, and epistemological resources for their own purposes and in light of the contexts, circumstances, and commitments informing their work. By analyzing the recontextualization strategies of the BLFI activists, I argued that we can better understand the situated contexts, layers of meanings, and productive effects tied to their composing strategies for their political writings.

As I also explained in the concluding portion of chapter one, my imperative for theorizing the recontextualization strategies the BLFI activists used for their political writings led me to adopt a kaleidoscope view as the basis of the traffic model analytic framework. Drawing upon Jaqueline Jones-Royster's use of the concept for the analytic model she adopted for her study of the essayistic writing practices of Black women, the kaleidoscope view for the traffic model analytic framework, I explained, merges three points of inquiry: (1) the contexts for literacy production (e.g. material conditions, power relations at work, motivations for writing, etc.); (2) the BLFI activists' "traffic" experiences (e.g. a reconstructed network of the rhetorical and literate activities influencing and shaping the BLFI activists' ideological, political, and discursive development); and (3) linguistic, generic, and discursive patterns identified in the BLFI activists' political writings.

Working from this kaleidoscopic traffic model analytic framework, I knew in the early stages of this project that my methodology would have to involve archival research. In particular, I theorized that I could use archival source material to assist me in my efforts to do three things: (1) curate an understanding of the contexts for literacy production for their political writings, (2) retrieve copies of the BLFI activists' political writings (e.g. position papers, scholarly articles, and editorials published in campus and local newspapers), and (3) reconstruct a comprehensive — though not exhaustive — portrait of the BLFI activists' "traffic" experiences. In terms of the contexts for literacy production and the portrait of their "traffic" experiences, I use the words curate and reconstruct purposefully in describing this work. As Lynee Lewis Gaillet reminds us in "(Per)Forming Archival Research Methodologies," across disciplinary contexts "archives

are now viewed as primary sources for creating knowledge rather than mere storehouses for finding what is already known" (39).

As I continued to frame the methodology for the project, I recognized the limitations of a singular reliance on archival material for my work in accomplishing those three objectives. I came to this conclusion through my critique of several of the analytic practices Suresh Canagarajah uses for one of his most recent projects. In *Translingual Practice: Global Englishes and Cosmopolitan Relations*, one of Canagarajah's objectives is to explore the negotiation strategies multilingual writers adopt to create texts that combine their own languages and cultural values with English. As part of this work, he discusses a reading he performed on Geneva Smitherman's 1999 article "CCCC's Role in the Struggle for Language." Canagarajah holds up Smitherman's article as an "example of a minority scholar employing a range of vernacular dialects to represent her voice and identity in formal academic writing" (114). His analysis, Canagarajah explains, focused on uncovering the "decisions Smitherman seems to have made on where, when, and how to mesh AAVE and SWE" (115).

Canagarajah is transparent in informing readers that his attempts to interview Smitherman about her composing processes for the article were unsuccessful. He is forthcoming in explaining that when he sought confirmation on his reading of her text and interpretations of her writing strategies, Smitherman "didn't comment much" (115). Confronted with these challenges to his methodology, Canagarajah conducted what he describes as "primarily a textual analysis" (115). And that it is. In his discussion of his interpretations we see Canagarajah trying to analyze Smitherman's agency in composing the article by interpreting issues of language use, word choice, lexicality, register, and

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discursive convention within the context of a host of conjecture he makes about Smitherman's purposes and commitments and the layers of meaning tied to her code-meshing practices. In the discussion of his analysis, it is not readily apparent how and to what end Canagarajah interpreted the contextual peculiarities of Smitherman's positioning by examining the intersection of issues of race, space, place, and power relations. I will not go as far as to say that Canagarajah performed an acontextual analysis. At points in the discussion of his analysis, he situates his interpretations of Smitherman's writing strategies within the context of scholarship on AAVE, African American identity, and African American rhetorical practices. For example, there are points where he frames his interpretations of Smitherman's first use of AAVE in the article within the context of signifyin' practices.[14] Additionally, when discussing word choice and discursive conventions, Canagarajah grounds his interpretations in scholarship on "in group expressions" and rhetorical practices that are culturally valued by Black Americans and that resonate with Black communities.

Nonetheless, as I stated, it is not readily apparent whether Canagarajah took that extra step in his analysis, attending to that intersection of issues of race, context, and power relations that I contend should not be deemphasized in any discussion about the agency of Black writers. John Ogbu's work is useful here in terms of understanding the pitfalls and problems that can arise when researchers and scholars fail to adequately consider how the intersection of issues of race, space, place, and power relations inform

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[14] Signifyin' practices make use of vernacular tropes such as "marking, loud-talking, testifying, calling out (of one's name), sounding, rapping, playing the dozens (a ritualized word game that consists of exchanging insults usually about the members of the opponent's family)" (Gates 1988, 52). For discussions on signifyin' practices, see Henry Louis Gates' *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1988); Geneva Smitherman's *Talkin' and Testifyin': The Language of Black America* (Houghton Mifflin, 1977); Bernard W. Bell's *The Afro-American Novel and Its Traditions* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1987).

and shape the agency of Black writers as they simultaneously constitute and construct cultures, identities, contexts, environments, and relations of power through their textual practices. In his research and scholarship on minority academic achievement, Ogbu draws a distinction between what he describes as voluntary and involuntary minorities. In Ogbu's typology, voluntary minorities are those who choose to immigrate to a host country and thus tend to hold a favorable and opportunistic view of their host society and its institutions. Involuntary minorities — Obgu argues — have acquired their minority position as a result of historic and systematic subjugation after conquest or forced migration (enslavement). Hence, involuntary minorities — Ogbu posits — often maintain an oppositional approach to society and its institutions.

As I positioned Canagarajah's discussion of his analysis within the context of Ogbu's typology, I couldn't help but wonder if he considered the peculiar and perhaps even oppositional relationship Black Americans might have (and have had) with mainstream American values and practices and American institutions. As I worked through Canagarajah's discussion of his analysis, I was confronted with a range of questions. Was Smitherman's code-meshing of AAVE and SWE in the article primarily — as Canagarajah suggests — an exercise in establishing her voice and identity as a minority academic scholar and writer? As a Black woman academic working in the disciplines of sociolinguistics and literacy studies, what historical, situated, and imagined conversations and activities might have Smitherman been trying to extend, challenge, complicate, transform, and/or resist? Although her article maintains a discipline-specific focus and was published in CCC's, was her reworking of dominant academic discursive values and conventions (through her code-meshing) primarily an attempt to, as

Cangarajah suggests, "practice what she preaches" (155)? Could there have been both larger and localized political purposes that extended beyond academic contexts motivating, informing, and shaping her composing strategies? Was there a homogeneous audience Smitherman imagined and anticipated for the article? As I read Canagarajah's interpretations of the instances where Smitherman integrates AAVE into the text, I remember thinking aloud, "How do you know in that moment she was even talking to you, or anyone in the academy, or anyone who wasn't African American?" Could this have been a hybrid text in terms of function, purpose, and meaning? In other words, could there have been multiple and discrete race-themed purposes and commitments informing and shaping her composing processes, and could there have been multiple and discrete race-themed layers of meaning constituted and constructed by Smitherman for a diverse range of productive effects? Canagarajah frames part of his analysis of Smitherman's composing strategies around what he describes as the "serious purposes" of academic writing. But how might Canagarajah's understanding and definition of the "serious purposes" of academic writing have differed for Smitherman whose relationship to the academy as a Black woman scholar and public activist was (and continues to be) informed and shaped by a range of peculiarities that distinguish her from the kinds of multilingual scholars and writers Canagagrajah focuses much of his work on in *Translingual Practice*? As she composed the article, how might Smitherman have negotiated the diversity in perspective in terms of the "serious purposes" of academic writing?

I can go on here listing the range of questions that Canagarajah's analysis raised. As I said, I got questions. But my point is this: Canagarajah had minimal contributions

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from Smitherman to not only help him construct a discursive articulation of the attitudes, purposes, expectations, and experiences informing and shaping her literate practices, but also make visible in the discussion of his analysis the social, political, and material aspects of these attitudes, purposes, expectations, and experiences. With the failed attempts to secure her active participation, Smitherman was not afforded the opportunity to participate in the creation of knowledge about her own literate practices by negotiating her own temporal-spatial positioning between time-present, time-past, and time-future and by giving shape and form to her own experiences by theorizing their sociality and materiality. Additionally, Canagarajah as researcher was not afforded the opportunity to intervene in and become a part of these temporal-spatial negotiations and meaning-making practices. What we see Canagarajah doing in the discussion of his analysis is reifying the experiential within the context of scholarship on AAVE, African American identity, and African American rhetorical practices in order to draw conclusions about Smitherman's writer agency for composing the text. His interpretations of Smitherman's composing strategies are also drawn from the reception-end of his methodology. Hence, a portion of his interpretations are based on conjecture, and the conclusions he draws about her strategies of production lack nuance and depth.

What I'm pinpointing here as the basis of my critique is what Lu and Horner describe as "the problematics of experience" in researching and teaching: "what it is, who represents it to whom to what ends, in what manner, and whether and how such representations change that experience" ("The Problematics of Experience" 258). Lu and Horner reject notions that posit the relationship between experience and discourse as polar and hierarchal, arguing that they "valorize[e] experience as both prior to and greater

than discursive understanding" (259), authorize experience as fixed and "self-evident beyond the politics of representation" (259), and exclude language from the "wholeness in our immediate experience" (qtd Spellmeyer 259). Instead, the authors suggest that there is a dialectical relation between experience and discourse, and they theorize the consequences researchers and teachers are confronted with if they fail to acknowledge this dialectical relationship: "A failure to acknowledge that dialectical relation leads to the danger of one discourse speaking in the name of experience against other discourse. It dissolves the tension between experience and discourse and so evacuates experience of its social materiality" (259).

In short, Lu and Horner call for critical work in research and teaching that recognizes and acknowledges experience as "historical and ongoing, constantly reconstituting itself" (261). Specifically in terms of research, the authors theorize a kind of critical ethnography of experience that does three things: (1) sustains the tension between experience and discursive understanding, (2) recognizes the difficulties researchers are confronted with in their efforts to discursively construct the experiences of their research participants, and (3) seeks to understand participants' experiences by asking how they are experienced "in different material social locations and in terms of the particular discursive understanding they give to them" (259).

As I moved further into my work of designing the methodology for this project, I decided to integrate into the framework the kind of critical ethnography of experience Lu and Horner describe. In conjunction with archival source material, I theorized that I could use these kinds of ethnographic practices to curate that understanding of the contexts for literacy production for their political writings and reconstruct that portrait of the BLFI

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activists' "traffic" experiences. This was particularly important in terms of the reconstruction of their "traffic" experiences. Ironically, in the introduction to *Literacy as Translingual Practice*, Canagarajah argues the importance of understanding the constitutive and emergent role of space and place in shaping literacies. Canagarajah's theorizations have important methodological implications for Composition and Literacy research. When we are trying to get a better understanding of the "traffic" experiences of writers — the traces of meaning that inform and shape their literate practices—we have to go beyond a simple examination of the social negotiations and rhetorical activities that writers enacted during the particular time and in the geographical spaces in which they were meaning-making through their textual practices. We have to also work on reconstructing the "wider field of action" that language and literacy practices always participate in (Pennycook 143). In terms of reconstructing the BLFI activists' "traffic" experiences, this meant I would have to analyze a continuum of their social negotiations and rhetorical activities using a spatiotemporal model rather than a time/place-bound model. I would also have to try to uncover the social, political, cultural, epistemological, and historical meanings, purposes, and commitments that were important in shaping their language and literacy practices.

To these ends, I decided to use oral history interviews which had two components: individual interviews with each participant and a roundtable discussion including all participants. The use of oral history interviews for curating an understanding of the contexts for literacy production and reconstructing the BLFI activists' "traffic" experiences — I theorized — would create space for the BLFI activists to function as what Royster describes as "co-knowledge-makers" (*Traces of a Stream* 223-224). In this

sense, I believed that I was creating a dialogical dynamic between myself (researcher) and the BLFI activists participating in this study (participants) as we worked collaboratively to mutually constitute knowledge about the contexts for literacy production and the social negotiations and rhetorical and literate activities informing and shaping their political writing practices. This dialogic nature of oral history interviews is what Brad Lucas describes in his efforts to theorize the usefulness of oral history for rhetoric and composition research. For Lucas, oral histories are "not simply historical documents recorded through oral means" (27), but rather "interpersonal exchanges developed with multiple perspectives and complex dialectical processes" (27). Drawing upon Paulo Friere's "banking model" concept, Lucas makes a case for understanding oral history interviews as non-banking practices, or to say it differently, "interviews that do not simply seek to extract information from their subjects, but instead to mutually constitute knowledge" (30). This approach attends to the kind of critical ethnography of experience Lu and Horner describe and it is useful in two ways. First, as Lucas points out, it deconstructs the role of the interviewer (researcher) as interrogator and imbues a sense of agency to interviewees (participants) by re-conceptualizing them as more than repositories of knowledge. Second, this approach provides new ways of thinking about and talking about oral history interviews using concepts and terms such as "negotiated accomplishments" or "a looking together at something" (30).

But I also added an additional component to the oral history interviews to reinforce their dialogic functioning —member checking. As a qualitative research practice, member checking is commonly defined as a technique used to help improve the accuracy and credibility of a study — a technique for validation in qualitative research

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(Barbour 2001; Flick 2006). But I incorporated member checking into my methodology as an acknowledgement of both the tensions that exist between experience and discursive understanding and my own difficulties and limitations in terms of discursively constructing their experiences composing their political writings. I was trying to do what Lu and Horner describe as part of a critical ethnography of experience. By providing the BLFI activists a draft of my interpretations of the contexts for literacy production and a draft my portrait of their "traffic" experiences, and by asking them to re-analyze their experiences in light of my interpretations and offer suggestions for revision, I was trying to interpret and discursively construct an understanding of their experiences by providing the BLFI activists the opportunity to engage those temporal-spatial negotiations, giving particular meaning and discursive understanding to their own experiences composing their political writings.

In short, by incorporating dialogic oral history interviewing practices I felt like I was adequately attending to the values, purposes, and commitments underlying each of the research positions I adopted for this project. In other words, I believed that I was attending to the personal, cultural, political, and scholarly aspects of my work. For example, I theorized that I was attending to that personal investment I have in the project by giving the BLFI activists the opportunity to assume a primary role in the research and collaborate in the discovery and creation of a kind of subversive and revisionist knowledge that was (and continues to be) just as important and significant to them as it is to me as the researcher. I also believed that I could draw more nuanced conclusions about the BLFI activists' strategies for their political writings by taking the knowledge co-constructed during the oral history interviews and placing it in analytic conversation with

archival source material and the linguistic, generic, and discursive patterns I identified in their political writings. From these drawn conclusions, I believed that I — as the researcher — could not only construct that more nuanced picture of their writer agencies, subverting and revising under-challenged disciplinary representations, but also create a body of knowledge that would provide insight into those three areas of inquiry I outlined as exigent to the theorizing and implementation of writing pedagogy in the classroom and beyond.

From Theorization to Practice: Critical Ethnography and Critical Archival Research

Working from this methodological design, I began the archival process with the Student Activism Collection housed in MSU's archives. From this collection, I accumulated government documents and MSU reports on the activities of the BLFI (on and off campus). Within the collection, the Ruth Simms Hamilton Papers also provided documents for contextualizing the social, political, and educational climate of MSU from 1969 to 1973 and the social and political climates of surrounding Lansing communities. Again, with these documents from the Student Activism Collection and the Ruth Simms Hamilton Papers I was trying to curate an understanding of the contexts for literacy production for the BLFI activists' political writing practices.

As part of my work in curating this understanding of the contexts for literacy production for the BLFI activists' political writing practices, I wanted to rely on both the documents in the general Student Activism Collection and the Ruth Simms Hamilton Papers because the materials contained in each respectively yield different (and sometimes contradictory) perspectives. In terms of the BLFI activists and the BLFI, there

are primarily two kinds of source material represented in the general Student Activism Collection: (1) newspaper archives which contextualize the activities and events surrounding Black student activism at MSU and (2) documents addressing Black student activism at MSU that were generated by and/or on behalf of MSU's university administration. It was not a surprise that most of the newspaper articles merely report on these activities and events and that the documents tied to MSU's university administration tend to portray antagonistic attitudes towards the BLFI activists and articulate antagonistic responses to the work of the BLFI. In contrast, the Ruth Simms Hamilton Papers contain research materials on affirmative action at MSU and other universities, case studies of MSU conflicts and protests, newspaper clippings, files about university diversity programs, and academic papers written by Hamilton who joined MSU's Department of Sociology in 1968 and was visibly politically active as part of a cadre of Black faculty at MSU. The collection also contains files about MSU's Black student organizations. In particular, there are archives of newspaper articles where the BLFI activists were interviewed about the state of Black student activism at MSU and their work with the BLFI. Also in the Ruth Simms Hamilton Papers are documents containing statements that the BLFI activists generated on behalf of the BLFI. These statements were released to general and university publics and campus and local news outlets and they addressed issues relevant to the political activities the BLFI activists were involved in locally, domestically, and internationally.

This variance in archival source material highlights two important aspects of archival research that influenced my decision to draw upon both the general collection and the Ruth Simms Hamilton Papers. It also illustrates why this decision was

methodologically important to my efforts to write a history from below that articulates a more nuanced and subversive portrait of the BLFI activists' writer agencies. First, this variance points out how asymmetrical power relations and hegemonic values and practices often dictate and authorize the decisions archivists make about the kinds of documents that will be preserved and made available to future generations. For example, what we often find in traditional archives, even traditional archives such as the general Student Activism Collection which focuses on student protest and activism at MSU, is what Shevaun E. Watson in *Trying Silence: The Case of Denmark Vesey and the History of African American Rhetoric* describes as an absence of unmediated Black voices and the absence of self-constructed and self-authorized forms and expressions of Black subjectivity. But this variance in archival source material also emphasizes the ways in which minority scholars working from the margins have pushed back against the racial, colonial, and imperial politics undergirding the selectiveness at work with traditional archives. As a core faculty member in the African Studies Center and the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies, and as the director of MSU's African Diaspora Research project for seventeen years, part of Ruth Hamilton's work involved pushing against these asymmetrical power relations, hegemonic values, and selective practices to create space in MSU's archives for source materials that make present unmediated Black voices and perspectives and articulate the counter-hegemonic and subversive rhetorics and practices of African peoples. Placing the documents from the general Student Activism Collection and the Ruth Simms Hamilton Papers in analytic conversation with one another emphasized the racial and political tensions at work at MSU and in surrounding Lansing communities, which allowed me to curate an understanding of the

social, political, and education climate at MSU and in these communities that's embodied by complexity, complication, and contradiction.

Of course I encountered inevitable limitations in terms of my initial reliance on these two archives. As I stated, in the Ruth Simms Hamilton Papers are academic texts Hamilton wrote on a range of topics relevant to Black student activism at work domestically and internationally. But as I immersed myself in the archival process I realized that I had to adjust that process somewhat and locate additional source material. As I discussed in the last section, I knew that the reconstruction of their "traffic" experiences had to go beyond a simple examination of the social negotiations and rhetorical activities that BLFI activists enacted during the particular time and in the geographical spaces in which they were engaging political literacy; it had to also investigate that "wider field of action" that language and literacy practices always participate in. To this end, in addition to the disciplinary knowledge I had already acquired on Black writing and African American rhetorics, I concluded that I needed to also rely on other kinds of source material to contextualize Black college students' participation in the Black radicalism of the sixties and seventies. I decided to focus on comprehensive studies on the Black Campus, Black Arts, Black Power, Pan-African, and African Liberation Movements, as well as the autobiographies of leading figures of these movements.

Here are several examples of these secondary source materials: Harry Edwards's *Black Students*; James McEvoy and Abraham Miller's *Black Power and Student Rebellion*; William Barlowe and Peter Shapiro's *An End to Silence: The San Francisco State College Student Movement in the 60's*; Stokely Carmichael's autobiography *Ready*

for Revolution: The Life and Struggles of Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture), co-authored

with Ekwueme Michael Thelwell; Joseph Penial's *Waiting 'Till The Midnight Hour: A*

Narrative History of Black Power in America; Ibram Rogers' *Diversity Demanded: A*

Narrative History of the Black Campus Movement, 1965-1972; James Edward

Smethurst's *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960's and 1970's*; L.

Van Deburg's *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture,*

1965-1975; and Joy Ann Williamson's *Black Power on Campus: The University of*

Illinois, 1965-1975.

But as I continued to engage the archival process, I also encountered another

limitation in terms of my initial reliance on these two archives. In the general Student

Activism Collection and the Ruth Simms Hamilton Papers, there are very few copies of

the BLFI activists' actual political writings. I made adjustments in light of this limitation

by responding to Gesa Kirsch and Liz Rohan's advocacy for expanding what they

describe as a "narrow conception of archives" (4). Kirsch and Rohan argue that many

researchers are expanding notions of the archive by using regional and familial archives

for their data collection and analyses. Working from this perspective, I solicited the help

of Chui Karega and Ernie Boone, the Chief Editor of *The Westside News*. As a

community mimeographed newspaper, *The Westside News* was primarily distributed in

demographically Black residential Lansing communities, and it had several BLFI

activists serving as staff writers, editors, and production and distribution assistants.

Karega had preserved in the basement of his Detroit home several editions of *The*

Mazungumzo, the Journal of African Studies that the BLFI activists created, edited, and

distributed during their tenure as undergraduates at MSU. Similarly, Boone had preserved

in his Ann Arbor residence several editions of *The Westside News* where editorial articles and position papers written by the BLFI activists were published. In this regard, expanding notions of the archive to include familial archives provided me with a fair representation of the BLFI activists' political writings which had never been incorporated into the archives of a university library system.

After initiating the ongoing process that is archival research, I began working on the oral history component of the methodology. For both aspects — the individual interviews and the roundtable discussion — data collection procedures involved video and audio-taped interviews. Each individual interview lasted at least one hour. The roundtable discussion lasted approximately two hours. Each individual interview was transcribed; the roundtable discussion session was also transcribed. For each individual interview, I asked the BLFI activists questions designed to guide and direct the focus of the oral history interviews. Remember, I wanted to create a dialogic dynamic between myself and the BLFI activists. Hence, with these questions I was trying to create discursive spaces that not only allowed the BLFI activists to create knowledge by negotiating their temporal-spatial positionings, but also allowed me to intervene in and become a part of these negotiations. Drawing upon Paul Rabinow's ethnographic research practices, Lu and Horner characterize this dialogic dynamic this way: research participants "actively informing — giving form to — experience in ways which meet the researcher's questions and in ways the researcher can understand" (263). This kind of practice, Lu and Horner explain, involves a "complex process of highlighting, identification, and analysis" (263).

The first tier of questions was designed to help me understand the motivations, purposes, and commitments that informed and shaped their activist work as undergraduates at MSU: *What social, political, and educational circumstances brought to life the BLFI's activist work, and thus their political writing practices? How did these circumstances authorize the discursive voices of BLFI activists? Was there opposition and fear of disassociation, reprimand, and retaliation, and if so, when and why did literacy cease to function solely as a tool for negotiating the demands of academic coursework and become a site for social and political engagement?* The second tier of questions focused on the BLFI activists' attitudes towards literacy and their expectations for literacy education: *What were their purposes and importance for each? What social, moral, political, cultural, educational, and economic values did they attribute to their understanding of literacy, literacy practices, and literacy instruction both within and outside of the academy?* The third tier of questions focused on uncovering the rhetorical and literate activities they engaged in before they enrolled at MSU and during their tenure as undergraduates at MSU: *What kinds of reading and writing activities were they engaged in before they enrolled at MSU and during their tenure as undergraduates at MSU. Was there any cultural, political, and/or familial importance and significance tied to those practices?* With the fourth tier of questions I was trying to uncover the ways in which the BLFI activists understood the relationship among six things: language, writing, discourse, race, identity, and power. *What theories and theorists were they drawing upon, rejecting, and/or reworking as they negotiated and attempted to define for themselves this relationship? What role did familial relationships and communal interactions play in helping the BLFI activists define this relationship?* The final tier included very open-

ended kinds of contextual questions about their political writings: open-ended questions about issues of language use, space, place, audience, purpose, and power relations. For example, I asked each participant to talk about the extent to which issues of language use factored into the composing of their political writings. To continue the dialogic engagement, a text providing an interpretation of each participant's responses during the individual interview was distributed to each participant via email. Each participant was encouraged to re-analyze their responses in light of my interpretations, comment on, and offer suggestions for revisions.

In the roundtable discussion session, I facilitated dialogue amongst all participants by directing their attention to their responses to the five tiers of questions utilized during the individual interview sessions. The purpose of the roundtable discussion session was to encourage participants to consider their responses to the five tiers of questions in light of other participants' reflections and responses. As the facilitator, I used transcriptions of each participant's individual interview sessions to query their responses to the five tiers of questions. To continue the dialogic engagement, a text providing an interpretation of the key discussion points of the roundtable discussion session was also distributed to each participant via email. Each participant was encouraged to comment on and/or offer suggestions for revision.

From Theorization to Practice: Complications, Adjustments, and Critical Ethnography

During the oral history interviews, I gained a valuable piece of information about the BLFI activists' political writing practices that pushed me to incorporate additional research practices into my methodology. From the individual interviews and the

roundtable discussion, I discovered that most of their position papers were composed using collaborative writing strategies. Of course I was also discovering this on my own as I collected samples of their political writings from Karega and Boone as part of the archival process. As I stated, this was valuable information but it also provided a major challenge to the implementation of my designed methodology.

In the late-eighties, John Trimbur proposed a model of collaborative learning for the composition classroom that redefined consensus as "a strategy that structures differences by organizing them in relation to each other" (468). This redefined notion of consensus, Trimbur argued, "enables individuals to participate actively and meaningfully in group life" (463). In this sense, writers composing in the composition classroom where collaborative learning is privileged work from an understanding of consensus as not necessarily "an agreement that reconciles differences through an ideal conversation but rather as the desire of humans to love and work together with differences" (454).

Trimbur's redefined notion of consensus frames the collaborative writing strategies Paul Lowry, Aaron Curtis, and Michelle Lowry call reactive writing:

> Reactive writing occurs when writers create a document in real time, reacting and adjusting to each other's changes and additions…As a given author writes a section, others may simultaneously review the section and create new sections in response that may contradict or concur with the author and that may be well thought out or reactionary. (78)

The argument can be made that the kind of reactive writing Lowry et al describe here functioned as a recontextualization strategy for the BLFI activists. In an interview on May 25, 2013, Chui Kaega provided insight into the collaborative character of these

writing contexts specifically in terms of the composing of their position papers for the
BLFI:

> With these papers, everybody added to it, refined it, edited it, the whole
>
> thing.You gotta know that we were all individuals still. I don't think there
>
> was ever a time when we all agreed and said this is exactly right.
>
> Everybody had a different little, umm, something you needed to put in it.

As Karega's comments suggest, the BLFI activists' collaborative writing practices for
composing position papers allowed "a heterotopia of voices" to thrive (Trimbur 455).
These voices were informed by the diverse range of linguistic, discursive, and
epistemological resources the BLFI activists each brought to these reactive writing
contexts. Hence, the collaborative composing of a single document — a position paper on
an issue relevant to the work of the BLFI — functioned as a situated practice in which the
BLFI activists were actively negotiating and constituting meaning amid differences in the
resources they each brought to these reactive writing contexts.

     In light of my discovery of these reactive writing contexts, in order to gauge how
and to what end they negotiated difference and achieved shared understanding in these
reactive writing contexts, I proposed to the BLFI activists that we incorporate an
additional ethnographic interview practice to the methodology — stimulated recall
interviews. Stimulated recall interviews are typically regarded as introspective methods.
Researchers across disciplinary contexts use stimulated recall interviews to study
language processes, interpersonal skills, and decision-making processes. In Composition
and Literacy research, scholars often use stimulated recall interviews in the same way
that Canagarajah appropriated the practice for his 2011 study of the code-meshing

strategies his Sri Lankan graduate student used in her academic writing. In the stimulated recall interview, Canagarajah took multiple drafts of his student's essay and pointed to specific instances in the text to query the attitudes, objectives, and expectations underlying the practices she adopted for composing and revising the essay.

What I wanted to do in terms of the BLFI activists was conduct a group-oriented stimulated recall interview with all the participating BLFI activists. For example, I wanted to take one of the position papers that they composed collaboratively and distribute copies to the BLFI activists and then point to specific instances in the text to query the attitudes, purposes, expectations, and experiences tied to the composing of the text. As the researcher, I theorized that I would determine these specific instances in the text by placing in analytic conversation the understanding of the contexts for literacy production for their political writings that I had curated as part of the oral history interviews and the portrait of the "traffic" experiences I had reconstructed as part of the oral history interviews as well. I theorized that I could ask very open-ended questions as I pointed to these specific instances in the text and asked the BLFI activists to rethink and give shape to their positional writing practices by theorizing the sociality and materiality of their experiences composing each of these instances in the text: "So what were you trying to *do* here with this particular word choice?"

Collectively, the BLFI activists were not sold on the use of this method for analyzing the strategies they adopted for composing their position papers. There were several BLFI activists who were active participants in the collaborative writing of these texts who did not (or could not) participate in this study. The BLFI activists participating in this study were concerned about the absence of these integral voices, in particular,

voices such as Kimathi Mohammed, the BLFI's Executive Chairman who was killed in a traffic accident on February 15, 2002. In particular, they were uncomfortable with the idea of using group or even individual stimulated recall methods as part of my analysis of their writing strategies for their position papers. They expressed their concerns about whether this kind of methodology would yield the best interpretations in terms of their collaborative writing strategies because there were multiple and absent voices. Additionally, because so much time had lapsed since the composing of their position papers, they were concerned that the BLFI activists "with the best memory and/or the louder and more aggressive voices"[15] would dominate the stimulated recall interviews.

What I'm describing here is their desire to preserve and advance an interpretation of their experiences composing their position papers that's unmediated by the problematics of representation and issues of time, space, and cognitive memory. But as I have argued here in this chapter, rather than conceptualizing experiences as fixed and self-evident entities, we should instead understand experiences as ongoing entities that are always engaged in the processes of reconstitution. Anytime research participants are asked to "reflect" upon their experiences or decision-making processes they are giving new meaning and shape to those experiences and decision-making processes. Nonetheless, the BLFI activists charged me with the task of developing alternative methods.

To this end, based on the oral history interviews, I decided to treat the BLFI activists as a strategically unified community of writers that composed their position papers in the spirit of the kind of consensus Trimbur proposed in his model of collaborative learning. In the absence of stimulated recall methods, for stage one, I

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[15] Abdul Jamal (Terry Johnson); interview with researcher on September 2, 2012.

initiated the traffic model analytic framework by identifying linguistic, generic, and

discursive patterns in their position papers and interpreting these patterns in light of the

network of the "traffic" experiences I reconstructed and the contexts of literacy

production that I curated as a result of the archival process and the oral history

interviews. In short, using the kaleidoscopic traffic model analytic framework, I

conducted a preliminary theorization of the sociality and materiality of their experiences

composing their position papers by analyzing the situated contexts, layers of meaning,

and productive effects tied to the linguistic, generic, and discursive patterns I identified in

their position papers.

But I also added an additional component that the BLFI activists were already

comfortable with — member checking. Although I knew this method would yield

minimal insight into the ways in which they negotiated difference and achieved shared

understanding in the reactive writing contexts for their position papers,[16] I theorized that

it would yield pertinent insight into those three areas of inquiry I outlined as exigent to

the theorizing and implementation of writing pedagogy in the classroom and beyond.

Remember, I also framed this project as an attempt to make use of the BLFI activists'

experiences with political literacy to inform and shape pedagogical practice. Hence, I

gave each participant via email a draft of my interpretations of their experiences

composing their position papers. Each participant was encouraged to rethink their

experiences in light of my interpretations and comment on and/or offer suggestions for

revisions. As I wrote the chapter discussing the strategies they adopted for composing

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[16] I return to a discussion of the BLFI activists' collaborative writing strategies in the Epilogue. There is more work that can be (and should be) done here in terms of researching and interpreting the situated contexts, layers of meaning and purposes, and productive effects tied to the BLFI activists collaborative writing strategies.

their position papers, I revised those interpretations accordingly. In this sense, we (myself as the researcher and the BLFI activists as participants) were still engaged in the kind of dialogic practices I described as constituting the oral history interviews.

But I didn't have to abandon altogether my interest in using stimulated recall interviews as part of my methodology. I was able to utilize a stimulated recall interview with Chui Karega as part of my efforts in interpreting the strategies he adopted for composing an editorial article for the *Mazungumzo: The Journal of African Studies*. Prior to the stimulated recall interview, I identified linguistic, generic, and discursive patterns in his editorial article. In my stimulated recall interview with Karega, I pointed to specific patterns in the text to query his attitudes, purposes, expectations, and experiences. To engage the full extent of the kaleidoscopic traffic model framework, I triangulated by doing two things. First, I interpreted Karega's responses during the stimulated recall interview in light of the "traffic" experiences I reconstructed and the contexts for literacy production I curated. In particular, I examined his responses in light of transcripts from interviews he participated in for articles published in MSU's *State News* from 1969 to 1973. Again, I used member checking. I gave Karega a draft of my interpretations of his strategies and I solicited his responses to my analysis and revised those interpretations accordingly.

Summary

By performing a theorization of my politics of location tied to this project, what I've tried to do in this chapter is demonstrate how and to what end the intersection of the personal, cultural, political, and scholarly aspects of my life informed and shaped the

research methodology I adopted for this project. In the next chapter, I begin the process of painting the portrait of the BLFI activists' "traffic" experiences. In Chapter Three, I will examine the BLFI activists' pre-MSU engagements with what Vorris Nunley in *Keepin' It Hushed* describes as hush harbor spaces. My argument in this chapter contends that it was the kinds of hush harbor spaces Nunley describes — kitchens, living rooms, churches, mosques, and barbershops — that functioned as important sites for the BLFI activists to first encounter Black speakers and rhetors discursively questioning and critiquing power and dominant ideologies and practices, discursively enacting resistance to dominance, and discursively performing alternative conceptions of the world and their relations to it.

CHAPTER THREE

HUSH HARBORS AND THE BLFI ACTIVISTS' INTRODUCTION TO THE
FUNCTIONING PURPOSE AND POWER OF THE HIDDEN TRANSCRIPT

Vorris Nunley uses the term hush harbors to refer to the quasi-public or hidden
spaces where "Black folks affirm, share, and negotiate African American epistemologies
and resist and subvert hegemonic Whiteness" ("From the Harbor to Da Academic Hood"
222). Nunley borrows the term from enslaved Africans and African Americans who used
spaces such as slave quarters, woods, and praise houses to come together and "freely
engage in and display otherwise heavily monitored practices, knowledges, and rhetorics
disallowed in the public sphere under the disciplinary gaze of Whites and Whiteness"
(*Keepin' It Hushed* 23).

But these hush harbor spaces, Nunley cautions, are not constructed as Black
spaces on the basis of the presence of Black bodies and Black rhetors. Rather, hush
harbor spatialities are constructed as Black because of the privileging of African
American knowledges, worldviews, and rhetorical forms that takes place in and through
these spaces. It's where the "Black unsaid" can be said in such a way that is recognizable,
appeasing, and persuasive to Black listeners. This "Black unsaid" thrives in hush harbors
because downplayed in these spaces is the perceived necessity on the part of Black
rhetors to participate in hegemonic discourses and alter the content, style, and delivery of
their rhetorics to avoid disrupting what Nunley describes as "the bipower of White

comfort constructed through political and social rationalities anchored in mainstream, commonsense understandings of race and society" (*Keepin' It Hushed* 16). As Nunley explains, the notion that Black rhetors can speak freely and openly to White audiences in the same way that they can with Black audiences is a false notion. Black rhetors, Nunley argues, have always had to be cognizant of the implications and consequences of speaking Black truths, knowledges, and experiences in the public sphere, and more specifically, to White audiences.

Nunley calls the "Black unsaid" that is constructed and enacted in hush harbor spatialities African American Hush Harbor Rhetoric (AAHHR). There are three primary principles to AAHHR: nommo, parrhesia, and phronesis. Codified by Arthur Smith (Molefi Asante) in Black speech communication theory and scholarship, nommo can be understood as the generative and sustaining power of the word. Using the imagery of the plow and quoting Richard L. Wright in his essay "The Word at Work," Nunley takes care to paint an active picture of functioning purpose and power of nommo. That is, Nunley strives to paint an active picture of how language—the word—functions as part of the ways in which the material world is understood, constructed, negotiated, and enacted: "[L]ike the plow, which parts the earth in preparation for the planting of the seed, the word does work in the world" *(Keepin' It Hushed* 45). But for African Americans, negotiating the day to day consequences of asymmetrical power relations enacted across social, political, and economic contexts, the word, Nunley argues, often functions as a special kind of tool — a discursive weapon: "Nommo intensifies the understanding of what is at stake in African language use and African American oppression when words

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are often the only or primary weapon left to a subjugated people advocating not only for

their rights but also for recognition as being fully human" (*Keepin' It Hushed* 45).

