

Constructing a Dual-Subjectivity: Understanding the Intersection of Ethnic Studies and YPAR

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Abstract

This article explores the outcomes of using Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) as an entry point into African Studies. The author draws from empirical research and anecdotal narratives to document a program where youth of African descent in the United States engage in Ethnic Studies through the lens of action research. Beginning with a tracing of the development of Ethnic Studies in the United States, the author shows how combining Ethnic Studies and YPAR builds a dual-subjectivity within youth where they are subjects of their own curricular exploration and simultaneously developing a subjectivity as researchers and knowledge producers. The article highlights three major implications of this dual-subjectivity for the political agency of youth of African descent living in a mid-sized U.S. city.

Keywords: Dual-subjectivity, Ethnic studies, YPAR

Philosophers have long conceded, however, that every man has two educations: 'that which is given to him, and the other that which he gives himself. Of the two kinds the latter is by far the more desirable. Indeed all that is worthy in man he must work out and conquer for himself. It is that which constitutes our real and best nourishment. What we are merely taught seldom nourishes the mind like that which we teach ourselves.'

– Carter G. Woodson, *The Mis-education of the Negro*

With his explanatory assertion, Carter G. Woodson, who many recognize as the founder of the field of African American Studies (Grant, Brown & Brown, 2016), refuses to allow for the conflation of education and schooling. Through a Woodsonian framing, education is about cultural sustenance, survivance, and human liberation. It is a vehicle that pumps the historical lifeblood of a people to their collective hearts and minds. Any educational endeavor, whether taking place inside of a school or not, must foreground the self-determining capacities of the people who constitute it and participate in its function. As an ideal, educational self-determin-

ation is conceptually sound, yet, it becomes infinitely more complex in application.

This task of educational self-determination is even more fraught for communities who have been historically marginalized and dispossessed of their educational rights (Espinoza & Vossoughi, 2014; Lozenski, 2017a). In exploring the construct of dignity in relation to education and schooling, Espinoza and Vossoughi argue that despite systems of schooling that have come into existence through the denial of educational rights to negatively racialized groups, communities faced with an attack on their humanity have found ways to assert their human dignity through manifestations of self-education. For instance, the authors explore how despite anti-literacy legislation and state-sanctioned violence (Williams, 2005), enslaved Africans in the United States found ways to teach themselves to write their own humanity into existence for others to know through the genre of (en)slave(d)¹ narratives.

¹ I use the term “(en)slave(d)” rather than “slave” to assert that African people were never slaves in an ontological sense. The shift in terminology focuses on the action of the enslavement rather than constructing the people who were acted upon as less than human.

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Cradled—sometimes buried—within these bodies of information (narratives) are brief, luminous first-person accounts of intellectual activity in the shadow of sanction, vigorous endeavors to learn that were suppressed, and fertile brushes with the acquisition of knowledge that, on occasion, resulted in harrowing forms of punishment. These reports are the remnants of learning—evidence of its cultivation, proof of its liquidation, and enduring witness regarding what participation in educational endeavors meant to the people involved (Espinoza & Vossoughi, 2014, p. 287).

Although no longer legally denied access to formal education, the African American descendants of these enslaved African authors continue to face forms of educational dispossession. The State has traded in its anti-literacy laws for a compulsory form of education designed to adhere the descendants of enslaved Africans to its settler colonial logics based in white supremacy through a Eurocentric curricular standard. While “multicultural education” is a common buzzword in contemporary K-12 education systems in the U.S., a myriad of scholars (Casey, 2010; Royal & Gibson, 2017; Spring, 2016) have documented how classrooms remain centered on the subjectivity of those who have been socially constructed as “white”. Often, implementations of “multicultural education” continue to place all other communities of color in relation to the white settler subject. Thus, African American history often begins with enslavement, Native American history begins with European contact, etc.

Ethnic Studies as a discipline constituted by subfields (e.g. Africana Studies, Chicana Studies) seeks to decenter the non-ethnic white subject² from the educational imagination. By constructing educational space and curriculum around the subjectivity of historically constructed ethnic groups, youth are able to come to understandings of themselves and their communities on their own terms, and not as background actors in a human history of those who have come to be called “white”. This article explores an instance of the praxis of Ethnic Studies with youth of African

descent in a midsized city in the Midwestern United States. The article describes an approach to Ethnic Studies that further seeks to build on the subjectivity of youth of African descent by positioning them not only as learners, but as researchers and community documentarians (Kinloch, 2010; Stovall & Delgado, 2009). The youth described in this article worked to grapple with their own lived experiences by historicizing themselves (Lozenski, 2017b) within an intellectual tradition, and by becoming producers of knowledge using participatory action research (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Caraballo, Lozenski, Lyiscott, & Morrell, 2017). The article outlines the context and curriculum of a program called the Uhuru Youth Scholars (Lozenski, 2017b), and demonstrates outcomes of the intersection of Ethnic Studies and Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR). I argue this intersection constructs a dual-subjectivity where youth of African descent are simultaneously subjects of their own curricular explorations and of their own research practices. I suggest this dual-subjectivity constructs an agentive identity for engaging with Ethnic Studies.

