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Parenting as Political Acts of Love and Resistance

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Abstract

Three motherscholars (Matias, 2011) utilize a co/autoethnography methodology to explore the inherent and necessary connection between mothering and political work. In doing so, they draw from their diverse experiences to explore whose parenting is seen as political, the intersection with formal schooling, and experiences with informal education towards political ends. They ground their conceptions of mothering in the work of Black feminist intellectuals like Angela Davis and bell hooks. This piece, written while navigating parenting, doctoral studies, and displacement caused by COVID-19, demonstrates how parenting can be an informal act curated by memories of the past, today's social and political climates, and the hopes for a better future. These authors explore the intersection of education, politics, and parenting through their lived experiences.

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Three motherscholars (Matias, 2011) utilize a co/autoethnography methodology to explore the inherent and necessary connection between mothering and political work. In doing so, they draw from their diverse experiences to explore whose parenting is seen as political, the intersection with formal schooling, and experiences with informal education towards political ends. They ground their conceptions of mothering in the work of Black feminist intellectuals like Angela Davis and bell hooks. This piece, written while navigating parenting, doctoral studies, and displacement caused by COVID-19, demonstrates how parenting can be an informal act curated by memories of the past, today's social and political climates, and the hopes for a better future. These authors explore the intersection of education, politics, and parenting through their lived experiences.

Keywords: art education, collective narrative, MotherScholar, love, political, parenting, informal education

The narrative of education in this country relies on a political project that constructed education as a public/male domain. Conversely, the home is considered private/female, and not a space of *real* education. The legacy that knowledge itself is “gendered as public” continues in educational initiatives and understanding today (Hendry, 2011, p. 16). Oftentimes when we explore education, we emphasize initiatives in school buildings and little attention is paid to educational possibilities in the home. Curriculum histories that delve into the political nature of education rarely stretch beyond the school building. This article explores the inherent and necessary connection between mothering and political work.

To parent is to educate. For many, parents are children’s first, most consistent, and most durable teachers (Gonzalez et al., 2005). If teaching within formal school buildings is intertwined with politics, then educating informally outside of school buildings is as well. As educators concerned with social justice, it is fitting that our parenting also be conscious of and attend to inequities. In this narrative, we explore our role as motherscholars who hold deeply humanistic concerns for the breadth of education.

Perspectives

We see mothering as a space in which to exercise our political voices. Clemens (2016) writes:

Politics itself requires a kind of freedom, the capacity to imagine that systems of power and inequality could be organized differently. Since all actors, even those who are

relatively advantaged, are caught up in networks of dependence on others, all face a question about how to respond to perceived grievances and sources of constraint. (p. 17) Like education, politics can be a space for replicating the status quo, but it can also be a site of resistance, transformation, and freedom. We hold both of these truths, but work to parent in ways informed by the latter conception of politics. Through our parenting, we can create a different reality for our children and all children. In this way, we are expressing our political voice. Clemens (2016) continues:

But politics... focuses on the exercise of voice... Analytically, “voice” comprises political speech and action, whether in the course of peacefully assembling to protest, or participating in the routines of electoral democracy, or simply debating issues of public concern over the dinner table. (p. 18)

Understanding how our political voices are intertwined with our identities as mothers and educators is central to this work.

Through this piece, we “rebut the notion that motherhood equals political indifference” (Law, 2016, p. 63). We draw from Black feminist thinkers to conceptualize our roles as mothers as political ones. As Davis (1990) writes, “Politics do not stand in polar opposition to our lives. Whether we desire it or not, they permeate our existence, insinuating themselves into the most private spaces of our lives” (p. 53). She continues to argue that women are a political force capable of dismantling oppressive forces. Throughout this piece, we contemplate how mothering is just one of many places where this transformation can occur. We also build upon the work of June Jordan who declared in a 1977 speech that “the task of providing for the survival of those who are not as strong as I am, is a political undertaking” (1977/2016, p. 12). This analysis resists conceptualizations of politics as largely male and public, but makes space for other forms of political work done by women in less-visible spaces. Hill Collins (1990) also shapes our work with her emphasis on ways of mothering that resist the normalized straight, two-parent household. We intentionally reconceptualize what mothering can look like in ways that “question Eurocentric masculinist perspectives of family” (Hill Collins, 1990, p. 222).

