"You Don't Want to Sound Like You're from Alabama"

Resonances of Place and Race in Student Narratives of The South

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because even though I lived in Alabama before I came here,
you always have this perception of what Alabama is,
and my mom kind of put that in there she was like,
"you don't want to sound like you're from Alabama"
(Annaliese, a Black university student in her fourth year)

THROUGHOUT MY STUDY that explored how college students navigate the socio-historical context of race on the campus of The University of Alabama, "The South" buzzed as a refrain. In walks across campus accompanied by the students in this study, Alabama came to stand in for the American South, The South came to stand in for Alabama, and the University of Alabama became simultaneously the State and The South.

As Alabama and The South became synonymous, they came to stand in for the other and, at the same time, they were explanatory for one another: The University of Alabama was the way it was *because* it was in The South; the texture of how participants thought about The South took shape *because* of happenings at the University of Alabama. These sonic repetitions of synonymity and explanation map discursive, intellectual, and material geographies that refuse and resist traumatic colonial and racialized legacies at the same time as they reify and perpetuate the very same histories and ongoing traumas of white supremacy and racialization.

Curriculum scholar Rob Helfenbein (2010) writes that, by charting the "subjectivity of our relationship to spaces (how spaces speak), [and] the lack of guarantee or determinism in the nature of both social and spatial production (how spaces leak) … point[s] to agency, the spaces of possibility" (p. 314). In other words, through attuning to the sonic and discursive slippages and repetitions in student narratives of navigating campus space, we might not only learn something about our relationship to place, but forge the potential for new geographies and possibilities within

place (for work at the intersection of sound, place, and education, see Flint, 2021, 2022; Gallagher, 2011, 2020; Gallagher & Prior, 2014; Gershon, 2013a, 2013b).

In higher education, campus climate research has long emphasized the ways in which the history of place matters in student experience (Harris, 2016; Rankin & Reason, 2008). For example, Hurtado et al. (1998) wrote that, "the historical vestiges of segregated schools and colleges continue to affect the climate for racial/ethnic diversity on college campuses" (p. 283). And yet, outside of campus climate research, an attention to space—both how it matters in student's experience and its production—is left out of many considerations of higher education policy and student experience. Research on "belonging" and student outcomes often methodologically neutralize campus space in favor of examining inputs, experiences, and outputs (Gopalan & Brady, 2020; Museus et al., 2017). Through attuning to the sonic and discursive slippages between The South and Alabama in student narratives, how place leaks, speaks, and becomes a site of possibility, this paper explores ways that trauma embedded in place come to matter in the ways that students navigate and negotiate campus.

In this manuscript, I explore how the sonic and discursive links between Alabama/The South/race are tied to history and current institutional practice. In what follows, I first provide the theoretical grounding of the paper, drawing on Massey's (2005) "sense of place" defined and produced through geometries of power, before turning to a discussion of sounded methodologies guided by McKittrick's (2006) conception of the demonic, which, together, ground the analysis of this inquiry.

A Sense of Space and Place

This research begins with the assumption, following critical feminist geographer Doreen Massey (2005), that spaces are never neutral, that they are more than simply a surface "where things happen," that they are always under production and being produced, and that space and time are dynamic, interrelated, and co-produced rather than linear (p. 13). Massey describes space and place as interrelated, relational, and multiplicitous: "my argument is not that place is not concrete, grounded, real, lived, etc. etc. it is that space is too" (p. 185). She argues that by paying attention to the interplay between space and place—how places (e.g., The University of Alabama) become spaces (e.g., The South) and spaces become places—we make possible a relational ethics that is grounded, accountable, and responsible to one another.

Helfenbein (2010) draws on Massey's scholarship to argue for a critical geography of curriculum spaces, offering a relational analytic that attunes to the interplay between space and place, a tightening and sliding of the scale of geography, from the school (or university) and its local geography to the global understanding of forces at work (exploring histories of urbanization, globalization, funding, etc.). This attention to the local and global connects the geometries of power that produce spaces (and places), attending to forces and productions. This is an analytic that is interested in following production and possibility, asking: What does this produce? or How did this become possible? rather than asking What does this mean?

Bringing together Massey's attention to power geometries and Helfenbein's interest in space for the study of curriculum and schooling forges what McKittrick (2006) describes as "conceptual connections between material and concrete spaces, languages, and subjectivity" (p. xiii). Through these connections, this paper attends to the simultaneity of how The South/Alabama/race is (re)produced in individual student narratives, following around the

histories, memories, policies and discourses evoked in their tellings. In doing so, I imagine possibilities for engaging differently with the curriculum of higher education spaces, "envisioning an interpretive alterable world, rather than a transparent and knowable world" (McKittrick, 2006, p. xiii).