Tracing the Development of Ethnic Studies in the United States

It is hard to know where to begin when trying to define the contours of Ethnic Studies as an academic field in the United States. Here I am exploring Ethnic Studies as an umbrella term for multiple sub-fields that explore the histories and cultural practices of peoples, foregrounding ethnic heritage as the emphasis of study. Ethnic Studies are interdisciplinary and although they are typically focused on the Social Sciences and Humanities, they can be applied to the Fine Arts, and Natural Sciences (Cuauhtin, Zavala, Sleeter, & Au, 2019). There has been plenty of recent scholarship about the application and role of Ethnic Studies in K-12 schools (de los Ríos, López, & Morrell, 2015; Sleeter, 2011; Tintiangco-Cubales et al, 2015), and we know that Ethnic Studies in these institutions has had to be fought for in political battles and even court cases, such as the recent trials in the state of Arizona³ (Zehr, 2010; Palos, 2011). In its current manifestation, Ethnic Studies stands as a direct challenge to the historical project of

² I use the phrase “non-ethnic white” to underscore the notion that “white” does not refer to a specific ethnic heritage; rather, multiple ethnic groups, typically of European origin have become “white” in the United States (Painter, 2010). There are myriad instances of European ethnic groups in the US creating educational environments around their own ethnic subjectivity. For instance, there is a long history of bilingual German, Polish, and Finnish schools (Iyengar, 2014); Hebrew schools; and Irish/Catholic parochial schools.

³ In 2010 the State Legislature of Arizona passed House Bill 2281, effectively banning Ethnic Studies courses throughout the state. The bill targeted popular Chicana/Latina Studies courses being taught in Tucson, AZ. The bill was overturned in 2018 because it was found to have been “motivated by racial animus”.



U.S. schooling, which has been designed to culturally castrate youth of color, and inculcate their thinking with Eurocentric ideation, and rationalizations for race, gender, and class hierarchy in order to subsume the potential for social unrest. As Woodson asserted, “If you can control a man’s thinking you do not have to worry about his action” (Woodson, 1990, p. 60). So it is no wonder why State-mandated education does not want Ethnic Studies to become a prevalent feature in its schools. Conceptually, Ethnic Studies is bigger than schooling, and school has never been the primary location for this work. Ethnic studies, perhaps, suffers from its own nomenclature. The difficulty in framing the field stems from the fact that Ethnic Studies has always been here. All peoples have found ways to educate generations and socialize them into a worldview that centers their own historical subjectivity. As Simpson (2017) describes in *As We Have Always Done*, referring to Nishnaabeg tribal knowledge systems, “These stories relied upon a return to self-determination and change from within rather than recognition from the outside” (p. 22). In this way, even the idea that people should be contextualized in these “ethnic” categorizations can be problematic. However, in a vulgar attempt to trace the modern manifestation of the field in the United States, I look to African Americans, who were at the forefront of broad-based movements to reaffirm their subjectivity through education.

The descendants of enslaved Africans in the U.S. have always had a precarious relationship to State-mandated, State-administered schooling, and thus, have been forced to deconstruct and reconstruct what notions of education mean. In the aftermath of legalized slavery and its adherence to educational dispossession through white terror and *de jure* anti-literacy laws, African Americans fought intently for access to print literacy by any means. Williams (2005) documents the attempts of the formerly enslaved to build schools, reading collectives, intergenerational knowledge sharing communities, and even militarized educational spaces. The desire for print literacy, that had been denied to so many, was palpable. An early connection made along with print literacy was the importance of the content of texts. For many, religious motivations to read the Bible drove desires for literacy. Yet, leaders like Martin Delaney and David Walker argued that literacy should primarily be used to know the histories of African people. In other words, print literacy was only a tool for reclaiming educational subjectivity. Literacy was not education in and of itself. These ideas continued

to build as public schooling in the U.S. was developed. Early proponents of educational self-determination in public education were people like Anna Julia Cooper and W.E.B. DuBois, who argued that black youth should not only be taught classical European history, which was the central focus of elite education in U.S. schools.