Nunley's second and third principles of AAHHR are parrhesia, which he posits

characterizes fearless and dangerous speech, and phronesis, which he argues refers to

practical wisdom, intellect, or virtue (*Keepin' It Hushed* 47). There's some risk-taking

involved when Black rhetors construct and enact parrhesia. Nunley's description of what

parrhesia entails highlights why Black rhetors risk the loss of life, first and foremost, as

well as influence, status, and resources when they choose to speak Black truths,

knowledges, and experiences to hegemony and what Nunley describes as "the dominant

political rationality":

> Parrhesia is endemic to AAHHR, as not only are African American
>
> knowledges and ways of knowing priviledged, but also as Black notions of
>
> civility, decorum, and permissible speech are dominant. African American
>
> parrhesia is often constructed as angry, militant, distorted, irrational,
>
> unreasonable, unpatriotic, divisive, and, of course, dangerous. (*Keepin' It*
>
> *Hushed* 46)

Phronesis plays a vital role in the reception of the knowledge that is constructed in and

through AAHHR. Black commonplaces are important elements of phronesis. Black

commonplaces can be defined in the following ways:

> a rhetorical place from which to invent or inform an argument (e.g., the
>
> Bible the vernacular culture, the barbershop), a strategy of argument (e.g.,
>
> call-and-response, signifyin'), or a Black cultural touchstone familiar to
>
> African American communities in a particular way within a constellation

of African American social relations (e.g., the Chitlin' Circuit, Harlem, twenty-twos)" (*Keepin' It Hushed* 47).

Black commonplaces are important because they tap into Black truths, epistemologies, and experiences. As such, phronesis at work in hush harbor spaces taps into those "rationalities informed by Black common sense" (*Keepin' It Hushed* 47) while affirming "Black ontology, knowledges, and subjectivities" (*Keepin' In Hushed* 47).

In short, Nunley's argumentations about hush harbors and AAHHR make two things clear. First, hush harbors should not be understood as fixed and static physical spaces. Instead, they should be understood as lifeworlds, or more specifically, lifeworlds of Black meaning.[17] In this sense, hush harbors are, as Nunley argues, geographies "within a network of ontological terrains upon which Black subjectivity, meaning, and existence are constructed" (*Keepin' It Hushed* 38). Second, AAHHR can also be considered a kind of hidden transcript. In *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, James C. Scott examines the relationship of discourse to power by working through the distinctions between what he calls the "public transcript" and the "hidden transcript." Characterizing the public transcript as a "discursive affirmation of a particular pattern of domination" (46), Scott argues that the work of the public transcript is political. One of the primary functions of the public transcript is to create the appearance of unanimity among the dominant elite and create the appearance of consent to the power of the dominant elite among subordinates. Social and cultural integration and enculturation enacted in and through social practices — linguistic practices, educational practices,

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[17] Several scholars have been challenging the notion of space as a fixed and static abstraction where social relations take place and replacing that notion with the term spatiality which emphasizes spaces as ideological, social, political, and epistemic. See Henri Lefebvre's *Production of Space* (1992), Alastair Pennycook's *Language as Local Practice* (2010), and Edward W. Soja's *Postmodern Geographies* (2001).

entertainment practices, etc. — are important to the work of the public transcript. But the public transcript, Scott posits, also "magnifies" and/or "beautifies" the power of the dominant elite while keeping certain socio-political workings concealed from sight in the public sphere.

Constructed by subordinate groups and concealed from the dominant elite the hidden transcript, as Scott suggests, is in constant argument with the dominant values enacted in and through the public transcript. More specifically, the hidden transcript functions as a discursive site where subordinate groups in sequestered spaces not only question and critique power and dominant ideologies and practices but also enact resistance to dominance by performing alternative conceptions of the world and their relations to it. The functioning purpose and power of the hidden transcript challenges the perception of subordinate groups as compliant and quiescent with the workings of hierarchal power and dominance — even as the subordinate enact and actualize performances of the public transcript in the public sphere. For this reason, Scott characterizes the hidden transcript as counter-hegemonic and subversive discourse.

In the sections that follow, I contend that it was the kinds of hush harbor spaces Nunley describes — hush harbors such as kitchens, living rooms, churches, mosques, and barbershops — that functioned as important discursive sites for the BLFI activists to first encounter Black speakers and rhetors constructing, negotiating, and deploying hidden transcripts. More specifically, I demonstrate how and to what end the BLFI activists' pre-MSU engagements with familial, communal, and political hush harbor spaces provided them numerous opportunities to witness and come to terms with how and to what end subordinate groups discursively question and critique power and dominant ideologies and

practices, discursively enact resistance to dominance, and discursively perform

alternative conceptions of the world and their relations to it.

Kitchens, Living Rooms, and Dining Room Tables: Resisting Dominance and Performing and Enacting Alternative Worldviews

When he was five years old, Chui Karega relocated from Belzoni Mississippi to

Detroit with his mother, his younger sister, his uncle and aunt, and their four daughters.

Karega's Detroit-based household reflected the extended-family living arrangements that

were common amongst Black familial households in cities such as Detroit between 1920

and 1970. As Ann Douglass explains in *Terrible Honestly: Mongrel Manhattan in the*

1920's, between the early 1900's and 1970 Africans Americans migrated out of the South

to northern cities in record numbers with jobs in the automobile, steel, meatpacking and

service industries functioning as impetuses for this massive migration (12). Upon

relocation to Detroit, Karega's uncle supported his wife and his four daughters by

securing employment through Detroit's sanitation department, while Karega's mother,

Catherine, supported her family by working as a tailor. Pooling their resources, the

extended family household was able to purchase a home on Detroit's northwest side. "It

wasn't a welfare neighborhood because everyone worked," Karega explained in an

interview conducted on October 17, 2012. But its functioning as a hotbed for vibrant

socio-political engagement was the point of emphasis Karega wanted to stress about the

northwest side neighborhood where he resided as an adolescent and young adult.

From 1920 to 1968, the Rev. Charles A. Hill Sr. served as the pastor of Hartford

Memorial Baptist Church which was centrally located in the center of Detroit's northwest

side. Rev. Hill's political activities were instrumental in fostering the contexts and

circumstances that helped turn over time Detroit's northwest side into this hotbed for vibrant socio-political engagement that Karega described. As Angela Dillard points out in *Faith in the City: Preaching Radical Social Change*, it was Rev. Hill who in the mid 1930's opened up the doors of Hartford, allowing auto workers to attend the organizing meetings of the UAW Ford Local 600 under the auspices of prayer meetings. Rev. Hill was one of the first African Americans to run for Detroit City Council, he worked with other Black Detroiters to fight racist violence and police brutality at work in Detroit, and he advocated and organized for fair housing policies and practices for Blacks in Detroit. It was Rev. Hill who was, as Dillard points out, branded by a Detroit newspaper as "one of the most active Communist front figures in all America" (163), but it was Rev. Hill who under the threat of Communist persecution nonetheless opened Hartford's pulpit to W.E.B. Dubois and Paul Robeson. In short, for forty-eight years, Rev. Hill's political activities and his emphasis on keeping his congregation engaged with the socio-political issues at work locally, nationally, and internationally created a communal environment on Detroit's northwest side that privileged a heightened level of socio-political engagement.

As committed members of Hartford and staunch supporters of Rev. Hill, Karega's extended-family was active in these socio-political engagements, and more often than not the familial conversations in Karega's home carried a socio-political tone. This was the case one evening when a news story depicting an incident of police brutality against a Black man captured the attention of Karega, his mother, and his aunt. Karega's mother and aunt were "fired up" he recalled during the roundtable discussion on November 18,

2012, and the conversation that ensued between his mother and his aunt made a lasting impression on him:

> There was a program on TV about police brutality. We had one TV and we would sit around it and watch TV every night. As they particularly do after they [the police] beat someone up, they put them on trial for resisting and obstructing a police officer. So this was what they'd done in this case. And so when the trial was portrayed, my mother said, "He [the recipient of the police brutality] should of done that!" My aunt followed that up saying "I'm surprised he didn't do more to the police officer!"

With the disciplining gaze of Whiteness absent, Karega's living room became a hush harbor spatiality where the creation of a hidden transcript was enacted. In this instance, the hidden transcript constituted a discursive recontextualization of the issue of police brutality which was tailored to the concerns, experiences, and understandings of Black Americans.

More specifically, in and through this discursive recontextualization of police brutality, Karega's mother and aunt were doing three things. First, when Karega's mother said "He should have done that!," she was pronouncing the Black man's so-called resistance and obstruction of justice as justifiable and resisting and in a sense rewriting the official (public) transcript of the dominant elite that posited (and oftentimes still posits) the enactment of institutionalized violence against people of color as warranted because of their opposition and resistance to institutionalized state power. Second, in both of their responses to the case of police brutality, they were challenging the naturalized power relations at work in the public transcript by reversing the roles of the participants.

In other words, in and through their discursive recontextualization of police brutality, Karega's mother and aunt were challenging the power relations at work in the public transcript by authorizing the victim in the case as the recipient of the police brutality and the perpetrator as the police officer. Third, when Karega's aunt said that she was "surprised he didn't do more to the police officer," she was discursively constructing and authorizing alternative ways for Black Americans to respond to police brutality. That is, instead of emphasizing for Karega the importance and necessity of compliance to police authority, even if that authority is compromised, Karega's aunt provided him with a more subversive response to police brutality — physical resistance and repudiation.

As Karega recounted during the roundtable discussion, he internalized his mother's and aunt's dissident discourse on police brutality, negotiating its functioning purpose and power as a counter-hegemonic narrative: "I was thinking like, Wow! I was always told to respect the police you know. Do this, do that, all that kinds of stuff. So to sit there and hear them say, 'Yeah, he should've knocked that police officer's head off' or something like that, well, it started the thought process in my head — Can you really stand up to the police?"

Karega's exposure to the functioning power and purpose of hidden transcripts was not, however, limited to his engagements with his mother's and aunt's discursive re-contextualization of police brutality. During the roundtable discussion, Karega recalled other familial and communal hush harbor moments involving his mother that I contend also provided him additional opportunities to witness and negotiate how subordinate peoples discursively question and critique power and dominant ideologies and practices, discursively enact resistance to dominance, and discursively perform alternative

conceptions of the world and their relations to it. For example, Karega recalled how his

mother would contextualize for him, his immediate family members, and his larger

residential community the importance of language and naming practices in terms of

understanding, questioning, and resisting gender-based inequities in the workforce:

> My mother used to sew for a living. And she would tell us and everyone in
> our community that she was a "tailor." Well, in those days women were
> "seamstresses." But she'd get very angry if anyone called her a
> "seamstress." Well, you know one day we were sitting at the kitchen table
> eating dinner and I wanted to know why. She said, "the only difference
> between a 'seamstress' and a 'tailor' is how much money you make." She
> said, "Being a 'seamstress' means I agree with women making less money
> than men for doing the exact same work."

What Karega was reflecting on here during the roundtable discussion was his mother's

understanding and explanation that language is not an abstract thing that carries the same

meaning across contexts. It's what the words are purportedly *doing* that matter. Karega's

mother was helping him understand that the distinction between the terms "tailor" and

"seamstress" were at work in socio-political-economic contexts in order to enact a

rhetoric of difference that elevated men (tailors) and delimited women (seamtresses) in

terms of status, classification, and compensation.

Facilitated by the generative and sustaining power of the word (nommo), when

his mother identified herself in familial and communal spaces as a "tailor" and got angry

at anyone who called her a "seamstress," she was using words as weapons to resist and

repudiate the rhetoric of difference at work in the public transcript that authorized and

normalized gender-based inequities in the garment business. She was, I contend, constructing and enacting a hidden transcript — a subversive and counter-hegemonic response to gender-based inequities in the workforce — that helped Karega begin questioning and critiquing on his own the public transcripts of the dominant elite: "It was these kinds of conversations that I had with my mother and that I witnessed my mother having with my immediate family and the people in my community that projected me to be inquisitive, to ask questions, to not go along with everything; that I would not just accept everything that was put in my face."

For Greg Kelly (also known as 2X), a native of East Lansing Michigan, the dining room table of his home also functioned as a hush harbor site where his politically engaged mother constructed, negotiated, and deployed hidden transcripts. Like Karega, these hush harbor engagements provided Kelly with opportunities to witness and negotiate how subordinate peoples discursively question and critique power and dominant ideologies and practices, discursively enact resistance to dominance, and discursively perform alternative conceptions of the world and their relations to it. In an interview on October 16, 2012, Kelly recalled one incident where his mother, sitting with him at their dining room table, not only instructed him on the importance of literacy in terms of understanding Black Americans' contributions to American history, but also instructed him on the importance of critical inquiry and the questioning of official historical narratives. In one of his elementary classes, Kelly's teacher assigned a Show and Tell assignment that required each student to get up in front of the class and talk about their heroes. In and through the dining room conversations that Kelly recalled were regular commonplaces in his adolescent life, Kelly's mother had already, prior to the

assigning of the Show and Tell assignment, introduced him to Black figures from Black history. In particular, Kelly's mother had introduced and talked about an individual named Dory Miller. A favorite of Kelly's mother, Dory Miller was a cook in the U.S. Navy who, for his bravery during the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, became the first African American to be awarded the Navy Cross. When the naval ship the West Virginian came under attack from the Japanese, historians believe that it was Miller who, with no formal training on how to operate a machine gun, single-handedly shot down several Japanese planes.

Listening to his mother talk about Dory Miller, Kelly developed an affinity for the Black naval hero and decided to talk about Miller for his Show and Tell project. But Kelly got a rude awakening, as he recalled during the interview: "It was time for Show and Tell and everyone had to get up and talk about their hero. I stood up and started to talk about Dory Miller. She [his teacher] told me to sit down. She thought I was lying. She said, 'Where you get that from?'" What Kelly was describing here was his introduction to the functioning purpose and power of the public transcript of the dominant elite. In this case, it was his introduction to the functioning purpose and power of the official historical narrative that Kelly discovered often excludes the contributions of Black Americans to American history. As Kelly discovered as a result of his teacher's repudiation of his Show and Tell project, information not filtered through the dominant elite's systems of understanding was often [and often still is] deemed lacking in credibility and sometimes downright false. Kelly explained: "If white folks didn't know about it, it didn't exist; they [white folks] would shut you down!"

When Kelly took the news of the Show and Tell debacle back home to his mother, she granted him permission to decline choosing another hero for the project and instead take an "F" on the Show and Tell assignment. She then got out her books and magazines, sat him down at the dining room table, and explained to him again all the information that supported claims of Miller's role as a naval hero of the Pearl Harbor incident. As Kelly explained, this time his mother used "imaginative stories and an aggressive tone" to help him understand not only Miller's role in the Pearl Harbor incident but also the circumstances and contexts which fostered a culture of denial of African American contributions to American history. In other words, this sequestered space of their dining room was a place where the disciplinary gaze of Whiteness was absent — in this case, the disciplinary gaze of Whiteness was symbolically represented by Kelly's teacher. In this sequestered space, using these imaginative stories and this aggressive tone, Kelly's mother constructed and enacted parrhesia by refusing to be silenced, by speaking the truth to hegemonic power, and by refusing to allow her son to buy into the official historical narrative that had excluded Miller's role in the Pearl Harbor incident.

This construction and enactment of parrhesia by Kelly's mother involved some risk-taking in terms of her son's education attainment and comfort at the elementary school. He did earn an "F" for the assignment, Kelly explained during the interview, and his mother's authorization of his refusal to redo the assignment created a hostile learning environment for Kelly at his elementary school. But Kelly's mother had used her books and magazines and her stories and aggressive and fearless tone to discursively critique, resist, and challenge the functioning and normalized power of the official historical narrative that excluded a Black man's contributions to the history of the Pearl Harbor

incident. I contend that Kelly's mother was discursively and rhetorically modeling for

him not only the importance of questioning historical facts, but also the importance of

literacy in terms of constructing alternative and counter-hegemonic historical narratives

that stand in direct opposition to official historical narratives.

The Black Barbershop, Everyday Talk, and Black Revolutionary Political Discourse

While living rooms and kitchen tables functioned as important hush harbor spaces

for the ideological and discursive development of the BLFI activists prior to their

enrollment as undergraduates at MSU, there were other kinds of hush harbor spatialities

that had this same kind of functioning purpose and power. As I discussed in the previous

section, many residents of Detroit's northwest side were active members of Hartford

Memorial Baptist Church and staunch supporters of its pastor Rev. Charles A. Hill Sr. As

Karega recounted in an interview on October 17, 2012, Rev. Hill was considered by

many in the community to be a "revolutionary and forward thinker," and the pulpit was

where many of his revolutionary and forward ideas were espoused to Black listeners.

"You didn't have to buy a ticket to hear him [Rev. Hill] speak on Civil Rights," Karega

explained. As such, for many residents of Detroit's northwest side, their understanding

of what constituted "revolutionary" and "forward" rhetorics and discourses was

actualized in and through the pulpit oratory of Rev. Hill.

But some of the soon-to-be BLFI activists who grew up on the northwest side of

Detroit were also hearing, reading, and negotiating other kinds of "revolutionary" and

"forward" rhetorics and discourses. For Kathy House (ne Stanley), the barbershop was

where she first began to hear, read, and negotiate these other kinds of "revolutionary" and

"forward" rhetorics and discourses. In *Keepin' It Hushed*, Nunley positions the barbershop as a "site of theory and epistemology" (131). To paint an active picture of the functioning purpose and power of the Black barbershop, Nunley carries his readers back to Keith Gilyard's seminal text *Voices of the Self*. Gilyard narrates his childhood and adolescent experiences and conducts an analysis of those experiences to theorize how the acquisition of literacy for Black males is a complex negotiation of space and place, identity(s), commitments, and socio-cultural-political values. Throughout the text, Gilyard draws upon the barbershop as an important trope for narrating his childhood and adolescent experiences, but it's in the chapter entitled "Big Fame and Other Games" that Gilyard delves into barbershop culture and introduces his readers to Mr. Shortside, Mr. Horton, and Mr. Boone — three barbers that Gilyard holds up as exemplars of men who provided him with what he describes as a "striking adult view" (81) on a range of social, cultural, and political issues and situations.

Nunley goes as far as to characterize Boone, Shortside, and Horton as philosophers because of their ability to "observe, contemplate, engage the world, converse with others who have acted in the world, and then convey that knowledge to hush harbor inhabitants" (118). In particular, Boone, Shortside, and Horton are hush harbor philosophers, Nunley argues, because of their ability to communicate through modes of argument and delivery — narrative sequencing, vernacular flip, humor, and signifyin'— that 'conve[y] experiential and personal investment" (113) in the issues and concerns relevant to the barbershop's predominately Black male inhabitants. It's the discursive work of the philosopher-barbers and the kinds of philosophizing that takes place in and through the sequestered space of the barbershop environment that leads

Nunley to characterize it as a "sanctified spatiality of African American male rhetorical education" (115). In using the term "sanctified," Nunley is emphasizing the Black barbershop as a site where the gendered and culturally specific conventions, rituals, and values that authorize its functioning have been passed on from one generation to the next.

As a young Black woman in her teens, the barbershop would not have necessarily been a space where Kathy House would have had free reign to engage the discursive work of this "sanctified spatiality" traditionally constructed through rituals, conventions, and values that speak to the concerns and experiences of Black males. But House's parents owned a barbershop on Detroit's northwest side, and although working in the barbershop after school every day did not authorize her participation in the discursive activities at work, it did provide her with numerous opportunities to listen to those 'striking adult view[s]" on a range of social, political, and cultural issues and situations that Gilyard described as important to his ideological, discursive, and literate development.

As House recounted in an interview on October 17, 2012, of particular importance to her were the late-Friday afternoon conversations that ensued at her parents' barbershop after the men from the Nation of Islam (NOI) would come by to drop off copies of their periodical the *Muhammad Speaks*: "Every Friday the brothers from the mosque [on Livernois Ave] would bring the papers in from the *Muhammad Speaks* and there would be dialogue going on." Composed of only about several hundred members in the early 1950's, by the mid-sixties, the NOI under the leadership of Elijah Muhammad had grown significantly and gained greater recognition in Black communities — specifically in northern urban Black communities in cities such as Detroit. The NOI's discursive

platform was what historian Jeffrey Ogbar in *Black Power* describes as "the plan for the tripartite liberation of black people" (19). This discursive platform was considered in the mid-sixties as "revolutionary" and "forward" in ideology, theory, and practice because it offered Black Americans a blueprint for their mental, physical, and spiritual deliverance which rivaled[18] the Civil Rights Movements' integrationist discursive platform.

As Ogbar notes, spiritual deliverance for African Americans was espoused by the NOI as deliverance from Christianity, and in particular, the Black church — both vilified by the NOI as enemies of a liberated Black nation. Mental liberation was posited as freedom from what was often described as the "slave condition," which NOI rhetoric argued had rendered Black people confused and self-hating, begging for social and political integration while adhering to the values of white middle-class culture. Physical liberation was articulated through an endorsement of self-defense and direct resistance to White supremacy and racist terror, as well as insistence on economic and educational autonomy. In particular, although an Islamic religious organization in part, it was the NOI's appropriation of the themes of economic and educational nationalism which likened it to the brand of Black Nationalism of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association of the early twentieth century. At the forefront of the NOI's brand of economic nationalism was the goal of developing and maintaining a separate Black economy within the U.S. In terms of educational nationalism, the insistence that Black children receive education from Black teachers and learn Black history and the tenets of Black Nationalism served as the impetus behind the formation of elementary and secondary Muslim schools.

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[18] I use the term "rival" here because there were differences between the NOI and the CRM's discursive platforms in terms of ideology, content, and practice.

First published in 1961, the *Muhammad Speaks* was the NOI's main periodical and its pages disseminated the rhetorics and discourses of the NOI's platform and covered local news relevant to Black communities. But what's important to note is that the *Muhammad Speaks* periodical often functioned as the primary vehicle by which information concerning international affairs was disseminated in Black communities. When I examined the archives of the *Muhammad Speaks*, looking specifically at editions published and distributed between 1961 and 1970, I found that each edition carried several articles and editorial pieces on topics ranging from African decolonization, Third World liberation and decolonization efforts in places such as Cuba, and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in the Middle East. In his autobiography *Ready for Revolution*, Stokely Carmichael[19] (later known as Kwame Ture) also talked about the international focus of the *Muhammad Speaks* when he identified the pages of the periodical as the source of his first encounter in the early sixties with "any discussion of Palestinian rights and resistance" (557).

As House recalled, the pages of *Muhammad Speaks* provided what she described as a "globalization of our struggle." It was this globalization of Black socio-economic-political struggle that House indicated was at the center of the conversations taking place at the barbershop on Friday afternoons. As the interview concluded, House theorized the significance of the late Friday afternoon barbershop dialogues inspired by the writings disseminated in and through the *Muhammad Speaks* periodical:

> They were always loud and animated and the conversations sounded like
> preaching time at church. Someone would make a point emphatically and
> everyone collectively would voice their approval with, you know, phrases

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[19] SNCC's chairman from 1966-1967 and Black Power rhetorician and Pan-African activist.

like "say that" and "tell the truth" and so on. I knew what was being talked

about was powerful and it always made me want to listen more. What I

learned from listening to them discuss the articles in the paper with the

Muslim brothers was that we weren't the only ones who had to deal with

this stuff. Our struggle was going on everywhere in the world. From that I

could talk about our struggle at school and in my community in new ways.

I already knew what "racism" was about, but I learned from those

conversations the words "colonialism" and "imperialism."

What House was describing as she concluded the interview was how and to what end the

barbershop provided her opportunities to listen to the philosopher-barbers, the Muslim

brothers, and the men inhabiting the barbershop on those late-Friday afternoons

discursively construct and negotiate alternative ways for imagining and enacting the

struggle for Black liberation. In particular, House gained from those late-Friday afternoon

dialogues a rhetoric of globalization, or to say it differently, a rhetoric of Pan-Africanism

and Third-Worldism that linked the struggles of people of color globally and identified

imperialism, colonialism, racism, economic marginalization, and oppression as problems

and challenges they all shared.

But House was also describing how and to what end the barbershop functioned as

a site for her exposure to the functioning purpose and power of phronesis, and more

specifically, Black commonplaces. Nunley's notion of the Black commonplace is

generative because of its role in producing and constructing Black subjectivities. In terms

of the relationship between hush harbor spaces and Black commonplaces, Nunley argues

the following: "Black hush harbor audiences are persuaded by rhetorical performances

that effectively deploy Black commonplaces linking the performed identity of the rhetor to the subjectivity of the audience through culturally derived African American commonplaces" ("From the Harbor to Da Academic Hood" 234). In other words, when Gilyard's philosopher-barbers drew upon Black commonplaces that voluminously circulate in Black communities so much so that they have become part of the ways in which Black subjectivity is constructed and enacted, they were establishing a link, an identification, between themselves and the men in the barbershop. It was their use of narrative sequencing, vernacular flip, humor, and signifyin' that allowed them to convey that experiential and personal investment in the issues and concerns relevant to the barbershop's predominately Black male inhabitants.

When Kathy House said that the conversations at work during the late-Friday afternoon dialogues sounded like "preaching time at church," she was positioning those dialogues within a particular Black commonplace that she could relate to as a young Black woman — the call-and-response tradition. In *Talkin' and Testifyin'*, Geneva Smitherman defines call and response as "spontaneous verbal and nonverbal interaction between speaker and listener in which all the speakers' statements ('calls') are punctuated by expressions ('responses') from the listeners" (108). As Michael Awkward suggests in *Inspiriting Influences: Tradition, Revision, and Afro-American Women's Novels*, what distinguishes call and response practices are their functioning as circular modes of communication rather than as linear modes of communication traditionally favored in Western cultures:

> In Western cultures, the favored model of communication is linear. That is
> to say, the speaker is held to deliver information to a quiet, courteous

audience which applauds occasionally at emphatically made points and at

the conclusion of the communication. For the most part, any failure on the

part of the audience to exhibit polite, mannered (silent) behavior is viewed

as an interruption of communication. On the other hand, communication in

Black culture is best symbolized by the geometric circle. The barrier

between speaker and audience created in Western culture do not exist in

Afro-American communication. Not only does the black audience listen to

the text — it helps to create it. (49)

As Awkward's exposition suggests, in and through call and response practices at work in

sacred spaces such as Black churches, the Black audience helps the preacher to create a

text — the sermon. This unified generative work of the preacher and his/her congregants

in terms of sermonic production is done, Smitherman explains, when the congregants do

one or more of the following: (1) co-sign the preacher's message with affirming phrases

such as "Uh-huh" and "yes, Go 'head now," (2) encourage the preacher to continue their

current line of reasoning with verbal and non-verbal responses such as rocking back and

forth, waving hands, and jumping up and down, and (3) provide a rhythm necessary to

the construction of the sermon through practices such as choral humming. The emphasis

of call and response practices such as these, Smitherman explains, is on "group

cohesiveness, cooperation, and the collective common good" (109).

It's this synthesis of speaker and audience at work in and through the deployment

of call and response practices in sacred spaces such as Black churches which led House

to position the barbershop dialogues within Black homiletic practices. For House, who

also regularly attended Hartford Memorial Baptist Church with her family, there was a

familiarity with the modes of text construction at work in the Friday afternoon barbershop dialogues — it was like "preaching time at church." As House explained as she theorized the significance of the Friday afternoon barbershop dialogues, it was her familiarity with these cooperative and unified strategies of text construction which, despite her positioning as a young Black female observer in a sanctified spatiality of Black masculinity, persuaded her to the functioning power of the rhetoric at work and made her want to "listen more."

Malcolm X, Hush Harbors, and Undomesticated Blackness

Although barbershops where the NOI's *Muhammad Speaks* was distributed, discussed, and negotiated were important hush harbor spatialities where many of the BLFI activists were first introduced to the NOI's platform and rhetorics and discourses that globalized the struggle for Black liberation, it was Malcolm X's effective and skillful use of hush harbor spaces such as Black churches, organized political meetings, and Black mosques that proved compelling in terms of capturing the soon-to-be BLFI activists' attention. When Malcolm X was the NOI's Chief Minister, he used Black churches, organized political meetings, and Black mosques as discursive spaces where he could espouse the "Black unsaid" to Black listeners in ways that were (1) recognizable, appeasing, and persuasive, (2) tailored to Black listeners' experiences and subjectivities, and (3) disengaged from concerns of disrupting the bipower of White comfort in American culture that Nunley argues Black rhetors have always had to negotiate in their efforts to speak Black truths in the public sphere.

As Jeffrey Ogbar and Penial Joseph uncovered in their work on Black radicalism and Black Power in the U.S. in the sixties and early seventies, African Americans were often overwhelmingly frustrated with their social, economic, and political condition. As a result, many African Americans found it difficult to envision a sustained relationship between their goals for social, economic, and political advancement and the Civil Rights Movement's message of integration and non-violence. This frustration, coupled with their inability to reconcile their everyday experiences with the rhetoric of non-violence and integration, created the circumstances which made many Black Americans open to the NOI's message of the need for spiritual, mental, and physical rebirth. Moreover, as C. Eric Lincoln discovered in his 1961 study of the Black Muslims in America, the overarching appeal of the movement was that it offered African Americans "the chance to become identified with a power structure strong enough to overcome the domination of whites — and perhaps even to subordinate them in return" (26).

As the NOI's Chief Minister, Malcolm X tailored his rhetorical performances in hush harbor spaces to these situated circumstances, experiences, and understandings. An excerpt from *The Hate That Produced Hate,* a five-part documentary which aired on national television July 13-17, 1959 and was produced by Mike Wallace and Louis Lomax,[20] provides an excellent example of Malcolm's skillful and effective use of hush harbor spaces. Lecturing to a predominately Black audience in a meeting hall, Malcolm argued:

> How could so few white people [Europeans] rule so many Black people?

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[20] Louis Lomax was a Black journalist and the first television Black journalist (1958—WNTA-TV in New York). He was a contributing writer for publications that were a part of the African American press—publications such as the Afro-American and Chicago Defender. He was supporter of several organizations that were a part of the Black Freedom Struggle (CORE, SNCC, and SCLS).

These are things that you should want to know. How could so few? The White man will tell you that thousands of years ago the Black man in Africa was living in palaces; the Black man in Africa was wearing silk; the Black man in Africa was cooking and seasoning his food; the Black man in Africa had mastered the arts and the sciences. He knew the course of the stars and the universe before the man up in Europe knew that the earth was flat. Then if the Black man in Africa had reached such as high state of civilization so long ago at a time when the people of Europe were crawling on their all fours, what happened to make these people or enable these people to come out of the cave and come down into our civilization and take it over and push us to the ground? What happened? How did they do it? These are things you should want to know.

Delivering an electrifying performance as evidenced by the crowd's energetic responses, by assessing the condition of the Black American within the context of European hegemony and imperialism and African history and culture and exhorting his audience to question and consider how imperialist and hegemonic practices developed, Malcolm was drawing upon his listeners' common frustrations with economic, social, and political subjugation and their aspirations to overcome these forms of domination. Moreover, by using Black colloquialisms such as the "Black Man" and "White Man" subjective identifications, Malcolm was establishing — and embracing—a rhetoric of difference between the two groups. This rhetoric of difference laid the groundwork for Malcolm's flipping of the script so to speak. That is, in and through this rhetoric of difference, Malcolm was able to posit a kind of revisionist history that rejects White supremacist

ideologies and origins narratives and instead identifies African peoples of the Diaspora as the authors and originators of "civilized" social living. This rhetoric of difference between Blacks and Whites was not active in the Civil Rights Movement's discursive platform that was geared towards integrationist efforts in social, political, institutional, and legal contexts.

By 1964, Malcolm X had left the NOI, declared his political independence, formed the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU), toured Africa twice, and visited the Middle East. But he was continuing to use hush harbor spaces to lecture and speak across the country. More specifically, he continued to provide an evolving population of young Black radicals such as the soon-to-be BLFI activists numerous opportunities to engage on an ideological and discursive level the Black socio-political radicalism that was sweeping the period, and he continued to introduce them to a kind of rhetorical and discursive prowess that many of them had never seen or heard before. By consensus, the BLFI activists participating in the roundtable discussion on November 18, 2012 identified Malcolm X as an important part of their activist, literate, and discursive development. Reflecting upon his attendance at Malcolm X's deliverance of the infamous "The Ballot or the Bullet" speech on April 12, 1964 at King Solomon Baptist Church in Detroit, Chui Karega contextualized for the group Malcolm's significance:

> When I got there [King Solomon Baptist Church], I saw people, grown folks, who were the meekest, mildest, best mannered people you'd ever want to see on the street. They wouldn't even step on a crack in the sidewalk, and they were standing up, jumping up and down, and screaming "Yeah Malcolm!" and "Go head Malcolm!" Malcolm opened

them up. He gave them the ability. Malcolm spoke for them. Malcolm said

what everyone wanted to say but they were scared to. And Malcolm stood

up there and said it in front of everyone. And Malcolm was a big

dude, and that deep voice. He'd stand up there, smile, and grin, waiting for

someone to come and strike him down. And it struck me like, Wow!

What was Malcolm X saying during this speech that, as Karega explained, opened up the

audience and sparked a kind of response from the listeners that was not only shocking but

also intriguing to Karega? What were the Black truths, experiences, knowledges, and

understandings that Malcolm X was touching on in this speech that made such a lasting

impression on Karega and the audience as a whole? In other words, what was the "Black

unsaid" that Malcolm X was willing to say in this hush harbor space on April 12, 1964?

What kinds of hidden transcripts did Malcolm create and disseminate in the sequestered

space of King Solomon Baptist Church that carried subversive and counter-hegemonic

meanings that the predominately Black audience seemingly longed to hear and receive?

Moreover, how and to what end did Malcolm espouse "The Ballot or the Bullet" in a way

that was not only recognizable, appeasing, and persuasive to Black listeners, but also, as

Karega's comments suggest, shockingly and attractively disengaged from the gaze of

mid-sixties White mainstream socio-political culture?

As I stated at the beginning of this section, when Malcolm delivered "The Ballot

or the Bullet" in Detroit, it had only been less than a year from the date of his spilt from

the NOI and his formation of his own political organization. The question of whether

there could be ecumenical unity at work amongst Black freedom fighters was being

placed at the center of Black political discourse. Malcolm began speaking to the

predominately Black audience in attendance at King Solomon Baptist Church by addressing that concern directly. By enacting the generative power of the word, Malcolm waged war on any and all impediments that he imagined might hinder the unification of Black people across religious differences to fight against Black oppression. For example, after issuing his formal greetings to the other Black leaders in attendance, Malcolm "name-dropped" several Christian ministers that would have been recognizable figures to the predominately Black audience. He explained the duplicitous functioning of their agencies as Christian ministers *and* freedom fighters but also stressed how the struggle for Black liberation called for the emphasizing of the latter:

> And when we realize that Adam Clayton Powell is a Christian minister, he's the – he heads Abyssinian Baptist Church, but at the same time, he's more famous for his political struggling. And Dr. King is a Christian Minister, in Atlanta, Georgia, but he's become more famous for being involved in the civil rights struggle. There's another in New York, Reverend Galamison - I don't know if you've heard of him out here - he's a Christian Minister from Brooklyn, but has become famous for his fight against a segregated school system in Brooklyn. Reverend Clee, right here, is a Christian Minister, here in Detroit. He's the head of the Freedom Now Party. All of these are Christian Ministers, but they don't come to us as Christian Ministers. They come to us as fighters in some other category.

Malcolm then drew a parallel between those Christian ministers and himself to drive home the importance of ecumenical unity in the fight against Black oppression: "I'm a Muslim minister - the same as they are Christian Ministers - I'm a Muslim minister. And

I don't believe in fighting today in any one front, but on all fronts. In fact, I'm a Black

Nationalist Freedom Fighter."

But it's in and through his identification of himself not only as a freedom fighter

but as a *Black Nationalist* freedom fighter that Malcolm began to construct in front of his

predominately Black audience a hidden transcript. In other words, it was Malcolm's

speaking of the term Black Nationalist in that sequestered space of King Solomon Baptist

Church that was instrumental in terms of his efforts to question and critique power and

dominant ideologies and practices, enact resistance to dominance, and perform alternative

conceptions of the world and the Black (wo)man's relation to it. When Malcolm was with

the NOI, his interjection of the term Black Nationalist into Black political discourse was

considered problematic by many people—White and Black. In particular, because Black

Nationalism emphasizes Black self-determination and self-definition as a means towards

liberation, Black unity, and Black political, social, economic, and cultural autonomy,

Malcolm's appropriation of it on an ideological and socio-political-economic level

always created tensions and divisions amongst Black intellectuals and activists over what

Black Nationalism might and could mean to the struggle for Black liberation in the

United States. For many Civil Rights' activists in particular, the NOI and Malcolm X's

brand of Black Nationalism represented a direct challenge to their attempts to enact

liberation for Black Americans by using moral suasion and integrationist efforts in social,

legal, political, and economic contexts (Ogbar, Joseph).

Using the generative power of the word, in delivering "The Ballot or the Bullet"

Malcolm used words as weapons to challenge the hypocrisy that demonized Black

Nationalism while White hegemony thrived as an integral part of the socio-political-

economic fabric of American culture. But that challenge was not just a demonstration per se to move and stir the audience. I contend that he was modeling for his predominately Black audience how and to what end that challenge could and should be constructed, enacted, and performed. Put another way, Malcolm was trying to empower Black listeners to develop tools of critical analysis to question, critique, and challenge not only the workings of society as a whole, but organized resistance and liberation efforts and practices as well. For example, Malcolm worked through the political philosophy of Black Nationalism and laid out for the audience why it presented a direct counter to what Nunley describes as "the dominant political rationality" (*Keepin' It Hushed* 46):

> The political philosophy of Black Nationalism only means that the black man should control the politics and the politicians in his own community. The time when white people can come in our community and get us to vote for them so that they can be our political leaders and tell us what to do and what not to do is long gone. By the same token, the time when that same white man, knowing that your eyes are too far open, can send another negro into the community and get you and me to support him so he can use him to lead us astray - those days are long gone too. The political philosophy of Black Nationalism only means that if you and I are going to live in a Black community - and that's where we're going to live, cause as soon as you move into one of their - soon as you move out of the Black community into their community, it's mixed for a period of time, but they're gone and you're right there all by yourself again. We must

understand the politics of our community and we must know what politics

is supposed to produce. We must know what part politics play in our lives.