Love is an action and a choice (hooks, 2000). Love is not simply a feeling; it is multifaceted, not limited to ‘caring,’ and is expressed through the actions we take. hooks (2000) encourages that “... we move beyond the realm of feeling to actualize love. This is why it is useful to see love as a practice” (p. 165). Through this piece, we explore how our practices of love and experiences of loving can be political. Our different positionalities and experiences mean that we all conceptualize and exert this political practice of love in different ways, but by writing a co/autoethnography we were able to explore whose parenting is seen as political, our experiences along the intersections with formal schooling, and experiences with informal education towards political ends.

In engaging with mothering as a site of political work, we also consider how all education is political work (Freire, 1970). Many teachers want their classrooms to be politically neutral, but we know there is no neutrality in teaching:

There is no such thing as a *neutral* educational process. Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, *or* it becomes the ‘practice of freedom,’ the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of the world. (Freire, 1970, p. 34)

Teachers that cling to those ideas are doing our children an intellectual and spiritual disservice. Just as formal education is a space weighted by political realities, so is the informal education of our parenting.

This article is also framed by the conceptions of our positions as motherscholars (Matias, 2011). Lapayese (2012) describes this position as one which “drive(s) the feminist impulse to dismantle patriarchal binaries— namely, the sharp divide between the intellect and the maternal, the public and the private” (p. 17). As we resist the false binary between private and public conceptions of political work, we also resist the false binary between mothering and intellectual thinking. We see them as inherently entangled and not separate entities. We choose mothering and all of the intellectual labor that goes with it.

Methodology

This co/autoethnography (Taylor & Coia, 2009) was constructed through virtual conversation and shared writing during the COVID-19 pandemic. This methodology “incorporates the autobiographical elements of self-narrative and extends its effectiveness by engaging participants in written exchanges and dialogue about and around the individual stories” (Taylor et al., 2014, p. 8). The power and possibility of multiple pieces of knowledge gained from lived experiences are central to our co/autoethnography. Our experiences as children of our parents and largely parents to our own children, inform the reflective process that composes this piece.

There is a great deal of mainstream scholarship articulating the political nature of educating within schools (Apple, 2012; Freire, 1970), but less conversation about the political nature of parenting. Bhattacharya (2013) argues that autoethnographic work like this one offers the possibility to “document narratives that are otherwise absent in the mainstream research literature” (p. 25). This piece intends to articulate just a sliver of the complexities involved with parenting with an orientation towards political engagement. Our co/autoethnography represents this conversation and its themes, not necessarily a complete representation, agreement, or consensus.

As doctoral motherscholars in New York City, we were all displaced from our apartments in March while studying, researching, and parenting. With this backdrop, a co/autoethnography felt generative since it involves a “cyclical sequence of literacy practices, including writing, rewriting and sharing narratives, talk, and discussion pre- and post-sharing narratives” (Taylor et al., 2014, p. 8). Especially in the midst of a pandemic, decisions around parenting can feel political and we shared lived experiences when parenting was political, felt political, and/or was perceived as political.

To write this narrative, we collaborated asynchronously by writing in a shared document. Our roles as motherscholars necessitated this more flexible approach since, in addition to our studying, teaching, and researching, we were also working around four very young children’s ever-changing sleeping and waking hours. Our feminist, collaborative approach did not just attend to our product, but also our process (Hesse-Biber, 2006). The asynchronous engagement was particularly helpful in this regard. At some moments we wrote in the document freely and at other moments we wrote in it by responding to prompts or ideas we co-constructed. We also utilized a WhatsApp group to share readings and reflections on the process. This enabled us to send pictures and audio messages to each other instead of being restricted to typing in the shared document. This made our asynchronous engagement more accessible since we were able to

engage while also meeting the mobile demands of parenting (e.g., responding to each other while nursing from a rocking chair).

We revisited the shared document on multiple occasions over the course of two weeks, reading each other's work and offering new stories, ideas, and comments in response. We used different colors to differentiate between our writings and engaged inside conversation using the comment functionality. This allowed us to lift up ideas and themes that resonated most with us as a collective. At the end of the two weeks, we had 10 pages of single-spaced stories and ideas.