Still, much of the focus on the education of black youth was about print literacy, rote memorization, and vocational skills. Ironically, this approach was not much different than what occurred for working class white communities as public education was still being formed to indoctrinate ethnically diverse European immigrants into a culturally homogenous “American” ideal, which included the notion of becoming “white” (Painter, 2010; Spring, 2016). Yet, for people of color who had little to no access to whiteness, this technical approach to education was part of the process of cultural erasure, and relegation to the bottom of the social strata. It was not until the liberatory transnationalist movement led by Marcus Garvey (Blaisdell, 2012; Chapman, 2004) that educational subjectivity gained more traction within black communities. Garvey’s organization, the Universal Negro Improvement Association, argued in its “Declaration of Rights” that the education of black people should center their history and fundamental humanity: “We demand that instructions given Negro children in schools include the subject of ‘Negro History’ to their benefit” (Vincent, 1977, p. 261-265).

Absent the black nationalist fervor of Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association⁴, Carter G. Woodson was developing curriculum and a network for the dissemination of African American history across the country to black educators through his organization, The Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (Grant, Brown & Brown, 2016). Building his theory of “mis-education”, Woodson argued that traditional education models were rendering “educated” black people useless to the liberation of their communities. In his classic text, *The Mis-education of the Negro*, Woodson wrote, “From literature the African was excluded altogether. He was not supposed to have expressed any thought worth knowing. The philosophy in the African proverbs and in the rich folklore of that continent was ignored to give preference to that developed on the distant shores of the Mediterranean (p. 18).

⁴ The Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) came to prominence in the 1920s and was one of the largest Pan-African, Black Nationalist organizations in history, spanning several countries in North America, South America, and the Caribbean.



Like Garvey, Woodson's hope was that black youth, largely, would become the subjects of their own educational thinking and learning.

Yet, this conception of education, which has come to be the core of Africana Studies, did not gain mainstream appeal. With the passing of the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision⁵, a lackluster process of racial desegregation began, where black youth were slowly phased into formerly all white schools, often facing violent resistance and hostility. Black teachers were fired en masse, further reducing the chances that black youth would be at the center of their own educational endeavors (Bell, 2004; Siddle Walker, 2009).

It was not until the movements on desegregated college campuses for Ethnic Studies departments toward the end of the Civil Rights Movement, that these desires for subjectivity became popular again (Kelley, 2016). Campuses like San Francisco State, Berkeley, Cornell⁶, and the University of Minnesota, among numerous others, saw massive protests and occupations demanding Africana Studies, Chicano Studies, Asian American Studies, and Indigenous Studies departments. Combined with postcolonial nationalist movements and calls for Third World Solidarity (Olesen, 2004), a global movement to displace colonial rule paralleled a movement for decolonial education. On college campuses today, it is not unusual to see Ethnic Studies programs, concentrations, majors, departments, and even some academic centers. In the 1970s a number of community-based and independent schools (Rickford, 2016) began, which focused on specific communities of color. Freedom Schools and political organizations like the Black Panthers and Nation of Islam modeled African-centered education (Perlstein, 2011). Still, as mentioned earlier, Ethnic Studies has not gained traction in the State-sanctioned elementary and secondary classrooms in across the US, despite perpetually growing numbers of youth of color in US Schools (Sleeter, 2011).

A Community Context for Ethnic Studies

Community-based educational spaces have attempted to mitigate the resistance to Ethnic Studies in traditional schools. It is common to find community-based organizations that provide Ethnic Studies programming across communities. The context for this article comes from one such organization called the Network for the Development of Children of African Descent (NdCAD) (Lozenski & Ford, 2014). NdCAD is located three blocks from one of the city's main thoroughfares, yet it is unassuming as it sits tucked away from heavily trafficked areas. Upon entering the organization, visitors are immediately drawn to the shelves of books on the left and the couches on the right. African art adorns the walls, and most people seeing NdCAD for the first time spend several minutes silently walking and looking at the art and posters filled with information about the global histories of peoples of African descent. In the main corridor, past the couches, is a meeting area with chairs seated around large tables pushed together. Beyond the large main room is a hallway connected to smaller rooms. The family resource room, which is reminiscent of a combined living and dining room with a fireplace, sofas, and large china cabinet, is filled with African ceramics made by Susan Martin, the assistant director of NdCAD. Large portraits of influential elders in the local African American community sit directly over the dining table, giving the room a homey feel, as though pictures of relatives were hanging on the wall. Down the hallway, around a corner, sits the Sankofa reading room, with a small table, child-size chairs, and books with a rainbow of black faces on the covers. There is also the Elder Kwame McDonald⁷ Memorial Library, which has several bookcases filled with the personal library of the distinguished activist, writer, and elder who left his accumulated lifetime collection to NdCAD, after his passing in 2011. The collection contains volumes of rare materials from the past half-century, such as originals of local black newspapers, journals, and magazines collected during the Civil Rights era.