And until we become politically mature we will always be mislead, lead

astray, or deceived or maneuvered into supporting someone politically

who doesn't have the good of our community at heart. So the political

philosophy of Black Nationalism only means that we will have to carry on

a program, a political program, of re-education to open our peoples eyes,

make us become more politically conscious, politically mature, and then

whenever we get ready to cast our ballot that ballot will be cast for a man

of the community who has the good of the community of heart.

By constructing an active picture of what Black Nationalism could and should mean to

the struggle for Black liberation in the United States, Malcolm exposed and analyzed for

his predominately Black audience the functioning purpose and power of White political

hegemony. Drawing upon the common frustrations and concerns of his predominately

Black audience — political communal subjugation, White control over local politics,

Uncle Tom and crooked Black political leaders, residential neighborhood integration,

White flight,[21] and restrictive covenants[22] — Malcolm brought the workings of White

political hegemony into the light so to speak so they could see it clearly, join in with him

in his critique of it, and fight against it diligently by creating and enacting alternative

conceptions of a world confronted with Black Nationalist ideas, politics, and practices.

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[21] The term "White flight" refers to the migration of middle-class White populations out of major cities such as Detroit and Cleveland during the 1950's and 1960's.

[22] Restrictive covenants were contractual agreements between property owners in a neighborhood that prohibited the selling, leasing, or occupation of a piece of property in the neighborhood by a particular group, usually African Americans. Real estate boards and neighborhood associations helped with enforcement of restrictive covenants.

But Malcolm also constructed carefully crafted arguments using vernacular language, figures of speech, and tropes that his predominately Black audience would have recognized and understood. For example, Malcolm launched a scathing indictment of the Democratic Party. It's a lengthy indictment so I only provide an excerpt here:

> The Democrats have been in Washington D.C. only because of the Negro vote. They've been down there four years, and there all other legislations they wanted to bring up they brought up and gotten it out of the way, and now they bring up you. You put them first, and they put you last 'cause you're a chump, a political chump…Anytime you throw your weight behind the political party that controls two-thirds of the government, and the Party that can't keep the promise that it made to you during election time, and you're dumb enough to walk around continuing to identify yourself with that Party, you're not only a chump, but you're a traitor to your race…You today are in the hands of a government of segregationists, racists, white supremacists who belong to the Democratic party, but disguise themselves as Dixiecrats. A Dixiecrat is nothing but a Democrat. Whoever runs the Democrats is also the father of the Dixiecrats, and the father of all of them is sitting in the White House…In the South, they're outright political wolves. In the North, they're political foxes. A fox and a wolf are both canine, both belong to the dog family. Now you take your choice. You going to choose a Northern dog or a Southern dog? Because either dog you choose I guarantee you'll still be in the doghouse.

In this excerpt, Malcolm likened the Democrats to just about every negative connotation Black folks in the audience could identify with. Whether from the North or South, the Democrats were, according to Malcolm, not only "dogs" but also nothing more than Dixiecrats, a southern term that carried references to racist, segregationist, and White supremacist ideologies and practices. But Malcolm didn't tether his indictment when it came to Black leaders and supporters of the Democratic Party. They were, Malcolm explained, "chumps" and "race traitors." He outlined out and painted and picture for the audience of how and to what end Black "chumps" and "race traitors" support the Democratic Party to their detriment.

This is one example of the "Black unsaid" that Malcolm was willing to say on that day in the sequestered space of the King Solomon Baptist Church, and this is one example of the "Black unsaid" that Karega and many in the audience seemingly longed to hear. And Malcolm knew it. After indicting the Democratic Party and its Black supporters, Malcolm said: "Whenever the Negroes keep the Democrats in power, they're keeping the Dixiecrats in power. Is this true? A vote for a Democrat is nothing but a vote for a Dixiecrat. I know you don't like me saying that, but I, I'm not the kind of person who come here to say what you like. I'm going to tell you the truth, whether you like it or not."

But it was also his enactment of parhessia — his risk taking and his use of what Nunley describes as fearless, dangerous, militant, unpatriotic, and divisive speech — that Karega was referring to when he said that Black people in attendance were standing up, jumping up and down, and screaming "Yeah Malcolm!" and "Go head Malcolm!" For example, towards the end of the speech Malcolm made it plain: it had to be the ballot or

the bullet — those were the only two courses of action available in 1964 in terms of achieving Black liberation in the United States. He issued the charge and the imminent threat:

> This is why I say it's the ballot or the bullet. It's liberty or death. It's freedom or everybody or freedom for nobody. America today finds herself in a unique situation. Historically revolutions are bloody. Oh yes, they are. They haven't never had a blood-less revolution, or a non-violent revolution. That doesn't happen even in Hollywood. You don't have a revolution in which you love your enemy, and you don't have a revolution in which you are begging the system of exploitation to integrate into. Revolution overturns systems. Revolutions destroy systems. A revolution is bloody, but America is in a unique position. She's the only country in history in a position actually to become involved in a blood-less revolution. The Russian Revolution was bloody. Chinese revolution was bloody. French revolution was bloody. Cuban revolution was bloody, and there was nothing bloodier than the American Revolution. But today this country can become involved in a revolution that won't take bloodshed. All she's got to do is give the black man in this country everything that's due him, everything.

Summary

In this chapter, I have argued and demonstrated that it was the kinds of hush harbor spaces Nunley describes — kitchens, living rooms, churches, mosques, and

barbershops — that functioned as important sites for the BLFI activists to first encounter

Black speakers and rhetors doing three things: (1) discursively questioning and critiquing

power and dominant ideologies and practices; (2) discursively enacting resistance to

dominance and power; and (3) discursively performing alternative conceptions of the

world and their relations to it. These pre-MSU rhetorical and literate engagements would

serve as motivating factors and set the tone for the BLFI activists' use of literacy beyond

academic contexts to mediate their activist work as undergraduate students at MSU.

CHAPTER FOUR

TRACES OF MEANING AND SOCIAL, POLITICAL, AND DISCURSIVE
COMMITMENTS: THE BLFI ACTIVISTS, THE PEOPLE'S HOUSE, AND THE
MALCOLM X COMMUNICATION ACADEMY

In *Traces of a Stream: Literacy and Social Change*, Jacqueline Jones-Royster

defines literacy as the "ability to gain access to information and to use this information

variously to articulate lives and experiences and also to identify, think through, refine,

and solve problems, sometimes complex problems, over time" (45). Royster's definition

of literacy speaks to its functioning as a social activity—a social practice—a part of the

ways in which individuals and groups not only make sense of themselves, the world, and

their relation to it, but also construct, negotiate, and actualize social change. In *Liberating

Language: Sites of Rhetorical Education in Nineteenth-Century Black America*, Shirley

Wilson Logan is more interested in the development of the "abilities" Royster

emphasizes in her definition of literacy and therefore defines a site of rhetorical education

as "involving the act of communication or receiving information through writing,

speaking, reading, or listening" (4). In her study of the sites of rhetorical education in

nineteenth-century Black America, Logan takes care to emphasize that these sites

included academic but also non-academic spaces. In fact, Logan's study focuses

primarily on non-academic sites of rhetorical education in nineteenth-century Black

America. Examples of non-academic sites of rhetorical education in nineteenth-century

Black America include what Logan describes as "free-floating" sites of literacy

(plantations, the pulpits of the emerging Black churches, the literary and debating societies at work in Black Civil War units, Black political leagues, and workplace factories for Blacks in the late nineteenth-century). Logan also points to literary and educational societies, the Black press, and self-educational spaces as non-academic sites where nineteenth-century African Americans were involved in the acts of communication and were the recipients of information disseminated in and through the practices of reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

Drawing upon Royster's definition of literacy and Logan's definition of a site of rhetorical education, I am defining in this chapter a site of knowledge construction and negotiation as a spatiality where the BLFI activists, during their tenure at MSU, participated in acts of communication, received information through reading, speaking, and listening, and used this information in various ways to not only make sense of themselves, the world, and their relation to it, but also construct, negotiate, and actualize social justice and change. In the following sections of this chapter, I will introduce two sites of knowledge construction and negotiation for the BLFI activists during their tenure at MSU: The People's House and the Malcolm X Communication Academy. In the same way that I argued in chapter three that there were traces of meaning enacted and social, political, and discursive commitments forged in and through the BLFI activists' pre-MSU engagements with hush harbor spatialities, my argument in this chapter contends that there were traces of meaning enacted and social, political, and discursive commitments forged in and through the literate and rhetorical activities the BLFI activists engaged as part of the work of The People's House and the Malcolm X Communication Academy. In chapters five and six, I will discuss and analyze the agentive strategies the BLFI activists

adopted to construct the political literacies they produced during their tenure at MSU.

These traces of meaning enacted and social, political, and discursive commitments

forged, I will argue and demonstrate, were an integral part of this negotiation process and

not only shaped their political literacies, but also provided the BLFI activists with a kind

of discursive and rhetorical agency and power that aided them in their efforts to intervene

in and transform university, community, and international politics.

In the first section of this chapter, I will examine what the BLFI activists were

reading, interpreting, listening to, and debating in and through their engagements with

The People's House. To develop a sense of the literate and rhetorical activities at work at

The People's House, I rely on the individual interviews, the roundtable discussion,

newspaper articles, and records kept by the BLFI activists themselves. In particular,

during the archival process, Chui Karega gave me two hardcover notebooks that

contained reprints of many of the texts and speeches that the BLFI activists were reading,

negotiating, and discussing (debating) at The People's House. Karega retrieved these two

hardcover notebooks from the basement of his home in Detroit, Michigan. It did not

surprise me that Karega preserved these texts and speeches for forty years. As the BLFI's

Minster of Information, one of Karega's responsibilities included ensuring that the BLFI

activists had copies of all the reading materials necessary for the study and discussion

sessions taking place at The People's House.

It's important to note here that Karega's work as the BLFI's Minister of

Information was enabled by the development of two things: Black revolutionary journals

and independent Black printing presses. In "Dashikis and Democracy: Black Studies,

Student Activism, and the Black Power Movement," Penial Joseph describes the Black

revolutionary journals that began publication and distribution in the late fifties and early

sixties as "critical texts that reached an influential segment of the African American

community" (186). As Joseph explains, publications such as *Freedomways* and the

Liberator "radicalized a generation of African Americans…raised the international

awareness of young African Americans…[and] provided a critical exploration of African

American history that encompassed the global implications for past and contemporary

black liberation struggles" (186). By the late sixties, with the Black Arts Movement

emphasizing what James Smethurst in *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in*

the 1960's and 1970's describes as "the need to develop, or expand upon, a distinctly

African American or African culture that stood in opposition to white culture or cultures"

(15), new Black revolutionary journals such as the *Negro Digest/Black World* emerged,

creating venues for the articulation and circulation of not only artists, activists, and

intellectuals' theorizations on the notion of a Black artistic aesthetic and what constitutes

Black culture, but also the ideas and rhetorics undergirding the Black Power and Black

Arts movements. The creation of the Third-World Press (Chicago) and the Broadside

Press (Detroit) — described by Smethurst as "unquestionably the most important black

literary presses of the last century" (243) — also carved out space for domestic and

international Black artists and intellectuals to publish and circulate their work. Moreover,

the creation of *The Black Scholar: A Journal of Black Studies and Research* in 1969 by

Robert Chrisman and Nathan Hare established an additional independent forum to

disseminate information important to African Americans, provide critical inquiry on a

range of topics on Black culture, education, and politics, and sometimes critique domestic

and international social inequalities based on race, class, and gender. The

cross/interdisciplinary and non-partisan textual productions of Black authors, scholars, intellectuals, and activists populated the pages of *The Black Scholar*.

In short, it was Black revolutionary and scholarly journals and independent Black printing presses and their work in publishing and disseminating the scholarly, political, and artistic work of Black intellectuals, activists, and artists that helped create the material contexts that allowed The People's House to function as a site where the BLFI activists were afforded the opportunity through reading, listening, and speaking (more often than not debating) to not only engage in the construction, negotiation, and articulation of arguments concerned with topics such as Black Nationalism and Pan-Africanism, sociolinguistics, Black language and literacy, and educational philosophy and pedagogy, but also use those arguments to begin creating a sense of their own social, political, and discursive commitments.

In section two of this chapter, I will examine what the BLFI activists were reading, interpreting, listening to, and discussing in and through their engagements with The Malcolm X Communication Academy. Organized and coordinated by the BLFI activists, the Malcolm X Communication Academy was a community-based educational initiative that not only offered communication and literacy classes for lower income African Americans residing in Lansing's west-side communities, but also expanded its instructional services to include regularly scheduled seminars conducted by several prominent Black scholars and activists — individuals such as Stokely Carmichael, Walter Rodney, Robert Williams, and C.L.R. James. Drawing upon the individual interviews, the roundtable discussion, and records kept by the BLFI activists themselves, I devote most of the second section of this chapter to doing two things: (1) highlighting the literate and

rhetorical instructional elements C.L.R James integrated into his seminar courses and (2) emphasizing the influence James's instruction had on shaping some of the social, political, and discursive commitments the BLFI activists made during their tenure at MSU.

The People's House: A Site of Knowledge Construction and Negotiation

It was not until the late sixties that Michigan State University (MSU), founded in 1855 as Michigan Agricultural College, saw any significant changes in the enrollment numbers of Black students. By the mid- sixties, federal legislative laws such as Title VI of The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA) had paved the way for the desegregation of traditionally White institutions (TWI's) of higher learning. Title VI of The Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited recipients of federal financial assistance from discriminating based on race, color, and/or national origin; violators of Title VI of The Civil Rights Act of 1964 risked losing federal funding. In terms of institutions of higher learning specifically, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 mandated a census of all U.S. post-secondary institutions. This census required the identification of enrolled students by race or ethnicity. Explicit in this mandate was a warning to administrators of TWI's that noncompliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 would result in the loss of federal funding for their respective institutions (Williamson 94). The following year, the Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA) increased financial aid assistance—grants, low-interest loans, and work-study opportunities. Moreover, President Lyndon Johnson's executive threats to enforce Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 put pressure on college presidents and administrators to accelerate the

desegregation of TWI's through scholarship programs for Black students and increased recruiting efforts.

MSU's response to these federal legislative laws was the initiation of the Detroit Project in 1967, which represented a shift in university administrative policy in terms of the recruitment and admission of minority students. Supported by federal funds until 1970, the Detroit Project brought 67 Black first-year students to MSU in 1967. Expanding the Detroit Project into the broader-based Developmental Program, by 1972, about 686 minority students were involved in the Developmental Program. The DP program, as it was often called, was divided into two parts—recruitment and student support. The recruitment office worked to identify students in the Detroit area who could be admitted to the university based on their projected potential rather than standardized criteria. However, the DP recruitment office also worked to recruit minority students who were admissible in terms of standardized criteria. In particular, the DP recruitment office worked to recruit to MSU minority recipients of awards from the National Merit Corporation—students classified as National Achievement Scholars. In terms of support for minority students, the DP program's Center for Supportive Services worked to assist minority students after admission to MSU by offering counseling services, a range of tutorial services, and financial aid in the form of Equal Opportunity Grants and Work-study programs.

Despite these changes in MSU's admission policies and recruitment efforts which increased Black student enrollment, historical records suggest that most Black students were not readily socially accepted at MSU during this period of intensified recruitment and admissions of Black undergraduate students. According to a June 1973 report on

Black students at MSU complied by Ruth Hamilton and Sharon Peters, most Black students on the campus of MSU functioned independently from White students on campus. Some Black students had interracial roommates in the dormitories, but for the most part dined, socialized, and studied with other Black students. From an institutional perspective, most of the dormitories that Black students resided in — where they were more often than not in the minority — were geared towards the needs of White students. The program mixers and lectures sponsored by White students were given priority in terms of the use of dormitory dues that all students, including Black students, had to pay. The meals served in the dormitory dining halls were geared towards the tastes of White students.

To counter these conditions, according to that same June 1973 report compiled by Ruth Hamilton and Sharon Peters, many Black students carved out social space on the MSU campus by creating Black population centers in the dorms. For example, in a group of dormitories called the Brody Complex, many Black students used the common cafeteria area called the Brody Center as a place to congregate and socialize. South Complex, which housed many MSU athletes, was also a popular center where many Black students hung out. Many Black upper-classmen who were not restricted by University policy to living in the dormitories also sought housing off-campus in the East Lansing community, but they regularly encountered discriminatory practices by landlords, leading them to secure housing in the communities of East Lansing predominately populated by African Americans. Although Black Greek organizations began renting space for their dances in dormitories, as a result of the development of off-

campus housing space for Black students, Black Greek apartment parties became one of the dominant modes of social activity for Black students.

But for some Black MSU students, these constructed social spaces were still considered insufficient. "If you weren't a Black Greek at MSU, you didn't have any kind of space," Chui Karega explained.[23] This all changed in 1968 when two MSU Kenyan graduate students — Maina wa Kinyatti and Kamuyu Kang'ethe — decided to convert the three bedroom two-story house they were renting into what they called The People's House. As a young-adult in Kenya, Maina[24] was associated politically, ideologically, and tactically with the Mau Mau Rebellion that lasted from 1952 to 1960. Largely made up of members from the Kikuyu tribe, the anti-colonial Mau Mau group sought to drive out British colonialism from Kenya by waging a rebellion against the British army and its Kenyan political allies. Along with his father, who was a key active figure in the Mau Mau movement, in 1954, Maina was arrested and placed in a concentration camp. Upon his release one year later, Maina completed his education in Kenya and was selected as a scholarship recipient for a program that brought Kenyan students to the United States to receive their undergraduate collegiate education. Maina completed his undergraduate education at the University of Maine in Farmington and enrolled at MSU to pursue his graduate education in history.[25] Similarly, born and raised in Kenya, Kamuyu received a scholarship to receive his undergraduate education at Lakeland College in Wisconsin. Kamuyu's undergraduate education was supposed to serve as preparation for the

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[23] Roundtable discussion on November 18, 2012
[24] From this point on, I use the first names of Maina wa Kinyatti and Kamuyu Kang'ethe based on a request made by both men.
[25] Maina would eventually return to Kenya but he was arrested and detained as a political prisoner for six and a half years because of his active opposition and resistance to Daniel Asap Moi's dictatorship. After his release from prison, Maina fled Kenya, eventually receiving political asylum in the U.S. Currently, he is considered to be the leading Kenyan historian on the Mau Mau movement.

Christian ministry, but after attending seminary at Hartford Theological Seminary in Connecticut, Kamuyu decided to also pursue graduate work at MSU in anthropology.

The two Kenyan graduate students immediately forged a friendship, and together they helped establish a Michigan chapter of the Pan-African Students Organization in the Americas (PASOA). Representing PASOA, Kamuyu and Maina embarked on a mission to build relationships with Black American students at MSU. It was under these conditions that Maina and Kamuyu met and forged relationships with several of the BLFI activists — Kimathi Mohammed, the BLFI's Executive Chairman, and Chui Karega, the BLFI's Minister of Information, to name two. Inspired by their newly forged relationships with Black American undergraduates at MSU, Kamuyu and Maina made it a top priority to work towards constructing what Kamuyu described as a sort of "African diasporic house" where African peoples from the continent and throughout the diaspora could "meet and talk issues."[26] Although The People's House was, as Karega recalled, "still a social space where parties and social gatherings were held,"[27] it functioned primarily as a discursive spatiality. During the roundtable discussion, Abdul Jamal contextualized for the group the atmosphere of The People's House: "If you came to The People's House you'd see that there were all these books and papers everywhere and people were always reading and talking with one another."

More often than not these discussions Abdul Jamal described were socio-political in context and tone. In this sense, The People's House functioned as the kind of hush harbor space Vorris Nunley describes in *Keepin' It Hushed* because it was a site sequestered from the disciplinary gaze of Whiteness where African American and

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[26] Individual interview with the researcher on October 7, 2012
[27] Roundtable discussion on November 18, 2012

African students and community members and activists could meet and discuss (more often than not debate) socio-political issues, philosophies, and strategies for liberation and socio-political resistance. In particular, in the same way that the familial, communal, and political spaces I discussed in chapter three functioned as sites of social negotiation and rhetorical engagement for the BLFI activists prior to their enrollment as undergraduates at MSU, The People's House, I would argue, functioned as a site of knowledge construction and negotiation for the BLFI activists during their tenure at MSU.

The debate-style aspect that undergirded these meetings and discussions was "fierce," as Karega explained during the roundtable discussion. But at the heart of these debates and conversations was information. As the BLFI activists participating in the roundtable discussion collectively explained, it didn't matter if a person was a new or regular attendee of The People's House. All attendees would leave the meetings and discussions (debates) with a notebook full of "Must Read" books and articles, a notebook containing a list of people they needed to hear speak, a notebook full of speeches they needed to listen to and/or read a transcription of, and a notebook full of a range of ideas, concepts, and arguments they had to negotiate and come to terms with on an ideological, political, organizational, and discursive level. For the BLFI activists in particular, the discussions and debates at The People's House mediated their efforts to define, negotiate, and enact the work of the Black Liberation Front International and create a sense of their own social, political, and discursive commitments.

I Want to be a Black Nationalist and Pan-African: The BLFI Activists and the Defining, Negotiating, and Enacting of Black Nationalist and Pan-African Politics

According to the BLFI activists participating in the roundtable discussion, The

People's House functioned as an important discursive space for the BLFI activists and all

attendees to define, negotiate, and come to terms with the notions of Black Nationalism

and Pan-Africanism and Black Nationalist and Pan-African politics. After reading

through and analyzing the re-prints of texts and speeches contained in the two black

notebooks Karega provided during the archival process, one thing I discovered is that the

BLFI activists and the attendees of The People's House spent a lot of their time engaging

the writings and speeches of African revolutionaries and intellectuals and Black activists

who identified themselves as Black Nationalist and/or Pan-African in theory, politics, and

practice — in particular, individuals such as Stokely Carmichael and Kwame Nkrumah.

<u>Stokely Carmichael: Discursively and Rhetorically Enacting Black Power</u>

Born in Trinidad but raised in the Bronx, Stokely Carmichael's identification with

the Left as a fourteen-year old high school student in the late 1950's was, as Carmichael

explained in his autobiography *Ready for Revolution*, "distracted" by two literary

influences, C.L.R. James and George Padmore, and complicated by exposure to what he

describes as an introduction to "the stepladder speakers of 125th Street" (100). As

Carmichael recounted, the Harlem orators, speaking on stepladders decorated on both

sides with the African liberation flag (red, black, and green) and the American flag

(required by law), provided listeners with "information and a perspective nowhere else

present in the society" (100). It was the Harlem orators that Carmichael identified as

important in terms of shaping his own public speaking style as a Black rhetor: "Important

elements of my adult speaking style — the techniques of public speaking in the dramatic

tradition of the spoken word, can be traced to these street corner orators of Harlem"

(101).

For Carmichael, individuals such as Queen Mother Moore and Carlos Cook —

remnants of the Black Nationalist Garvey movement — as well as individuals such as

Charles X Kenyatta and Eddie "Porkchop" Davis functioned as "the oral historians of the

community, our town criers…our secular prophets…keepers of the flame, holding aloft

our heritage as African people in exile alive, ceaselessly exhorting us to keep historical

and revolutionary faith with our ancestors' long history of struggle and resistance" (100-

101). In particular, from the stepladder, the Harlem orators kept listeners such as

Carmichael captivated with up-to-date information on liberation struggles in Africa and

the Caribbean. It was the Harlem stepladder speakers who first introduced Carmichael to

African revolutionaries such as Kwame Nkrumah, Patrice Lumumba, Jomo Kenyatta and

the Kenyan Land and Liberation Army, Sekou Toure, and African Diaspora revolutionary

thinkers and writers such as Padmore and James. The introduction to James and Padmore

by the Harlem stepladder speakers led Carmichael to venture down 125th Street to the

infamous Michaux's African Bookstore, where he first encountered and read Padmore's

Pan-Africanism and Communism.

By the time he reached Howard as an undergraduate student, Carmichael, along

with other students from the newly formed Non-Violent Action Group (NAG), was also

developing his Pan-Africanist and Black Nationalist consciousness as a result of his

exposure to what he described in his autobiography as "a number of venerable,

pioneering scholarly presences as well as brilliant young scholars and artists" (127).

Heavily influenced by the philosophies and rhetorics of Malcolm X, after Carmichael

graduated from Howard in 1964, he immersed himself in the work of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Malcolm X's influence continued to guide his work as SNCC's chairman as he unveiled in 1964 on a national stage the organization's appropriation of a more Black Nationalist and Pan-Africanist ethos by declaring before a mass of demonstrators at the June 16th Meredith Mississippi March Against Fear in Greenwood, Mississippi the necessity for Black Power. As Black Power rhetoric spread through Black communities across the countries, manifesting itself in the summer uprisings of 1966 in cities such as Cleveland, Chicago, Oakland, and San Francisco, Carmichael became what Ibram H. Rogers in *The Black Campus Movement* describes as "a national black power youth icon" (78). In particular, between the summer of 1966 and the spring of 1967, while raising funds for SNCC, Carmichael disseminated the message of Black Power through television appearances, in published writings in academic and Black revolutionary journals, and during speaking engagements on college campuses and at community rallies.

By the time the BLFI activists arrived as undergraduates at MSU, Carmichael had resigned as chairman of SNCC and had established residency with his wife Mkeba in Konakry, Guinea. But he continued to return to the U.S. for speaking engagements on college campuses and for organized events in Black communities, and his writings on Black Power and Pan-Africanism continued to be important to the ideological, political, and discursive development of many young Black collegiate students such as the BLFI activists. As the BLFI activists participating in the roundtable discussion collectively explained, the reading and negotiating of Carmichael's writings on Black Power were important to their efforts to come to terms with and localize Black Nationalist politics on

the MSU campus and in the surrounding East Lansing communities. In one of the notebooks Karega provided during the archival process, there was a copy of SNCC's position paper on Black Power authored by Carmichael and Michael Thelwell.[28] According to Carmichael in his autobiography, the concept of Black Power was all about cultural, psychological, and political determination. However, the division amongst black intellectuals and activists over what Black Power might and could mean caused Carmichael and Thelwell to draft the position paper, which they entitled "Toward Black Liberation." As Carmichael explained in his autobiography, they wrote the SNCC position paper in order to "analyze and crystallize everything SNCC had learned about our people, our culture, our struggle, and American society into a single argument…[and to] define the need for and possibilities of Black Power [and] project a realistic program and a new approach for the next stage of the political and cultural struggle" (528).

Not surprisingly, "Toward Black Liberation" encapsulated themes central to Black Nationalist rhetoric and thought. First, the position paper on Black Power articulated the necessity of Black self-definition as a means towards liberation:

> Our concern for black power addressed itself directly to this problem, the necessity to reclaim our history and our identity from the cultural terrorism and depredation of self-justifying white guilt. To do this we shall have to struggle for the right to create our own terms through which to define ourselves and our relationship to the society, and to have these terms recognized. (*Stokely Speaks* 32)

For Carmichael and Thelwell, self-definition was important to the liberation struggles of Blacks in the U.S. because of the racism that had produced a continuous record of

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[28] Michael Thelwell held the position of field secretary for SNCC.

distortion and omission of the voices, experiences, and achievements of the Black people. Second, the position paper on Black Power attempted to expose and explain the nature of the colonial relationship between Black communities and American power structures. Seemingly addressing what Carmichael in his autobiography described as a "massive chorus of outrage and distortion" (526) from many civil rights activists and media outlets which insisted that Black Power was reverse racism and harmful to the goals of the Black Freedom Struggle, in and through the position paper on Black Power Carmichael and Thelwell tried to demonstrate how Black Power was an active response to the White power that continued to function as a part of the fabric of American culture:

> There have been, traditionally, two communities in America; the white community, which controlled and defined the forms that all institutions within the society would take, and the Negro community, which has been excluded from participation in the power decisions that shaped the society…It is more than a figure of speech to say that the Negro community in America is the victim of white imperialism and colonial exploitation. It is white power that makes the laws, and it is violent white power in the form of armed white cops that enforces those laws with guns and nightsticks. The vast majority of Negroes in this country live in captive communities and must endure these conditions of oppression because, and only because, they are black and powerless. (*Stokely Speaks* 35-36)

Third, the position paper on Black Power critiqued integration as a political strategy:

According to the advocates of integration, social justice will be

accomplished by "integrating the Negro into the mainstream institutions of

the society from which he has been traditionally excluded"…This concept

of integration had to be based on the assumption that there was nothing of

value in the Negro community, so the thing to do was to siphon off the

"acceptable" Negroes into the surrounding middle-class white

community…Such a limited class orientation was reflected not

only in the program and goals of the civil rights movement, but in its

tactics and organization…What has the movement for integration

accomplished to date? The Negro graduating from M.I.T with a doctorate

will have better job opportunities available to him…But the rate of

unemployment in the Negro community is steadily increasing…housing

conditions in the ghetto are steadily declining…The rate of school

dropouts is increasing among Negro teenagers…(*Stokely Speaks* 36-40)

Fourth, the position paper on Black Power articulated the importance of grassroots

activism and the necessity of political and organizational autonomy for a liberated Black

population in the U.S.:

SNCC proposes that it is now time for the black freedom movement to

stop pandering to the fears and anxieties of the white middle class…and

return to the ghetto to organize these communities to control

themselves…When the Negro community is able to control local offices,

and negotiate with other groups from a position of organized strength, the

possibility of meaningful political alliances on specific issues will be

increased. (*Stokely Speaks* 40-42)

When we look closely at these four argumentations articulated through the

position paper on Black Power, we can draw several conclusions about what exactly

Carmichael and Thelwell were attempting to *do* in and through the SNCC position paper

on Black power. As I stated, in his autobiography Carmichael identified Malcolm X as

important to not only his ideological and political development but also his discursive

and rhetorical development. If we juxtapose Carmichael and Thelwell's four

argumentations with some of the rhetorics and discourses of Malcolm X, the argument

can be made that Carmichael and Thelwell were recontextualizing some of Malcolm X's

argumentations for their own purposes. As I explained and demonstrated in chapter three,

as a Black rhetor there were several things Malcolm X was committed to *doing* in and

through his rhetorical performances in hush harbor spaces. He was committed to

exposing the hypocrisy at work in critiques of Black Nationalism, determined to place

Black Nationalism and Black Nationalist politics as the center of the struggle for Black

liberation, and he was dedicated to positing Black Nationalism and Black Nationalist

politics as the most viable option for enacting true revolutionary and transformative

change for Black Americans. But he was also committed to helping Black Americans

critically understand for themselves the importance of self-definition, self-determination,

sustained political autonomy, and grassroots activism to the struggle for Black liberation

in America and abroad. By drawing upon some of the Black Nationalist argumentations

of Malcolm X, but tailoring those argumentations to a more radicalized socio-political

climate that had witnessed the assassination of Malcolm X, Carmichael and Thelwell, I

would argue, were trying to construct and enact through the position paper a world confronted with the potentialities of Black Power. This Black Power brought to life in and through Carmichael and Thelwell's discursive workings in that position paper was rooted in Black Nationalism and Black Nationalist politics and enacted through the authors' voiced commitments to Black self-definition, Black self-determination, Black political autonomy, and Black grassroots activism.

It was that kind of literate engagement that made the position paper on Black Power what Karega described as "a constant fixture in our talks and organizing meetings at The People's House."[29] That is, it was what Carmichael and Thelwell were *doing* in and through that position paper on Black Power that placed it at the center of the discussions and debates taking place at The People's House. By the time the BLFI activists set foot on MSU's campus, they had already witnessed the rise of Black rebellion enacted through the riots that took place in several urban cities including Detroit. As Abdul Jamal explained, "As Black people we needed Black Power more than ever then, and Stokley wrote about and outlined just what Black Power was all about, making that essay important to us as an organization."[30] In other words, the SNCC position paper on Black Power was attractive to the BLFI activists because Carmichael and Thelwell had discursively and rhetorically constructed and enacted this Black Power that Abdul Jamal indicated Black Americans desperately needed at the time.

Abdul Jamal's explanation as to why the position paper was so important to the BLFI activists is a simplistic one but the importance of Carmichael and Thelwell's discursive and rhetorical construction and enactment of Black Power for the BLFI

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[29] Interview with the researcher on October 6, 2012
[30] Roundtable discussion on November 18, 2012

activists cannot be underscored. Across the country the calls for Black Power were spreading, and the Black Power slogan was being articulated by many Black Americans in a variety of different contexts and spaces. As the BLFI activists collectively explained during the roundtable discussion, the oral performances and enactments of Black Power at rallies, demonstrations, community meetings, and protests were very powerful. But the BLFI activists also wanted a literate engagement with the notion of Black Power, and they got that literate engagement from the SNCC position paper. Abdul Jamal explained the functioning purpose and power of Carmichael and Thelwell's textual construction and enactment of the notion of Black Power:

> We didn't just want to hear that we needed Black Power and we didn't
> want to just say it ourselves. Perhaps it was that most of us had a
> background in journalism in high school or from working with Ernie,[31] but
> we also wanted to read about the 'who,' the 'what,' the 'when,' the
> 'where,' and the 'why' of Black Power and take the 'who,' the 'what,' the
> 'when,' the 'where,' and the 'why' of Black Power and talk about it and
> write about it in relation to what was going on for us at MSU and in
> Lansing. That's what the essay on Black Power was to us.[32]

The "who" in the SNCC position paper on Black Power Abdul Jamal referenced here was African peoples on the continent and throughout the diaspora, and the "what" was Black Power authorized and actualized through the workings of Black self-definition, Black self-determination, Black political autonomy, and Black grassroots activism. When did

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[31] Ernie Boone was the editor-in-chief of *The Westside News*, which was distributed in residential Black communities in Lansing, MI. Most of the BLFI activists worked as staff writers, editors, and production assistants for *The Westside News*.
[32] Roundtable discussion on November 18, 2012

Black Power need to be initiated and enacted? Immediately and with urgency. Where? Not only in the United States but on the African continent and throughout the African diaspora. Why? Because, as Carmichael and Thelwell explained in the SNCC position paper, Black Power was the only "realistic program…for the next stage of the political and cultural struggle" (528).

As Abdul Jamal's recollections demonstrate, from the BLFI activists' perspective, Carmichael and Thelwell's position paper on Black Power was an exemplary model for how to take a theory of Black resistance and translate it and bring it to life textually on an organizational and practical level. It had provided the kinds of answers to all of the standard questions any trained journalist would have been inclined to ask of those advancing arguments in support of Black Power and its possibilities as a strategy of resistance in the struggle for Black liberation in the U.S.

Nkrumah and the Rhetorics of Revisionist African Education and Neo-colonialist Critique

Another commonplace at The People's House was the reading, negotiating, and debating of the writings and speeches of African revolutionaries such as Kwame Nkrumah. Kwame Nkrumah has often been characterized by scholars across disciplines as the African father of Pan-Africanism. Whether one agrees with this characterization or not, Nkrumah's role in constructing a way to think about, talk about, and engage Pan-Africanism and Pan-African politics cannot be underscored. Immersed in the decolonization efforts of the Conventions People's Party, Nkrumah led Ghana to political independence on March 6, 1957 and was appointed Prime Minister of Ghana that same year. As Prime Minster he began a campaign geared towards forging the kind of African

diasporic socio-political unity that lies at the heart of Pan-African ideology. For example, as Prime Minster, Nkrumah welcomed and received many U.S. Black activists into Ghana.

But from a discursive standpoint, his emphasis on situating his nationalist and Pan-Africanist epistemology and rhetoric within the contexts of a burgeoning Black Atlantic discourse is what made his writings and speeches important for the BLFI activists' attempts to come to terms with the notion of Pan-Africanism and Pan-African politics. Nkrumah's writings and speeches were important in this way for the BLFI activists even though by the time they had arrived on the campus of MSU as undergraduates Nkrumah had been deposed as Prime Minster of Ghana (Feb. 1966) and was living in Conakry, Guinea as the guest of President Sekou Toure. Here's how Karega explained the impact Nkrumah's writings and speeches had on the BLFI activists' ideological, political, and discursive development: "We read and discussed Nkrumah's writings a lot because he was fighting against colonialism on an ideological and political level. He got at it in terms of revolution, politics, and education reform, and he gave us terms, concepts, and ideas that worked for us and that we could also use in our fight against it here in the U.S. and at MSU and in Lansing."[33]

At the center of Nkrumah's epistemology and rhetoric was his understanding of political revolution against racism, imperialism, and all forms of colonialism as the first principle of African independence. For example, in many of his speeches and writings Nkrumah articulated a firm commitment to uncovering and positing the dangers and threats of what is traditionally described and critiqued in Black Atlantic discourses as neocolonialism. A document entitled the "Revolution on Neo-Colonialism," drafted by

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[33] Roundtable discussion on November 18, 2012

The Third All-African People's Conference held in Cairo, March 23-31, 1961, defines neo-colonialism as "the survival of the colonial system in spite of formal recognition of political independence in emerging countries which become victims of an indirect and subtle form of domination by political, economic, social, military or technical [forces]" (reprinted in Wallerstein 260). That same conference document also identifies neo-colonialism as "the greatest threat to African countries that have newly won their independence or approaching this status" (reprinted in Wallerstein 260)—a view shared by Nkrumah, an attendee of the conference and contributor to the drafting of the resolution.