During data analysis, we coded the various narratives and comments for patterns in how we were conceptualizing parenting as political (Horvat, 2013). Initial codes included necessity, names, and issues with institutions among others. Following this, we grouped codes into overall themes that resonated in different ways across the three authors' narratives. Four themes emerged as resonating across our written narratives and surrounding discussion: 1) whose parenting is political; 2) relationships with formal schools; 3) parenting as informal education; and 4) the politics of naming.

Participants

Abby

Abby is a second-year doctoral student at Teachers College, Columbia University, researching antiracist teacher education and parenting. In addition to studying these topics, she works as a teacher educator and facilitates workshops with White parents on antiracist parenting. While she is originally from New Hampshire, she currently lives in Brooklyn. She is White and raising two White children. She grew up middle class and was raised in a “colorblind” household. Now, she spends a lot of her time interrogating whiteness and reflecting on how it manifests in herself and society. Her parenting moves away from colorblindness to frames of racial literacy (Guinier, 2004). Previously, she was an elementary school teacher in NYC public schools. During that time she was named the 2018 National Association for Multicultural Education's Critical Teacher of the Year.

Jacqueline

A second-year doctoral student at Teachers College, Columbia University, Jacqueline researches the intersections between creativity, race, and power in teaching and learning. She identifies as African American, was raised in upstate New York, and is the mother of a binational toddler. Jacqueline has traveled to over sixty countries, is trilingual, and has lived on five continents. Her teaching background includes elementary and middle schools in New York City, Pittsburgh, and Rochester, NY, as well as at the university level. She received national recognition for her STEAM education programming and was designated a Science Super Hero by the Science and Discovery Channels. Jacqueline prioritizes social justice, is the Founder and President of J Rêve International LLC, and curates global arts and culture programs.

Maureen

Maureen is a doctoral student at Columbia University studying early childhood education and is the Founder and Director of Camp Story, a pop-up arts camp based on the continent of Africa. Her background is in teaching and education. Maureen is committed to working with

young children and educators to ensure every child and teacher knows their value, worth, and power. Maureen's research and work interests have always situated Children of Color, but specifically young Black girls. Her ultimate goal is to make schools safer places for young Black girls, with the idea of safety being articulated based on the terms and articulations of Black girls. Maureen is also researching and building curricula for young girls (specifically young Girls of Color) on how they can see themselves as feminists using arts integration. Maureen identifies as an African American woman who is raising a Black daughter with a complicated and beautiful make up of West African, European, Christian, and Jewish.

Is Parenting Political? For Whom?

To begin by always thinking of love as an action rather than a feeling is one way in which anyone using the word in this manner automatically assumes accountability and responsibility. (hooks, 2000, p. 13)

Mothering—like gender—is not biologically determined but socially constructed. (Ross, 2016, p. xvii)

Maureen

There is no neutral parenting when I am in an unjust system. Picking formal educational institutions for my children is blatantly political, but sitting with myself to think about the informal ways I educate my children on care, trauma, and love is the most political act of all. Parenting is political, but the fight is constantly filled with complexities when you are a Black mom. As a mom, I always do the best I can for my child with what I know. As a Black mother who is also a single mother, I am always having to convince others of this fact. In addition to trying to convince the world of you and your child's worth, accessing many basic rights is constantly a fight. It is difficult when your politics are actually intertwined with your survival and basic needs.

Who I let into my community, how I care for myself as a mother, and what I teach my children of what is acceptable or not impacts their ways of being and understanding of the world and their role in it. To be honest and humble to the vulnerabilities of motherhood means to be honest and humble to the ebbs and flows of the world, complexities of families, and change. This requires me to give myself freedom so my daughter(s) can also have freedom, without my traumas, fears, and experiences imposed on her and her future children (if she wishes to have them).

Abby

There are so many ways to parent, but I am frustrated by a common belief amongst White parents that parenting can be a neutral process. This is not the case. For example, when a White parent chooses what school to send their child to, this is a highly political one. This choice can have an impact that extends far beyond what the parent even realizes. Their choice plays a role in school funding and hiring practices, the curriculum taught at the school, and even local real estate markets.