NdCAD itself is the manifestation of a community vision developed from a series of community conversations in the mid-1990s called "Cultural Beginnings." The idea of Cultural Beginnings was to engage in a systematic inquiry of the assets that local people and communities of African descent could draw from to promote

⁵ The *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka Kansas* was a Supreme Court decision in 1954 making racial segregation in US schools illegal. The decision spurred a wave of policies outlawing racial segregation in all public accommodations.

⁶ In 1969 the Willard Straight Hall takeover by African American students at Cornell University was the impetus for the development of the first ever Africana Studies and Research Center. The protest gained notoriety as the first armed building takeover when students procured weapons after being attacked by a white fraternity.

⁷ Elder Kwame McDonald was a local educator and journalist, influential in founding NdCAD.



social change. This asset-based framework of collective inquiry was already a departure from the deficit-based approaches that have become predictable in attempts to “fix” black communities, absent of any discussion of structural white supremacy. NdCAD’s vision and mission statements are displayed prominently at the entrance of the organization.

Our Vision

We envision a place where the African spirit is nurtured and renewed

We envision a place where African people come together to learn of and from ourselves

We envision a place where we come to learn from our elders and our children

We envision a place where we affirm our global family

We envision a place where we take care of family business

Our Mission

We exist to strengthen the cultural connections within communities of African descent that promote, sustain, and enhance the healthy development of our children.

NdCAD uses several programmatic strategies to achieve this vision and mission within its community. Among these strategies is the Sankofa Reading Program, which is an 8-week reading intervention for children in grades K–8 that uses a sociocultural approach to learning connecting literacy with African identity. Parent Power is 4- to 8-week series of workshops that recognizes that parents have the ultimate power to help their children become lifelong independent readers. Parent Power helps parents mobilize this power to work with their children to build literacy skills and become literacy advocates for their children when working with educators. Through its Think Different, Do Different affiliate network, NdCAD facilitates professional development for educators, helping teachers, youth workers, administrators, and others gain a deeper understanding of how culture is implicit in how children learn. The Uhuru Youth Scholars program is the fourth programmatic strategy developed by NdCAD.

The Uhuru Youth Scholars

Caraballo et al. (2017) describe Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) in their comprehensive review as:

a critical research methodology that carries specific epistemological commitments toward reframing who is “allowed” to conduct and disseminate education research with/about youth in actionable ways. Its origins in critical pedagogy inform its role as a pedagogical approach based on a conception of teaching and learning through collaborative and transformative inquiry (p. 313).

Situated in critical theory, YPAR positions youth as researchers and documentarians of their own lived contexts. Caraballo et al suggest that there are four major entry points for youth into this work including, academic learning and literacy, youth development and leadership, youth organizing and civic engagement, and cultural and critical epistemologies. The Uhuru Youth Scholars (Uhuru) program emerges from the last of these entry points. Uhuru was imagined, designed, and implemented by a collective of high school youth, parents, faculty from a local university, and staff from NdCAD. Uhuru is a year-long course where high school-aged youth gain high school and college credit through an Ethnic Studies course. The hybrid course combines exploration of classical and contemporary African studies with research methods in YPAR. Uhuru holds steadfast to its goals of positioning youth as researchers who use historical constructions of African thought to make sense of contemporary issues related to their lives.

The constant features of Uhuru are an initial scaffolding of critical educational theory connected to their schooling experiences, practice in traditional qualitative research methods, and exposure to community educators and elders (Lozenski, 2017b). For instance, Uhuru youth read excerpts from critical texts like *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1970), *The Mis-education of the Negro* (Woodson, 1990), and *The Souls of Black Folk* (DuBois, 1986). They explore the educational lives of the youth from a macro level and ask them to interpret the purpose, curricular breadth (or lack thereof), teaching techniques, and learning outcomes of their time in school. This is often the first time these youth have had the opportunity to openly discuss the “why’s” and “how’s” of school. They make connections between disparate pedagogies. They describe specific teachers as culturally relevant, and specific types of pedagogy as



“banking” (Freire, 1970). This allows the educators to situate the pedagogical philosophy of Uhuru in “problem-posing” and collective inquiry (Freire, 1970). Uhuru’s work is metacognitive and transparent. The youth are informed by the political goals of black liberation and use African American scholars to construct themselves alongside black intellectual traditions, situating research as a form of literacy.