But Nkrumah's critique of neo-colonialism was even more pronounced in one of his articles entitled *Africa Must Unite*, published in 1963. I found a re-print of *Africa Must Unite* in one of the notebooks Karega provided during the archival process. As the BLFI activists collectively explained during the roundtable discussion, it was an article they read, interpreted, and discussed at length at The People's House because of Nkrumah's "direct" approach to talking about and writing about the concept of neo-colonialism and because of his ability to provide examples of neo-colonialism at work in post-colonial contexts. Interpreting the neo-colonialist undertones of British post-independence policy in Ghana, in *Africa Must Unite* Nkrumah criticized neo-colonialism by arguing the following:

> [It means that] by voluntary withdrawal at a suitable time the British would retain the goodwill of the African, strengthen the Commonwealth, earn the praise of the rest of the world, and at the same time keep maximum political and economic advantages. The British, though liking

to pose as dreamy idealists who, through absence of mind, achieved an

empire, are in my experience the most hard-headed realists. They know

that Africa must inevitably be ruled by Africans, and they want to come

out of the business in the best way possible. (16)

As this passage demonstrates, the "direct" approach the BLFI activists were referencing

was Nkrumah's defining and pointing out of the inconsistencies, fallacies, and

contradictions inherent in British neo-colonialism at work in Kenya. Providing a vivid

example of neocolonialism at work in a postcolonial context, Nkrumah exposed the

opportunistic economic and political motives of British neo-colonialism in Kenya.

But Nkrumah's writings and speeches were also attractive to the BLFI activists

because he recognized and articulated the importance of culture, history, and education to

the struggle for liberation and the success of a postcolonial African country. In one of the

notebooks Karega provided during the archival process, I found a re-print of Nkrumah's

speech entitled "The African Genius," which was delivered at the inaugural opening

ceremony of the Institute of African Studies in Ghana on October 25, 1963. As Abdul

Jamal explained during the roundtable discussion, this was a speech they also read and

discussed frequently at The People's House because Nkrumah posited in the speech the

importance and liberatory potential of African-centered curricula and revisionist African

history. Indicting European colonialism for its attempts to distort and destroy African

history, culture, and socio-political structures, Nkrumah introduced for his audience his

rhetoric of revisionist African education, making a case for the privileging of African-

centered education:

One essential function of this Institute must surely be to study the history,

culture and institutions, languages and arts of Ghana and of Africa in new

African centered ways — in entire freedom from the propositions and

presuppositions of the colonial epoch, and from the situations of those

professors and lectures who continue to make European studies of Africa

the basis of this new assessment. By the work of this institute, we must

reassess and assess the glories and achievements of our African past and

inspire our generation, and succeeding generations, with a vision of a

better future. (14)

In short, this rhetoric of revisionist African education was one of the things that Karega

indicated Nkrumah's writings and speeches provided the BLFI activists. As the BLFI

activists during the roundtable discussion collectively explained, through the reading,

interpreting, and discussing of Nkrumah's articulated support for African-centered

curricula, they were trying to define and actualize their own commitments to reforming

post-secondary education in the U.S. in order to include curricula that speaks to the

concerns, histories, and experiences of African peoples on the continent and throughout

the diaspora.

But it was also Nkrumah's appropriation of a rhetoric of neocolonial critique and

his ability to theorize and explain its workings in postcolonial African contexts that

proved attractive to the BLFI activists. The BLFI activists believed that despite

geographical and socio-political differences, Blacks in America and Africans on the

African continent were experiencing the same kinds of things on a social, political, and

economic level. As Abdul Jamal explained, "we believed what was being written at the

time — that here in the U.S. we [Blacks in America] are also in a post-colonial situation; we are just in the West and not in Africa and our colonizer has always resided and continues to reside post colonization right along with us in the same location and country." [34]

Language, Naming, and Black Liberation

In addition to the reading, interpreting, and discussing of the speeches and writings of Black and African intellectuals, activists, and revolutionaries who identified as Black Nationalist and/or Pan-African in theory and practice, the BLFI activists (and all attendees) were reading, interpreting, and discussing at The People's House texts that attempted to theorize and advance arguments on a range of topics concerning the functioning of language and naming practices in the struggle for Black liberation on the African continent and throughout the diaspora.

The late sixties and early seventies witnessed the emergence of several public and scholarly debates on a range of topics on Black language, Black writing, and the relationship among literacy and language arts instruction and Black students. As I discussed in chapter one, during this period, several scholars and linguists worked to legitimize non-mainstream speech and language varieties including African American Vernacular English (AAVE). For example, in *The Logic of Non-Standard English*, published in 1969, William Labov was arguing against the stigmatization of AAVE and instead was positing it as a variety of English with its own grammatical, semantic, and contextual rules and systems. Similarly, in her 1968 article "Black Power is Black Language," Geneva Smitherman was schooling her readers on the problems with notions

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[34] Interview with the researcher on September 2, 2012

of correctness in language and literacy scholarship and pedagogies that ignore issues of social context in language use. Defining Black English as a dialect of English with its own lexicon, phonology, and syntax, in the article, Smitherman posited its social, cultural, religious, and political importance in Black communities. Moreover, Smitherman called for scholars and teachers to focus on the Black writer's ability to enact rhetorical power in and through their texts rather than focusing on acontextual correctness. In particular, Smitherman urged teachers to focus on helping Black students gain power in language. Power in language was defined by Smitherman as a language user's ability "to choose rhetorical strategies, not grammatical "niceties," for moving the audience in the direction desired" (91).

Smitherman presented the article "Black Power is Black Language" in April of 1969 in Miami at her first College Composition and Communication Conference (CCCC). Smitherman and several other scholars and linguists were working within professional societies and organizations such as the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and CCCC to "bring about mainstream recognition and legitimacy to the culture, history, and language of those on the margins" ("Students' Right to Their Own Language: A Retrospective" 21). The impetus behind this work was a belief that all students should have a right to use their own language varieties in the academic classroom and when composing academic texts.

At the same time that Labov was working to legitimize AAVE and Smitherman was schooling compositionists, linguists, and literacy scholars on the social, cultural, and political significance of Black English and fighting for students' right to use their own language varieties when composing academic texts, Black creative intellectuals and

artists associated with the Black Arts Movement (BAM) were advocating for what Larry Neal in his essay "The Black Arts Movement" described as a "cultural revolution in art and ideas." For Neal and many Black creative intellectuals and artists, this "cultural revolution in art and ideas" had to be rooted in the development of a distinct Black aesthetic. "The Black artist," Neal argued, "must create new forms and new values, sing new songs (or purify old ones), and along with other Black authorities, he must create a new history, new symbols, myths, and legends (and purify the old ones by fire)."

Responding to criticism waged against the idea of a Black aesthetic and the BAM as a whole, Hoyt W. Fuller in "Towards a Black Aesthetic" contextualized the importance of this journey towards the creation of a Black aesthetic for Black revolutionary writers:

> The black writer, like the artist generally, has wasted much time and talent denying a propensity every rule of human dignity demands that he possess, seeking an identity that can only do violence to his sense of self. Black Americans, for all practical purposes, colonized in their native land…It is one thing to accept the guiding principles on which the American republic ostensibly was founded; it is quite another thing to accept the prevailing practices which violate those principles.

What Fuller was critiquing here was the notion that the Black writer can (and should) appropriate, parallel, and/or imitate a so-called "American identity" along with its viewpoints, values, and worldviews without critically evaluating the contradictions at work in the prevailing racist, imperialist, and undemocratic practices of an American republic purportedly built upon the principles of freedom, liberty, and democracy. Those

contradictions in practice, Fuller argued, hurt, harm, and "do violence" upon Black

Americans, and in particular, the Black writer and his own sense of identity. For Fuller,

the only solution for the Black writer was the creation of a Black aesthetic that could

speak to the needs and experiences of Black Americans:

> …in the time of revolutionary struggle, the traditional Western liberal
> ideas are not merely irrelevant but they must be assiduously opposed. The
> young writers of the black ghetto have set out in search of a black
> aesthetic, a system of isolating and evaluating the artistic works of black
> people which reflect the special character and imperatives of black
> experience.

While the BLFI activists were aware of these public and scholarly conversations

taking place, their entrance into these discussions on Black Language, writing, and

liberation came through the reading, interpreting, and discussing of two kinds of texts.

The first was Kamuyu's extracurricular graduate work on the social, political, and

cultural workings of African naming practices. As Abdul Jamal explained, "Kamuyu's

essay pamphlet on African names was something that had a huge impact on our views on

language."[35] As a graduate student in anthropology, Kamuyu was deeply interested and

invested in the study of African naming practices. In particular, Kamuyu wanted to

understand the psychological effects of naming practices and what he believed is a

correlative relationship among African naming practices and the construction and

enactment of African diasporic cultures and heritages. As such, in 1971 with Maina's

assistance, Kamuyu authored a pamphlet entitled *What is Your African Name*, published

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[35] Roundtable discussion on November 18, 2012

the text with the help of PASOA, and disseminated it to the BLFI activists, the Black MSU student community, and the larger Black East Lansing residential communities.

After the publication and distribution of *What is Your African Name*, Kamuyu's interest and investment in the study of the socio-political-cultural workings of African naming practices became a source of interest and investment for the BLFI activists. Hence, the pamphlet featured prominently in the discussions and meetings taking place at The People's House. "One of the things we were talking about in our discussions was names," Karega explained.[36] The twenty-three page text, which included a list of African names common in different countries across the continent, was meant to be a case study of Kamuyu's own personal experiences with naming practices in order to demonstrate the strategies and tactics of the "stripping of African names, culture, history, and African mode of thinking" (Kange'the and Kinyatti 14). What proved rhetorically powerful, the BLFI activists participating in the roundtable discussion collectively explained, was Kamuyu's use of his own personal experiences to not only explain how and to what end British colonization and Christianization processes worked to strip African names, culture, history, and epistemologies in Kenya, but also critique those practices on a theoretical level.

In the 1920's, Kamuyu's parents and many Kenyans were forced to convert to Christianity by British colonial missionaries residing in Kenya. Following this conversion experience, as Kamuyu explained in *What is Your African Name*, "the first duty of the missionaries was to strip us of our names and cultural traditions" (10). Kamuyu narrated an active picture of this process:

> Our African dances, religions, educational, political, and economic

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[36] Roundtable discussion on November 18, 2012

institutions were forcefully banned as one missionary after another administered cupfuls of Christian opium to my people. Before anyone could be admitted in what they called the "company of the faithfuls," he had to swear to their god, Jehovah that he would from thence, detach himself from what they called "African savage, and primitive beliefs and traditions." One of the prerequisites for such a detachment was to give up your African names…In every coffee and tea plantations and in every small town and village, there was a missionary who did the stripping of African names. It is not, therefore, unlikely to find that most of the African slave names are biblical and others are mostly the names of missionaries, their families, relatives, kings, queens, thieves, racists, bigots, and beastly oppressors from their respective countries. (10)

Through the Christianization process, Kamuyu's father was stripped of his African name, Kang'ethe-wa-Munyua. Munyua was Kamuyu's grandfather's name but Kamuyu's father's new Christian name became Shem Kange'the. As Kamuyu explained in *What is Your African Name*, his father therefore became "a man without a father" (11). Kamuyu's mother, whose maiden name was Wanjiru-wa-Kinuthia, became Wanjiru-wa-Kang'ethe after she married Kamuyu's father. But through the Christianization process, Kamuyu's mother was forced to drop the name Kang'ethe and was given the name Lois Wanajiru. In essence, not only was she given a non-African first name, but with the adoption of Wanjiru as her last name, she was returned to her maiden status with the appropriation of part of the name she held before she married Kamuyu's father. Put

another way, as Kamuyu explained in *What is Your African Name*, she became a "wife without a husband…a husband of herself" (11).

For Kamuyu in particular, Christianization meant that he was given two names at the time of baptism: 1) his official and legal Christian name — Peter Shem and 2) his African name — Kamuyu-wa-Kang'ethe — which was only used sporadically by his parents and some of the elders in his community. As he grew older, Kamuyu was socialized to believe in the symbolic, religious, and linguistic power his name Peter Shem held, and in *What is Your African Name* he tells a powerful narrative that emphasizes the role that the instruction of African peoples on European and biblical histories played in this socialization process:

> …I was made to believe that I was named after two great men. I was told that "Peter" was a great man in ancient Israel who loved his master (Jesus Christ) so much that he was willing to die for him on the cross. I was further told that there were other great "Peters" like Peter the Great, the Tsar of Russia, Karl Peter, a German racist bigot who explored and colonized Africa, and many more. As for the "Shem," I was told that he was a great and faithful man who, together with his father Noah, were saved by Jehovah during the big flood, which is supposed to have swept the entire world. Furthermore, to make the name "Shem" greater, this "Shem," son of Noah, became the most blessed son. God chose him to be the founder and the father of the most superior race on the face of the earth — THE WHITE RACE. (12)

Through a socialization process rooted in teaching of European and biblical histories, Kamuyu was taught that he was named after a disciple of Christ, a Tsar, and the so-called father of the White race, and somehow he was supposed to be proud of his Christian and White names and pattern his life after these namesakes.

But as Kamuyu explained in an interview on October 7, 2012, when he came to the U.S. to begin his collegiate studies, he began to question the socialization process that had given him Christian and White names and stripped him of his African names. The reading and negotiating of Malcolm X's speeches was one of the things that helped him begin this stage of critical inquiry: "Malcolm X had changed his name. I had heard many speeches of Malcolm X and I used to play them over and over again. And what I liked about him was he would talk about names and that he was given a slave name and that was why he called himself Malcolm X. So I started reflecting on my own name."[37]

When he arrived at MSU as a graduate student, Kamuyu spent a lot of time evaluating the political, historical, and cultural histories and implications behind the stripping of names and languages from Kenyan people under British colonial rule and Christianity. From this work, he was able to draw several conclusions that he compiled and articulated in *What is Your African Name*. Kamuyu wrote:

> I found that the process of stripping African names from people was
> widespread and was an accepted practice among all the white racists
> throughout the world. They had done it among the Africans in the
> Americas, West Indies, Islands of the South Seas, England, France,
> Germany, and in Africa as well. It was the best process to divide and rule
> us; assimilate us in the white culture; bury our heroes; reject our history;

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[37] Interview with the researcher on October 7, 2012

distort and destroy our African ancestry; make us think and imitate white

heroes; and lastly reduce us into a nameless, cultureless, and landless

people like the animals and the bird of the air. In fact, their propaganda

on the greatness and significance of white names has had a damaging

effect in Africa. (13)

From these conclusions, Kamuyu solidified several commitments he also articulated in

the text:

We must bear African names which reflect our African ancestry. We must

discard our slave names. Our countries, cities, mountains, rivers, lakes,

valleys must and shall bear African names. Our languages, beliefs,

customs, political and economic systems must and shall be African. We

must claim and fight for every country, every valley and mountain and

every gold and diamond mine that belong to the African people. This is

our commitment. This is our historic task. This is our dream. We must and

will attain it. We are an African people born of African flesh and blood.

(14)

Kamuyu was stressing two very important commitments here. First, he was stressing a

commitment to understanding the relationship of African names and language to the

construction of African culture, heritage, and community. But Kamuyu was also stressing

a commitment to a way of thinking that was birthed for many of the BLFI activists prior

to their enrollment at MSU. Just as we saw with Karega's mother in chapter three with

her attempts to subvert gender-based discrimination in the garment business through

language and naming practices, what we see here in Kamuyu's declaration is a

commitment to understanding that how a person is linguistically identified (either through self-identification or through imposition) has social, political, and cultural implications for a people engaged in revolutionary struggle against imperialism, racism, and oppression.

Through the publication, dissemination, and discussion of *What is Your African Name* at The People's House, Kamuyu's conclusions and commitments became the BLFI activists' conclusions and commitments. As Abdul Jamal explained, "From discussing Kamuyu's African names book what he knew about it resonated with us; we learned what he had learned and shared with us and the whole thing with African names became just as important to us as it was to him."[38] It's important to note that while Kamuyu changed his name officially from Peter to Kamuyu in 1969, almost all of the BLFI activists participating in this study also underwent a name changing process in which they replaced what they all described as their "slave names" with an African name or something representative of the kind of name shift that Malcolm X made when he first converted to Islam and joined the Nation of Islam. For example, Greg Kelley became 2X and Barney Young became Chui Karega; Stan McClinton became Kimathi Mohammed, Terry Johnson became Abdul Jamal, and Candace Hartland became Fabu Ata.

But the BLFI activists were also addressing issues of language and liberation by reading, interpreting, and discussing at The People's House Frantz Fanon's writings. As Karega explained, "We read and talked about Fanon a lot, mostly for his ideas about decolonization and liberation, but also for his ideas about the role that language plays in colonization."[39] One of the key texts authored by Fanon that the BLFI activists read,

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[38] Roundtable discussion on November 18, 2012
[39] Interview with the researcher on May 25, 2013

interpreted, and discussed at The People's House was *Black Skin and White Masks*.

Fanon, who's central goal in the text is to "help the black man to free himself of the

arsenal of complexes that have been developed by the colonial environment" (30),

theorizes about the psychology of the Negro Antillean confronted with the "white world"

and attempts to expose how oppression and domination works in colonial and post-

colonial contexts. In the text, Fanon posits that oppression and domination in colonial and

post-colonial contexts works to establish a dialectic of difference between the colonizer

and the colonized through the enactment of two things: (1) the reinforcing of the values,

beliefs, and practices of the dominant culture and (2) the devaluing and subordination of

the values, beliefs, and practices of the colonized culture and through the imposition of a

burden of identification on the subordinate in order to construct what Homi Bhabha

interpreting Fanon's work describes as "a reformed, recognizable Other, a subject of

difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (126).

     One of Fanon's key constructs of analysis is language. Functioning within the

context of colonization and post-colonization, language — Fanon argues — serves as an

index of cultural difference and power relations. Since Fanon's emphasis is on moving

colonized subjects into a psychological state of resistance and revolution, what he's

trying to do with this discussion of language is expose how it is at the center of the Black

man's problems with marginalization which impede his efforts at resistance and

revolution. Fanon's language ideology encompasses two main ideas: 1) power comes

with the mastery of language and 2) to speak "means, above all, to assume a culture, to

support the weight of a culture" (18). In other words, the interconnectedness between

having power and the mastery of language — Fanon argues — has implications for the

language user's identity; there is an interdependent relationship at work between language, identity, and power.

But the problem for Fanon — and the Black man — is that this language ideology functions as a double-edged sword for the colonized Black man in terms of his own identity and his relation to the dominant culture. On the one hand, the White man—Fanon argues—is sealed in his "whiteness"—"whiteness" posited by the dominant culture as a "normal" representation of humanness. On the other hand, the Black man is sealed in his "blackness"—"blackness" posited by the dominant culture as a symbol of "Evil and Ugliness" (180), "wretchedness" (190), "sin" (189), the archetype of the lowest values" (189), and "the dark side of the soul" (190). Because of these signifiers of "whiteness" and "blackness," Fanon believes that the Black man, in an effort to be recognized as human rather than as a racialized individual, becomes alienated from his own sense of self, suffers from an inferiority complex, and consequently tries to transcend race and abandon all manifestations of the signifiers of "blackness," including language.

But as Fanon explains in the text, the Black man soon discovers that since humanness is posited as directly correlated with the values, beliefs, and practices of the dominant culture —"whiteness"— he can only truly become human if he adopts the values, beliefs, and practices of the dominant culture. Fanon writes: "The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle" (18). That is why Fanon argues that the Black man is often psychologically complicit in his indoctrination into submission to the idea of the inferiority of her/his own language and the transformative power of the mastery of the dominant language. In trying to unpack

why "the Antilles Negro is so fond of speaking French" (27), Fanon portrays an example of the Black man struggling to transcend his "blackness" by downplaying and/or eradicating its signifiers in his language use:

> The Negro arriving in France will react against the myth of the R-eating man from Martinique. He will become aware of it, and he will really go to war against it. He will practice not only rolling his R but embroiding it. Furtively observing the slightest reactions of others, listening to his own speech, suspicious of his own tongue—a wretchedly lazy organ—he will lock himself into his room and read aloud for hours—desperately determined to learn diction. (21)

Yet Fanon devotes chapters one through seven to proving that the Black man's compulsive mimicry of the colonizer's culture, his attempts at the mastery of the dominant language and other dominant values and beliefs, is not powerfully transformative at all, but defeating and pathological because of this interconnected relationship between this linguistic mastery and the necessity for the "proportionately whit[ening]" (18) of the Black man's identity. That is, Fanon is arguing that the transformative power of language automatically entails the transformation of the language user.

But this correlation binds the Black man, Fanon argues. When the Black man tries to exert himself as a "mimic man"— perform his linguistic mastery and his transformed identity —it is often viewed as pathological by Whites. In other words, this is of no avail to the Black man because his mimicry — his linguistic performances of mastery of the dominant language, and thus his performances of "whiteness" — renders him dangerous

by the dominant culture. Fanon explains this concept arguing the following: "In every group of men in the Antilles, the one who expresses himself well, who has mastered the language, is ordinately feared; keep an eye on that one, he is almost white" (20-21). In other words, the Black man's efforts to escape his condition, his "blackness," render him a walking contradiction, a spectacle, a Black man masquerading around in a White linguistic mask.

For the BLFI activists, wearing the White linguistic mask Fanon describes was a phenomenon they wanted to avoid. As Karega explained, "One of the reasons we were reading Fanon was cause we were trying to make sure we understood how language can be used to oppress."[40] But it was also important for the BLFI activists to reconcile everything they were engaging: (1) what they were learning through Fanon's writings about the pathological potential of the Black man's mimicry of the dominant culture's language practices; (2) what they were learning from Kamuyu's work on African names; and (3) what they had learned about the relationship among language and writing through the mentorship of Ernie Boone and their participation in journalistic writing as part of the staff of *The Westside News*.

As the BLFI activists collectively explained during the roundtable discussion, as writers for *The Westside News*, they were encouraged by Ernie Boone to use standardized and conventional forms of language and discourse. But this encouragement was not interpreted by the BLFI activists as a cosigning of the notions of correctness that scholars such as Geneva Smitherman were trying to counter during the period. "We took all our experiences with writing, what we were reading and doing with Kamuyu's work on

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[40] Interview with the researcher on May 25, 2013

names, and our reading of stuff like Fanon, and put it all together," Karega explained.[41]

Karega contextualized how these theories and ideas came together for the BLFI activists:

> As you saw with how important Kamuyu's work on names was to us, we believed (and still do) that African language and names were important to Black culture, history, and just how we as Black people understand ourselves. Most of us learned Swahili to give you another example. Swahili was important to us for that reason, or that connection we believed (and still do) was there. But we didn't think what was considered academic language was superior or something we as Black people have no claim to. If the oppressor's language was what they considered academic language or proper English, whatever that is, then we wanted to make the oppressor's language work for us and what we were trying to do in challenging oppression."[42]

In other words, the reading, interpreting, and discussing of Fanon's work and the juxtaposing of his theories on language with their reading, interpreting, and discussing of Kamuyu's text on African naming practices and their experiences working with Boone and for *The Westside News* helped the BLFI activists do two things: (1) work through their efforts to complicate the notion that subordinate peoples cannot use language mimesis of the dominant culture as a discursive strategy for constructing and enacting agency and (2) establish their commitments to using mimicry of the dominate culture's language and discourse practices intentionally as a political strategy, a tactic of dissent for subverting oppressive social and political orders and their respective structures.

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[41] Interview with the researcher on May 25, 2013
[42] Interview with the researcher on May 25, 2013

Theorizing the politics of identification within the context of colonialism, Diana Fuss in "Interior Colonies: Frantz Fanon and the Politics of Identification" surveys how mimesis has been conceptualized in theories of language and discourse. Specifically, examining postcolonial language and discourse theories, Fuss argues that the postcolonial language theorist typically works within the context of what she calls a theory of mimicry as subjugation. That is, the postcolonial language theorist understands mimicry as "an emphatic instrument of political regulation, social discipline, and psychological depersonalization" (24) and reads mimicry in the language practices of the colonized and/or subordinate as little more than a symptom of domination and a result of colonial indoctrination.

Of course Fuss points to Fanon's examination of the role of mimesis in the development of the Black colonial subject to validate her analysis because, as I have argued, one of the things Fanon seemingly set out to prove in *Black Skins and White Masks* was that the Black man's compulsive mimicry of the colonizer's language and discourse conventions is defeating and pathological. It is this understanding of mimicry as subjugation and pathological, Fuss argues, which causes many postcolonial language theorists to reject mimesis as a discursive strategy for effecting agency for the postcolonial subject. For example, for the post-colonialist theorist Ngui wa Thiong'o, strategies for decolonizing the colonized mind involve what Bill Ashcroft et al. describe as the restoration of an "ethnic or natural identity embedded in the mother tongue [and]…a rejection of English, a refusal to use it for his unity, a refusal to accede to the language of the world and the reality it appears to name, a refusal to submit to the political dominance its use implies" (283). Specifically, for Thiong'o writing in the native

Giyuku language is an important strategy in the postcolonial struggle of native Kenyan peoples. Written text, composed in Kenyan languages — Thiong'o argues — does two things: (1) it reflects "not only the rhythms of a child's spoken expression, but also his struggle with his nature and his social nature" (290) and (2) it functions as a kind of discursive carrier of the Kenyan peoples' "anti-imperialist struggles to liberate their productive forces from foreign control" (290). In Fanon-like fashion, the basis of Thiong'o's postcolonial agenda is his assertion that language carries culture and is "thus inseparable from ourselves as a community of human beings with a specific form and character, a specific history, a specific relationship to the world" (290).

But some scholars such as Suresh Canagarajah argue the importance of understanding mimicry as "strategies which the marginalized detach themselves from the ideologies of the powerful, retain a measure of critical thinking, and gain some measure of control over their life in an oppressive situation" (122). As demonstrated by Karega's description of how the BLFI activists reconciled Fanon's writings, Kamuyu's work on African names, and what they learned through the mentorship of Ernie Boone and their participation in journalistic writing as part of the staff of *The Westside News*, the BLFI activists seemingly aligned themselves with Thiong'o's belief that languages communally privileged by Africans and people of color mediate their histories, positionings in society, and their constructions and performances of culture and identities. But like Canagarajah they also believed in the subversive possibilities of mimesis of what was understood as the dominant culture's language and discourse conventions. That is, rejecting notions of correctness that were dominating pubic and scholarly discussions on language, writing, and minority writers and students — notions scholars such as

Smitherman were working to dismantle — the BLFI activists believed that they could appropriate so-called standardized languages and discourse conventions and flip the script so to speak, using those languages and conventions to disrupt and dismantle racist, imperialist, and colonial discourses and structures.

The Malcolm X Communication Academy: A Site of Knowledge Construction and Negotiation

In the summer of 1970, the BLFI activists started offering classes in communication and literacy as The Westside Action Center in Lansing. These classes were free and predominately taught by the BLFI activists. By the fall of 1970, in an effort to expand their community-based educational initiatives, the BLFI activists met with several public officials in Lansing to express their interest in securing a building that they could transform into an academy offering communication and literacy classes for lower income African Americans residing in Lansing's west-side communities. In particular, the BLFI activists wanted the city's assistance in purchasing an abandoned fifty-room convalescent home located at 404 West St. Joseph Street. Lansing's City Council approved a land contract for the BLFI activists to purchase the building. Unfortunately, Lansing's Mayor vetoed the contract. The contract did come up for an override vote which failed, but the BLFI activists had already moved into the building, set up on-site housing arrangements for three of the BLFI activists (Karega, Abdul Jamal, and Kenne Lou), and organized and started offering several classes in communication and literacy instruction for Black MSU students and community participants from Black neighborhoods on Lansing's west-side. They called the establishment the Malcolm X Communication Academy.

The BLFI activists continued to maintain the Malcolm X Communication Academy for a few years, making every effort to pay the rent collectively on their own. During that period, the BLFI activists expanded the instructional services offered at the academy to include regularly scheduled seminars conducted by several prominent Black scholars and activists. "Our goal was to be activists, students, and educators," Karega explained, "and we knew that a lot of students like us were on campus cause they wanted to get their education, and we knew that there were a lot of people in the Black communities in Lansing like us who wanted to be activists to improve their situation."[43] As Karega explained further, "We weren't trying to be philanthropic; we wanted to integrate through the academy Black students at MSU and Black community folk."[44] Most of the Black scholars and activists the BLFI activists brought to the academy to conduct seminars were not compensated for their work. "We couldn't come up with half the money we would of needed to pay them for what they gave to us and all who attended," Karega explained, "but they came anyway cause they understood our vision and sense of responsibility."[45] Karega explained that vision and sense of responsibility in the context of the BLFI activists' understanding of their positioning as activists, students, and educators: "We went to school at MSU, did our political activities after, and along with the people attending the seminars, we went to school again at the academy."[46]

Working from this vision and sense of responsibility, the BLFI activists brought Stokely Carmichael to the academy to conduct a seminar on a range of topics on Pan-Africanism and Pan-African politics. Walter Rodney, a prominent historian and

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[43] Interview with the researcher on May 25, 2013
[44] Interview with the researcher on May 25, 2013
[45] Interview with the researcher on May 25, 2013
[46] Interview with the researcher on May 25, 2013

Guyanese revolutionary working out of the University of Michigan at the time, came to the academy and conducted several seminars on the history of the Atlantic slave trade and the impact of colonialism and imperialism on Africa. Robert F. Williams also conducted several seminars at the academy. As Penial Joseph points out in *Waiting 'Till the Midnight Hour*, it was Williams who gained popularity in the late fifties and early sixties by leading the NAACP's Monroe, North Carolina chapter in its battles with the Ku Klux Klan and White supremacy and by forging alliances with Black intellectuals and activists in the North such as Malcolm X and the members of the Harlem Writers Guild. Williams was suspended as president of the NAACP's Monroe, North Carolina chapter, but soon after, was selected to be a part of the delegation that embarked on the first tour of a liberated Cuba, organized by Fair Play in June of 1960. On that trip, Williams consulted with Cuban officials, cultivating a developing relationship between radical Black activists and Cuban militants by putting together a special issue of *Lunes de Revolucion*, where Black activists, artists, and writers analyzed the connection between Jim Crow in the U.S. and the Cuban revolution. As Robin Kelley in *Black Like Mao* notes, by 1961, Williams' connection to Cuba became more realized when he was forced to seek political asylum in Cuba after a bogus federal warrant was issued for his arrest on kidnapping charges. In exile, Williams became more Leftist in thought and action, aligning himself with the Socialist Workers Party, the Workers World Party, and members of the Old Left portion of the CPUSA. It was these experiences, and his understandings of the social, political, and economic politics at work in Cuba and how those social, political, and economic politics impacted the struggle for Black liberation in America and across the diaspora that

Williams discussed with the BLFI activists and the enrolled participants for each seminar he conducted at the academy.

But it was the Trinidadian historian, intellectual, writer, educator, and Pan-Africanist C.L.R. James who conducted the most seminars at the academy. In particular, it was James who had what the BLFI activists participating in the roundtable discussion described as the greatest influence on shaping their discursive, political, and literate development during their tenure at MSU. Born, raised, and educated in Trinidad, at the age of 31 James relocated to England in 1932 , discovered Marxist thought, and became a committed Trotskyist. As Robin D.G. Kelley points out in his Introduction to the second-edition release of James's *The History of Pan-African Revolt*, James became one of Trotsky's leading spokespersons. Working from his positioning in Trotskyist circles, while in London, he also became an active part of the Black anti-colonial activism and Pan-African politics that introduced him to individuals such as George Padmore. It was during this time that James was developing into what Kelley describes as a "Marxist intellectual with Pan-Africanist leanings" (3). James's Marxist/Pan-Africanist agency was exemplified through his publishing of two texts in 1938: *The Black Jacobians: Tousssaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* and *A History of Negro Revolt*.

In 1938, with the encouragement and support of Trotsky, James left England for the U.S. to begin a national speaking tour geared towards encouraging Black participation in labor politics domestically and internationally. Although his speaking tour was supposed to be brief, growing disillusion with Trotsky's theoretical apparatus and his ongoing disputes with Trotsky over the "Negro Question" influenced James's decision to extend his stay in the U.S. and transform his American sojourn from what Andrew J.

Douglass in "Democratizing Dialectics with C.L.R. James" describes as "a mission for Trotsky" (424) to "more of an open-ended learning experience" (424).

After Trotsky's assassination in 1940, James began working more with a small sect of individuals who also shared his disillusionment with Trotskyism—a small sect that called themselves the Johnson Forest Tendency and included individuals such as Raja Dunayeyskaya and Grace Lee (later Grace Lee Boggs). For James, in particular, bringing a Marxist outlook to his critical studies and discursive engagements with the revolutionary character of Black struggle and liberation in the diaspora and on the African continent became a top priority during this period, which was exemplified in his speeches and writings. Although he was deported from the U.S. in 1953, when he was allowed to re-enter the U.S. in 1968, establishing residency in Washington D.C., James found himself surrounded by a new generation of young Black radicals searching for a way to unite theory and practice to challenge and dismantle racism, colonialism, and imperialism on their own terms. It was under these conditions that Kimathi Mohammed, the BLFI's Executive Chairman, met James. "For a college student, Kimathi still got around," Karega explained, "and somehow he met C.L.R. during his travels."[47] That meeting between James and Mohammed served as the impetus behind James's initial interest in working with the BLFI activists in terms of their educational initiatives at the Malcolm X Communication Academy.

But as he continued to come to Lansing to conduct seminars at the academy, a relationship between James and the BLFI activists was forged over time. "We worked very closely with C.L.R.," Abdul Jamal explained.[48] "He was our own personal Professor

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[47] Roundtable discussion on November 18, 2012
[48] Roundtable discussion on November 18, 2012

Emeritus," Karega added.[49] This was a critical positioning for James that provided a

much needed service to the BLFI activists. Karega explained the functioning purpose of

this critical positioning James adopted as part of his work with the BLFI activists and the

academy: "We knew that racism would keep us from getting all the education we needed

from the university, so we really depended on those we knew were political and academic

like C.L.R. We needed the schooling he gave us cause they didn't have anything like that

on campus." What Karega was describing here was not only the BLFI activists' critique

of what Ibram H. Rogers in *The Black Campus Movement* characterizes as the "the

normalized mask of whiteness" in post-secondary education, but also their efforts to

create alternative educational spaces where the subverting and challenging of this

"normalized mask of whiteness" could take place.

In his study of what he defines as the Black campus movement, Rogers argues

that in the same way that Black activists such as Carmichael and Malcolm X sought to

demonstrate how White power functioned as a part of the fabric of American culture,

many Black students in the late sixties and early seventies were critiquing traditionally

White post-secondary institutions in the U.S., arguing that from their inception these

schools had fostered institutional climates and cultures geared towards concealing

academic practices that positioned White and Eurocentric ideas, people, and scholarship

as the center of a kind of universal standard curricula for post-secondary institutions in

the United States. For these students, European and Euro-American history and

literature, for example, were never posited in those terms — that is, they were never

distinguished as European and Euro-American. Rather, European and Euro-American

history and literature were always posited as *the* history and literature — that is, the only

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histories and literatures valid for inclusion in the universal standard curricula that Black

students during the period were trying to critique and dismantle. Everything else that was

not European or Euro-American in content, style, theory, and/or practice, these students

argued, was denigrated and marginalized and excluded from university-wide curricula.

Moreover, the tools academia used to mask the normalization of whiteness at work at

post-secondary institutions, Black students argued, were theoretical in content (notions of

objectivity and universalism), methodological (empiricism, evolutionism), and practical

(standardized tests, unbiased scholarly assessment) (Rogers 5).

The theorizations of Black students demonstrate the kinds of critiques enacted

during the period that challenged the "normalized mask of whiteness" at work in post-

secondary institutions. For example, writing to faculty and administrators on May 19,

1969, Genna Rae McNeil of the Black Student Union of Kalamazoo College in Michigan

argued the following: "Through perspectival elimination you have necessarily de-

emphasized some aspects of reality…Black people are not demanding the impossible.

Black people are affirming the need to look at reality again. For in looking more closely

with us you, too, may build a construct of more details from which you, too, may see new

patterns of possibilities" (Rogers 153). What McNeil was asking for in this position paper

was a reworking and refashioning of post-secondary curricula in order to take into

account the notion of a Black scholarly perspective that not only challenges the notion of

a universal scholarly perspective undergirded by European and Euro-American thinkers

and ideas, but also critiques and replaces racist and imperialist scholarship.[50]

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[50] Black scholars had already cultivated a tradition of critiquing racist scholarship, in particular, theories
which posited the cultural inferiority of African Americans and historical literature which advanced a
picture of Blacks in America as incompetent and docile during historical periods such as slavery and
Reconstruction. McNeil was probably drawing upon these traditions.

For the BLFI activists, who were at the same time reading, interpreting, and discussing at The People's House Nkrumah's critiques of neocolonialism and his theories on the importance of African-centered education, one way for them to subvert and challenge the "normalized mask of whiteness" was to extend their education beyond the confines of MSU and bring in to the Malcolm X Communication Academy Black scholars and activists such as James to provide what they believed they weren't going to receive from their university courses and professors. In this sense, the argument can be made that in the same way that The People's House functioned as a site of knowledge construction and negotiation for the BLFI activists, the Malcolm X Communication Academy also functioned as a site where the BLFI activists were afforded the opportunity to participate in acts of communication, receive information through reading, speaking, and listening, and use this information in various ways to not only make sense of themselves, the world, and their relation to it, but also construct, negotiate, and actualize social justice and change. During the roundtable discussion, reflecting on James's critical positioning, Karega shed light on the Malcolm X Communication Academy's functioning as a site of knowledge construction and negotiation:

> We went to C.L.R.'s school along with the people who enrolled for his seminars at the academy. It wasn't a formal school and we didn't get a grade or degree. But we'd come to the seminars for one of C.L.R.'s lectures on a subject and learn all kinds of things. Or we'd get a copy of something he wrote and we'd study it beforehand. It was school. He would come in and address a chapter and you were expected to have read prior and to be prepared on the subject and prepared to discuss the subject when

the professor stood up. And that's what we did. But what was different is

from C.L.R we got an academic education that was also political. That

was what we needed for what we were trying to do with the BLFI.

It was James's academic *and* political education Karega described here that was

important in terms of shaping the BLFI activists ideological, political, and discursive

development.