For me, as a White parent, my parenting is not seen as political unless I proclaim it to be and make intentional moves indicating as such. This is a privilege to be able to seemingly choose

political parenting. Yet, I know there is no neutrality in parenting. The apolitical stance that many White parents see themselves in is an illusion set up by a system that favors whiteness (Leonardo, 2004). I am inspired by Twine’s (2004) research exploring the antiracist parenting done by White parents. She writes, “Although they do not occur on the picket lines in view of organized anti-racists, they, nevertheless, constitute one type of anti-racist project” (Twine, 2004, p. 902). White antiracist parenting is parenting that must engage with frames of racial literacy (Guinier, 2004) over frames of colorblindness (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). Explicit conversations attending to race are vital to the transformation of our world. The political power of parenting resonates with me deeply, but I am grateful to my co-authors for reminding me that I am still in the position of it being seen as a choice.

Jacqueline

Parents are aware that many dangers exist in the world and we want to protect and nurture our children. As a Black mother, the racist realities of the world elicits anxiety. In order to protect the spirit, self-esteem, livelihood, and literal lives of our children, Black, Indigenous, and other Parents of Color are generally charged with taking on the role of preparing children for a racist society. Lamentably, I know far too well that my child may face racialized harassment; it would be negligent to not ‘home-school’ and prepare her to negotiate such encounters.

I seek to protect. When I discuss microaggressions, humiliation, deficit thinking, redemptive punishment, and even violence with children, I am not seeking political stances. Are these truly political choices? In many ways, society necessitates that parenting is a political process. It is unjust and problematic that parenting choices and decisions appear political for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, and not for White people.

All

Common to all of us is an understanding that parenting cannot be seen as a process isolated from society. We understand that our parenting is not neutral. Leonardo (2004) describes how the “hidden curriculum of whiteness saturates [every day]” (p. 144) and part of that hidden curriculum is that White ways of being are considered neutral. That is not to say parenting while White is not inherently political, but it is not *perceived* this way. The dominant paradigm of viewing the world sees White ways of being as the only legitimate ways of being. This paradigm is deeply aligned with the status quo (Ladson-Billings, 2000). This positions any parenting that resists the status quo as a political project, when in reality, anything that maintains the status quo is, in fact, also political. Through our narratives, we surface questions around whose parenting is perceived as neutral. We are reminded of Lorde (1984) when she writes, “Every line I write shrieks there are no easy solutions” (p. 78).

For Maureen and Jacqueline, as Black women, parenting choices made simply in the name of survival are seen as political stances. For example, political leaders across the party spectrum evoke images of Black mothers in varied ways for their political gain on the campaign trail. For Maureen, it is sometimes not a choice. Given how some people are policed and attempted to be oppressed, every action often becomes political—consciously or subconsciously and by choice or not. Parenting as a Black woman is a terrain of unsteady footing in society that constantly tries to make you feel like you are unsure of yourself and all of your multitudes, so every decision and action becomes a political quest to ensure your child does not feel that same doubt or

unwantedness. For Black moms, these politics become instinctual and necessary. Jacqueline wonders how perhaps the contemporary politicizing of our every thought and action is a psychologically violent extension of the dehumanizing silencing that has prevailed historically through the civic unknowability (Cooper, 2017) and epistemological erasure of Black women's thoughts. She wonders: when my parenting is considered political simply because I am a Black woman, do I not continue to be unknown? Are the hidden peculiarities of my embodied discourse masked and portrayed as known by others who in turn do not require my individual intellectual thoughts? Therein lies both the offense and danger of politicizing my parenting.

For Abby, a White mother, her parenting is seen as neutral unless she personally declares otherwise. Because of this context, she embraces the political nature and works to engage in conversations to remind White family and friends of this reality. As Jordan (1977/2016) asserted, attending to your survival and the survival of others is a political task. While this looks different for us across our varying positionalities, we all engage with the responsibility with thought and care.

Politics of Parenting: Formal Education

The heart of justice is truth telling, seeing ourselves and the world the way it is rather than the way we want it to be. (hooks, 2000, p. 33).