Another staple of the Uhuru Youth Scholars program is to spend time connecting African knowledge systems to African language systems. Pedagogically, language provides a unique avenue to make tangible connections between Diasporic and continental African peoples. Using the writings of raciolinguists like Smith (1998) and Smitherman and Smitherman-Donaldson (1986), the youth explore how language contains something like the DNA of a people and can be helpful in tracing movement and transformation over time. Typically, the short stint with African language systems is one of the more eye-opening periods for the youth researchers who have usually been told since they were of school age that their and their families’ black linguistic codes were deficient and “broken.” The youth often return with stories of how they showed the readings to their parents and grandparents who would respond with reserved interest, or their English teachers who would skeptically look at the readings and then commence with their narrow curriculum.

As Uhuru youth connect the pieces of their deep dive into the construction of their own belief systems, the educators help them organize their thinking by exploring how African knowledge systems are defined by interconnectedness rather than distinct disciplines of thought (Lozenski & Ford, 2014). Through this framing black language is connected to spirituality, which is connected with aesthetics, which is connected with science and math, which is connected to photography, which is connected to history, and so on.

As the youth circle a research topic, they develop what is known as an “issue tree”. The issue tree is made up of leaves (research questions about issues/topics that interest the youth), branches (categories connecting each of the leaves by topic), limbs (underlying structures that connect multiple categories), and finally the trunk and roots (final research questions that explore the most pertinent limbs and go “below the surface”). Not only is the tree a way to help excavate the underlying ideas that connect many of our interests, it is a teaching tool that helps them learn how to design researchable questions, provoke dialogue that requires

depth of thought, and acts as a visual for presentations of the research design process. At this point the work of Uhuru becomes largely unique from cohort to cohort as their research questions dictate their modes of inquiry, methods of data generation, and action-oriented activities. In the remainder of this article I highlight three important implications for pedagogy in Ethnic Studies work when mediated by YPAR.

A Critical Research Methodology

I have studied Uhuru for several years as a participant ethnographer (Madison, 2005), facilitator, and co-researcher with the youth in the program. Each of these positions impacts my understandings of the pedagogical and methodological implications in nuanced ways, as does my social location and racial construction as an African American, cisgender, man. Yet, as I explored in previous writing specifically focusing on methodology (Lozenski, 2016), it is impossible for me to disaggregate these positionalities into distinct identities. I have described my role as being engaged in an “irreversible methodology”, which I liken to an irreversible chemical reaction, such as baking a cake. When baking a cake, the constituent parts (e.g. flour, eggs, sugar, milk) cannot be retrieved once the chemical reaction takes place. In similar ways, being an ethnographer, an educator, and a co-researcher cannot be easily disjoined. I explored how my research was impacted by my teaching, which was impacted by my collaborative relationship with the youth in Uhuru.

Methodologically, I situate my work amidst previous critical ethnographers engaged with youth in PAR (Morrell, 2004; Kinloch, 2010). Drawing from this critical research tradition, I see my role as both critical pedagogue and critical researcher as an attempt to enact what Kincheloe, McLaren, and Steinberg (2011) have referred to as “bricolage”. Kincheloe (2008) writes, “Appreciating research as a power-driven act, the critical researcher-as-bricoleur abandons the quest for some naïve concept of realism, focusing instead on the clarification of his or her position in the web of reality and the social locations of other researchers and how they shape the production and interpretation of knowledge” (p. 131). Bricolage refers to the hyper-awareness of social location amidst a field of power such that researchers are forced to imagine new ways of making interdisciplinary meaning about their social world. My theorization of my own “irreversible methodology” is an attempt to describe the complexity of educating and being educated within a context of inquiry. More



importantly, the Uhuru youth, as described below, enacted this conceptualization of research more proficiently because they were unbounded by years of disciplinary limitations.

The findings explored in this article come from both empirical and anecdotal evidence. Uhuru has been in existence since 2012, and I completed an empirical study of the 2012-13 academic year. I then co-facilitated the program until 2017. Some of my empirical findings have become more nuanced in the subsequent years of teaching and co-researching with Uhuru youth. The methods that inform these findings are both formal and informal. My ethnographic study of the 2012-13 cohort consisted of six high school seniors of African descent (ages 17-20), including youth who had recently immigrated to the US from Liberia, African American youth, and youth who identified as having mixed ethnic and racial heritage. All of the youth who participated in Uhuru agreed to take part in the ethnography as research participants. Empirically, I conducted multiple semi-structured interviews with participants, video-recorded class sessions, took ethnographic field notes, and collected cultural documents such as data from the youths' research (Lozenski, 2014; 2016; 2017b). These data consisted of the youths' metacognitive research journals, semi-structured interviews and focus groups they conducted with community members, iterative concept maps of their findings, and video recordings of the youth disseminating their research in multiple forums. Analytically, I engaged in mediated discourse analysis (Lozenski, 2014) of the Uhuru program, including iterative qualitative coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Informally, I have engaged in discussions with individuals and groups about their experience, analyzed video resulting from their community-based research, video-recorded disseminations of their research at local and national academic conferences, video-recorded artistic performances based on their research, and collected cultural documents from their work together (Lozenski, 2016). The findings here come from years of contemplating this work from multiple perspectives and positions. The entirety of the Uhuru program, including its implementation, operation, and the research described in this analysis are embedded in critical theory, which is inherently attuned to the flows of power. Uhuru was constructed out of a space of resistance to the dominant educational power structures. This analysis assumes these asymmetrical power dynamics are always in place and seeks to serve as a disruptive force,