But what was particularly unique about this academic *and* political education

James provided the BLFI activists (and all enrolled seminar participants) that proved

important in terms of shaping their ideological, political, and discursive development?

What specifically did the BLFI activists get from James's school that they believed they

couldn't get from their university courses and professors? What kinds of knowledge

construction and negotiation were the BLFI activists engaging as part of their

participation in James's seminar courses at the academy? The following sections attempt

to provide answers to these questions, examining what Karega and Abdul Jamal, during

the roundtable discussion, contextualized for the group as two particular instructional

elements that made James's academic *and* political education significant for the BLFI

activists.

C.L.R. James: Instructing the BLFI Activists on Discursive and Rhetorical Versatility

As Abdul Jamal explained during the roundtable discussion, James believed that

a great revolutionary leader, speaker, and writer is one who is discursively and

rhetorically versatile, equipped with the ability to understand people, communicate with

people, and articulate the desires of the people in their own terms. Helping the BLFI

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activists work through and come to terms with the functioning purpose and power of the revolutionary speaker and writer was an important part of James's work at the academy because it was important to the BLFI activists as they were working towards defining the goals and objectives of the BLFI. Karega explained:

> We needed to know how to take what we were learning and coming to understand and use it to go in and challenge folks but also share it with the Black community so people would better understand their plight and what they could do about it. But we knew how hard it would be to package revolution and communicate it to people who were the ones we were challenging and who were flat out against what we were trying to do and also communicate it to our own folks who were different from us and each other in all kinds of ways too. It's like this. Here's an example. We were of the frame of mind that you needed to be able to go into the boardroom and be able to talk to people on an intellectual level but at the same time get out into the streets and talk to the brother and sister too on a community level. And you needed to know when it was right to do each and you had to know what you were talking about.[51]

It was James's positioning as both an academic and Pan-African activist that made the BLFI activists believe that he was someone who could help them construct and refine their discursive and rhetorical practices for packaging the revolution Karega described for a diverse range of purposes and communicating it to a wide range of diverse audiences in a wide range of diverse contexts. Karega explained:

> When talking to us in the classes, he could go back and forth in the ways

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[51] Roundtable discussion on November 18, 2012

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that we were looking for. You know, he would talk to us on an intellectual level when he felt it was right, talking a lot of theory with us on all kinds of worldly, intellectual, and political issues. As an academic, he knew a lot of the jargon common to certain subjects and disciplines, and when talking with us he made sure he used it and that we understood what he was talking about and why knowing that jargon mattered. It mattered because it would ensure that we could, for example, go to any University forum on a subject important to us and participate in that forum intelligently. But then he knew when to talk practice if you know what I mean. He knew what practical talk sounded like and he knew when that was what was appropriate and necessary. He could give us plainly on any subject that "who," "where," "what," "why," and "when" Abdul talked about earlier. C.L.R could switch to talking practical talk with us about the stuff that was going on at MSU and in Lansing that we were confronting every day.[52]

But James's instruction on discursive and rhetorical versatility was not limited to a focus on orality and public speaking. He also worked with the BLFI activists and enrolled seminar participants, helping them to understand the functioning purpose and power of discursive and rhetorical versatility in terms of writing and the composition of written texts. Karega explained: "He also had us looking at his writings too. He didn't write say for instance his essay 'From Dubois to Fanon' in the same way that he wrote his essay 'State Capitalism and World Revolution.' They were written for different reasons and for different audiences so how he went about writing those two essays had to

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[52] Roundtable discussion on November 18, 2012

be different. We looked at that."[53] What Karega was discussing here was James's instruction during the seminar courses on the role that writer agency plays in the writing process. It's a concept that Min Zhan-Lu discusses in her article "Metaphors Matter: Transcultural Literacy." Lu talks about the concept of writer agency in the following way: "Agency means to engage in proactive deliberation over the actual sense of each instance of learning and writing and the why of writer's options and decisions" (290). In other words, this notion of writer agency is the "why to tinker or not" with language and discourse conventions "given the specificity of the contexts, commitments, and consequences of [a writer's] work" (290).

By having the BLFI activists and enrolled seminar participants look at the two texts comparatively, James, I would argue, was demonstrating for his students how those contexts, commitments, and consequences of a writer's work that Lu describes not only function as the basis for their motivations for engaging in the writing process in the first place, but also shape the resulting literacies. On the one hand, with the essay "From Dubois to Fanon," James was trying to not only chart a trajectory of Pan-African theory, politics, and activism that had been and was continuing to be at work on the African continent and throughout the African diaspora, but also position his own Pan-Africanist work in relation to it. It was a text arguably written to a Black audience — in particular, proponents of Pan-Africanism who would have had some familiarity with the names of some of the Pan-Africanist individuals James was referencing in the essay. As such, the text was discursively argumentative while at the same time discursively informal. That is, while James was decidedly making a powerful argument about the richness of a tradition of Pan-Africanism that could be located historically and contemporarily, James didn't

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[53] Roundtable discussion on November 18, 2012

spend a lot of time in the essay performing a critical analysis of the theories and politics of Pan-Africanists such as Fanon and Dubois. Rather, the text reads as a narrative explanation of sorts of the theories, practices, politics, and personalities of some of the notable figures attached to Pan-Africanist theory, politics, and activism — again, notable figures such as Dubois and Fanon.

On the other hand, "State Capitalism and Modern Revolution," published in 1950 in collaboration with Raja Dunayeyskaya and Grace Lee (later Grace Lee Boggs), was composed by James during the height of his disillusionment with Trotskyism and during the period when he was working diligently with the Johnson Forest Tendency. With "State Capitalism and Modern Revolution," James attempted to provide a critique of Lenin and Trotsky and their respective theories and practices and advance a reclamation of Marx and Marxism. His audience was arguably two populations of individuals — those who aligned themselves with Lenin and Trotsky and their respective theories and practices and those who were experiencing the same kind of disillusionment with the theoretical frameworks of individuals such as Trotsky and wanted a more dedicated focus on Marx and Marxism. As such, the text is heavy in theory and critical analysis of each of the theoretical frameworks under review by James.

It was this kind of comparative analysis of James's texts that the BLFI activists and enrolled seminar participants engaged as part of James's academic and political education on discursive and rhetorical versatility when composing texts. Moreover, as Karega explained during the roundtable discussion, it was this kind of comparative analysis of James's texts that encouraged the BLFI activists to value and privilege the kind of discursive and rhetorical versatility James demonstrated in his writings.

C.L.R. James: Instructing the BLFI Activists on the Writing of Revisionist Black Historiography

In terms of the second instructional element Abdul Jamal and Karega referenced, James devoted several sessions to helping the BLFI activists and all enrolled participants work through and come to terms with the functioning purpose and power of the writing of revisionist Black historiography. James accomplished this objective by having the BLFI activists and all enrolled participants read, interpret, and discuss the two texts he had authored and published almost thirty years prior. A second edition of *The Black Jacobians* had been released in 1963. Similarly, in 1969, James had given permission to Drum and Spear Press, an independent Black Nationalist oriented publishing house in Washington D.C., to re-issue *A History of Negro Revolt*. The title was changed to *A History of Pan-African Revolt* and James added an Epilogue discussing his intellectual and political development since the book was first published in 1938.

James placed both texts at the center of his seminar courses on the writing of revisionist Black historiography and, as Abdul Jamal explained during the roundtable discussion, it was the reading, interpreting, and discussing of these two texts that helped the BLFI activists understand how revisionist historical writing could be used subversively and politically in Black revolutionary struggle. Abdul Jamal explained the functioning purpose of this kind of instruction for the BLFI activists:

> In both of those books C.L.R. was rewriting our history. All I heard in
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> school about us — our history — was how we were slaves and how bad it
>
> was for us and how we were oppressed and powerless. It was made out
>
> like we were here sitting around waiting for Lincoln and the Civil War to

be free. And there was never any mention of what was going on with

Africans in the Caribbean. I knew we had found ways to counter slavery

through culture, religion, and other social means. But you couldn't tell me

that some of us here and in the Caribbean weren't challenging slavery in

other more physical and aggressive ways. Revolting I mean. We're all

reading this Marxist theory wanting so bad to just read and talk about

something that told us how we — Black people, Africans — have been the

proletariat revolting against oppression and dominance. Even if it hadn't

been successful, we wanted to read that and we wanted other people to

know what our revolutionary potential was and could be. That's where we

felt you had to begin — changing our understandings and Black people's

understandings as a whole of what our revolutionary potential was and

could be. C.L.R.'s books spoke to us on those frustrations and desires.[54]

What Abdul Jamal was describing here was a way of thinking that had been birthed for

many of the BLFI activists prior to their enrollment at MSU as undergraduate students.

For example, as I discussed in chapter three, working in and through hush harbor spaces,

Greg Kelley's mother not only instructed him on the importance of literacy in terms of

understanding Black Americans' contributions to American history, but also instructed

him on the importance of critical inquiry and the questioning of official historical

narratives. As Abdul Jamal explained in his recollection, through the reading,

interpreting, and discussing of *The Black Jacobians* and *The History of Pan-African

Revolt*, James was extending that mode of critical thinking for many of the BLFI

activists.

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[54] Roundtable discussion on November 18, 2012

But James was also bringing something new to the table so to speak — something new that during the roundtable discussion Abdul Jamal indicated the BLFI activists wanted but didn't really know how to go about creating. James was showing them how and to what end they could actualize and enact that mode of critical thinking in and through text. In particular, James helped the BLFI activists and all enrolled seminar participants understand how a recontextualized appropriation of discursive practices traditionally particular to Eurocentric and Western scholarship could be used intentionally and politically in the writing of revisionist Black historiography. In this sense, James was bringing another critical voice to the conversations the BLFI activists were having at The People's House in which they were trying to reconcile Fanon's writings on language and decolonization, Kamuyu's work on African names, and what they learned through the mentorship of Ernie Boone and their participation in journalistic writing as part of the staff of *The Westside News*.

During an interview on May 25, 2013, Karega provided the contexts and circumstances that made James's inclusion of this instructional element in the seminar courses important for the BLFI activists:

> You'd be surprised at the kinds of classes we were taking at the MSU. Or maybe not. But most of us were taking some heavy-hitting courses in philosophy, history, and political science. We were reading all kinds of stuff in these classes — like Hegel and Marx. And I'll tell you, the stuff Hegel and Marx wrote made sense to us. It really did. But there was a problem. We weren't satisfied that we could make those theories work for us and what we were doing. So we were more than anxious to hear from

someone who could talk about the strengths and short falls of those

theories and who had reworked those theories for the Black experience.

Throughout his career James had done exactly what Karega was describing here in this

recollection. Speaking specifically about James, here's how post-colonial theorist Edward

Said described how intellectuals from colonial regimes were using the weapons of

European and Western philosophy to advance arguments in support of Black resistance

efforts on the African continent and throughout the diaspora: "These figures address the

metropolis using the techniques, the discourses, the very weapons of scholarship and

criticism once reserved exclusively for the European, now adapted either for insurgency

or revisionism at the heart of the Western center" (29). James, in particular, had used the

weapons of European and Western philosophy in his efforts to write revisionist histories

that would challenge what he described in *The History of Negro Revolt* as "established

fictions" about the revolutionary history and potential of Black laborers (enslaved and

free). As James argued in that same text, "The only place where Negroes did not revolt is

in the pages of capitalist historians." As such, James made it part of his life-work to

construct revisionist Black historiographies that drew upon a Marxist lens of

interpretation reworked with a Pan-African theoretical base. James's kind of Black

historiography articulated a more nuanced history of Black revolt on the African

continent and throughout the diaspora.

But as Karega explained during the roundtable discussion, it was important for

James to share with the BLFI activists and enrolled seminar participants the "how to" and

the contexts and circumstances necessitating that kind of work. For example, as Robin

DG Kelley in *Race Rebels* explains, with *The Black Jacobians* James was attempting to

write "history from below." That is, by focusing on Black revolting laborers in the San Domingo colony and trying to show how they developed a racial and class consciousness that propelled their collective resistance and attack against the bourgeoisie, James was attempting to "revis[e] the history of Western revolutions by placing race, culture, and the agency of African people — the slaves, ex-slaves, and the free Black populace — at the center of the story" (5). James did not view the revolting Black laborers of the San Domingo colony as what Kelley describes as the "passive products of economic exploitation and distortion" (5). Rather, James saw the revolting Black laborers of San Domingo as "the newly created proletariat" (5) who exhibited a great amount of revolutionary potential. In the chapter entitled "The San Domingo Masses Begin," James wrote:

> The slaves worked in the land, and, like revolutionary peasants everywhere, they arrived at the extermination of their oppressors. But working and living together in gangs of hundreds on the huge sugar-factories which covered the North Plains, they were closer to a modern proletariat than any group of workers in existence at the time, and the uprising was, therefore, a thoroughly prepared and organized mass movement (85-86).

This notion of the Haitian Revolution as "prepared" and "organized" and embodied by the socio-political agency of Black laborers free and enslaved provided a direct challenge to Euro-centric historical narratives, which had traditionally failed to contextualize the Haitian Revolution as derived from an amalgamation of economic and racial forces and relationships, characterizing it instead as simply a barbaric slave insurrection.

It was this kind of reading, interpreting, and discussing of James's *The Black Jacobians* that was taking place during the seminar courses at the academy. More specifically, it was this kind of literate engagement taking place in James's seminar courses at the academy that spoke directly to what Abdul Jamal recalled the BLFI activists desperately wanted — an opportunity "to just read and talk about something that told us how we — Black people, Africans—have been the proletariat revolting against oppression and dominance."[55]

But it wasn't just the act of revisioning the Haitian Revolution in scholarship using a Marxist/Pan-Africanist lens of interpretation — a theoretical apparatus of global colonial order that included considerations of class *and* race — that proved attractive to the BLFI activists. As Karega and Abdul Jamal both explained, it was also how James constructed this revisioning of the Haitian revolution in the text that proved attractive to the BLFI activists. Historical writing is a genre that has traditionally been noted for its insistence on so-called objectivity. But in his efforts to write the history of the Haitian Revolution from below, James took a slightly different approach. In terms of discursive techniques, what James attempted to *do* in and through *The Black Jacobians* was paint an active narrative picture of the growth of organized discontent among Haitian Black laborers (slave and free), while providing social and political commentary on these contexts and circumstances.

For example, appropriating traditional rhetorics of historical writing James did spend time in the first half of *The Black Jacobians* educating his readers on the economic workings of the pre-revolutionary San Domingo colony. In particular, drawing upon historical records, census reports, and statistics, James discussed the slave-labor trade and

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[55] Roundtable discussion on November 18, 2012

the methods of production of resources such as sugar, cotton, hides, molasses, cocoa, and rum that made the pre-revolutionary San Domingo colony excel economically. But writing this "history from below," James spent a considerable amount of time in *The Black Jacobians* describing and commenting on the brutal everyday realities for Haitian slaves and the free Black populace. Here's an example of how James discussed the history of slave punishment in the pre-revolutionary San Domingo colony:

> For the least fault the slaves received the harshest punishment. In 1685 the Negro Code authorized whipping…The whip was not always an ordinary cane or woven cord, as the Code demanded. Sometimes it was replaced by the rigoise or thick thong of cow-hide, or by the lianes — local growths of reeds, supple and pliant like whalebone. The slaves received the whip with more certainty and regularity than they received their food…Whipping was interrupted in order to pass a piece of hot wood on the buttocks of the victim; salt, pepper, citron, cinders, aloes, and hot ashes were poured on the bleeding wounds. Mutilations were common, limbs, ears, and sometimes private parts, to deprive them of the pleasures they could indulge in without expense. Their masters poured burning wax on their arms and hands and shoulders, emptied the boiling sugar cane over their heads, burned them alive, roasted them on slow fires, filled them with gunpowder and blew them up with a match; buried them up to the neck and smeared their heads with sugar that the flies might devour them; fastened them near to nests of ants or wasps; made them eat their own excrement, drink their urine, and lick the saliva of other slaves…Were

these tortures, so well authenticated, habitual or were they merely isolated

incidents, the extravagances of a few half-crazed colonists? Impossible as

it is to substantiate hundreds of cases, yet all the evidence shows that these

bestial practices were normal features of slave life. (12-13)

Drawing upon the writings of those who had observed and documented the institution of

slavery at work in the San Domingo colony — in particular, the writings of Girod

Chantras and the Frenchman Pierre de Vaissiere — James weaved together a description

of a historical law (the Negro Code of 1685) with a narrative portrayal of just how that

law was enacted in San Domingo slave culture. In this sense, James not only took on the

agency of the traditional historian, informing his readers (including the BLFI activists) on

the harsh realities of slave punishment in the pre-revolutionary San Domingo colony, but

he also brought those harsh realities to life so to speak, playing to the emotive power that

is often generated through the reading and interpreting of such events and circumstances

in narrative form.

But immediately after introducing his readers to the harsh realities of slave

punishment in the pre-revolutionary San Domingo colony, James did something that

many historians refrain from doing in their work. He attached his own personal socio-

political commentary to his description of the Negro Code of 1685 and his narrative

portrayal of how that law was enacted in San Domingo slave culture. James wrote:

After an exhaustive examination, the best that de Vaissiere can say is that

there were good masters and there were bad, and his impression, "but only

an impression," is that the former were more numerous than the latter.

There are and always will be some who, ashamed of the behavior of their

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ancestors, try to prove that slavery was not so bad after all, that its evils

and its cruelty were the exaggerations of propagandists and not the

habitual lot of the salves. Men will say (and accept) anything in order to

foster national pride or soothe a troubled conscience. (13)

Seemingly addressing his audience, James used the observations of one of the sources of

his historical information — Pierre de Vaissiere — in order to interject his own critique

of the ways in which the harsh realities of slavery and slave culture in the San Domingo

colony had been (and were continuing to be) downplayed by historians, government

officials, and all those invested in morally and institutionally eradicating the stain of

slavery.

This merging of historical fact, active narration, and socio-political commentary

gave the BLFI activists an exemplar for how they could write revisionist Black

historiography using alternative rhetorical and discursive strategies.

Summary

Working from the premise that the traces of meaning enacted and the social,

political, and discursive commitments forged in and through the BLFI activists' "traffic"

experiences were an integral part of their negotiation processes for their political

literacies, in this chapter I have introduced two sites of knowledge construction and

negotiation for the BLFI activists during their tenure at MSU — The People's House and

the Malcolm X Communication Academy. In an effort to locate and identify these traces

of meaning and social, political, and discursive commitments, I have examined what the

BLFI activists were reading, interpreting, and discussing in and through their engagements with these two sites.

In terms of their engagements with The People's House, on the one hand, the BLFI activists were reading, interpreting, and discussing the texts of speakers and writers that identified themselves as Black Nationalist or Pan-African in theory, politics, and practice. In particular, the BLFI activists spent a lot of time at The People's House reading, interpreting, and discussing Stokely Carmichael and Michael Thelwell's position paper on Black Power. The reading, interpreting, and discussing of the position paper on Black Power gave the BLFI activists a literate engagement with the notion of Black Power and they valued and privileged the position paper on Black Power as an exemplary model for how to take a theory of Black resistance and translate it and bring it to life textually on an organizational and practical level. Since most of the BLFI activists had a background in journalism, what Carmichael and Thelwell were *doing* in and through the position paper on Black Power was significant to the BLFI activists because it provided the kinds of answers to all of the standard questions any trained journalist would have been inclined to ask of those advancing arguments in support of Black Power and its possibilities as a strategy of resistance in the struggle for Black liberation in the U.S. Similarly, the speeches and writings of the African revolutionary, leader, and activist Kwame Nkrumah were elevated to the same kind of significance for the BLFI activists because they gave the BLFI activists new words, concepts, and ideas that they could use in their work as part of the BLFI — mainly discursively enacted critiques of neocolonialism and a rhetoric of revisionist education reform that valued and privileged African-centered curricula and revisionist African historiography.

On the other hand, the BLFI activists were trying to work through their understandings of the functioning purpose and power of language and naming practices for Black revolutionary struggle by reading, interpreting, and discussing at The People's House Frantz Fanon's writings on language and colonization and Kamuyu's extracurricular graduate work on African naming practices. It was Kamuyu's publication *What is Your African Name* that helped the BLFI activists not only identify the strategies and tactics involved in the practice of stripping African names, but also understand the psychological effects of naming practices and the correlative relationships among African naming practices and the construction and enactment of African diasporic cultures and heritages. Moreover, it was the reading, interpreting, and discussing of Kamuyu's twenty-three page text at The People's House that prompted the BLFI activists to forge a commitment to understanding that how a person is linguistically identified (either through self-identification of through imposition) has social, political, and cultural implications for a people engaged in revolutionary struggle against imperialism, racism, and oppression. But it was the negotiating of Fanon's writings on language and colonization with what they were learning from Kamuyu's work on African Naming practices and what they had learned about the relationships among language and writing through the mentorship of Ernie Boone and their participation in journalistic writing as part of the staff of *The Westside News* that helped the BLFI activists do two things: (1) work through their efforts to complicate the notion that subordinate peoples cannot use language mimesis of the dominant culture as a discursive strategy for constructing and enacting agency and (2) establish their commitments to using mimicry of the dominate culture's language and discourse practices intentionally as a political strategy, a tactic of

dissent for subverting oppressive social and political orders and their respective structures.

In terms of their engagements with the Malcolm X Communication Academy, it was the academic and political education the BLFI activists received from C.L.R. James's seminar courses that proved important in shaping their ideological, political, and discursive development and helping them further extend their own social, political, and discursive commitments. In particular, it was their comparative examination of James's writings in his seminar courses that helped the BLFI activists learn to value and privilege the revolutionary speaker and writer as one who is discursively and rhetorically versatile, equipped with the ability to understand people, communicate with people, and articulate the desires of the people in their own terms. Moreover, from James's seminar courses at the academy the BLFI activists learned how and to what end revisionist historical writing could be used subversively and politically in Black revolutionary struggle. More specifically, from James's seminar courses, the BLFI activists learned to value and privilege the use of a recontextualized appropriation of European and Western philosophies to write revisionist Black historiography that articulated a more nuanced history of Black revolt on the African continent and throughout the diaspora. In addition, they learned to value and privilege a kind of revisionist Black historiography that, in terms of discursive strategies and techniques, blended the use of historical fact, active narration, and socio-political commentary.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE BLFI ACTIVISTS' POSITIONAL WRITING PRACTICES:
RECONTEXTUALIZATION, TRANSFER, AND COUNTER-LITERACIES

In this chapter, I identify several strategies the BLFI activists adopted for composing their position papers, and I analyze the situated contexts, layers of meanings, and productive effects tied to these strategies. For example, in the first section, I examine the strategies the BLFI activists used for creating discursively hybrid position papers. I characterize some of their position papers as discursively hybrid because they are populated by the theoretical and practical discourses that have traditionally constituted what Cedric Robinson in *Black Marxism* defines as Black radicalism. In my analysis, I discuss the ways in which the composing of these discursively hybrid position papers mediated their efforts to assume a lead role in the politicization and radicalization of Black MSU students and Black student activism at MSU. In addition, I analyze their strategies for composing discursively hybrid position papers as acts of transfer and repurposing, and I examine the ways in which the BLFI activists functioned as what Rebecca Nowacek describes as "acts of integration" (35) who repurpose and "sell" their writing to various audiences.

My analysis continues in section two with an examination of the ways in which the narrative reporting practices the BLFI activists adopted for composing position papers on the African Studies Center controversy at MSU functioned as what Alastair

Pennycook, in *Language as a Local Practice*, describes as counter-literacies. In particular, I examine the ways in which these narrative reporting practices mediated their efforts to challenge and reverse power relations at work with the ASC and assume a level of access in and control over the structure and orientation of the ASC and the discipline of African Studies at MSU. I also point to these narrative practices as mediators of the BLFI activists' work in positioning themselves as active agents in a larger work that was not only ideologically rooted in critique of the institutional relationship between post-secondary colleges/universities and students of African descent, but also organizationally focused on developing a reconstructed brand of higher education that attended to the experiences and needs of African diasporic peoples.

Discursive Hybridity and the Politicization and Radicalization of Black MSU Students and Black Student Activism at MSU

As a student-based organization at MSU, one of the objectives for the BLFI activists was to politicize and radicalize Black MSU students on a subjective and organizational level. The BLFI activists were very critical about the state of Black student activism at MSU during their tenure as undergraduates. In an interview for a *State News* article published on March 5, 1970, Chui Karega made the following statement: "Black students formerly were political activists. The black student movement in the United States has gone from the sit-in stage, through the militant stage, to the present inert stage." Karega insisted that Black MSU students needed "a political revival to renew the resistance movement in the United States."

But this was a specific brand of politicization and radicalization of Black MSU students that Karega was calling for in the interview. In a statement published in the *State*

News on May 16, 1970, Abdul Jamal also critiqued the state of Black student activism at MSU by analyzing it within the context of the kind of Black student activism that had been at work nationally several years prior:

> In 1968-69 black students were among the most progressive in the country. There was always some kind of activity going on. Not activity for the sake of activity, but activity based on concrete study and practice…The failures of black students to be a progressive force at MSU is not just a problem of outside forces…Until some black students or a large group of black students decide to seriously study student organizational and ideological problems, black students will remain subject to the whims of an educational system which is systematically opposed to the plight of black and other oppressed people.

The politicization and radicalization of Black MSU students, Abdul Jamal continued theorizing, had to involve three elements: "concrete goals, objectives, and functional organizational definitions." In particular, these concrete goals, Abdul Jamal argued, needed to include "something more than just the word freedom."

So here in Abdul Jamal's statement we see the BLFI activists pushing for a specific brand of politicization and radicalization of Black MSU students that involved a reimagining of the agencies of Black MSU students and a reworking and redefining of the practices that constituted Black student activism at MSU. We see the BLFI activists calling for Black MSU students to adopt an agency and set of practices rooted in a kind of Black political radicalism that emphasized the integration of theory and practice.

In the context of these efforts, the position paper served a functional purpose, helping the BLFI activists actualize this reimagining of the agencies of Black MSU students and this redefining and reworking of Black student activism at MSU. As Pennycook argues in *Language as a Local Practice*, genres are not "fixed textual categorizations" (122), but rather "temporary ways of getting things done with language" (122). But instead of using the position paper as a means of exhorting Black MSU students to take on these processes of reimagining, redefining, and reworking on their end, I contend that the BLFI activists adopted the position paper to assume a lead role in undertaking these processes.

Pennycook's work is also useful here in terms of understanding the BLFI activists' use of the position paper within the context individual and group identity formation. In *Global Englishes and Transcultural Flows*, Pennycook uses a discussion of Judith Butler's notion of performativity as a way of rethinking relationships between language and identity. As Pennycook argues, performativity emphasizes "the productive force of language in constituting identity rather than identity being a pregiven construct that is reflected in language use" (70-71). In other words, identities are brought to life and sedimented over time by our ongoing and everyday social, cultural, and political language performances. In terms of the BLFI activists, the argument can be made that they used the position paper to bring to life and construct themselves and the work of the BLFI within the context of the kind of Black political radicalism they wanted to see actualized in the agencies of Black MSU students and localized at MSU and in surrounding Lansing communities. More specifically, I'm arguing here that by composing discursively hybrid position papers populated by the theoretical and practical

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discourses that have traditionally constituted what Cedric Robinson in *Black Marxism* describes as Black radicalism, the BLFI activists constructed themselves and the BLFI's work as part of the kind of Black political radicalism that Abdul Jamal stressed as exigent in his statement. This Black political radicalism that Abdul Jamal emphasized as exigent was a form of Black political resistance that emphasized the integration of theory and practice.

We've seen the BLFI activists' engagements with a similar kind of discursive strategy. In chapter four, we learned that through their rhetorical and literate engagements with James's discursive practices the BLFI activists were negotiating strategies for discursively uniting theory and practice for the cause of Black liberation. Through Abdul Jamal's recollections in chapter four, we also learned that the BLFI activists highly valued Stokely Carmichael and Michael Thelwell's work in using the position paper to construct and narrate the subjective and organizational possibilities of Black Power for Black Americans. What proved attractive — Abdul Jamal recalled — was how Carmichael and Thellwell went beyond mere ideological articulations by positioning Black Power within the context of the theoretical and practical discourses that have traditionally framed Black Nationalist and Pan-African politics.

My argument here is that the BLFI activists adopted the strategy of composing discursively hybrid position papers by repurposing and recontextualizing the knowledge they acquired through their rhetorical and literate engagements with both James's discursive practices and Carmichael and Thelwell's work with the position paper. On the surface, this strategy for composing position papers perhaps reads as lacking in sophistication — a mere valorization of James's work and a mere appropriation of

Carmichael and Thellwell's strategy. But I challenge this interpretation and claim the nuance at work with the BLFI activists' adoption of this strategy. Using this strategy the BLFI activists were producing new meanings and effects by establishing connections between prior knowledge they acquired through their rhetorical and literate engagements and the contextual factors surrounding the production of each discursively hybrid position paper they composed for the BLFI (e.g. purpose, location, audience, material conditions, power relations, etc.).

Current research in rhetoric and composition on transfer is useful here in terms of understanding the nuances of recontextualization and repurposing practices. Drawing on a series of case studies and analytic data gathered from her work with a team-taught interdisciplinary learning community, Rebecca Nowacek argues that transfer is best understood as an act of recontextualization. Nowacek outlines five principles underlying the idea of transfer as recontextualization, but for the purpose of this discussion I want to focus on one in particular. Nowacek argues that transfer understood as recontextualization is both an act of application and an act of reconstruction. On the one hand, understanding transfer as application is synonymous with understanding the practice of "bringing knowledge or skills from an earlier context into contact with a later context, the earlier context shedding light on and changing the perception of the later" (25). To exemplify the workings of transfer as application, Nowacek points to how one of the students from her study used factual knowledge from his history class (a reference to Martin Luther) to provide support for a claim he was making in his paper on *Doctor Faustus* for his literature class that knowledge equals power. On the other hand, quoting Veronica Boix Mansilla's definition of "interdisciplinary understanding," Nowacek

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characterizes transfer as reconstruction as "the capacity to integrate knowledge and modes of thinking drawn from two or more disciplines to produce a cognitive advancement" (26). To exemplify the workings of transfer as reconstruction, Nowacek points to another student from her study who drew upon a network of resources (her identity, prior educational knowledge and ways of knowing, and her feminist goals) in order to generate a topic for a paper on the French Revolution. With both acts of transfer — application and reconstruction — Nowacek argues that writers (student-writers for her study) act as "agents of integration" who consciously in varying degrees work to "not only 'see' connections among previously disparate contexts but also to 'sell' those connections, to render them appropriate and convincing to their various audiences" (39).

Extending Nowacek's work on transfer is Kevin Roozen's work on repurposing. One of the limitations of Nowacek's study is its narrow scope of inquiry on how students transfer knowledge acquired in educational settings. Roozen extends the scope of inquiry beyond academic contexts by "investigating the repurposing of extradisciplinary practices in the development of disciplinary activities" (320). Roozen uses Steve Witte's concept of "intertextuality" to qualify the extension of his scope of inquiry. Drawing upon the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, Julia Kristeva, and others, Witte argues that the concept of "intertextuality" can be understood as a "hypothesis about the source of the experience and the prior knowledge critical to the writing and reading process" (252). Roozen explains how Witte's concept of "intertextuality" draws attention to key concerns in terms of understanding the development of writing expertise:

> First, it illuminates the broad range of encounters with texts beyond the
> immediate context that are relevant to textual production…Second, it

illuminates the creative repurposing of practices and processes involved in

textual invention, production, and use across contexts…Third, it calls

attention to the transformation of practice not only across contexts but

across a range of semiotic modes of representational media as well.

Finally, it foregrounds the extensive array of "minor" forms of writing and

texts, including lists, labels, and notes, involved in textual production and

use. (321)

Working from his understanding of Witte's concept of "intertextuality," Roozen

conducted a longitudinal study, tracing how one student developed and enhanced her

writing for her English Studies courses by drawing upon several extradisciplinary

practices (prayer journaling, Bible verse-copying, her participation in graphic design, her

encounters with writing on the closet door of her family's summer cottage, her fourth-

grade science project, and other rhetorical and literate engagements). For example, in his

analysis section, Roozen discusses how the student's efforts to coordinate this network of

diverse texts and practices shaped the arrangement of her argument for a literary analysis

paper and deepened her understanding of the novels and articles she was using as source

material.

So while Nowacek describes this work using the notion of transfer as

recontextualization, Roozen describes these processes as repurposing and points to the

importance of understanding how the writing process is informed by extradisciplinary

texts and discourses and the interplays between a writer's multiple literate, rhetorical, and

social engagements. Together, both approaches empower us to claim the nuance at work

with the BLFI activists' adoption of the strategy of composing discursively hybrid

position papers for the BLFI. In other words, we can claim agency at work in their

decisions to use the knowledge they acquired from their rhetorical and literate

engagements with James's discursive practices and Carmichael and Thelwell's work with

the position paper to assist their invention processes for their position papers.[56] In

addition, we can interpret the layers of meaning and productive effects tied to the BLFI

activists' work as agents of integration as they composed their position papers by

populating them with the theoretical and practical discourses that have traditionally

constituted Black radicalism.[57]

Let me take a moment here and try to contextualize and descriptively frame the

characteristics of these theoretical and practical discourses that have traditionally

constituted Black radicalism. In *Black Marxism*, Robinson maps what he describes as

"the historical and intellectual contours of the encounter of Marxism and Black

radicalism" (1). Although they "each represent a significant and immanent mode of social

resolution" (1), Robinson argues that Marxism and Black radicalism are "so distinct as to

be incommensurable" (1). He devotes much of his study to qualifying that argument. As a

productive agent of revolutionary critique and change, Marxism, Robinson argues, is a

Western construction. More specifically, it is "a conceptualization of human affairs and

historical development which is emergent from the historical experiences of European

peoples mediated, in turn, through their civilization, their social orders, and their

cultures" (2). As such, its analytical prescriptions, historical perspectives, and points of

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[56] The ways in which the BLFI activists engaged these acts of transfer and repurposing as a community of writers composing in reactive writing contexts is beyond the scope of this study.

[57] Evaluations of how effective the BLFI activists' "sold" the connections they were making to the imagined and realized audiences for their position papers are also beyond the scope of this study.

view, Robinson argues, are also decidedly Western, emerging from and informed by this epistemological substratum.

Robinson also understands Black radicalism as a productive agent of social critique and change — a form of Black collective resistance. But he argues its distinctiveness:

> It is not a variant of Western radicalism whose proponents happen to be Black. Rather, it is a specifically African response to an oppression emergent from the immediate detriments of European developments in the modern era and forced by orders of human exploitation woven into the interstices of European social life from the inception of Western civilization" (97).

Implicit and explicit in the theoretical and epistemological frameworks of Black radicalism is both a belief in the insufficiency of Western radicalism, and in particular, a critique of Marxism. As Robinson points out, the Black radicals who were playing an important role in constituting the Black radicalism from which they were emerging, were "particularly troubled by the casual application of preformed categories to Black social movements" (447). Moreover, they believed that "Western Marxists, unconsciously bound by Eurocentric perspective, could not account for nor correctly assess the revolutionary forces emerging from the Third World" (447). Robinson cites as examples Black radicals such as C.L.R. James, W.E.B. Dubois, and Richard Wright, and he discusses each of their intellectual and organizational engagements with Marxism and their subsequent movements towards Black radicalism.

In the context of Robinson's discussions of Dubois, James, and Wright, we get a clear understanding of the theoretical and practical discourses that have traditionally constituted Black radicalism. When I speak of the theoretical discourses of Black radicalism, I am referencing discourses that frame Black radicalism's approach to the problem of revolutionary change on a theoretical, ideological, and/or philosophical level. These theoretical discourses of Black radicalism extend beyond what Robinson describes as Marxist grammar for "synthesizing the degradation of capitalist production and accelerating technological development, the increasing resort to state coercion mediated by bureaucratic rationalism, and the strangulation of whole regions (most of them former colonies) through pricing mechanisms, market manipulation, monopolization of advanced technology, the international organization of production, international banking, military assistance, and the stultifying dependencies of monocultural economies" (416-417). When I speak of the practical discourses of Black radicalism, I am referencing discourses that attend to the political instrumentation and implementation of Black radicalism. In other words, I am referencing discourses that construct a set of political and organizational practices that mediate the work of that distinct African response to the kind of racialized oppression Robinson describes as emergent from European development and imperialism and sustained by the fact that it has been and continues to be woven into the fabric of European and Western societies and their respective institutions.

The following listing contains examples of these theoretical and practical discourses of Black radicalism:[58]

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[58] This list is not intended to represent an exhaustive characterization of the theoretical and practical discourses of Black radicalism.

<u>Theoretical Discourses That Construct Black Radicalism</u>

- discourses that situate Black Americans subjectively and politically within an international context of Africa and the Third world
- discourses that theorize historical linkages between Black people in Africa and throughout the diaspora
- discourses that provide insights into the nature of capitalist development and revolutionary agency using an interpretive lens that assigns global and historical significance to the Black worker, Black experiences, and the social relations of Black people
- discourses that theorize the social processes of Black revolution
- discourses that authorize culture and consciousness as just as powerful in shaping human agency, choice, and behavior as the material reproduction of society
- discourses that construct understandings of an African social and historical consciousness
- discourses that project a vision of the psychic and cultural identities of the Black proletariat
- discourses that analyze and critique the systematic relationship between capitalism, state power, and racialized oppression
- discourses that articulate an anti-logic to racism, capitalism, and imperialism
- discourses that give the processes and workings of racism, capitalist domination and exploitation, state-sanctioned racialized oppression, and/or imperialism concrete, historical appearances

<u>Practical Discourses That Construct Black Radicalism</u>

- discourses that posit methods for challenging, decentering, deconstructing, resisting, and eliminating the processes and workings of racism, capitalist domination and exploitation, and imperialism
- discourses that describe and/or paint an active picture of manifested expressions of Black radicalism (e.g. marronage, open rebellion, 19th century Black Abolitionism, the work of American Black Nationalist politics, African and Third World decolonization work, Black obeah at work in the San Domingo colony, the development of the Pan-African Congress, the rhetorics and literacies of Black radicals such as Dubois, C.L.R James, Angela Davis, David Walker, Malcolm X, Kwame Nkrumah, etc.)