Mothering is an investment in the future that requires a person to change the status quo of their own lives, of their community and of the society as a whole again and again and again... (Gumbs, 2016, p. 115)

Jacqueline

My parents did not solely rely on teachers in formal education settings to school me. They took it upon themselves to not only educate and support me within our nuclear and extended family but also within communities that uplift Black children. In addition, they were committed to cultivating my broader awareness of the human experience in multicultural and global settings. In turn, as a parent now, I hold a similar orientation. Schools do not teach students who are racially marginalized how to stay safe in a racist society, or how to cope with harassment that often comes in the forms of microaggressions, humiliation, deficit thinking, redemptive punishment, and even violence. That silence from formal schools in the face of societal injustice is not politically neutral. Love (2019) suggests that oftentimes, Black, Indigenous, and other Students of Color experience spirit murder at the hands of their predominantly White teachers who do not recognize, value, or explore their culture. As a parent, like my parents, and like many other Black, Indigenous, and other Parents of Color, we are not satisfied with the status quo of American schooling.

Then and now, standard school curricula do not teach enough about multicultural histories. While I learned about Anne Frank in school, I did not learn about Emmitt Till. This is problematic because Till's murder was—*is*—a big deal. It was the catalyst for the Civil Rights Movement. Still, this event is rarely taught in American schools. My child will likely not get this sort of education at her school, so it is my duty to supplement her learning. Most parents certainly would not anticipate that the schooling experience would damage, rather than foster, a child's spiritual sensibility, but I know that that is a possibility I must be prepared for.

Abby

I, as a White parent, am also not satisfied with the way schools educate. While the race-neutral conversations dominant in formal school settings do not pose as much of a physical threat to my White children, my children are shortchanged. The world presented to them is narrow, shallow, and inaccurate (Ladson-Billings, 2000). When White children are raised with such a narrow view, their ability to see others in their full humanity is dampened (Love, 2019). When a child is not able to see the full humanity of others, their own humanity is hindered.

The parenting work at home is in a dialogical relationship to the world. The way I parent and the conversations I have with my children are in response to and anticipation of the world they are going to encounter. “The dialogic spiral moves back and forth,” writes San Pedro (2013), “while it also advances forward/upward by expanding prior understandings...” (p. 380S). I know that my children are receiving and will receive racist messages from the world. In turn, I am actively trying to both get ahead of them and counter them.

Although the curricula of schools often perpetuate narratives that replicate the political status quo, my parenting provides me opportunities to imagine other possibilities (Freire, 1970). For example, through racial literacy conversations, my three-year-old is able to articulate a basic understanding of police brutality and the ways in which we can fight against it. This did not happen in a single conversation but was made possible by engaging her in conversations about world events and not shying away from their racial dynamics. I hope as she gets older that we will find school spaces where these conversations can also happen.

Maureen

In elementary school, I realized my parents being immigrants—something that I found beautiful—was not validated by my school. To take on their story as a part of my identity meant to never belong, to feel unwanted, and to challenge stereotypes. My parents’ journey to the States, and how they were treated because of it, makes me think of the poem *Immigrant*, which reads: “You broke the ocean in half to be here. Only to meet nothing that wants you” (Waheed, 2013). My peers would tease me about being from Africa (because to them I was from the whole continent). Teachers were no better. My teachers would speak slower and use dumbed-down words when speaking to my parents even though my parents are (highly) fluent in English. My school community made me realize that to be an immigrant means to be unwanted and inadequate at times. As a result, I realized that my parents’ story, which is also my story, would not be handled by my teachers and peers with the same care and beauty with which I handle it. My culture was not capital to them.

My peers (and the teachers who did not intervene) were not aware of the heterogeneity of Black culture and identities (O’Connor et al., 2012). They held stereotypical and reductive understandings of what they perceived my experiences to be. Through these early experiences, I learned about intersectionality and how narratives and people can be displaced in academic institutions. Young children are political beings by nature and additionally, many groups who are marginalized are political forces because the conditions in which they experience the world require them to be. As a parent, I must move in political ways to ensure my children’s experiences in schools support their right to reach their highest potential. One way I can use my political voice is through challenging the constant assumption that my child comes from a heterosexual, married couple where one parent can readily attend school meetings at 3:30 pm on a weekday (Hill Collins, 1990). When I reflect on situations like this, I do not believe White educators in schools are ill-intentioned—I do believe their privileges allow them to be so far

removed from my realities as a Black single mom that they could not begin to understand the distress certain situations cause. This is an equity issue based on class, gender, and race, and an example of reproductive justice rights (e.g., affordable childcare for Black moms). Political parenting is a constant act of doing the mental and emotional push-ups to not only create openings but also make clearings for your child and your identity as a parent while advocating for what you deserve, even when you feel like you should not have to.