refusing notions of objectivity and neutrality that uphold the status quo of educational research.

Findings

Black youth in the United States embody particular explanatory forms of contradiction. They stand as testaments of survivance—sheer and utter determination of generations to simply resist erasure. They inhabit a liminal space between rhetoric and practice, enslavement and emancipation, and colonial subjectivity and citizenship. Their construction as youth situates them uniquely within their communities as well. They experience the world differently, inhabit underground spaces, and fight to maintain some semblance of innocence, though that often dissipates early in their lives. The precarious positionality of black youth situates them powerfully as community researchers and documentarians (Payne, Starks, & Gibson, 2009; Stovall & Delgado, 2009). Understanding this positionality has important implications for enacting critical forms of research, developing curriculum, and rethinking teaching practices and the functions of schooling. Positioning black youth as community researchers builds a Deweyan (Dewey, 2011, 2013; Kurth-Schai, 2014) sense of educative meaning, and “psychologizes the curriculum” of their lived environment.

In our current historical moment of videotaped police brutality and murder, the reification of colonial curricula in schools (Calderon, 2014), mass media demonization of black youth, and the continuance of mass incarceration, positioning black youth as community documentarians is a radical act. Yet, this is precisely the goal of the Uhuru. Through their use of YPAR, I saw how Uhuru's constructions as both black and youth produced important researcher dispositions such as skepticism, cultural hybridity (Gonzalez, 2005), and historicity. Although Dewey was, at best, passive and, at worst, complicit (Fallace, 2015) with regard to racism and structural white supremacy in the United States, the youth in my study inadvertently buttressed his treatment of democracy as an ongoing practice, which is constantly threatened by the status quo.

Kurth-Schai (2014) writes, “For Dewey, democracy, as a radical process of living in dynamic relationship, is always vulnerable. Among democracy's greatest threats is complacency—an unreflective passivity that renders processes of communal decision-making and civic action irrelevant and ineffective” (p. 428). This re-envisioning of democratic practice that moves away from an adherence to State-governmentality, realized only



through participation in electoral politics and voting, prioritizes the agency of community-based processes of self-governance and active citizenship. In this framing, citizenship is less about membership to a nation-state and more about local efforts to draw from community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) to impact the lived realities of families and close-knit communities. Drawing on this notion of “democracy as a radical process of living”, black youth are situated as researchers in three important ways:

1. The precarious nature of citizenship for black youth provides a healthy skepticism of ubiquitous claims of the United States being an egalitarian, democratic society. The distance between rhetoric and reality can push black youth toward a Deweyan construction of radical lived democracy.
2. Due to the constant threat of state-enacted and state-sanctioned violence against black youth, often through schooling, they are more apt to resist the complacency that Dewey suggests is a constant threat to lived democratic practice. Thus, these youth should be positioned as holders of particularly insightful capacities (e.g. oppositional consciousness) (Sandoval, 2000) for action-oriented research.
3. Critical participatory action research with youth provides the conditions for radical democracy to be practiced and allows curriculum to be “psychologized”, or have intrinsic meaning within the lived experiences of youth.

Enacting Democratic Praxis

Typically, democratic participation in the US is narrowly conceived around electoral politics. Voting stands as the epitome of what it means to be a participatory democratic citizen. Historically, the right to vote has been denied to most subgroups in the United States at one time, including women, people who did not own property, people of color, felons, the disabled, and youth. Today in most states, people convicted of a felony still face some form of disenfranchisement, even if they have served their sentence (Fortin, 2018). Youth under eighteen have always been disenfranchised, limiting their capacity to practice the perceived mechanisms of democratic practice. Black youth are particularly vulnerable as pseudo citizens because they experience the historical accumulation of civic discrimination, and do not have access to the levers of power that many tell them are the only legitimate way to change their

circumstance. As Vaught (2017) writes, “Children have no vested rights. They do not own property. They are not enfranchised. Attached to White propertied guardians, youth are private citizens-in-the-making or citizens-in-waiting. If they are not, they are a threat... They are foremost a threat to the exclusivity and authority of... the state” (p. 113). Faced with this limited notion of democratic practice, all youth, and particularly black youth must conceive of democracy in alternative ways. They must either completely depend on the adults in their life to be their vicarious democratic conduits, or they need to find ways to assemble this practice using the means available to them. In this way, similar to the methodological bricolage (Kincheloe, McLaren, Steinberg, 2011) described above, these youth become bricoleurs of democracy, thus enacting this Deweyan approach.