From the BLFI activists' recollections in chapters three and four, we know that they were

listening to, reading, critically analyzing, and discussing the speeches and writings of

Black radicals who frequently used these theoretical and practical discourses to frame

their political arguments and their academic/intellectual work. To obtain a clear

understanding of how this network of rhetorical and literate activities shaped the BLFI

activists' positional writing practices in terms of purpose, meanings, and effects, let's

take a look at two of the position papers the BLFI activists composed for the BLFI. The

first is a shorter position paper entitled "The BLFI's Philosophies and Programs."

Composed in the fall of 1970, this shorter text was one of the first position papers the

BLFI activists drafted as part of their political work. As Karega explained in an interview

on May 23, 2013, the imagined and realized audiences for this position paper consisted of

university publics. It was printed on plain-style paper and distributed campus-wide.

The BLFI activists began "The BLFI's Philosophies and Positions" by stating in

the first paragraph the BLFI's mission statement:

> The BLFI was organized to facilitate the development of Pan-African
> unity, to politicize and radicalize students, to protect the interests of
> people of African descent in western educational institutions, to assist
> Black communities in their struggle against racism, colonialism, and
> imperialism.

Here in this first paragraph we see the BLFI activists articulating a set of practices using a

string of action verbs — to facilitate, to politicize and radicalize, to protect, and to assist.

Arguably, by articulating this set of practices early on in the position paper, the BLFI

activists were trying to introduce the BLFI to university publics by constructing the

organizational character of the BLFI within the context of the kind of work that has

traditionally emerged from and framed Black radicalism. These are practices that

explicitly and implicitly speak to the work of challenging, decentering, deconstructing, resisting, and eliminating the processes and workings of racism, capitalist domination and exploitation, and imperialism.

But as the text progresses its discursive character and structure changes. The second paragraph reads as follows:

> We believe in complete freedom, independence and self-determination for all people of African descent and Third World descent. We believe that we must move in the direction of Black Nationalism and Pan-Africanism to control and develop our communities worldwide. We believe that we must eliminate all destructive political, economic, and social forces that threaten the survival of our people. We believe that all black people have the right to utilize any and/or all means necessary to insure the security and perpetuation of our race and heritage. We believe in supporting all black organizations, whenever possible that have the revolutionary interest of our people at heart. We believe that no black man is free until all are free. We believe that the African in the Americas, Caribbean, and Africa is an average and ordinary human being who will develop and produce if he has the environment in which to do so.

Each sentence begins with the phrase "we believe." This repetitious use of the phrase "we believe" could also be read as a demonstration of a lack of discursive sophistication on the part of the BLFI activists. Again, I would argue against this interpretation. In *Analyzing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Research*, Norman Fairclough posits the importance of the pronoun "we" in terms of identificational meanings. That is, Fairclough emphasizes how the pronoun "we" is commonly used by speakers and writers to construct groups and communities. When we take into account both Abdul Jamal and Karega's statements and recollections about the BLFI activists' efforts to politicize and radicalize Black MSU students and Black student activism at MSU, it can be argued that the BLFI activists' repetitious use of the phrase "we believe" is indicative of their attempts to prepare the imagined and targeted readership — university publics — to read

the position paper in a way that understands the BLFI as a unified group and community of participants working from a sense of shared experiences, viewpoints, commitments, and purposes and working towards a sense of shared goals and objectives.

But more specifically, I would also argue that these "we believe" phrases provide additional evidence that the BLFI activists were engaging in acts of transfer and repurposing as they composed this position paper. Each "we believe" sentence is a short declarative statement articulating either a theoretical or practical discourse of Black radicalism. Again, when we take into account both Abdul Jamal and Karega's statements and recollections about the BLFI activists' efforts to politicize and radicalize Black MSU students and Black student activism at MSU, the argument can be made that these short declarative statements were being used by the BLFI activists to establish a rhetoric of particularity geared towards exhorting (and even cajoling) their readers — university publics — into an acceptance of the BLFI — its work and its members — as particularly radical and political in theory AND practice. The "we believe" phrases can be viewed as signaling devices designed by the BLFI activists to alert readers of two things: (1) that the discourses articulated in each declarative statement share a commonality in terms of their association with a specific brand of Black activism and (2) that collectively each declarative statement in the paragraph positions them and their work within this specific brand of Black activism — one that integrates theory and practice.

From this perspective, the BLFI activists were engaging in acts of repurposing and transfer as reconstruction. In other words, through their negotiation and coordination of the knowledge they acquired from that network of rhetorical and literate activities, the BLFI activists created a blueprint for developing the position paper in terms of purpose,

structure, and argument. This knowledge they acquired from that network of rhetorical and literate activities was multifaceted: (1) knowledge about the content properties and functional purposes of the theoretical and practical discourses of Black radicalism, (2) knowledge about potential strategies for discursively uniting theory and practice for the cause of Black liberation, and (3) knowledge on how to use the position paper to discursively construct radicalized forms of Black resistance on a subjective and organization level. I would argue that with these "we believe" phrases operating as signaling devices, the BLFI activists were attempting to make visible[59] to readers — university publics — the connection they were making between the knowledge they acquired from that network of rhetorical and literate activities and the work they were attempting to *do* through the position paper.

As I stated earlier, this work they were doing through this position paper was about taking on a lead role in the politicization and radicalization of Black students at MSU and Black student activism at MSU. So rather than using the position paper to exhort Black MSU students to adopt on a subjective and organizational level a kind of Black political that integrates theory and practice, the discursive hybridity at work in this second paragraph was used by the BLFI activists to mediate their engagements in those processes of reimagining, redefining, and reworking that were helping them take up this work on their end. For example, although these discourses were not fully developed, in this second paragraph there are theoretical discourses that both situate Black Americans subjectively and politically within an international context of Africa and the Third world and theorize historical linkages between Black people in Africa and Black people

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[59] Again, as I stated earlier, evaluating whether or not this act of transfer was "sold" to the intended buyers—university publics—is beyond the scope of this study.

throughout the diaspora. The "complete freedom, independence, and self-determination" the BLFI activists spoke of in this paragraph extended to "all people of African descent and Third World descent." Moreover, they were theorizing here a connectedness between peoples of African and Third World descent by linking "the African in the Americas, Caribbean, and Africa" in their discussion of the potentialities arising from the development of Black peoples and by affirming their belief in collective liberation for Black peoples. As they stated at the end of the paragraph, "no black man" could be free "until all are free."

But through this second paragraph the BLFI activists also took that additional step in those processes of reimagining, redefining, and reworking — that additional step towards a kind of Black political radicalism that Abdul Jamal indicated had to also have concrete goals, objectives, and functional organizational definitions. And remember, Abdul Jamal argued in his statement that these concrete goals needed to include "something more than just the word freedom." So here in this second paragraph, we see the BLFI activists integrating again into the text practical discourses of Black radicalism to construct themselves and the work of the BLFI according to this directive. For example, we see the BLFI activists establishing their organizational work using discourses that construct the nature of Black revolutionary organization. Again, although these discourses are not fully developed, clearly by indicating their intent to "move in the direction of Black Nationalism and Pan-Africanism to control and develop our communities worldwide," the BLFI activists were actualizing concrete goals, objectives, and functional organizational definitions for the BLFI and constructing its work within the context of Black radicalism. We also see the BLFI activists again framing their own

organizational work using discourses that posit methods for challenging, decentering, deconstructing, resisting, and eliminating the processes and workings of racism, capitalist domination and exploitation, and imperialism. Their concrete goals and objectives — as described in the text — included work designed to "eliminate all destructive political, economic, and social forces that threaten the survival of our people." Again, although this discourse is not developed and supported, the BLFI activists were clearly trying to construct themselves as practical agents in the work of a kind of Black radicalism that emphasized direct opposition to the systematic workings of racialized forms of state power, imperialism, and capitalist domination and exploitation.

By the time the BLFI activists wrote "Africans Must Limit Fighting to Struggle for Their Own Liberation" a year and a half later, they had extended this strategy for composing discursively hybrid position papers. Perhaps this extension work was motivated by shifts in material contexts and shifts in purpose. As I stated, "The BLFI's Philosophies and Positions" was one of the first texts they generated as a community of writers composing on behalf of the BLFI. Perhaps there were discussions and work done to clarify and fine-tune the functional role they wanted their positional writing practices to play in their efforts to politicize and radicalize Black MSU students and Black student activism at MSU. For example, from my examination of the corpus of their position papers, it is readily apparent that there was a shift that occurred in terms of topical focus. It's clear that through "The BLFI's Philosophies and Positions" the BLFI activists were trying to comprehensively construct themselves and the BLFI's work within the context of a kind of Black political radicalism that emphasizes theory and practice. The focus was on the BLFI — its work and its members — and throughout the paper the BLFI activists

were positioning themselves and the BLFI's work within the context of a range of different theories and practices associated with Black radicalism. However, most of the position papers composed after "The BLFI's Philosophies and Positions" were issue-specific or maintained a singular topical focus.

But perhaps the reception-end of "The BLFI's Philosophies and Positions" also motivated this extension work. There was a lack of development with the discourses the BLFI activists used to construct themselves and the work of the BLFI within a kind of Black political radicalism that integrated theory and practice. It is possible that the responses they received to the text from their imagined and realized audience influenced the ways in which they extended this strategy. The BLFI activists participating in this study could not provide concrete information on the reception-end of this text, and I didn't locate any reader-based responses to the text in my archival materials.

Despite the uncertainty and lack of clarity, using the traffic model analytic framework we can still identify evidence of a connection at work between that network of rhetorical and literate activities and the ways in which they extended their strategy for composing discursively hybrid papers. From the fall of 1970, when they composed "The BLFI's Philosophies and Positions," to a year and a half later, when they drafted "Africans Must Limit Fighting to Struggle for Their Own Liberation," the BLFI activists were continuing to read, critically analyze, and discuss the speeches and writings of Black radicals working from and within the context of Black radical politics (e.g. C.L.R. James, Kwame Nkrumah, etc.). Arguably, during this period there was development in the amount of literate resources they had available to them and there was progression in

their critical thinking, political understanding, and discursive abilities.[60] The BLFI

activists participating in this study explicitly established a relationship between these

rhetorical and literate activities and the progressive development of their positional

writing practices.[61]

When we analyze through the traffic model analytic framework the strategies they

adopted for writing "Africans Must Limit Fighting to Struggle for Their Own

Liberation," we can see this relationship at work. In this second position paper, we still

see the BLFI activists constructing themselves and the work of the BLFI by meshing the

theoretical and practical discourses that have traditionally constituted Black radicalism.

But whereas there wasn't a lot of development with these discourses in the "BLFI's

Philosophies and Positions," the theoretical and practical discourses of Black radicalism

at work in "Africans Must Limit Fighting to Struggle for Their Own Liberation" are more

developed and supported. Moreover, it is clear that when meshing these theoretical and

practical discourses of Black radicalism, the BLFI activists were drawing upon strategies

for developing a line of reasoning to more effectively accomplish their purposes and

objectives. What we'll see in the following examples are instances where the BLFI

activists were acting as agents of integration by using the knowledge they acquired on the

content properties and functional purposes of the theoretical and practical discourses on

Black radicalism to develop a conceptual and discursive framework for the text and to

provide support for their claim that Africans should limit their fighting to the struggles of

African peoples. Again, they acquired this knowledge by continuing to read, critically

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[60] Roundtable discussion, November 18, 2012.
[61] Roundtable discussion, November 18, 2012.

analyze, and discuss the speeches and writings of Black radicals such as James and Nkrumah.

As Karega explained in an interview on May 23, 2013, the production and reception contexts for "Africans Must Limit Fighting to Struggle for Their Own Liberation" were similar in many ways to the production and reception contexts for "the BLFI's Philosophies and Positions." The imagined and realized audience for the text was university publics. But whereas "The BLFI's Philosophies and Positions" was distributed campus-wide on plain-style paper, "Africans Must Limit Fighting to Struggle for Their Own Liberation" was printed in the BLFI's mimeographed newspaper and was distributed campus-wide.

The BLFI activists began the position paper by providing readers insight on the purpose of the text: to address the question of whether Black Americans should participate in the militaristic and state-sanctioned political struggles of the United States. The BLFI activists answered this question in the opening paragraph by articulating a set of practices that they believed should be adopted by peoples of African descent in the U.S.:

> The Black Liberation Front acknowledges the fact that an African should fight only to defend Africans until the liberation of all African-people is complete. The Black Liberation Front International agrees that no African should enter the armed imperialistic forces of the racist government of Amerikkka.[62] Nor should Africans be part of the repressive police forces of U.S. cities.

So here were the BLFI activists drawing upon the practical discourses of Black radicalism by positing concrete methods for challenging, decentering, deconstructing, resisting, and eliminating the processes and workings of racism, capitalist domination and

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[62] The BLFI activists are engaging in satiric misspelling here with this term "Amerikkka." The use of this practice appears in several of the BLFI activists' position papers. I discuss this practice in Chapter Six.

exploitation, and imperialism. This notion that peoples of African descent should refrain from participating in state-sanctioned military and political endeavors was a theme that was evident in many of the speeches and writings of Black radicals emerging from and working within the Black radical tradition.[63]

But the BLFI activists' positional work didn't end here with their articulation of this set of practices and their exhortations calling for Black Americans to adopt those practices. Remember, the position paper had a functional purpose, assisting the BLFI activists in their efforts to assume a lead role in the processes of reimagining, redefining, and reworking the agencies of Black MSU students and the work of Black student activism at MSU. Through the position paper, the BLFI activists were trying to construct themselves and the BLFI's work within the context of a kind of Black political radicalism that emphasized theory and practice. So the BLFI activists devoted the remainder of the position paper to qualifying this set of practices by providing readers a theoretical and ideological rationale for the adoption of these practices by peoples of African descent. They constructed this theoretical and ideological rationale by iterating several of the theoretical discourses that have traditionally constituted Black radicalism.

Let me give a few examples here from the text. After articulating this set of practices for challenging, decentering, deconstructing, resisting, and eliminating the processes and workings of racism, capitalist domination and exploitation, and imperialism, the BLFI activists wrote the following in the next paragraph:

> Africans have participated in every war the United States has entered. We have fought and we have died to maintain this land. What we

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[63] For further reading, see Cedric Robinson's *Black Marxism*; Jeffrey Ogbar's, *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity*; Penial Joseph. *Waiting 'Till The Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America*; L. Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975*.

didn't bargain for was the maintenance of the double standard, based on skin color, which the government and people of the United States of Amerikkka maintains. We have fought and died in all the wars, but we still do not have freedom, justice, or equality. The three basic rights of a human being.

So here were the BLFI activists qualifying the set of practices they were advancing by iterating theoretical discourses of Black radicalism. But this time these discourses were more fully developed. In this paragraph, the BLFI activists were explicating the hypocrisy and anti-logic of the workings of racialized oppression in the United States: Despite their historical and situated participation in the militaristic and political struggles of the United States, social and institutionalized racism had established and was continuing to maintain a systematic form of oppression that denied Black Americans the same basic human rights (freedom, justice, and equality) that they were helping the U.S. protect and sustain.

The BLFI activists continued to articulate in the position paper theoretical discourses of Black radicalism to qualify the set of practices they were authorizing as important to the resistance and liberation efforts of Black Americans. As they articulated these discourses, they also continued developing them in ways they hadn't in "The BLFI's Philosophies and Positions." For example, at one point in "Africans Must Limit Fighting to Struggle for Their Own Liberation," the BLFI activists started articulating discourses that analyzed and critiqued what they understood to be a systematic relationship between capitalism, state power, and racialized oppression:

> The Black Liberation Front International realizes that the European who disguises himself as the Amerikkkan white man seeks methods to repress and still the revolutionary spirit with which African peoples' hearts is pregnant today. The European colonizer put brother against brother in the daily hussel to survive on our urban reservations. The colonizer is

moving daily and increasingly to put African against African continuously.

So here in this passage the BLFI activists were analyzing and critiquing how divide and conquer methods were being used as state-sanctioned weapons to stifle the resistance efforts of Black Americans on a psychological and practical level. In this sense, in order to qualify the set of practices they were proposing, they were placing these divide and conquer practices under a theoretical microscope so to speak to further argue the destructiveness of these methods and the problems and contradictions that accompany Africans' participation in the United States' governmental and state-sanctioned practices.

Again, arguably the BLFI activists' extended rhetorical and literate engagements with the speeches and writings of Black radicals enhanced their abilities to more fully develop these discourses in these ways. For example, if you recall in chapter four, Karega explained the impact Kwame Nkrumah had on the BLFI activists' ideological, political, and discursive development. In particular, Karega explained that they read and discussed Nkrumah's speeches and writings that were populated by analysis and critiques of neo-colonialism because he gave them concepts and ideas they felt they could use in their fight against colonialism in the U.S. and at MSU. As I explained in chapter four, neo-colonialism was generally defined in the speeches and writing of Black radicals such as Nkrumah as a system of subjugation where post-colonial subjects are confronted with indirect and often subtle forms of domination from the former colonial power that are enacted through political, military, economic, social, and/or technical forces. So as Karega explained, Nkrumah's understandings of the workings of this kind of subjugation and his subsequent critiques were important for the BLFI activists and politically relevant to their work.

So the argument can be made that here in this passage the BLFI activists were engaging in acts of transfer as reconstruction, or to say it differently, they were drawing upon the analyses and critiques of neo-colonialism generated by other speakers and writers in order to provide a conceptual and discursive framework for their analysis and critique of divide and conquer methods. Although they did not explicitly characterize these divide and conquer methods as forms of neo-colonialism, they were clearly constructing them as such by establishing an identificational relationship between the "European colonizer" and the "Amerikkkan white man" and by arguing that the purpose of these methods, which were by nature indirect and subtle, was "to repress and still the revolutionary spirit" of African peoples and to "put African against African continuously."

But the question of how much the BLFI activists did to "sell" the connection they were making here between the knowledge they acquired on various forms of analyses and critiques of neo-colonialism and the conceptual and discursive framework they were using for their analysis and critique of divide and conquer methods is a difficult question for this study to consider. In their analysis and critique of divide and conquer methods, there is no recognizably visible moment of integration. For example, there is no direct reference to Nkrumah's analyses and critiques of neo-colonialism which could have made visible to readers a constitutive relationship at work between Nkrumah's analyses and critiques of neo-colonialism and the analysis and critique of divide and conquer methods that they were advancing in the text. It's possible that the connection here was relatively invisible, recognizable only to those readers who had knowledge of the rhetorical and literate activities the BLFI activists were participating in at The People's

House and the Malcolm X Communication Academy. So again, this is a question for future research that relates directly to the affective dimension of transfer. Analysis of the reception-end of "Africans Must Limit Fighting to Struggle for Their Own Liberation" would shed more light on the affective dimension of transfer at work here. But as Nowacek helps us understand through her discussion of transfer, regardless of whether their acts of transfer here had a "positive" or "negative" affect, the BLFI activists were still acting as agents of integration by choosing to draw upon the analyses and critiques of neo-colonialism generated by other speakers and writers in order to provide a conceptual and discursive framework for their analysis and critique of divide and conquer methods.

In the next three paragraphs, the BLFI activists further developed their analysis and critique of divide and conquer methods — an analysis and critique they were using to qualify the set of practices they were proposing for peoples of African descent in the United States. The BLFI activists enacted this development by giving these divide and conquer methods concrete appearances as neocolonial processes and workings of racism, capitalist domination and exploitation, and state-sanctioned racialized oppression. In other words, they developed their analysis and critique of divide and conquer methods by providing evidence and relevant information that they believed was important for understanding divide and conquer methods as neocolonial processes and workings. From this perspective, in these instances, the BLFI activists were engaging in acts of transfer, but this time they were engaging in acts of transfer as application:

> Notice that in the recent urban rebellions it was the division of the army that utilized most the bodies of our African brothers — the paratroopers. No planes used, but the paratroopers were sent. Africans sent to quell the just struggle of Africans. The white guards are unable to handle us African people. That too is why Africans are being used to murder Africans.

> Remember when the brothers and sisters were protesting conditions at Mississippi Valley State College. When oppressive agents (police) were brought in to arrest the students, we found that the skin of these agents of the oppressor was Black.
>
> Urban police forces are just extensions of the U.S. military machine, present to protect the interest of the Europeans. The police will arrest an alcoholic who is injuring no one but himself but will not arrest the landlord who exploits the low income brother who rents from him, or the crooks who sell unsanitary meat and other foods to African people, nor will they arrest the men who really bring the dope into our community. They will arrest the dope, but the police don't touch the source that gives the dope to that brother.

So here in these three paragraphs the BLFI activists were giving a concrete appearance to neocolonial divide and conquer methods by discussing three different phenomena: the urban rebellions of the sixties and early seventies, the protest activism that had occurred at Mississippi Valley State College, and the workings of urban police forces. With these discussions, they were giving concrete examples of that destructiveness produced by these divide and conquer methods, and they were giving concrete examples of the contradictions and problems accompanying Africans' participation in the U.S.'s governmental and state-sanctioned practices. The discourses at work in these discussions characterized other Africans as "agents of the oppressor," and the BLFI activists established a causal relationship between the practices of these "agents of the oppressor" and racialized, capitalist-oriented domination and exploitation and racialized state-sanctioned violence and oppression.

But the BLFI activists didn't end their efforts to qualify the set of practices they proposed with these strategies for supporting their line of reasoning. They continued to develop their explication of the contradictory and illogical workings of racialized oppression in the U.S. by citing more relevant evidence and information that they

believed were essential for understanding the issue (theory), and thus, their proposed

solution (practice):

> The issue is the abuse of power by the legislators of Amerikkkan government. The Amerikkkan government legislates to the purpose of supporting the racist and imperialistic Amerikkkan economy rather than legislating to the needs of the inhabitants of this land. Law should protect the weaker members of society, and establish working order for all. The selective service laws are in conjunction with the realities of the Amerikkkan system. The system of the big businessman.
> The selective service laws exploit the weaker, less organized inhabitants of the U.S.A by establishing an order of involuntary servitude to support the interest of big business.
> We Africans receive nothing for our sacrifices in the U.S. military. Remember the late Brother Poindexter E. Williams? A 20 year young African who was killed in Viet Nam serving the interest of the U.S. imperialist. The brother died in the Nam fighting for this country, but the brother's family was prohibited from burying the dead soldier's body in the same cemetery with white folks until they got a court injunction. The brother died for NOTHING!

So here were the BLFI activists analyzing and critiquing selective service laws and the

legislative racism that was exerted against Black soldiers in order to further demonstrate

the ways in which the notion of African participation in the United States' militaristic,

governmental, and political struggles was full of contradiction and just illogical. These

selective legislative laws, the BLFI activists argued, were being used by the U.S. to

advance their imperialist agendas abroad and to enact the same kind of racism, capitalist

exploitation, and violence that Black Americans were experiencing at the hands of the

U.S government and its institutions. Moreover, the BLFI activists argued, while Black

men were fighting and dying for the governmental, political, and economic causes of the

U.S., legislative laws and social and institutionalized racism was keeping them from

having the same kind of dignities and privileges that slain white soldiers were afforded.

The emphatic exclamation at the end of that third paragraph which argued that Williams

"died for NOTHING!" seemingly emphasized how contradictory and illogical it was for Black Americans to continue to support the governmental, militaristic, and political struggles of the United States.

Again, with these additional efforts to support their analysis and critique of divide and conquer methods, there's evidence that the BLFI activists were engaging in the act of transfer as application. Using the traffic model interpretive framework, we can see evidence here that the BLFI activists were drawing upon the knowledge they acquired on various forms of analyses and critiques of neo-colonialism to provide theoretical support for their analysis and critique of divide and conquer methods. Arguably, their rhetorical and literate engagements with Nkrumah's analyses and critiques of neo-colonialism informed the decisions they made on the examples they used in the position paper to give a concrete appearance to the destructiveness produced by these divide and conquer methods. They were acting here as agents of integration. But again, there is no recognizably visible moment of integration, no direct reference to Nkrumah's analyses and critiques of neo-colonialism which could have made visible to readers that constitutive relationship at work between Nkrumah's analyses and critiques of neo-colonialism and the concrete examples they were using in these last three paragraphs to give divide and conquer methods concrete appearances as neocolonial processes and workings of racism, capitalist domination and exploitation, and state-sanctioned racialized oppression.

Summary

In this section I have attempted to demonstrate the ways in which the BLFI activists constructed themselves and the work of the BLFI by composing discursively hybrid position papers populated by the theoretical and practical discourses that have traditionally constituted Black radicalism. I have also argued that the BLFI activists, through this composing strategy, were participating in acts of transfer as they worked to assume a lead role in the processes of reimagining, redefining, and reworking the agencies of Black MSU students and Black student activism at MSU within a more radicalized and politicized context that emphasized the integration of theory and practice. In the next section, I analyze how the practices they adopted for composing their position papers functioned as productive forces that mediated the BLFI activists' efforts to actively transform and create more radicalized and politicized campus and educational environments.

Counter-Literacies and Narrative Reporting: A Discursive and Literate Struggle for Access to and Control over the African Studies Center

In *Language as a Local Practice*, Pennycook forwards an understanding of "space as process" (56). Within this framework, space is "a central interactive part of the social" (55), neither fixed nor immutable, and practice is "an activity creating time-space" (Crang qtd. in Pennycook 56). Using a discussion of graffiti writing practices, Pennycook paints an active picture of this production of space and time specifically through language practice. In Pennycook's, graffiti (specifically hip-hop style and stencil art) are the "products of artists moving through an urban landscape" (56). In other words, rather than characterizing graffiti as immobile text on static walls, he understands the practice in

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terms of the interdependent relationship between the discursive creation of place and the movement of individuals and groups in social space. Put another way, graffiti — unsanctioned and criminal in many cities and contested as socially and visually destructive — is about an individual or groups' symbolic movement through public city space. These practices function as part of the ways in which cities are constructed and articulated.

In this sense, the practice of graffiti writing can be understood not only as a form of social and linguistic practice which gives meaning to a cityscape, but also as a counter-literacy that redefines and refashions public city space through language. That is, it accentuates how the discursive mapping of public space is always a process where new social, political, and cultural understandings are changing how space is ordered and narrated. Moreover, graffiti as a counter-literacy is always about the struggle for access and control over public space. As Pennycook argues, graffiti writing "challenges assumptions about who has access to public literacy, who controls the space, who can sanction public images and literacy, who gets to decide on what a city looks like" (58).

Working from this kind of understanding of language practices as activities that produce space and time, the point of analysis then for the language and literacy researcher is, as Pennycook explains, "how different linguistic resources are used, different worlds evoked, different possibilities engaged in as people use the linguistic wherewithal around them" (69). In terms of the BLFI activists, I contend that the narrative reporting practices they adopted for composing several of their position papers played a primary role in their active engagement in that mapping of space Pennycook describes — that discursive and literate struggle for control over how a particular space

or context is constituted, understood, and articulated. To demonstrate this functioning

purpose and effect of the BLFI activists' narrative reporting practices, in the following

sections I analyze the ways in which the BLFI activists used the narrative report as part of

their work in challenging and refashioning MSU's African Studies Center (ASC).

Micro-level and Macro-level Purposes and Commitments: A Discursive Struggle for Access, Control, and Transformation

On October 17, 1969, the BLFI activists — with representatives of the Pan

African Students Organization in the Americas (PASOA) — took over and occupied for

several hours MSU's African Studies Center (ASC). At the time of the takeover and

occupation, the exclusively White staff of the ASC was attending a conference on

African Studies in Montreal, Canada. The BLFI activists and the representatives of the

PASOA believed that the ASC's staff had intentionally excluded most Black and African

MSU students from attending the conference, and this exclusion served as one of the

impetuses behind the takeover and occupation. In a statement released by the BLFI

activists and the PASOA representatives during the takeover and occupation, they argued

the following:

> The number of African students born in mother Africa and those born in
>
> the Americas on this campus who participate in African Studies courses, at
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> both the undergraduate and graduate levels, is very large, and number in
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> the dozens. Yet as far as we have been able to discover, only four African
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> students were informed about this conference, and only one eventually
>
> attended.

In that same statement, the BLFI activists and PASOA representatives called for an investigation of the ASC's activities and an examination of its organization structure. They also demanded that the ASC be placed under Black leadership.

Three days after the takeover and occupation the BLFI activists and the PASOA representatives met with the ASC's staff. The meeting was unsuccessful and the BLFI activists and PASOA representatives walked out, indicating their intent to write and issue a manifesto on the ASC controversy and organize a post-manifesto meeting with the ASC staff and MSU's upper-level administrators. That manifesto was composed by the BLFI activists and issued to the ASC's staff and to MSU administrators. It was also reprinted in *The Westside News* on November 8, 1969. Over the next year, position papers on the ASC controversy were written and issued by the BLFI activists as a response to what they perceived as reluctance from MSU's upper-level administrators and the ASC staff to meet their demands.

From this perspective, the argument can be made that their writing practices for the ASC controversy functioned as the kind of counter-literacy Pennycook describes. As the BLFL activists collectively explained during the roundtable discussion, there were "local and broader" — micro-level and macro-level — purposes and commitments informing their work with the ASC. On the one hand, they were trying to challenge power relations at work with the ASC and assume a level of access in and control over the structure and orientation of the ASC and the discipline of African Studies at MSU. In that statement the BLFI activists and PASOA representatives released during the takeover and occupation, they posited the following:

PASOA and BLFI want to make it clear that they will no longer permit the center to rape and exploit the African students on this campus in the name of Mother Africa. The African students are not too naïve to realize that the center is a nursery-school for neo-colonialist academic scholars; we all know this.

Here in this statement we see the BLFI activists and the PASOA representatives articulating rhetorics of authority, knowledge, and critical understanding. As the BLFI activists collectively explained,[64] through these rhetorics they were trying to demonstrate for university publics their critical agency and understanding about the conditions and circumstances surrounding the ASC controversy. Additionally, these rhetorics were making transparent to university publics their intentions to claim both a level of authoritative access to the ASC and a level of control over the discipline of African Studies at MSU.

On the other hand, the BLFI activists were also trying to position themselves as active agents in a larger work that was not only ideologically rooted in critique of the institutional relationship between post-secondary colleges/universities and students of African descent, but also organizationally focused on developing a reconstructed brand of higher education that attended to the experiences and needs of African diasporic peoples. As I stated in chapter four, at the same time that the BLFI activists were initiating their political work, Black college students across the country were indicting the curricular norms of American post-secondary institutions as oppositional to the needs of Black American and African students. From these activities arose demands for the creation and

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[64] Roundtable discussion, November 18, 2012.

implementation of curricula relevant to peoples of African descent in the areas of history, politics, science, and culture.

Black students at San Francisco State University were leading the charge to reconstruct higher education on this curricular level. By the spring of 1966, Jimmy Garrett, Marianna Waddy, Jo Ann Mitchell, Benny Stewart, and Jerry Varnando had converted San Francisco State's Black student organization to a more radicalized BSU. By the fall of 1966, Garrett had completed a position paper entitled "Justification for Black Studies" which critiqued higher education curricula and laid out supporting arguments for the creation of a Black Studies program and department. Garrett and members of the BSU were already working in the university's Experimental College, creating their own curricula and teaching courses that were relevant to Black experiences and that explicitly allowed students to dialogue with topics such as Black Nationalism, Black Power, and Third World politics (Rojas 63-64). As Garrett explained in an interview with Ibram H. Rogers, BSU members working in the Experimental College "developed whole curriculums around challenging Western concepts and the domination of the West and the hegemony of the West and hegemony of the U.S." By the fall of 1968, the organizing and protest efforts of Black, African, and ethnic minority students at San Francisco State culminated in the Third World Strike, which eventually led to the authorization of the creation of a Black Studies department and a plan for the establishment of a School of Ethnic Studies. Consequently, Black college students began staging strikes and issuing demands for Black Studies at schools such as the University of California, Harvard, Yale, Cornell, Columbia, University of Chicago, and the University of Illinois at Chicago.

This same kind of critique and push against education on a curricular level was also taking place internationally and beyond post-secondary educational contexts. As I also discussed in chapter four, at the same time that the BLFI activists were beginning their political work at MSU, Pan-African revolutionaries and leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah were indicting European colonial and neo-colonial education for their work in distorting African history and culture. As a corrective, Nkrumah was calling for African-centered education. But Nkrumah's critiques of European colonial and neo-colonial education and his calls for African-centered education were the recontextualized products of larger historical, situated, and transnational traditions. For example, forty-years prior, Carter Woodson, in *The Miseducation of the Negro*, launched a similar critique of Western post-secondary education by indicting Black colleges and universities for teaching African Americans "to admire the Hebrew, the Greek, the Latin and Teuton and despise the African" (1). For Woodson, this pedagogy was problematic and rooted in a conceptual framework where "the 'Negro' is thought of as a race or studied only as a problem or dismissed as of little consequence" (1). Woodson's alternative emphasized the importance and significance of African-centered education:

> After Negro students have mastered the fundamentals of English, the principles of composition, and the leading facts in the development of its literature, they should not spend all their time in advanced work on Shakespeare, Chaucer and Anglo-Saxon. They should direct their attention also to the folklore of the African, to the philosophy in his proverbs, to the development of the Negro in the use of modern language, and to the works of Negro writers. (150)

In similar fashion, Dubois, delivering a 1933 commencement speech at Fisk University entitled "The Field and Function of the Negro College," indicted the theoretical frameworks and pedagogies used to educate African Americans. As a corrective, he argued for the placement of African American experiences at the center of curricula designed to educate them:

> …upon these foundations, therefore, your university must start and build…A university in Spain is not simply a university. It is a Spanish university. It is a university located in Spain. It uses Spanish language. It starts with Spanish history and makes conditions in Spain the starting point of its teaching. Its education is for Spaniards, not for them as they may be or ought be, but as they are with their present problems and disadvantages and opportunities. (reprinted, 1973, 93).

Additionally, as early as the late 1950's, Black Nationalist groups such as the Nation of Islam (NOI) were advancing a brand of educational nationalism that insisted that Black children receive education from Black teachers. For the NOI, their brand of educational nationalism served as the impetus behind the formation of elementary and secondary Muslim schools. In addition to Black history and the tenets of Black Nationalism, students were instructed in traditional subjects such as math, reading, spelling, the natural sciences, and language arts, in particular, the teaching of Arabic beginning in the third grade.

As the rhetorics and practices of Nkrumah, Dubois, Woodson, and the NOI demonstrate, this was a wider field of action — a larger ideological and organizational work — that the BLFI activists were trying to participate in through their work in

challenging and refashioning the ASC. As the BLFI activists explained during the roundtable discussion, this larger ideological and organizational work was just as important and exigent to the work of the BLFI.

Narrative Reporting: Transfer, Invention, and Subversion of the "Official Narrative"

One way the BLFI activists actualized these micro-level and marco-level purposes and commitments was through the narrative reporting practices they adopted for composing their position papers on the ASC controversy. Narrative as a form of literary technique tends to emphasize character development. Its storytelling conventions create space for writers to bring to life the main characters of their texts. More specifically, by telling stories that place individuals and groups within the context of certain circumstances, activities, and experiences, writers can construct and reveal to an audience the values, attitudes, expectations, and other character elements particular to the main players in their texts. Although the BLFI activists' narrative practices were not functioning as literary techniques, the argument can be made that their adoption of narrative reporting practices for composing their position papers on the ASC controversy was about character development. But this wasn't the kind of fictionalized character development we tend to see with literary texts. These narrative reporting practices were constructing two character groups within the context of a non-fictional story of power struggle. On the one side there were Black and African students at MSU whom the BLFI activists believed had a racially, ethnically, and culturally-based relationship with and responsibility to the ASC and the discipline of African Studies. On the other side was the exclusively White ASC staff and upper-level MSU administrators.

So what we need to understand as we prepare to analyze an example of these narrative reporting practices is that the BFLI activists' decision to use the narrative report as part of their work in challenging and refashioning the ASC is further evidence of their participation in acts of transfer and repurposing. By the time they wrote the narrative report entitled "Africanization History of the African Studies Center at MSU," issued it to the ASC's staff and upper-level MSU administrators, and distributed it campus-wide, the BLFI activists were addressing a new set of purposes and challenges. Struggling for over a year to get their demands met, the BLFI activists and PASOA representatives had become increasingly antagonistic towards the ASC's staff and increasingly frustrated with MSU's upper-level administration. On the one hand, the ASC's staff was continuing to challenge the notion that the ASC needed Black leadership and that the ASC's work was antithetical, oppositional, and destructive to the discipline of African Studies and Black and African students at MSU. For example, resigning after pressure from the BLFI activists and representatives of the PASOA, the ASC's White director Dr. Charles Hughes made the following declaration in his statement of resignation: "I don't believe in color magic. There is nothing in the genes that allows a person to know more about an area. I think the African Studies Center is, by its name, concerned with events in Africa." On the other hand, MSU's upper-level administration had made no progress in securing funding for the salary of a new director. The Plenary Group of the African Studies Center, which had a fair representation of Black and African students and faculty, had recommended for the position Dr. Elliot Skinner, a Black professor of Anthropology from Columbia University. But using local and campus press outlets, MSU's upper-level administration was citing anticipated reduction of Federal support and restricted state-

funded resources as the cause of the delay in hiring Skinner. MSU's upper-level administration was also articulating in local and campus press outlets these rhetorics of reduced Federal support and restricted state-funded resources to justify the steady cuts in the ASC's budget they had made since the BFLI activists and PASOA representatives took over and occupied the ASC and issued their proposal and demands.