All

Our conception of parenting as a political process has important implications for how we engage and maneuver the formal education settings for our children. We are in a unique position as educators and education doctoral students where we deeply believe in the power of education and school settings, but we are also aware of the inadequacy of schools. As educators and/or as parents, we understand firsthand how the school system can work to marginalize certain student populations. Critical race theory understands that racism reaches its tentacles into every aspect of society, from education to media to healthcare (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). A political agenda carried out by schools that consciously or unconsciously encourages conformity under the guise of neutrality that fails our children. This understanding is why we enter relationships with formal schools with trepidation.

Above, Jacqueline highlights the need to advocate for a more robust curriculum that digs both deeper and wider into the historical realities of our world. That advocacy is a form of political parenting that engages with schools. Maureen reflects on the disparity between intent and impact when it comes to schools and the necessity of challenging their assumptions about what parenting should, could, and would look like. Parenting that embraces its political dimension is parenting that blurs the line between public and private. While parenting, and mothering, specifically, has been historically confined to the private sphere of the home (Lapayese, 2012), the inequity of formal education means that we must disrupt those boundaries and intervene. In order for education to be a space of transformation and not merely social reproduction, our relationships with schools must be a site of resistance. Abby's resistance to the inequities within school settings must look a little different. As a parent of White children, in advocating for their education, she must be vigilant that her process of resistance does not veer into entitlement or power hoarding so common with White parents. She has a responsibility to speak up for their learning while reading the educational context with a racial literacy lens (Guinier, 2004). The education of her children should not come at the expense of others.

The schools our children learn and grow in prompt us to “imagine [how] the systems of power and inequality could be organized differently” (Clemens, 2016, p. 17). We have an obligation to educate beyond the scope of what is possible in schools while simultaneously working with schools to cultivate spaces of societal transformation. We can resist and reconceptualize. We can use our political voices through parenting.

Politics of Parenting: Informal Education

Whether we learn to love ourselves and others will depend on the presence of a loving environment. (hooks, 2000, p. 53)

I believe that the home is a social space where we can employ pedagogies that reinforce or deconstruct dominant narratives about race and other marginalized identities.

(Delgado-Bernal, 2018, p. 26)

Just as mothers can become the ideological vehicles for hierarchy and dominance, they are uniquely positioned to lead both visionary and opposition strategies to it.

(Cyril, 2016, p. 33)

Abby

Growing up, volunteering and service were not optional activities. While I am critical of the ways in which it developed a savior mentality that took unlearning (Ayers, 1994), it was this childhood emphasis that led me to the education field. In doing volunteer work, I was exposed to communities from which I was different. It helped me learn informally about the worlds not shown to be me in the school building and I am grateful for that. I hope to instill a similar sense of community accountability in my own children, but I anticipate strengthening the work. It is vital to have conversations about systemic inequities that unjustly place people in differing positions of giving and receiving such services, as well as nuanced differences between charity, volunteering, service, activism, institutional change, abolition, etc. These conversations are part of my practice of love. Love is not simply the feeling I share with my children, but it is in the conversations and actions I choose to engage in daily (hooks, 2000).

Jacqueline

Though I was raised in a small suburban town in upstate New York, I traveled a lot during my childhood. My parents took us on trips across the US and into nearby Canada. I recall visiting historic landmarks in Wisconsin, Michigan, Virginia, Pennsylvania, Louisiana, and California before I attended middle school, and then before I began high school my parents enrolled me in a college-level language immersion program in Cuernavaca, Mexico. During that trip, my class visited The Palace of Cortés, where we marveled at murals by Diego Rivera. His artworks tell the story of the working class, native Mexicans, and the Mexican Revolution. Prior to that moment, I had never seen Indigenous Americans depicted in a painting. As a young African American, I found myself enthralled by Diego's depictions of pain and struggle. Entranced by stories within the images, I was startled to discover similarities between native Mexican oppression and enslaved Africans in United States history. These images redefined the shared human experience in my young eyes. hooks (2000) states that "definitions are vital starting points for the imagination" (p. 14). "To call for imaginative capacity," proclaims Maxine Greene (1995), "is to work for the ability to look at things as if they could be otherwise" (p. 19). Diego's images brought history alive, prompting connections within and across cultures in a way for me that words simply had not. I experienced the visual arts as pedagogical and they promoted intercultural understanding through counter-storytelling and imagination.