Across each of the Uhuru cohorts, they have found creative and critical ways of engaging in an active democratic process to influence the political contexts that impact their lives. This is due to a combination of the developing political agency that attracts youth to a program like Uhuru, and the pedagogy mediated by YPAR and its active approach to influencing the social worlds of the youth. From this perspective, the political realm need not be reduced to electoral politics. Elected officials are not the only policymakers in the lives of these youth. Often, Uhuru youth are impacted by more intimate policies happening at the school level, or by contact with local law enforcement. For instance, Uhuru youth in the 2015-16 cohort engaged in research exploring the role of “school resource officers” (SROs) in their high school. SROs are police officers designated to public schools based on a contract between the police department and the school district (Boarini, 2017). The youth surveyed their peers about contact with SROs, engaged in a discourse analysis of district policy regarding the presence and role of SROs, presented their findings at school board meetings, and engaged in protest around the presence of SROs, and the disproportionate contact they have with students of color in the district.

Uhuru’s interest in this issue came after one of their classmates was assaulted by an SRO, which came on the heels of several similar incidents. Interestingly, the youth organized themselves outside of the context of Uhuru, but used many of the methodologies they adopted through the program to inform their activism. They recognized that in order to challenge the power structure of the district that they would need to employ



multiple methods beyond the franchise. Understanding the practices of these youth as democratic broadens how we conceive of democracy in action. Once youth see themselves as political agents, the methodological bricolage of democratic practice opens up to them, only being limited by their imagination.

The Praxis of Ethnic Studies in Understanding State-violence

The 2014-15 cohort of the Uhuru Youth Scholars consisted of twelve high school youth from across St. Paul. This particular year of Uhuru was rife with emotion and frustration as the non-indictments of police in the slayings of Michael Brown (Ferguson, Missouri) and Eric Garner (Staten Island, New York) seemed to pile on top of each other each week. Much of our early class time was spent giving the youth space to vent, yell, question, and voice desires for what justice could look like. Our role as pedagogues was to help our youth develop the practice of historicity (Lozenski, 2017b), by exploring how these seemingly modern instances of injustice were cyclical manifestations of white supremacy. We examined past accounts of police injustice and asked the youth to draw parallels between the relationship between police and black communities over time. We examined the role that research could play in documenting police brutality (Eisen, 2014) and how, as researchers, we could develop a skill set to more effectively mobilize the resistance that was palpable in our community.

Some Uhuru Youth Scholars became part of outside organized efforts to protest and resist through participation in the Minnesota contingent of #BlackLivesMatter and the local National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's (NAACP) efforts to bring awareness to disparities in the criminal justice system. We were careful to make distinctions, however, between our roles as researchers and our participation in direct action, which allowed us to explore the multifaceted aspects of historical social movements that required the intellectual renderings of historical moments combined with the willingness to place bodies on the line in the face of oppression. Martin Luther King's *Letter from a Birmingham Jail* (1963/1992), enabled us to engage with dualism between thought and action, exploring how they constitute each other.

Still, our work was not only about being immersed in the current events of our time, although they provided us with usable evidence that we had much to learn and do as scholars and activists. Thus we took a

step back and began to explore media accounts of how current events were being covered using critical media studies (Morrell, Duenas, Garcia, Lopez, 2013). We investigated language, bias, media production, consumption, and ownership, asking "who benefits from this coverage and who suffers?" Simultaneously, we explored methods of qualitative and mixed-methods data generation such as field observations, semi-structured interviewing, survey development, and photography. Youth saw the process of research from multiple angles and perspectives, generating and deconstructing data simultaneously. They were exploring their own purposes for conducting research while contemplating why other researchers and journalists were not being transparent about their relationship to the issue. They were questioning why what they were observing was being defended as "objective" while they could see obvious bias in the study. All the while they were immersed in classical African epistemologies (Martin, 2008; McDougal, 2014), which stood in stark contrast to the ways in which they were used to thinking about social inquiry. The resulting framework of their own research illuminated how all of these elements came together to provide a powerful lens through which to begin their own inquiry.