The BLFI activists and PASOA representatives were challenging this "official narrative" on the ASC controversy that the University was constructing and actualizing in the public sphere by also using local and campus press outlets to construct and actualize their own narrative that presented a different and counter-hegemonic perspective on the ASC controversy. For example, in an interview for a December 4, 1970 article for the *State News*, Chui Karega argued that MSU's administration was "a racist component of American imperialism" that was "racist to the goals of people of African descent." Karega also called the steady cuts to the ASC's budget "a neo-colonialist plot to destroy the African Studies Center." Karega's argumentations in the article were followed up by the comments of Frank Morant, a PASOA representative, who declared the following: "We want Elliot Skinner here and Skinner we will have."

But as the BLFI activists explained during the roundtable discussion, they were also using the narrative report to not only articulate a different and counter-hegemonic perspective on the ASC controversy, but to also publicly challenge and subvert the "official narrative" on the ASC controversy that MSU upper-level administrators were constructing and actualizing in the public sphere. From this perspective, with their decision to use the narrative report to perform this counter-hegemonic and subversive work, the BLFI activists were participating in acts of transfer and repurposing. In chapter

three, we learned that the pre-MSU familial and communal instruction the BLFI activists received on the importance of critical inquiry and the questioning and challenging of "public transcripts" and "official historical narratives" heavily influenced their political writing practices during their tenure at MSU. For example, from Karega's recollections we learned that his hush harbor rhetorical engagements with his mother and aunt not only helped him begin questioning and critiquing the "public transcripts" of the dominant elite, but also provided him numerous opportunities to witness and come to terms with some of the strategies subordinate individuals and groups adopt to do three things: (1) discursively question and critique dominant ideologies and practices, (2) discursively enact resistance to dominance, and (3) discursively perform alternative conceptions of the world and their relations to it. In addition, through Greg Kelley's recollections on the hush harbor instruction he received from his mother, we learned that the work of questioning and challenging "official historical narratives" that excluded the contributions of peoples of African descent was important to most of the BLFI activists in terms of their ideological, political, and discursive development.

But we also learned in chapter four how their rhetorical and literate engagements with C.L.R. James's work provided the BLFI activists with examples for how to enact these modes of critical thinking and resistance through revisionist historical writing. In particular, we learned that the BLFI activists critically examined in those seminar courses at the Malcolm X Communication Academy the ways in which James had countered European and Western historians' "established fictions" on the revolutionary potential of Black laborers by writing *The Black Jacobians*. Using a combination of narrative, commentary, and historical fact, James had constructed a text that described and

explained how Black laborers in the San Domingo Colony developed a racial and class consciousness that propelled their collective resistance and attack on the bourgeoisie.

When we take into account these multiple rhetorical and literate engagements, it is not a surprise that the BLFI activists used the narrative report to construct this position paper as an Africanization history of the ASC. As a collective, the BLFI activists participating in this study identified these multiple rhetorical and literate engagements as particularly important to the strategies they adopted for composing their position papers on the ASC controversy.[65] The argument can be made that the BLFI activists used the knowledge they acquired from these multiple rhetorical and literate engagements as part of the invention process for the composing of the text. Arguably, they networked two kinds of knowledge and established a connection with the contextual factors driving their intent to compose the text (location, time, audience, purposes, commitments, etc.). The first kind of knowledge was the familial and communal instruction they received on critical inquiry and the challenging of "public transcripts" and "official historical narratives," and the second kind of knowledge was the strategies they learned for enacting these modes of critical thinking and resistance through narrative-style revisionist historical writing. So from this connection they developed a blueprint for the generic, stylistic, and generic character of the position paper: a narrative report on the Africanization history of the ASC.

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[65] Roundtable discussion, November 18, 2012.

Narrative Reporting: Authorizing Access and Control, Delimiting Hegemony and Power

Let's take a look at this narrative report the BLFI activists issued one year after

the initial takeover and occupation of the ASC. The opening paragraphs of

"Africanization History of the African Studies Center at MSU" read as follows:

> It all began on October 17, 1969 when Black Liberation Front International (BLFI) and Pan-African Students Organization in the Americas (PASOA) took over the African Studies Center while the majority of the faculty from the Center were attending a neo-colonialist conference in Montreal, Canada. Before the takeover, the Center had been in existence since 1960. It had always been manned by an all white faculty staff. In the late 1960's one Diasphoran African, Sister Ruth Hamilton, was added to the faculty for token purposes. She never played any major role in decision-making policies. The Center held conferences behind closed doors to determine the destiny of us African peoples. Research money was fairly distributed between the white faculty members and the white students. Diaphoran Africans as well as Continental African students were declared the "Most-Unwanted Lot" by the mere structure of the Center.
>
> Then came the October Revolutionary takeover. This historic takeover grew out of careful study and a firm conviction from the members of BLFI-PASOA that since African Studies Centers were instituted in the United States in the late 1950's, they have been the training grounds of "top-level C.I.A. agents." (As a matter of fact, MSU, the African Studies Center, and the International Center were built with C.I.A. money during President Hannah's heydays.)* These "agents" generally baptized as "Africanists" have been involved in many "fact finding research projects" for the State Department. They have been instrumental in expanding the most barbaric form of colonialism in Africa—the Scientific Colonialism.
>
> Immediately after the takeover, we issued a manifesto in which we demanded a complete restructuring of the Center. One of our priorities was to get a Black director. Other demands just as important as the first one included more participation of people of African descent in the decision-making policies, establishment of a Cognate Program on African Studies for undergraduate students, funding of the Umoja (Unity) Project to send students of African descent to Africa last summer, recruitment of African descent secretaries and faculty members.

On display here are opening paragraphs that introduce and frame the content parameters

of a non-fictional story of power struggle between Black and African students at MSU

and the exclusively White ASC staff and upper-level MSU administrators. So with these

opening paragraphs we see the BLFI activists immediately attending to those macro-level

purposes and commitments. The non-fictional story that the BLFI activists were

introducing here in these opening paragraphs was one of many non-fictional stories about

Black college students being circulated across the country. As I explained earlier, there

were Black student organizations and groups who were indicting the curricular norms of

American post-secondary institutions and demanding the creation of Black Studies

departments and course offerings. With these opening paragraphs that introduce the

content of the report, the BLFI activists were establishing a connection between the

power struggle they were engaged in at MSU and the power struggles that other Black

students were engaged in across the country.

Also, the setting of the story's content parameters within the context of issues

surrounding Black and African students and African-centered education located the story

as part of that wider field of action, or to say it differently, those larger historical,

situated, and transnational traditions that were (and continue to be) grounded in critiques

of all forms of colonial and neo-colonial education and calls for African-centered

education. In this sense, with these opening paragraphs, we see the BLFI activists trying

to position themselves as active agents in that larger ideological and organization work

that the BLFI activists participating in this study indicated was important and exigent to

the BLFI's work as a whole.

But the BLFI activists' attention to some of those micro-level purposes and

commitments is also on display here in these opening paragraphs. On the one hand, we

can see that the BLFI activists were using the narrative reported here in these opening

paragraphs to reverse power relations between the two character groups by authorizing

themselves as the gatekeepers and protectors of the ASC and the discipline of African Studies. Their mission — as reported in these opening paragraphs — was one of exposure of and resistance to the neo-colonialist workings of the ASC and its staff. In this sense, through their reporting on the activities and events leading up to and surrounding the ASC takeover and occupation, the BLFI activists were qualifying and justifying their role as gatekeepers and protectors of the ASC and African Studies. Remember, they were writing this Africanization history on the ASC in order to articulate a different and counter-hegemonic perspective on the ASC controversy and publicly challenge and subvert the "official narrative" on the ASC controversy that MSU upper-level administrators were constructing and actualizing in the public sphere. So in these opening paragraphs they were doing what the narrative report allows writers to do best. They were placing the ASC's staff and themselves as an organization within the context of the circumstances and activities surrounding the takeover and occupation in order to demonstrate why they needed to guard and protect the ASC and African Studies from what they believed were neo-colonialist workings.

An example of this literate placement appears in the first paragraph:

> It all began on October 17, 1969 when Black Liberation Front International (BLFI) and Pan-African Students Organization in the Americas (PASOA) took over the African Studies Center while the majority of the faculty from the Center were attending a neo-colonialist conference in Montreal, Canada. Before the takeover, the Center had been in existence since 1960. It had always been manned by an all white faculty staff. In the late 1960's one Diasphoran African, Sister Ruth Hamilton, was added to the faculty for token purposes. She never played any major role in decision-making policies. The Center held conferences behind closed doors to determine the destiny of us African peoples. Research money was fairly distributed between the white faculty members and the white students. Diaphoran Africans as well as Continental African students were declared the "Most-Unwanted Lot" by the mere structure of the Center.

Here, the BLFI activists specifically characterized the conference that the ASC's staff

was attending at the time of the takeover and occupation as neo-colonialist; they

referenced the notion of neo-colonialism directly by name, explicitly establishing a

connection between neo-colonialism and the ASC staff. After explicitly establishing this

connection, the BLFI activists devoted the remainder of the paragraph to reporting on

three phenomena: (1) the ASC's advocacy of Black tokenism, (2) the exclusive

distribution of ASC resources to White faculty and students, and (3) the exclusion of

African diasporic voices from decision-making activities for the ASC. Arguably, they

were trying to build upon the connection they made by describing some of the

mechanisms that they believed were being used to enact, authorize, and sustain neo-

colonialism at the ASC and within African Studies at MSU. For example, there's one

sentence in particular in this first paragraph that the BLFI activists were arguably using to

expose the neo-colonialist workings of the ASC: "The Center held conferences behind

closed doors to determine the destiny of us African peoples." Remember, in the speeches

and writings of Black radicals such as Nkrumah, neo-colonialism is generally defined as

a system of subjugation where post-colonial subjects are confronted with indirect and

often subtle forms of domination from the former colonial power that are enacted through

political, military, economic, social, and/or technical forces. By indicating that the ASC

staff was holding meetings to "determine the destiny of us African peoples," the BLFI

activists were arguably establishing the ASC's leadership as a form of colonial power.

But by characterizing the secretiveness and exclusivity of these meetings, the BLFI

activists were further establishing the ASC's leadership as a form of neo-colonial power.

On the other hand, in terms of the second character group in the story, with this Africanization history of the ASC we see the BLFI activists directly questioning and challenging the legitimacy and credibility of the ASC by constructing it as an illegitimate faction whose leadership and work was antithetical, oppositional, and destructive to the discipline of African Studies and Black and African students at MSU. An example of this discursive questioning and challenging appears in the second paragraph of the text:

> Then came the October Revolutionary takeover. This historic takeover grew out of careful study and a firm conviction from the members of BLFI-PASOA that since African Studies Centers were instituted in the United States in the late 1950's, they have been the training grounds of "top-level C.I.A. agents." (As a matter of fact, MSU, the African Studies Center, and the International Center were built with C.I.A. money during President Hannah's heydays.)* These "agents" generally baptized as "Africanists" have been involved in many "fact finding research projects" for the State Department. They have been instrumental in expanding the most barbaric form of colonialism in Africa—the Scientific Colonialism.

The BLFI activists began this second paragraph by describing African Studies centers such as the ASC as training grounds for "top level C.I.A agents." As narrators often do, the BLFI activists spoke to their audience, giving commentary each step of the way and providing (and imposing) on their audience insight into what they believed were the neo-colonialist attitudes, expectations, and practices of the ASC's staff. For example, the C.I.A was positioned in this commentary as a form of oppressive and imperialistic state-sanctioned power. By pointing out a contradiction in the ASC's staff's positioning as both "Africanists" and "agents" of the C.I.A, and by describing the ASC's work as "fact-finding research projects" for the State Department and mechanisms for "expanding the most barbaric form of colonialism in Africa," the BLFI activists were developing the

character of the ASC and its staff as an extension of the C.I.A., and more broadly, a form of oppressive and imperialistic state-sanctioned power.

As the narrative report progressed past the activities and circumstances leading up to and surrounding the initial takeover and occupation, the BLFI activists began reporting on what they described as the "machinery of betrayal." With this portion of the report, we see the BLFI activists intensifying the power struggle between the two character groups and establishing the lines of demarcation that separate them. For the purpose of this analysis, I want to reproduce here this portion of the narrative report in its entirety so we can see exactly how the character development work the BLFI activists enacted in this part of the report mediated their efforts to articulate a counter-hegemonic perspective on the ASC controversy and challenge and subvert the "official narrative" on the ASC controversy:

> The contradictions between the BLFI-PASOA, the African Studies Center, and the Administration reached a very high level of antagonism. Immediately the Center and the Administration began to act reluctantly. A new Steering Committee with more people of African descent participating came into being. A Black secretary was hired. BLFI-PASOA was permitted to teach an IDC course. Sam Ramtus' case of exploitation was half-solved. The Umoja Project Proposal was rewritten and accepted. A Search and Selection Committee was created to look for a Black director. Sister Ruth Hamilton was permitted and enthusiastically encouraged to go ahead and construct a Cognate Program and to even hire a co-coordinator of that program. The Black United Front (BUF) became a force of decision-making of the Center. There were talks about hiring from more African descent secretaries and offering scholarships to graduate students interested in African Studies. And lastly, the students were encouraged to start a student journal (Mazungumzo) now already under publication.
> This was in March.
> In April, the machinery of betrayal was set in motion. Dean Winder of the College of Social Science, who had been supposedly "encouraged" by the new direction the Center had taken announced there would be a budget cut for the next academic year (1971-72), however, he upheld the amount that would be cut. The Umoja Project was written off

with a very "deep regret" for not having the funds. But in order to keep the students peaceful and happy, a note of deceptive hope was added in regards to the project. "Perhaps," the note said, "an earlier start for the following summer might be a more realistic subjective."

Although the Umoja Project was rejected, the Center continued with its other programs. A co-ordinator for the African Cognate Programs and one African descent faculty member were hired. Another one was given a research grant. More secretaries were hired to meet the demands of the new programs at the Center. Three more Tanzanian language instructors were hired to meet the demands for the rise of enrollment in Swahili. An acting director, Dr. Victor Low, was hired on a half-time basis awaiting the appointment of an African descent director.

In mid-August, the Search and Selection Committee announced the choice of an African descent scholar, Dr. Elliot Skinner, as one of the most highly qualified candidates among others who had presented their names. Having gone this far, the machinery of betrayal was set in motion. Dean Winter announced that the Center's budget would be cut up to 100% for 1971-72. Remember, before the "October takeover," African Studies Center had a budget of $207,107.00 (1969-70). This year, it has a budget of $183,303.00, a cut of about 10% from last year. Next year, the proposed budget cut will be $125,230.00, a cut of 100%.

So here in these paragraphs, we see the BLFI activists again using those storytelling conventions that allow writers to place individuals and groups within the context of certain circumstances, activities, and experiences in order to reveal to their readers the attitudes, expectations, and practices that were driving this "machinery of betrayal," intensifying the power struggle, and establishing the lines of demarcation between the two character groups. For example, the narrative reported in the first paragraph arguably set the stage and prepared its readership for the climax of the story — the act of betrayal initiated by the ASC staff and upper-level MSU administrators and enacted against the BLFI activists and PASOA representatives. As the narrative reported, there was antagonism between the two character groups, but concessions were being made by the ASC staff and upper-level MSU administrators: the creation of Steering Committee with participation from people of African descent, the hiring of a Black secretary, African

Studies courses taught by the BLFI activists and PASOA representatives, movement on

The Umoja Project Proposal, the formation of a Search Committee for a Black director,

potential scholarships in African Studies for Black and African students, support for the

student journal of African Studies, etc.

But then the BLFI activists abruptly alerted readers of a change in circumstance

with one lone sentence: "This was in March." What then followed was a narration that

told a very different story than the one that upper-level MSU administrators were

constructing and actualizing in local and campus press outlets. Using those storytelling

conventions, the BLFI activists described one activity after another, one practice after

another, driving home the character development that they were constructing throughout

the narrative report. They described the budget cuts to the ASC, providing numbers and

charting the monetary and percentile progression of these cuts for added affect. Arguably

this additional information about the budget cuts, offered in the form of percentages and

dollar amounts, was being used by the BLFI activists as counter-evidence to MSU

administrators' claim that reduced Federal support and restricted state-funded resources

was driving the budget cuts. They also described University administrations'

abandonment of The Umoja Project. Here the BLFI activists drew upon one of the

stylistic features of narrative which creates space for writers to use language and words

descriptively. When describing the abandonment of The Umoja Project, the BLFI

activists painted an active picture of what they believed was the deceptive character of

upper-level administrators: They describe the note they were given to try to appease their

anger over the abandonment of the project as a "note of deceptive hope."

What we see in this portion of the report is a work of character development that was designed to challenge and subvert the "official narrative" on the ASC controversy. In this counter-hegemonic and subversive narrative, upper-level MSU administrators and the ASC staff were the betrayers and the BLFI activists and PASOA representatives were the betrayed.

Summary

In this section, I've attempted to demonstrate how the narrative reporting practices the BLFI activists adopted for composing position papers on the African Studies Center controversy at MSU functioned as counter-literacies. More specifically, I've emphasized the ways in which these narrative reporting practices mediated the BLFI activists' efforts to challenge and reverse power relations at work with the ASC and assume a level of access in and control over the structure and orientation of the ASC and the discipline of African Studies at MSU. In addition, I've pointed to these narrative practices as mediators of the BLFI activists' work in positioning themselves as active agents in a larger work that was not only ideologically rooted in critique of the institutional relationship between post-secondary colleges/universities and students of African descent, but also organizationally focused on developing a reconstructed brand of higher education that attended to the experiences and needs of African diasporic peoples. Finally, I've made a case for considering these narrative reporting practices as acts of transfer and repurposing, demonstrating the ways in which the BLFI activists developed a blueprint for the discursive, stylistic, and generic character of the narrative report by establishing a connection between the knowledge they acquired from a network of

rhetorical and literate activities and the contextual factors driving their intent to compose

the text (location, time, audience, purposes, commitments, etc.).

CHAPTER SIX

LANGUAGING AS POLITICAL PRACTICE:
MAKING IT PLAIN FOR THE MASSES

Drawing upon our work with stimulated recall and member checking

ethnographic practices, in this chapter I discuss the stylistic aspects of the language

practices Chui Karega adopted for composing an editorial article entitled "Two Year

Report" for the *Mazungumzo Journal of African Studies*. More specifically, I discuss a

practice Karega described as "making it plain for the masses," and I explain the various

ways Karega implemented that practice as he composed the "Two Year Report." The

situated contexts and layers of meaning tied to this practice are examined in detail.

My argument for this chapter is twofold. First, the discussion and analyses of this

stylistic aspect of Karega's linguistic practices for the text provides insight into the ways

in which writers composing from the margins assign a level of political agency to

languaging acts that both approximate and deviate from "standard" conventions. This

process is not, however, initiated indiscriminately. A writer's assessment of the

communicative context (audience, material conditions, purpose, potential productive

effects and consequences, relevance of their "traffic" experiences.) informs and shapes

the political agency they imbue to various languaging practices. Moreover, it guides the

ways in which a writer engages acts of relocalization and recontextualization as political

practices. Second, the discursive understanding that Karega gave to this stylistic aspect of

his linguistic practices emphasizes the importance of theorizing and talking about a writer's generic, discursive, and stylistic practices in terms of Alastair Pennycook's notion of relocalized forms of doing (136).

Theorizing Languaging as Political Practice

Working from the traffic model analytic framework, prior to the stimulated recall interview I identified general surface-level linguistic features of Karega's "Two Year Report." For this preliminary step, I decided to characterize the "Two Year Report" as a hybrid text embodying a mixture of linguistic features that both approximate and deviate from standardized conventions. For example, in the beginning of the text Karega was basically standard in his deployment of English as he introduced the purpose of the editorial article:

> This issue marks the beginning of the third year of publication for Mazungumzo. Through the first two years we have faced numerous hassles; assaults, physical and verbal; threats of expulsion from Michigan State University; threats of arrest and imprisonment. But six issues of Mazungumzo have been published despite all Mazungumzo, the editors, and staff have faced. Furthermore, despite the new hassles and continuing old ones, we will continue to publish the word of truth concerning Afrikan people.
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> Two years is not a long time to publish a journal that tries to fill a gap created by five-hundred and thirty plus years of capitalist imperialist propaganda against Afrikan people. In no way am I trying to acclaim greatness for the dedicated brothers and sisters who have contributed two years of our lives in order that the truth about our people can be available. I write this missive to Mazungumzo readers first to reiterate to those who have been with us through the two years what our ideological stand continues to be, and secondly, because it is my duty as editor-in-chief to give Mazungumzo readers an account of the editors' and staff's activity during our two young years of publishing.

But as the text progressed, there were portions constructed using less-standard discourses

and conventions. Describing the power struggles tied to the production of the

Mazungumzo, Karega wrote the following:

> Trying to continue their bourgeoisie academician work, despite the fact that their African Studies Center, as was their whole operation, was in a state of chaos, a group herein called the cry-babies attempted to start up a new journal to replace Mazungumzo. I call these academicians cry-babies because they came together on the basis of their common feeling that "Mazungumzo did not reflect a wide enough spectrum of political or intellectual opinion." They were crying because their "political and intellectual opinion" did not merit inclusion in Mazungumzo.
> I would not call them cry-babies though if they had a right to cry. These cry-babies had no right to be crying, for nature had only taken its course. It was only a matter of time before "white liberal Africanists" were told that their academic representation was unwanted and will not be tolerated by Afrikans; as the workers of Mazungumzo told the cry-babies. It is only natural that a people struggling for total liberation of all brothers and sisters will refuse to publish material that reinforce the lies and myths that have been directed against our people for more than 500 years; as the workers of the Mazungumzo have done and will always continue to do.
> The cry-babies attempted to start a new journal, ironically called The Michigan Africanist. The cry-babies went before the Steering Committee of the ASC. The idea of funding The Michigan Africanist was defeated. All of the Afrikans on the Steering Committee voted to not fund that journal. The Afrikans were called racist for going against the predominately white journal. No attention was paid to the fact that the two persons of European-Jewish decent, Harold Marcus and Victor Low, voted in favor of the cry-babies journal.

This preliminary step, characterizing the "Two Year Report" as a hybrid text embodying

a mixture of linguistic features that both approximate and deviate from standardized

conventions was purposeful on my part, and I wanted to begin the stimulated recall

interview with these two passages.

After Karega reviewed the text again,[66] I highlighted these two passages and

asked Karega a very broad and open-ended question about these two passages: "It

appears that you were using in the text a mixture of standardized language forms and

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[66] I asked Karega to re-read the text several times before the scheduled stimulated recall interview.

conventions and less-standard forms and conventions. Do you think this is an accurate and fair representation?" In a move that both met and exceeded my expectations, Karega pushed back against what I already believed was an uncomplicated and surface-level interpretation of the linguistic practices he adopted for composing the text. Karega explained:

> I think I see where you're going and I wouldn't exactly describe it that way. And not because I wasn't aware at the time that these kinds of distinctions were being made and debated. As I talked about in the group meeting, we were aware of these issues. We were reading what Fanon had to say about language and all the debates about Black language. We had to talk about those kinds of distinctions as part of our work with Ernie[67] and *The Westside News*. We were talking about language when we were talking about Kamuyu's work with names and when we were studying Swahili and some folks Arabic and so on. But I don't think those kinds of distinctions were at the forefront of my thinking as I wrote this or anything else really. I think what I was trying to accomplish usually dictated how I would write.

What Karega was doing here in his explanation is the same thing I was doing in chapter one when I introduced the traffic model analytic framework. In his own way, Karega was making a case for understanding his language practices as what Alastair Pennycook describes as relocalized forms of doing (136).

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[67] As I discussed in Chapter Four, Ernie Boone was the editor-in-chief of *The Westside News*, which was distributed in residential Black communities in Lansing, MI. As Karega's comments indicate, and as I discussed in Chapter Four, most of the BLFI activists worked as staff writers, editors, and production assistants for *The Westside News*.

In chapter one, introducing the traffic model analytic framework I explained how Lu and Horner's translingual approach to literacy conceptualizes writer agency "as both always in operation and always in development as writers shape themselves and language forms through recontextualization" (27). As I also explained, this conceptualization of writer agency was a response to trends in disciplinary scholarship which tend to codify translingual approaches to literacy as associable with the production of recognizable difference in writing. Emergent from this codification process, I explained, are scholarly initiatives in research and teaching to theorize code-meshing practices and translanguaging competence and translate these phenomena into pedagogical practice. But as I also explained, Lu and Horner's conceptualization of writer agency widens the scope, enabling researchers and teachers to recognize agency at work in both writing that appears to approximate and deviate from standardized languages and discourse conventions. In this regard, instead of parsing a writer's strategies into compartmentalized categories — code-switching, code-meshing, translanguaging, approximating the standard, privileging alternative discourses, etc.— I made a case for analyzing a writer's generic, discursive, and stylistic practices in terms of Pennycook's notion of relocalized forms of doing (136). In *Language as a Local Practice*, Pennycook makes the following argument:

> If we view language practices as a set of social activities that are always bound up with other practices, as mediating between the activity of language and the larger social sphere, we can see how social practices are relocalized in language and language practices are relocalized as other forms of doing. (136)

From this perspective, in chapter one I suggested that as researchers we analyze and talk about a writer's generic, discursive, and stylistic practices in terms of what a writer is trying to *do* in and through these practices.

Arguably, this is what Karega was attempting to do as he pushed back against surface-level descriptions of his language practices. Karega continued explaining: "If I had to describe this, I'd say that I was trying to make it plain for the masses. That's how I'd describe it. I think that was my intention for most of my writing." When I asked Karega to elaborate on his description of his language practices in terms of his efforts to "make it plain for the masses," he immediately went back to our discussions about C.L.R. James during his individual interviews and during the roundtable discussion. If you recall, in chapter four I discussed Karega's theorizations on the ways in which James helped the BLFI activists work through and come to terms with the functioning purposes and power of the revolutionary speaker and writer. As Karega explained, the BLFI activists were trying to determine the best practices for "packaging" their brand of revolution and communicating it to diverse audiences in diverse contexts. It was James's real-time instruction on discursive and rhetorical versatility that proved attractive to the BLFI activists. That is, it was James's ability to critically assess his rhetorical situation and exercise a level of contextual agency in "talking both theory and practice" during those seminars at the Malcolm X Communication Academy that helped the BLFI activists in their efforts to develop those best practices for accomplishing the objectives Karega described. Moreover, as Karega also explained, their critical analyses of James's writings helped the BLFI activists in their efforts to understand how the context,

commitments, and potential consequences of a revolutionary writer's work inform and shape the text produced.

By returning to those recollections about James and his influence on the BLFI activists' discursive and literate development, arguably what Karega was doing was theorizing the impact James's real-time instruction on discursive and rhetorical versatility and his instruction on the relationship between text and material contexts had on his composing processes. Karega explained:

> In the group meeting, I talked about how we felt we needed to be able to communicate with different people. We had to know how to go into the boardroom and communicate but also know how to talk to our brothers and sisters in our communities. And sometimes it wasn't always as easy as knowing your location. Sometimes you were talking to boardroom folks and community folks at the same time. Sometimes boardroom folks could be community folks and vice versa. As I said then, C.L.R helped us with that. But you know I also talked about his writings and how our discussions about his writings made us think about and really understand that how you write is based on what you're trying to accomplish and what you're writing for and the audience that you're writing to.

At this point in the stimulated recall interview, Karega was contextualizing how his engagements with James's discursive practices enhanced his ability to do what Suresh Canagarajah characterizes as gauging the communicative context to determine languaging strategies. In his 2011 study of his Sri-Lankan graduate student's code-meshing practices, Canagarajah discusses how this gauging of the communicative context

is one of the earliest strategies that multilingual writers adopt. In discussing translanguaging specifically, Canagarajah talks about how code-meshing is a rhetorical choice "not a mechanical activity independent of the specific communicative situation" (404). For example, in the stimulated recall interview with his Sri-Lankan graduate student, she identified several clues that she indicated encouraged her to code-mesh in one of her academic essays: (1) her impression that Canagarajah (her instructor) is a theorist and practitioner of code-meshing and friendly to the practice and (2) her impression that other members of her audience for the text (her classroom peers) were open and hospitable to interpreting her code-meshing practices. While Karega was not explicitly discussing translanguaging and code-meshing practices, he was, however, laying the foundation in order to begin theorizing the ways in which he assessed the writing situation for "Two Year Report" in order to frame his own language practices accordingly. In other words, he was contextualizing James's influence so he could, as I requested, elaborate on the situated contexts and layers of meaning tied to his decision to adopt for the text this practice he was describing as "making it plain for the masses."

As Karega explained, gauging the communicative context to determine the languaging strategies for the "Two Year Report" required his negotiation of the purpose of the editorial article. At the time of the production of the "Two Year Report," the *Mazungumzo Journal of African Studies* was an important topic of discussion for all those associated with the African Studies Center (ASC). The *Mazungumzo* was a product of the demands the BLFI activists and PASOA representatives made when they occupied and took over the ASC in October of 1969. With funding and support from the ASC, the BLFI activists and PASOA representatives had created the *Mazungumzo* and in its early

stages distributed the journal as associated with the ASC but not an extension of it. Karega explained this distinction:

> We had been active in all kinds of stuff. But one of the themes that kept standing out was this theme of oral traditions for Black people. We are great storytellers. We can talk till our heads and tongues fall off and out. But we don't write a lot of stuff down. So once we got into the politics of the African Studies Center after the takeover, the question presented to us was always about what we wanted. Well, the African Studies Center was one of the more published institutions in the University. They were able to get money to send a professor, White professors, anywhere in Africa. And they'd go for a year or so and come back and write a manual of sorts. They were putting out booklet after booklet on stuff from farming in Africa to political stuff on constitutions and parliamentary structures. So we said, "Look." We said that we liked some of it that was purely academic. But we also said the other stuff dealing with political structures was nonsense. So we insisted on having the opportunity to publish a journal of African Studies written by Black students. We wanted to publish something and we said it would be different. We knew there were other publications around. There was a publication out of California at UCLA I think called UFAHAMU being published by Black students. And there was also the Black Scholar. We knew we could do that too that way, different from the kind of stuff the African Studies Center was putting out.

But by the time Karega composed "Two Year Report," the BLFI activists and PASOA representatives had completely dissolved all associations the *Mazungumzo* had with the ASC. The functioning purpose of the *Mazungumzo* was at the center of their movement in this direction:

> When we first started, the people who had been in charge of the African Studies Center didn't have a good impression of us. They thought we would just fall by the way. Do some kind of student-leaflet or something. But we took a serious approach to the publication and we tackled those same kinds of issues that the professors who were getting fellowships from the African Studies Center were doing. For example, we did an issue dedicated to soil erosion and drought issues on the African continent. You see we had folks writing for the journal who knew this stuff, studying this independently. And we had African students, undergrads and graduates, writing for the journal. But we also had Africans living in Africa, scholars, average folks, all kinds of writers, sending in stuff for publication for the journal. We had just as much information to put together our own scholarship. But our approach was also contrary to the stuff they were calling scholarship. That's what caused the divide. Look, their scholarship was very restrictive. If you can think about how the study of Black people in the United States has been done, for example, how sociologists were always coming into Black communities — and still coming in by the way — and always coming up with these ideas based on part of a discussion with a group of people. That's just how we saw the work they were doing

about the African continent. Folk who called themselves scholars were

just parroting and helping neo-colonial African governments. They

weren't asking the hard questions. Were people better off under these

governments? They were of course better than they were under colonial

rule. But were they better off? Example, there was a push to get African

countries to borrow money from the World Bank or other economic

entities so they could become exporters of some kind of cash crop or even

tourism or something of that nature. Well, we saw early on that was a dead

end. It was a joke. But these guys in the African Studies Center were

going to study there. They'd come back and write publications that would

say what Africans need is a new agricultural program and they should

adopt the one that's been adopted at MSU, or at UCLA, or wherever, and

they would say African countries should become part of the modern

world. Nevermind the cultural and political issues accompanying that

viewpoint. So we said, "Wait a minute." And that's what we were doing

with the journal, challenging that nonsense. And of course they didn't like

it, but we weren't backing down. So we had to remove the *Mazungumzo*

from the African Studies Center.

From this perspective, when Karega set out to write the "Two Year Report" as editor-in-

chief, he was doing so, as he explained, to both contextualize "the history of the

Manzungumzo to justify the disassociation with the ASC" and "map out for our readers,

patrons, and contributors where we were going with the journal."

But as his theorizations also suggest, gauging the communicative context to determine the languaging strategies for the "Two Year Report" required Karega's negotiation of a second contextual factor: the diversity in readership that constituted his imagined audience for the text. Karega theorized:

> We had an international audience at The People's House just sitting around reading and talking, people from all over the African continent. People always had this idea that Africa is a country. But it's a continent with people with different shades, languages, cultures, everything. So I knew that there was so much diversity to Africa. I also knew from talking to people we encountered through our work who had travelled the world how diverse things are. I also knew there were large communities of Africans living outside of the African continent. Not just in North America, but in European countries and other places too. The BLFI was a local organization but PASOA was international. That was one of the important connections. We met people through conferences and we built relationships through letter-writing and stuff like that. These folks became interested in the journal and wanted copies. After about a year of publishing *Mazungumzo*, we also started contacting libraries all over the world — Cambridge, England, Germany, Belgium, you name it. We just got a list of libraries and we started writing letters and sending them copies of the *Mazungumzo,* seeing if they wanted to subscribe. And lo and behold, most of them did. Mostly because the radical students, White and Black, wanted it. So we had a large following worldwide. So when the

requests from writers to publish their stuff started coming in from Africans all throughout Europe, I wasn't surprised. We couldn't publish them all cause they may not have been germane to the subject matter for each volume. But the requests were overwhelming. And then of course we had the people reading and writing for the journal here in the U.S. –Black students at MSU and from other universities, Black folks in the prisons writing articles and sending them in, Black folks in the communities, Black faculty at MSU and at other universities.

So as Karega's theorizations suggest here, there was a transnational audience for the *Mazungumzo* which included subscribers, readers, patrons, and contributors from all over the world. What's also important to note here was Karega's critical awareness of the varying levels of diversity at work within this transnational audience. As Karega explained, there were obviously shared viewpoints and commitments amongst this transnational audience — shared viewpoints and commitments to the work of the *Mazungumzo*. But this transnational audience was demographically, linguistically, and culturally diverse. In particular, in his theorizations Karega was diligent in emphasizing his awareness of the diversity at work even within African and Black American populations. He pointed out the geographic, linguistic, and cultural diversity at work with Africans on the continent and African diasporic peoples, and he outlined the demographic diversity in terms of the *Mazungumzo's* Black American patrons and contributors.

Negotiating both contextual factors — the purpose of the "Two Year Report" and the diversity in audience — Karega thus believed that adopting the "make it plain for the masses" practice was the best option to accomplish his objectives:

I knew that if the *Mazungumzo* was going to speak to everyone and be

open to all ideas we had to touch people in these diverse areas. I knew that

as editor-in-chief if I was going to do something with the journal, I was

going to have to speak to more than just Black people here in the States.

But when you're faced with that kind of diversity in audience, you also

don't want to not address the hard-hitting stuff that needed to be addressed

as part of the kind of work we were trying to do with the journal. That's

why we split from the African Studies Center. We had to be committed to

that. I had to be committed to that. So I knew I had to write in a way that

made it plain for everyone, plainly in a way that brought all these different

groups together under the important subjects that we were trying to

address in the journal. With this essay, I was writing fully aware that I had

to educate people on what had taken place with the journal, everything in

theory and practice, and make sure that diverse group of people I talked

about understood that history and our vision.

In this regard, as Karega's theorizations suggest, "making it plain for the masses" was

about linguistic and theoretical simplicity for the purpose of uniting the masses —

citizens and intellectuals — locally, domestically, and internationally for the work of

Black revolutionary struggle. But part of what Karega was describing here is what

Kimathi Mohammed, the BLFI's Executive Chairman, discussed at length in an essay he

wrote entitled "Organization and Spontaneity: The Theory of the Vanguard Party and its

Application to the Black Movement."[68] During the archival process, I located this essay written by Mohammed, and I discovered that Mohammed used this text to, among other things, explain his understanding of the relationship between theory, language, and the revolutionary masses. Discussing the work of the revolutionary speaker and writer, Mohammed argued the following:

> Every effort must be made to take theory out of the world of academics and to integrate it into the day-to-day struggles of the mass of the population where it rightfully belongs. That is, theoretical jargon must be broken down into understandable language and placed before the masses, and the ordinary man and woman must be encouraged to undertake theoretical work not only in cooperation with intellectuals, but also without the influence of an "official" symbol of leadership… Those intellectuals who have totally integrated themselves into the mass movement have discovered that the ordinary man and woman is also quite capable of posing theoretical questions. The average person, however, does not pose things in the same manner and tone as those who have been thoroughly educated in educational institutions of "official" society. (63)

Here, Mohammed was making a case for the "ordinary man and woman's" engagements with theoretical problems facing the movement for Black revolution and liberation. Complicating the notion that theory — revolutionary theory in particular — is the work of the academic and intellectual, Mohammed was widening the scope, creating space for the masses to not only "undertake theoretical work," but do so unbound by a required

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[68] This essay was the product of a presentation Mohammed gave at the First Spontaneity/Organization Conference (First S/O Conference) which was held in Detroit on August 4th and 5th, 1973. It was published as a pamphlet in the late spring of 1974.

attachment to any revolutionary or intellectual unit or organization. But by arguing that theoretical jargon needed to be broken down into understandable language, Mohammed was also drawing another important distinction between the ways in which academics and intellectuals do theoretical work and the ways in which the masses do theoretical work. This distinction, Mohammed was arguing, needed to mediate and inform the revolutionary speaker and writer's rhetorical and discursive practices.