Similarly, I will curate a home, community, and global experiential curriculum for my child. My intention as a parent is to expose my daughter to the broader human experience so that she too can more deeply connect to and understand the sociocultural contexts in which she and others are positioned and interrelated. I also intend for my child to develop diverse literacies in multiple communication systems. I strongly believe that the inward contemplative and liberatory states that the arts and aesthetics elicit can foster not only these connections but activate the

imaginary and generate possibilities for more just futures. Therefore, I intend to continue this tradition of learning and developing through the global arts.

Maureen

For me, my informal education is highly connected to the fact that I am the product of two hard-working, immigrant parents who came to the United States with the hopes of a better life. They never finished college and are the epitome of the lower-middle, working class. In terms of school, my parents being from Sierra Leone was something that was only palatable on certain occasions (e.g., international nights). My teachers and peers were close-minded about Blackness and what it meant to be from the continent of Africa. Every time Kwanza was mentioned, the whole class looked at me. Despite these challenges with schools, like most immigrant parents, mine reminded me of their plight to arrive in America and how it was for better opportunities and education. The reminders that they left everything behind and made the journey here informally taught me that I had to achieve.

I have also had to navigate a space of being neither here nor there. While I am from and live in a country that will never fully accept me or my child (the United States), I also claim another country I am not from but feel deeply connected to (Sierra Leone). This positionality also taught me understandings of existing in a Thirdspace (Soja, 1996). As a child, educators and parents could not understand this, but this is where deep learning happened. I learned how to navigate and dance between spaces. Now with a Black, Jewish daughter who is biracial and who has immigrant grandparents, I am reckoning with all of the spaces she will dance between that no one will ever understand. As her mother, it is my job to advocate for her and give her opportunities to advocate for herself. For only she will know her realities, the joy, and the struggles of being many things in a world that has limited ideas of her multitudes.

All

Throughout all of our narratives, we found a common theme regarding the importance of the informal education we received from our parents. In turn, we seek to curate informal educational experiences for our children as well. The home is such an important space for parents who want to parent in critical ways (e.g., critical race, critical whiteness). Ward (1996) identifies “homespace” as a place where “parents provide their children with ways of thinking, seeing, and doing. Racial socialization includes the acquisition of attitudes, values and behavior appropriate to the social and political environments in which black children are raised” (p. 87). The homespace serves dual functions: a protective space from a racist society, while also a space to educate children on how to prepare for it. For Jacqueline and Maureen, the protection offered by the homespace is vitally important. For Abby, the homespace is less about protection since she sees her children as largely protected within normative society, but about a space to intentionally disrupt those normative ways of “thinking, seeing, and doing” (Ward, 1996, p. 87). As educators, we value formal schools, but as critical educators, we also understand that the learning they provide must be supplemented.

Davis (1990) reminds us that politics are not separate from the home for they “insinuat[e] themselves into the most private spaces of our lives” (p. 53). The fact that we have to carve out a “homespace,” as described by Ward (1996), is itself a political act. Aspects of politics frame the condition where we are compelled to make choices in socially unjust environments. The nature

of parenting in this way is a use of our political exercise of voice (Clemens, 2016). Sometimes this political voice can be heard and seen outside the walls of our home, and sometimes it can echo quietly in a conversation with a two-year-old.