YPAR as Bricolage

An undertheorized aspect of youth research is creativity and improvisation in the research process. Like other collectives of youth researchers, the Uhuru Scholars were unafraid to explore alternative methods of data generation. For instance, one Uhuru cohort was interested in researching perceptions of beauty among black youth. They hypothesized that black youths' understandings of beauty were tied to anti-black marketing and exposure to demands for hyper-consumption from the beauty industry. On a larger level, they were also attempting to historicize their work within the context of European colonization and the psychological impacts of domination on black communities. After doing interviews at a local beauty salon, the team found out that a group of people got together each week to watch the popular TV show *Empire* at the salon. The group called up members of a different cohort exploring media conditioning to join them for the gathering to interview attendees. After the show finished members of each team held an impromptu focus group with everyone in the salon, which they video recorded, to get their perspectives about how media impacted the ways in which they saw the world and also defined beauty.



Whether it was due to the youths' boldness, intuition, or naiveté, they generated some of the most rich, insightful data of their project.

The focus group allowed for generative discussions about data analysis, coding, and alternative methods of collective meaning making. At the same time, it allowed us to discuss more abstract ideas like research ethics and the responsibility of collecting sacred stories from our community that we may not want to share with everyone. The notion of collecting sacred stories became an idea that the Uhuru scholars continued to develop and presented at a national conference over the summer. It is experiences like these that give substance to the Uhuru Youth Scholars program. The combination of the structured and the unscripted, the jazz-like flow of a solid foundation infused with improvisation provided a rhythmic heartbeat to our work, which allowed them to live out their heritage.

Conclusion

As educators, researchers, and activists continue to demand Ethnic Studies in K-12 contexts, it becomes more imperative to be vigilant about how Ethnic Studies are implemented. Just as important as the existence of spaces for the exploration of the ethnicized subject are the curricular, instructional, and monetary structures that constitute its capacity. In this article, I used a particular context for Africana Studies to illustrate how the capacity of black youth to engage in this work requires our expansive methodological and spatial imaginations. The intersection of YPAR and Ethnic Studies positions youth to be subjects of their own analysis at the curricular level, and it positions them to be subjects of their own instructional practice at the research level. This dual subjectivity has important implications with regard to how the Uhuru youth were able to understand the work of Africana Studies. Ethnic studies are larger than the container of school. They require contexts that are not about technical approaches to teaching and learning. Understanding the Ethnic Studies student-as-bricoleur enables educators to see that youth in these contexts are working to cobble together their freedom through self-determination.

Through this framing, the purpose of Ethnic Studies becomes entirely different. As Kelley (2016) describes, referring to institutions of higher education.

Black studies was conceived not just outside the university but in opposition to a Eurocentric university culture with ties to corporate and military power. Having emerged from mass revolt, insurg-

ent black studies scholars developed institutional models based in, but largely independent of, the academy. In later decades, these institutions were—with varying degrees of eagerness—incorporated into the university proper in response to pressure to embrace multiculturalism (p. 157).

If we are true to the inception of these educational spaces, as Kelley describes, then their purpose cannot purely be academic, or for some credential. Rather, we should understand Ethnic Studies spaces as preparation for, and an attempt to engage in liberatory praxis. Thus, Kelley argues, we cannot separate our activist and intellectual capacities. Ethnic Studies is activism. The two cannot be disaggregated.

As explored in the examples from the Uhuru Youth Scholars program, if we see Africana Studies as an active space for liberation of the ethnicized subject, then there needs to be a concomitant pedagogy. YPAR holds this capacity. YPAR, as a pedagogical and methodological practice, provides the necessary fluidity for both the intellectual and action-based entities needed to engage in this work. I am not arguing that Ethnic Studies cannot be conceived of absent YPAR. I am suggesting that the merging of the two creates a dynamic environment where the reciprocation of their ideals live in tact. Ethnic Studies cannot simply be taught using disconnected, technical, and mainstream methods in similar ways that YPAR cannot take up issues absent of critical theory. The Uhuru Youth Scholars demonstrate that liberatory democratic praxis needs a diverse theoretical and methodological environment. Kincheloe (2008) writes, "The bricolage exists out of respect for the complexity of the lived world.... The task of the bricoleur is to attack this multicultural complexity, uncovering both the visible and invisible artifacts of multiple forms of power, and documenting the nature of its influence on not only their own but on scholarship and knowledge production in general" (p. 131-132). The ethnic subject is within this bricolage. The Ethnic Studies student must become bricoleur to describe the complexity of this experience in order to know the ethnicized subject's liberated pathways.



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