When I explained to Karega my reading and understanding of Mohammed's philosophy on the relationship between theory, language, and the revolutionary masses (as articulated here), he cosigned that reading and interpretation, establishing a relationship between Mohammed's philosophy and his own discursive strategy that he gave meaning to by characterizing the practice as "making it plain for the masses." Karega explained:

> As Kimathi's work shows, the first thing we always tried to do was break everything down into simplistic language. Look, you could read some of the publications coming out of the African Studies Center and you needed a dictionary and grammar book next to you as you were reading. That was one of the things we knew we couldn't do. One of things I knew I couldn't do writing for the *Mazungumzo*. As I said, we had multiple audiences who would be reading the same words. I forgot to mention the high school students. We were sending the *Mazungumzo* to Black students at the high schools in Lansing and Detroit specifically to generate their interest in African Studies. We weren't committed to college and only college. Other writers were writing for a college audience and just a college audience.

You had to get a college graduate to appreciate what they were reading. That's not what we were about. We were all college students and naturally we wanted to be academically profound. But all the way down from the subject matter to the writing itself, we wanted the *Mazungumzo* to be read on various levels by different people. We wanted the content to politically reflect what the *Mazungumzo* was about. But we needed it to be read by these multiple audiences that we believed all needed to be a part of what the *Mazungumzo* was doing.

So again, "making it plain for the masses" was about unified collaboration and discursive inclusion. It was a strategy birthed from Karega's — and the BLFI activists' — engagements with James's discursive practices and his instruction on the functioning purpose and power of the revolutionary speaker and writer. It was about critical awareness of diversity in audience and the adoption of communicative practices that could mediate their efforts to package their brand of revolution and communicate it to diverse audiences across diverse contexts. It was about linguistic and theoretical simplicity for the purpose of uniting the masses in the work of Black revolutionary struggle. It was languaging as political practice.

Making it Plain for the Masses: Relocalization and Recontextualization

After Karega established a relationship between Mohammed's philosophy and his "making it plain for the masses" practice, I asked him to revisit and talk about those two initial passages we examined at the beginning of the stimulated recall interview in light of the description he had provided about his "make it plain for the masses" discursive

practice. He started with the first passage, the one that I had initially in that preliminary

stage characterized as indicative of a standard deployment of English. Again, the passage

reads as follows:

> This issue marks the beginning of the third year of publication for
> Mazungumzo. Through the first two years we have faced numerous
> hassles; assaults, physical and verbal; threats of expulsion from Michigan
> State University; threats of arrest and imprisonment. But six issues of
> Mazungumzo have been published despite all Mazungumzo, the editors,
> and staff have faced. Furthermore, despite the new hassles and continuing
> old ones, we will continue to publish the word of truth concerning Afrikan
> people.
> Two years is not a long time to publish a journal that tries to fill a
> gap created by five-hundred and thirty plus years of capitalist imperialist
> propaganda against Afrikan people. In no way am I trying to acclaim
> greatness for the dedicated brothers and sisters who have contributed two
> years of our lives in order that the truth about our people can be available.
> I write this missive to Mazungumzo readers first to reiterate to those who
> have been with us through the two years what our ideological stand
> continues to be, and secondly, because it is my duty as editor-in-chief to
> give Mazungumzo readers an account of the editors' and staff's activity
> during our two young years of publishing.

Working from this passage, Karega theorized how and to what end he believed the

"making it plain for the masses" practice was at work in the text:

> You see, I think I was aware of the different people I was writing to and
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> I'm trying to address them all. As I said, we had students, academics,
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> people doing time, Black folks in the community, Black folks overseas, all
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> reading this and writing for the journal. So I'm being straight-forward so
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> everyone reading would understand the history of the *Mazungumzo* and
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> the political struggle that was a part of our work with the journal. Most of
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> these sentences weren't complicated and I wasn't trying to use any kind of
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> creative language here. I think the only thing I do that might be seen as
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> creative is the spelling of "Africa" with a "k." But that wasn't even

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creative. I wasn't doing that to be creative. That was political too and

matched the whole purpose of the journal. In other stuff we wrote, like

other writers, we spelled America with three "k's" to represent the

oppressiveness and the lynchings and enslavement and everything else

Black people have been victimized by in the United States. Spelling can

be political. Look, we live in the West and we learn our ABC's and how to

spell based on the Western world. But there are different spellings for just

about every place on Earth. Africa was initially spelled with a "k" instead

of a "c." So we were trying to let people know that there have been

modifications to us. Everything about us has been changed to satisfy the

way certain people talk, spell, everything. You know they just take our

culture and say "to hell with it, we're going to spell it this way cause this

is how it sounds to us." Well, we wanted people reading to challenge us

and say "you spelled Africa wrong." And they did. You know what that

does though? It starts the conversation. Now I can talk to you about

Africa. It's a door-opener, a starter. *Mazungumzo* means dialogue in

Swahili. So now we're gonna talk because of how I spelled Africa. You

see? (laughing) I think the only word I use that some may not have known

was "missive."

On the one hand, what stands out immediately in Karega's theorizations is his

politicization of his use of spelling in the text, in particular, his reworking of the spelling

of the word "Africa" by replacing the "c" with a "k." But as Karega's theorizations

suggest, there are deeper implications tied to his use of spelling politically. In his own

way, Karega was engaging Pennycook's theory of language sedimentation and applying it to his own languaging practices.

In chapter one, I referenced Pennycook's theory of language sedimentation when discussing Lu and Horner's notion of recontextualization. Through that theory, Pennycook argues that "the notion of systematicity embedded in the concept of grammar is itself a product of repeated social action" (46). From this perspective, the implications of Pennycook's theory of language sedimentation are clear. If you recall, in chapter one I discussed how theorizing language as localized practice — languaging as relocalization — does three things: (1) gives us a way of thinking about language as fluid and emergent from the social practices engaged in; (2) gives us a way of thinking about language practices as the everyday activities that produce space and time; and (3) gives us a way of understanding identities as always emergent from the social activities individuals and groups engage in.

In his efforts to politicize his use of spelling, Karega was also theorizing this notion of systematicity tied to grammar and theorizing the layers of meaning and productive effects tied to his relocalization of the word "Africa." As Karega explained, grammar structures and rules that underlie English used in Western contexts are the products of repetitious social practices and cultural conditioning. Through various social practices, Karega theorized, Westerners learn these grammar structures and rules and are socialized to reproduce them in their everyday practices. But as Karega also explained, in other localities, repetitious social activities and practices have produced regularities of grammar that are diverse, distinct, and multiple in form, structure, and meaning. However, hegemony and dominance have been enacted against these diversities,

distinctions, and multiplicities. As Karega theorized, the revisions to the spelling of the word "Africa" — revisions that substituted the "k" for a "c" — were enacted through and for the purpose of hegemony and dominance. As repetitious social practices, these langauging acts of hegemony and dominance were enacted to alter not only the layers of meaning tied to the word "Africa," but also its respective contexts, cultures, and peoples. The "k" was replaced with a "c," Karega theorized, to subordinate all things African and "to satisfy the way certain people talk, spell, everything." Arguably, when Karega used the descriptive "certain people" he was referring to the agents of European and Western imperialism and colonialism and White supremacists. But countering and challenging these practices, Karega's reworking of the spelling of "Africa" by removing the "c" and reinserting the "k" was a political act of subversion and revision. As Karega explained, in the same way that "certain people" used spelling to enact hegemony and dominance, he used spelling politically to reconstruct and bring back to life alternative meanings tied to the word "Africa" and alternative meanings tied to its respective contexts, cultures, and peoples. In this regard, Karega's efforts to use grammar politically and rhetorically to contest power relations, challenge representational politics, and encourage dialogue between his targeted readership and the BLFI activists and the PASOA representatives were acts of relocalization that produced new African meanings, contexts, and identities.

On the other hand, Karega's theorizations also suggest that he was gauging the communicative context as he composed the text. He established a relationship between three things: (1) the purpose of the "Two Year Report," which was to contextualize and communicate the historical and political circumstances and contexts informing the *Mazungumzo* and its production and distribution; (2) the multiplicity of his targeted

readership; and (3) his decision to be "straight-forward" and predominately use uncomplicated sentences grammatically and syntactically and his decision to use language he described as lacking in creativity. Grammatically, syntactically, and contextually, the last sentence in the second paragraph is the only compound-complex sentence in the passage, and each sentence in the passage introduces a singular circumstance or contextual factor that Karega was using to not only set the commemorative tone of the article, but also prepare readers for the account of the activities surrounding the *Mazungumzo* that he was set to deliver in the editorial article. He also explained how there was a political purpose not a creative purpose for "misspelling" the word "Africa," and by pointing out the potential difficulties some readers may have had interpreting the word "missive," Karega was also demonstrating how keeping the text "standard" and understandable in terms of word choice was a consideration in terms of the political purpose of the editorial article.

From this perspective, at this point in the text Karega was indeed choosing "standard" structures and features in light of his deliberations over the communicative context for composing the "Two Year Report." However, Karega's reluctance at the beginning of the stimulated recall interview to characterize these structures and features as "standard" and his insistence on characterizing these languaging acts as part of his "make it plain for the masses" practice emphasizes his efforts to politicize his decision to approximate "standard" conventions. In other words, Karega's decisions to approximate "standard" structures and features was not what Lu and Horner in "Translingual Literacy and Matters of Agency" describe as "a submission to demands of the dominant" (33). Rather, by theorizing his adoption of the "standard" within the context of a discursive

practice that he explicitly defined as amicable to the revolutionary speaker and writer, Karega was emphasizing what Lu and Horner describe as "the political and rhetorical agency of repetition, identification, mimesis, and reproduction" (33).

As I explained in chapter one, Lu and Horner's notion of recontextualization—understood in light of Alastair Pennycook's theory of language sedimentation and Anthony Giddens theory of language iteration—emphasizes the degree to which every instance of language use "is a potential modification of that language at the same time as it acts to reproduce it" (qtd. Giddens 22). From this perspective, as Lu and Horner point out, even repetition in language and discourse is understood as acts of recontextualization where new meanings, purposes, and contexts are created. Researchers are empowered to characterize both the literacies writers produce that appear recognizably "different" and "transformative" and the literacies produced that appear "conventional" and "the same" as exhibiting a kind of writer agency at work that carries social, cultural, and political meanings and purposes.

But as his theorizations suggest, Karega also felt empowered to claim a kind of political agency tied to his adoption of the "standard" in this portion of the text. If you recall in chapter four, Karega discussed the ways in which the BLFI activists reconciled Frantz Fanon's language theories, Kamuyu's work on African names, and what they learned through the mentorship of Ernie Boone and their participation in journalistic writing as part of the staff of *The Westside News*. As Karega explained, even though they were encouraged to use "standard" conventions as part of their journalistic writing, they never bowed to or internalized those notions of correctness that scholars and activists such as Geneva Smitherman were countering during the period. They embraced a belief

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that languages communally privileged by Africans and people of color mediate their histories, positionings in society, and their constructions and performances of culture and identities. The BLFI activists also read and discussed Fanon's work to understand how language can be used as a systematic and pathological tool of oppression against the subordinate. However, as Karega explained, they never bought into the idea that "academic language was superior or something we as Black people have no claim to." Instead, they believed in the subversive possibilities in using "standard" languages and conventions to disrupt and dismantle racist, imperialist, and colonial discourses, systems, and structures. As such, it is not a surprise that Karega pushed back against a singular interpretation of his language acts in this opening passage as "standard" and insisted on talking about his use of "standard" conventions within the context of a political discursive strategy that emphasized linguistic and theoretical simplicity for the purpose of uniting the masses in the work of Black revolutionary struggle.

As Karega continued to interpret and theorize the opening passage of the text, he spoke directly to the notion of discursive theoretical simplicity, demonstrating how gauging the communicative context resulted in the implementation of the "make it plain for the masses" practice along the lines of theory:

> There are things in here that I'm sure I was using to identify with the different people I knew would read this. Like in the second line I say "capitalist imperialist propaganda." Now our theory-heavy readers could see that as a reference to Marxist Leninist theory. And I'll say again, as a group the BLFI was not totally sold on Marxist-Leninist theory. We debated that a lot. Some stuff we liked and some we didn't. That's why

C.L.R. and his work was so appealing to us, especially me. So I think I'm using "capitalist imperialist propaganda" to say to some people reading it that theory was a part of my thinking and the thinking of those associated with the *Mazungumzo*. But I don't want to go too far with it so others won't get it. You know, like Kimathi said in that quote. Not go too far using theoretical jargon. Those are common words most people know, especially at that time. "Capitalist." "Imperialist." "Propaganda." Everyone would get what I'm saying which was that oppression against us has always been economic and structural and media, news, books, all that, have always been used to reinforce it. That point was important for understanding that history of the *Mazungumzo*. I was trying to explain as editor what we were trying to do with the journal and why. So everyone really needed to be able to understand that line of thinking.

In this instance, as he composed the text Karega was still negotiating diversity in his targeted readership, the purpose of the editorial article, and the potential consequences of his languaging practices. In his efforts to explain to his diverse readership the history of the *Mazungumzo* and the projected future of the journal, as editor-in-chief his "make it plain for the masses" practice had to involve a level of attentiveness to the theoretical underpinnings that had informed and were continuing to inform their work. Yet, Karega was clear here in describing a level of consciousness at work as he determined the extent to which he would integrate theory into the text. He wanted his diverse readership to engage the text and understand its purpose and meanings. In this regard, "making it plain for the masses" meant refraining from using extensive theoretical jargon and instead

using common terms associable with frameworks that theorize the intersection among issues of racialized oppression, capitalism, imperialism, and communicative propaganda. In other words, "making it plain for the masses" was all about — as Mohammed and Karega theorized — breaking down theoretical jargon into understandable language. In this case, understandable language wasn't an abbreviated and simplistic articulation or narration of Marxist-Leninist theory, but rather it involved using those common terms — "capitalist," "imperialist," and "propaganda" — that Karega believed readers across contexts could recognize as indicative of his efforts to historicize the *Mazungumzo* and map out its functioning purpose within the context of that intersection among issues of racialized oppression, capitalism, imperialism, and communicative propaganda.

Making it Plain for the Masses: Signifying and Vernacular Languaging

As we began discussing the second passage that we examined at the beginning of the stimulated recall interview, it became clear that the "make it plain for the masses" practice was even more multifaceted in its implementation than I had imagined when Karega first introduced it. Karega explained: "Now with that first part I was talking about making it plain with language and theory. I'm making it plain in a different way in this part." Again, this second passage from the "Two Year Report" reads as follows:

> Trying to continue their bourgeoisie academician work, despite the fact that their African Studies Center, as was their whole operation, was in a state of chaos, a group herein called the cry-babies attempted to start up a new journal to replace Mazungumzo. I call these academicians cry-babies because they came together on the basis of their common feeling that "Mazungumzo did not reflect a wide enough spectrum of political or intellectual opinion." They were crying because their "political and intellectual opinion" did not merit inclusion in Mazungumzo.
> I would not call them cry-babies though if they had a right to cry. These cry-babies had no right to be crying, for nature had only taken its

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course. It was only a matter of time before "white liberal Africanists" were told that their academic representation was unwanted and will not be tolerated by Afrikans; as the workers of Mazungumzo told the cry-babies. It is only natural that a people struggling for total liberation of all brothers and sisters will refuse to publish material that reinforce the lies and myths that have been directed against our people for more than 500 years; as the workers of the Mazungumzo have done and will always continue to do.

The cry-babies attempted to start a new journal, ironically called The Michigan Africanist. The cry-babies went before the Steering Committee of the ASC. The idea of funding The Michigan Africanist was defeated. All of the Afrikans on the Steering Committee voted to not fund that journal. The Afrikans were called racist for going against the predominately white journal. No attention was paid to the fact that the two persons of European-Jewish decent, Harold Marcus and Victor Low, voted in favor of the cry-babies journal.

I asked Karega to elaborate on the distinction he was drawing between the "make it plain for the masses" practices at work in the first passage and in this second passage. He theorized:

With this second part, making it plain was about, how do you say it now, calling out our opposition. (laughing) See, at this point I'm further in. I'm past the history of the *Mazungumzo* and I'm talking about our opposition so I could show why we were where we were with the journal, why we broke ties with the African Studies Center, and why we were going in the direction we were going. You see, this part explains what had taken place and what was going on. When we held to the work the *Mazungumzo* was about, this group was put together to challenge us. It says what they did. When we wouldn't include them and their work in the journal, they did everything they could to oppose it and us, including trying to start their own African Studies journal. So at this point writing, for everyone

reading, I had to call it for what it was. Call them out. That's making it

plain too.

Here, Karega's theorizations suggest that as he composed the text he was still negotiating

issues related to the labor of writing (diversity in readership, purpose, and the potential

productive effects of the text). But he was adding an additional element to the "making it

plain for the masses" practice. For Karega, this portion of the text was about exposure of

the *Mazungumzo's* opposition and erasure of the control and power this opposition

believed they had over the *Mazungumzo* and its staff. In this regard, these acts of

exposure and erasure required a distinct languaging practice where "making it plain for

the masses" involved calling out this opposition and discursively delimiting their

perceived control and power. So in the first passage, "making it plain for the masses" was

a political act involving not only his use of grammatical and syntactical structures and

features that approximated the "standard," but also his use of theoretical terminology that

could be interpreted by readers across contexts. His decision to "make it plain for the

masses" using linguistic and theoretical simplicity was guided by his desire to engage a

diverse audience in the work of Black revolutionary struggle. But in this second passage,

"making it plain for the masses" required Karega's use of less-standard terminology and

conventions in order to perform a vernacular languaging act that was political in purpose,

intent, and affect.

This vernacular languaging act Karega was describing in his theorizations is a

rhetorical practice that resonates with Black communities and is culturally valued by

Black Americans. In *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary

Criticism*, Henry Louis Gates Jr. characterizes signifyin(g) as a range of Black rhetorical

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tropes which include "marking, loud-talking, testifying, calling out (of one's name),

sounding, rapping, playing the dozens, and so on" (52). Expounding on this notion of

signifying in terms of Black writers, in "The Signifying Monkey Revisited" Kermit E.

Campbell describes it as "a way of rendering powerless through language an

uncompromising oppressor" (463). To exemplify this particular mode of signifying,

Campbell also points to the Signifying Monkey tales in Black folklore (stories and

poems). As Campbell explains, "signifying as derived from the Signifying Monkey Tales

means the use of certain discourse forms not only to put down or poke fun at someone

but categorically to debunk an individual's or community's self-imposed status of power"

(465). For example, in one of the tales we see the Signifying Monkey using vernacular to

call out the Lion and challenge his positioning as the most powerful and dominant figure

in the jungle:

> Here goes the monkey in the tree with that same signifying.
> He said, "Look at you, you goddamn chump.
> Went down in the jungle fucking with that man[69]
> And got your ass [mangled] and drug in the sand.
> You call yourself a real down king,
> But I found you ain't a goddamned thing.
> Get from underneath this goddamned tree
> 'Cause I feel as though I've got to pee." (qtd. in Abrahams 116)

Here, the Signifying Monkey calls out the object of his critique—the Lion—using name

calling and direct insult. For example, the Monkey calls the Lion a "chump" and proceeds

to demonstrate why the Lion has earned that name by ridiculing him for challenging the

Elephant and getting trounced as a result. Instead of holding up the Lion as this powerful

and dominant figure, the Monkey pokes fun at the Lion's self-proclaimed title as "a real

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[69] "The man" here refers to the Elephant. As the tale goes, the Monkey, the Elephant, and the Lion are all mutual friends. The Monkey dupes the Lion into believing that the Elephant has insulted him. Outraged and unaware that the Monkey was signifying, the Lion confronts the Elephant, demands an apology, but ends up getting trounced by the Elephant.

down king" and delimits his perceived power and authority by proclaiming him to be not "a goddamned thing."

For the "Two Year Report," Karega was employing similar vernacular languaging acts to call out the *Mazungumzo's* opposition and delimit plainly for the *Mazungumzo's* diverse readership this opposition's perceived control and power. For example, in the same way that the Monkey used name-calling to call out the Lion, in that second passage Karega was intentional in using name-calling to call out the object of his critique. Karega theorized this intentionality, suggesting that he was exercising a level of conscious agency in his deliberations over language use and word choice:

> You see in the paragraph before this, I identified who one part of our opposition was, "white liberal Africanists" who I said were put together to oppose us and the *Mazungumzo*. But in this part I also give them a different name, "cry-babies." And that's the word I wanted to use. I guess you can describe it as less-standard as you said earlier. The word "malcontent" might have been more academically appropriate. But the language fits what I was trying to do. You're not trying to sound academic when you're trying to call someone or something out. Especially when you're writing to as many different people as I was. Everyone knows what a "cry-baby" is. I didn't have to take two or three paragraphs to make it clear to everyone reading how we felt about those who were opposing our work and the *Mazungumzo* and why we felt that way. Plus, "cry-baby" was insulting and in this case insulting needed to be part of calling them out. They thought they had control. They had none. So that word fit. And

to make it clear why we were taking that stance I say more to drive that point home. But that word alone said so much.

Here, Karega was theorizing how he introduced his opposition formally as "white liberal Africanists," only to tear them down — call them out — later in this portion of the text by giving them an alternative name — "cry-babies." This alternative name, Karega theorized, would emphasize for his readers that he was engaging in acts of exposure and erasure by insulting and ridiculing this opposition. Karega was clear in his claim that signifying was the desired languaging act he wanted to use for this portion of the text, and he contextualized his choice within the context of his "make it plain for the masses" practice. For example, as he explained, he could have used the word "malcontent" to characterize this opposition instead of the word "cry-baby." He theorized here that the word "malcontent" would have been the more "academically appropriate" word choice. But it was his political purpose and intent to expose the "white liberal Africanists" to a diverse readership as opposers of the work of the *Mazungumzo* and erase their perceived control and power over it that dictated his rejection of the more "academically appropriate" word and his appropriation of the more familiar and less-standard term that would serve his efforts to signify, call out his opposition, at this portion in the text. The term "cry-baby" carries recognizably negative connotations — one who, in an infantile manner, unjustifiably and uncontrollably complains and is discontent with a person, circumstance, or situation. In this regard, just as the Monkey challenges and delimits the Lion's perceived status and power by calling him out as a "chump," by calling his opposition "cry-babies," Karega was delimiting their perceived status and power and

recasting the "white liberal Africanists" within the context of the recognizably infantile and negative connotations tied to the word "cry-baby."

As Karega alluded to in his theorizations, he didn't merely call this opposition "cry-babies" in the passage. He reinforced his efforts to challenge and delimit their perceived control and power, and ridicule and direct insult were his discursive weapons of choice. Just like the Monkey employed the Lion's own words and interpretations to recast him as one who is not "a goddamned thing" as opposed to his perceived status as "a real down king," Karega used the words and interpretations of the "white liberal Africanists" to paint an active picture of the behaviors and practices that had earned them the "cry-baby" descriptor. He made fun of these behaviors and practices in the process. For example, in the passage Karega explained for his readers the source of the "white liberal Africanists" discontent with the *Mazungumzo*, the source of their complaining against the *Mazungumzo* staff, and the impetus behind their efforts to start a new journal of African Studies. To these ends, Karega used their own words in the form of a direct quote that was issued by one of the "white liberal Africanists" during a meeting with the BLFI activists and the PASOA representatives: "I call these academicians cry-babies because they came together on the basis of their common feeling that '*Mazungumzo did not reflect a wide enough spectrum of political or intellectual opinion'.*"[70] But Karega was signifying on the "white liberal Africanists," first, by again calling them out as cry-babies in that sentence, but second, by portraying them in the next sentence as "crying because their "political and intellectual opinion" did not merit inclusion in *Mazungumzo*." The direct insult was unleashed by Karega in those two sentences, challenging the "white

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[70] Karega explained during the stimulated recall interview the origins of this quote from the "white liberal Africanists."

liberal Africanists" assertion that the limitations of the *Mazungumo* was the source of their discontent and complaining and their efforts to start another journal and offering an alternative explanation for their exclusion from the work of the *Mazungumzo.* Their ideas, interpretations, and scholarship were excluded from the *Mazungumzo* on the basis of merit alone. Karega reinforced this notion by ridiculing their "cry-babying" behaviors and practices. Karega wrote: "These cry-babies had no right to be crying…" Then Karega proceeded to unpack for his audience how absurd and ridiculous their "cry-babying" behaviors and practices were: "It is only natural that a people struggling for total liberation of all our brothers and sisters refuse to publish material that reinforce the lies and myths that have been directed against our people for more than 500 years."

Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed and analyzed a linguistic practice Karega adopted for composing the "Two Year Report" as editor-in-chief for the Mazungumzo journal of African Studies. As I argued in the introduction of this chapter, this practice Karega described as "making it plain for the masses" provides insight into two things. First, it emphasizes the ways in which writers composing from the margins assign a level of political agency to languaging acts that both approximate and deviate from "standard" conventions. As I also argued, this process is not initiated indiscriminately. As Karega's theorizations suggest, a writer's assessment of the communicative context (audience, material conditions, purpose for writing, potential productive effects and consequences, and relevance of their "traffic" experiences) informs and shapes the political agency they imbue to various languaging acts. On the one hand, for Karega, "making it plain for the

masses" was about using grammar politically and rhetorically to contest power relations, challenge representational politics, and encourage dialogue between his targeted readership and the BLFI activists and the PASOA representatives. These were acts of relocalization that Karega used to subvert hegemony and dominance and produce new African meanings, contexts, and identities. But Karega's decision to "make it plain for the masses" using linguistic and theoretical simplicity and standard conventions was guided by his desire to engage a diverse audience in the work of Black revolutionary struggle and was informed by his engagements with C.L.R. James's discursive practices and his instruction on the functioning purpose and power of the revolutionary speaker and writer. On the other hand, his decision to "make it plain for the masses" using signifying and vernacular languaging was guided by his desire to call out the *Mazungumzo's* opposition and delimit plainly for the *Mazungumzo's* diverse readership this opposition's perceived control and power.

Second, the discursive understanding Karega gave to the "making it plain for the masses" practice emphasizes the importance of theorizing and talking about a writer's generic, discursive, and stylistic practices in terms of the notion of relocalized doing (*Language as a Local Practice* 136). At the beginning of the stimulated recall interview, Karega pushed back against my attempts to characterize his language practices for the "Two Year Report" in terms of surface-level descriptors. His efforts to politicize his language practices mediated this action. For Karega, compartmentalized descriptors characterizing his language practices as hybrid embodied by standardized and less-standard conventions could not adequately describe the commitments, contexts, and purposes driving his languaging practices. From his perspective, "making it plain for the

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masses" was a political practice in terms of purpose, intent, and desired effect. By discussing his language practices within the context of what he was trying to *do* (emphasis mine) in and through the practice, Karega was afforded the opportunity to theorize his writing and writing process in more meaningful ways, examining the situated contexts and layers of meaning tied to this practice. In this regard, he was able to theorize the sociality and materiality of his composing practices for the "Two Year Report.

EPILOGUE

I presented this dissertation as multifaceted project. First, I described this project as a historical work of subversion and revision designed to do two things: (1) apply pressure to trends in rhetoric and composition historiography that have left under-challenged a politics of representation that historically and systematically marked Black college students of the late sixties and early seventies as underprepared, lacking in linguistic resources and rhetorical agency, and politically militant yet academically apathetic; and (2) construct a more nuanced picture of the writer agency of Black college students of the late sixties and early seventies. Second, I framed this project as an attempt to make use of the BLFI activists' experiences with political literacy to inform and shape pedagogical practice. I posited this project as disciplinary work that will give compositionists insight into the following: (1) the social, cultural, and political circumstances and contexts that motivate students to use writing not just as a site for negotiating academic coursework, but as a site for negotiating their activist sensibilities; (2) the ways in which writer agency and motivations for writing function in the composing process; and (3) the nuanced ways in which writers actively engage in the practices of carving out discursive space to construct identities and perform a range of diverse social, cultural, and political meanings and effects.

To these ends, I adopted what I described as a traffic model analytic framework which merges three points of inquiry: (1) the contexts for literacy production (e.g.

material conditions, power relations at work, motivations for writing, etc.); (2) the BLFI activists' "traffic" experiences (e.g. a reconstructed network of the rhetorical and literate activities influencing and shaping the BLFI activists' ideological, political, and discursive development); and (3) linguistic, generic, and discursive patterns identified in the BLFI activists' political writings. Working from the traffic model analytic framework, I discussed the BLFI activists' pre-MSU hush-harbor familial and communal experiences, arguing that these experiences served as motivating factors for the BLFI activists' use of literacy beyond academic contexts to mediate their activist work as undergraduate students at MSU. It was these hush harbor experiences that introduced the BLFI activists to the ways in which rhetoric and language could be used to question and critique power, enact resistance to domination, and perform alternative worldviews and viewpoints. Next, I introduced The People's House and the Malcolm X Communication Academy as two important sites of knowledge construction and negotiation for the BLFI activists during their tenure at MSU. It was in and through these spaces — which I described as global contact zones that fostered rhetorical and literate engagements amongst people of African descent — that the BLFI activists began to develop their use of literacy to mediate their political activism locally, domestically, and internationally. For many of the BLFI activists, their pre-MSU hush harbor experiences had introduced them to radical political rhetorics of Black activists such as Malcolm X. But it was in these sites of knowledge construction and negotiation that the BLFI activists extended their engagements with these kinds of discursive practices by reading and discussing the speeches and writings of Black activists and intellectuals working from and within a tradition of Black radicalism.

Turning to their political literacies, I presented the findings of my analysis of the strategies the BLFI activists' adopted for their positional writing practices. Applying pressure to trends in rhetoric and composition historiography, I demonstrated the ways in which the BLFI activists negotiated and developed the literate practices they used to not only construct themselves politically on a subjective and organizational level, but also to intervene in campus and communal politics. Contrary to the politics of representation that had characterized Black students of the late sixties and early seventies as underprepared, lacking in linguistic resources and rhetorical agency, and politically militant yet academically apathetic, I demonstrated how and to what end the BLFI activists engaged in the repurposing of practices and processes involved in textual invention and production. More specifically, I demonstrated the ways in which the BLFI activists, as a community of writers, adopted the practice of composing discursively hybrid position paper populated by the theoretical and practical discourses of Black radicalism by repurposing and recontextualizing the knowledge they acquired through their engagements with C.L.R. James's discursive practices and Stokely Carmichael and Michael Thelwell's work with the position paper on Black power. I also showed how the BLFI activists, composing collaboratively for the BLFI, developed a blueprint for the discursive, stylistic, and generic character of the narrative report they used as part of their positional writing practices by establishing a connection between the knowledge they acquired from their engagements with James and Kwame Nkrumah's discursive practices and the contextual factors driving their intent to compose the text (location, time, audience, purposes, commitments, etc.)

I continued in my efforts to construct a nuanced picture of the BLFI activists'

writer agency by discussing the stylistic aspects of a language practice Chui Karega

adopted for an editorial article he wrote as editor-in-chief for the *Mazungumzo*. But this

discussion also yielded pertinent insight into those three areas of inquiry I outlined as

exigent to the theorizing and implementation of writing pedagogy in the classroom and

beyond. The discussion of Karega's "making it plain for the masses" practice illustrated

the ways in which writers composing from the margins assign a level of political agency

to languaging acts that both approximate and deviate from "standard" conventions. This

discussion provided insight into the ways in which a writer's assessment of the

communicative context (audience, material conditions, purpose, potential productive

effects and consequences, relevance of their "traffic" experiences) informs and shapes the

political agency they imbue to these diverse languaging practices. But this discussion also

provided insight into how writers engage acts of relocalization and recontextualization as

political practices.

The discursive understanding that Karega gave to his "making it plain for the

masses" practice emphasized the importance of theorizing and talking about a writer's

generic, discursive, and stylistic practices in terms of Alastair Pennycook's notion of

relocalized forms of doing (136). For Karega, "making it plain for the masses" was a

political practice in terms of purpose, intent, and desired effect. By discussing his

language practices within the context of what he was trying to *do* in and through the

practice, Karega was afforded the opportunity to theorize his writing and writing process

in more meaningful ways, examining the situated contexts and layers of meaning tied to

this practice. In this regard, he was able to theorize the sociality and materiality of his composing practices for the "Two Year Report."

So what's next in terms of this project? Of course there is more work that can be done that was beyond the scope of this dissertation. As I explained in chapter five, the ways in which the BLFI activists engaged acts of transfer and repurposing as a community of writers composing in reactive writing contexts was beyond the scope of this dissertation. But I believe that it was an important aspect of the practices they adopted for composing position papers for the BLFI. As such, future work can explore how and to what end the BLFI activists, and similar groups of writers, negotiated difference and achieved shared understanding in these reactive writing contexts. Moreover, it can examine the ways in which the processes of seeing and selling Rebecca Nowacek describes were enacted and negotiated by the BLFI activists as they collaboratively composed their position papers. Finally, additional work can focus on evaluating how effectively the BLFI activists' "sold" the transfer and repurposing connections they were making in their writing between the knowledge they acquired from the network of rhetorical and literate activities I reconstructed and the practices they adopted for composing their position papers.

Stimulated recall ethnographic practices will need to figure prominently in this work. In this regard, part of my work as a researcher will involve selling with patience and care the usefulness of stimulated recall to the BLFI activists participating in this dissertation project. In other words, I will need to find creative and useful ways to help the BLFI activists negotiate and work through the problematics of representation and the issues of time, space, and cognitive memory that left them unsold on the benefits of

stimulated recall for examining the collaborative writing practices they adopted for their position papers. I will need to emphasize in creative and useful ways the potential benefits gained from stimulated recall in terms of affording the BLFI activists the opportunity to reflect upon their experiences with and their decision-making practices for their positional writing, giving meaning and shape to those experiences and processes.

But I began this dissertation with my Writing Center work with James. The insight this dissertation has provided on the BLFI activists' experiences with political literacy has laid the groundwork for future work in terms of pedagogical practice. I described those Writing Center sessions with James as "failed engagements" because I overwrote the range of experiences and practices James was attempting to negotiate by re-telling the stories of my father's literate practices and by expecting that somehow those stories would project a particular understanding of literacy and a particular kind of activist literate practice for Black student-writers that James could adopt or use as a model for his own work. The BLFI activists have demonstrated through this dissertation project the importance and usefulness of providing writers opportunities to critically engage and discursively give meaning to their own literate practices. Future work can focus on developing pedagogical approaches — for classroom and Writing Center contexts —that enable students to create meaning and knowledge through reading and writing as they critically engage their writing and negotiate issues of language use, context, traditions, histories, purposes, commitments, and the potential consequences of their work.

These kinds of pedagogical approaches will need to do two important things. First, they will need to immerse students in a range of reading, writing, and discussion

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activities which enable them to scrutinize — in their own writing and the writing of others — the workings of language and how it is shaped by and mediates social, political, cultural, and economic circumstances, contexts, and practices. Second, these pedagogical approaches will need to attend to the role that writing transfer and repurposing play in the writing process. As I stated, there was a wide repertoire of rhetorical and literate activities that the BLFI activists were arguably transferring and repurposing in their political writing in terms of invention and the textual practices they adopted for each text. Pedagogical approaches will need to engage students in reading, writing, and discussion activities that enable them to bring to the level of critical consciousness their engagements with those acts of seeing and selling Nowacek describes.

Finally, future work can focus explore pedagogical practice in terms of classroom culture. As this dissertation demonstrated in the discussions of The People's House and the Malcolm X Communication Academy, the BLFI activists constructed extracurricular sites of rhetorical education and sites of knowledge construction and negotiation. As I explained, these were global contact zones that fostered rhetorical and literate engagements amongst peoples of African descent. Future work can focus on developing pedagogical approaches which aim to create classroom environments that mirror these kinds of rhetorical and discursive spaces — classrooms which function as global contact zones that foster translingual and cross-cultural literate engagements.

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Courses designed and taught at the University of Louisville

        Introduction to College Writing (English 101)
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General Education Assessment Coordinator, University of Louisville, (2010-present)
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CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

"And the Archival Walls Come Tumbling Down—21st Century Historiography: Opening Histories, Sharing Revisions, and Democratizing Texts," Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), Indianapolis, IN, March 2014.

"Assess Thyself, Lest Ye Be Assessed: Reports on a Longitudinal Study of a University-Wide, General Education Assessment Model," National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), Las Vegas, NV, November, 2012.

"Localized Language Practice, Translingual Literacy, and Black Collegiate Students, 1965-1975," Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), St. Louis, Missouri, March, 2012.

"…Whether They Like it or Not, We Gonna Use the Word 'Black Power'": Translingual Literacy and Black Radical Students, 1961-1975, Penn State Conference on Rhetoric and Composition, State College, PA, July, 2011.

"Language Performance and Identity: Moving Beyond Code-Based Theories and Pedagogies for African American Students," Thomas R. Watson Conference, Louisville, KY, October 2010.

"The Polemical Rhetoric of Anne Dutton, Eighteenth-Century Calvinist Theologian," Conference of the Rhetoric Society of America (RSA), Minneapolis, MN, May, 2010.

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Advanced Seminar: African American Literature and Criticism (Karen Chandler)
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Nineteenth-Century American Poetry and Prose (Susan Ryan)
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History of Criticism: Plato-New Criticism (Andrew Rabin)
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General Education Curriculum Committee (GECC), University of Louisville, (2010-
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GECC Cultural Diversity Petition Committee, University of Louisville, (2010-present)

GECC Syllabi Review Committee, University of Louisville, (2011-2012)

Quality Collaboratives Project, an AAC&U Initiative Sponsored by the Lumina
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