Names as Histories and Stories

Abby

Even before I was pregnant with my first, I knew my child(ren) would have my last name in some way. In talking with my partner upon the arrival of our first pregnancy, he bristled at the idea of our children not having his name. When reminded that many women have had to give up the idea of children carrying their last name, he acknowledged that it was not fair and he didn't necessarily want to feel his entitlement to their last name, but he did. Women are expected to give up a piece of themselves and even the most generous of men find it disgusting to even imagine. For Ahmed (2004), the emotion of disgust, simply defined as 'bad taste,' defines boundaries between people, and the subjects of disgust are those that threaten the power relations that manifest in those boundaries. In many straight relationships in the United States, children carrying the name of the mother and not the father is a simply repulsive boundary. I experienced that repulsion from people within my own family. The boundary exists as a way to maintain gendered hierarchies. In the end, we hyphenated my children's last names. My desire to push against that boundary and speak back against patriarchal norms is seen as political, and while I am okay with this label, I ultimately just seek a connection with my child.

Jacqueline

Hirsi Ali (2008) explains that in Somali culture, long names tell a story of your ancestry. When I was pregnant and considering names, I wanted *that* for my child; a name consisting of many names that tell the story of her multicultural ancestry. My daughter's name is five words long and honors both grandparents on both sides. She has two last names, not hyphenated: the first one is the same as mine, the other, her father. The naming choices I made were not uncontested. Nevertheless, I feel there is power in my child's long name and I remain pleased with this decision.

Maureen

I also insisted on my last name and it was such a fight! Even my family members showed pushback, saying, "That's just the way it is." At this time, her father was not involved but still pushed for his last name because he was the father. I felt very confused about giving her someone's last name who had not been kind to me and whose family was not very open. I finally picked a hyphenated version at the time of the birth certificate and it was a hard decision. I still kind of regret tagging his name on because names tell stories, and I did not feel she should carry the weight of his.

All

The process of naming is a political process. All of us encountered resistance in some form or another when it came to our children's last names. Although in the United States the last name

is often taken from the father, we are critical of male-dominated, Eurocentric perspectives of family that accept this as truth without attention to the actual context of the family (Hill Collins, 1990). Our resistance to the normative way of naming children was an act of love. It is through the process of naming that we can engage in what hooks (2000) describes as the *practice* of love. She conceptualizes love as broader than the emotions and feelings commonly associated with love, but rather as the ongoing actions one takes and choices one makes. Like most people, we have chosen our children's multiple names with careful intention. Whether it be our selection of first names, last names, or multiple names, it is a space for us to engage in politics where we exercise our voices that consist of speech (the chosen name) and action (the choice of that name; Clemens, 2016).

We also see naming as pedagogical for our children. Whether to honor their ancestry or state a value important to us (e.g., Rebel), their names are pedagogical. The names they hold teach them who they are and what we value. Political work is too often imagined as restricted to public spaces, unaligned with the lives of mothers raising children (Davis, 1990). Yet, while names in some way are personal endeavors, we also cannot imagine anything more public than the name a child carries with them every day.

Love, Education, and Hope Continue

There can be no love without justice. (hooks, 2000, p. 19)

Mothering is a queer practice of transforming the world through our desire for each other and another way to be. (Gumbs, 2016, p. 116)

It is a romantic, idealized, and naive concept of parenting to think that all we have to do is hold a loving feeling for our children. It is more complex than this. hooks writes, "To truly love we must learn to mix various ingredients-- care, affection, recognition, respect, commitment, and trust, as well as honest and open communication" (2000, p. 5). All of these aspects help us to take action in our love for our children. Using our various political voices (Clemens, 2016) through parenting, we can not only imagine but actively cultivate a different future.

Our children are still babies. We find ourselves daydreaming about what the world will look like in 15-20 years when they are young adults. We are hopeful that their generation will exist in a multitude of ways that have been unwelcomed in our generation. This will only be possible if we acknowledge and embrace the ways politics penetrate our most sacred relationships (Davis, 1990). Parenting without taking intentional actions to move against the racist political system means that we are complicit in it. Transformation of society through parenting necessitates that we look at formal schools, informal conversations, and even the names we choose as sites for the "practice of freedom" (Freire, 1970). The education done by motherscholars and parents must be seen for its valuable political role in transforming our world. We love that our children can serve as mirrors reflecting back versions of our world, but they can also serve as bridges into a different one. We are hopeful that if we parent our children with a love rooted in political action, that they will offer ways forward toward a new reality.

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