Sound Methodologies

To pay close attention to the ways in which The South/Alabama leak and speak and become sites of possibility, I draw on sound methodologies and a practice of geographic listening to map the sonic and discursive geographies of higher education curriculum spaces in student narratives. Qualitative researchers who use sound argue that the medium makes possible understandings beyond semiotics (what is said) to a multimodal event that can be seen, heard, and felt (Ceraso, 2014; Gershon, 2013b). As a methodological practice, sound has been incorporated in research studies as a method of data generation, analysis, and representation. For example, Gershon (2012, 2013a) and Wozolek (2018, 2022) use a methodology of sound ethnography where sound is, as Wozolek (2018) describes, "the vehicle through which the depths of experience are understood" (p. 370). Sound also offers the possibility for participatory engagement and an embodied response from the listener or audience of the research, as Flint et al. (2022) write, "enabling an engagement with research that moves beyond a passive encounter of findings" (p. 83). In this paper, I take up Tina Campt's (2017) theorization of sound as,

> an inherently embodied process that registers at multiple levels of the human sensorium to invoke another counter intuition that serves as a second point of theoretical departure, while it may seem an inherent contradiction in terms, sound need not be heard to be perceived. Sound can be listened to, and in equally powerful ways, sound can be felt. (p. 6)

Conceptualizing sounds as an embodied process that encompasses what is heard, felt, perceived, and sensed considers the physical sensation of sounds—audio waves on ear drums—as well as the more inescapable qualities of feeling, such as emotion or memory. In this way, "because everything engages sound, sound acts to link and collectivize bodies and environments, creating different kinds of atmospheres" (Gallagher et al., 2017, p. 9). In this paper, the sonic encompasses both audio captures of student narratives, what is spoken and made audible, as well as that which is not said, the metaphors, aporias, pauses, and unspoken histories and legacies. In this way, the sonic links place and space, and the practice of geographic listening opens up fissures in what is known or understood about place (and space), troubling what is taken for granted, assumed, accepted, and normalized (Campt, 2017).

Throughout this paper, I turn to sound as both a theoretical and method(ological) engagement. As Gershon (2013b) argued, sounds evoke spatial-material ontologies that embrace the interconnected and related nature of bodies and materials (see also: Gallagher, 2020; Gallagher & Prior, 2014; Tate, 2023). In previous iterations of this project, I explored how histories of racism, slavery, and white supremacy continued to resonate in the present through the creation and curation of an audio compilation of student's narratives of encountering racialized histories (Flint, 2021) and also co-created audio portraits with students, where two student co-researchers created a playlist of clips from their original interview audio to create a sonic portrait as an entry point to understand the layered histories of place across individual narratives (Flint et al., 2022).

The audio used for this inquiry included recordings of interviews and focus groups conducted with the 13 students who took part in the study. Students were asked permission to be recorded and also gave consent to have audio of their voice shared in results or reports from the study before they were recorded. Five of the thirteen students were involved with a campus arts-organization that provided funding for the research and participated in initial analysis of the audio clips during a research team meeting (described more fully in Flint et al., 2022). In addition, the audio compilations were shared with all students from the study for comments and feedback, and they were all invited to attend two art-installations that presented the sounded representations, including those that are incorporated into this manuscript.

Through attention to both the sonic (tone, volume, cadence) and discursive qualities of sound (polyphony, multiplicity, aporias, metaphors, and repetitions) the practice of geographic listening opens up a “demonic” analysis of place (McKittrick, 2006). The demonic is “hinged on uncertainty and nonlinearity because the organizing principal cannot predict the future … call[ing] into question the ‘always non-arbitrary pre-prescribed parameters’ of sequential and classificatory linearity” (McKittrick, 2006, p. xxiv). My analysis maps the non-linear slippages between The South/Alabama/race-history, carrying out the labor of “‘*saying*,’ imagining, and living geography locat[ing] the kind of creative and material openings traditional geographic arrangements disclose and conceal” (McKittrick, 2006, p. 144, emphasis my own). The demonic is an analytic and conceptual practice of non-linearity, zigzag, and uncertainty.

I began my analysis through paying attention to the moments when The South or Alabama was invoked in the audio recordings of conversations with students. Listening to these moments, I identified narrative segments, creating a clip or boundary around each mention using the open-source audio editing program, Audacity. Thinking with Campt (2017), who writes that “all sound consists of more than what we hear, it is an inherently embodied modality constituted by vibration and contact” (p. 7), after making the clips, I listened back to them again, paying attention to vibration and contact, through sonic elements such as tone and cadence, as well as discursive elements such as metaphor and aporia (Gallagher & Prior, 2014; Hocks & Comstock, 2017). Considering these elements, I began compiling transcriptions of the narrative segments or clips, both in the audio editing software and through ordering and reordering printed segments of the transcripts, thinking about what they said or produced differently in different orders.

After spending some time with these clips, I imported them into another open-source editing program, Reaper, and began ordering and layering them together sonically.

Ultimately, I created two sound compilations—one I titled “Perceptions,” where I brought together moments where students considered how they had thought about the University before attending campus, and another titled “Conceptions,” where students talked about how they conceptualized campus in the present. As I had composed with the text excerpts, I had believed that thinking about “Perceptions” as a moment-located-in-time *before* encountering the physical place of campus and “Conceptions” as considerations of campus space in the present would help me understand the slippages and overlapping of The South/Alabama/race and how that shifted and changed as students encountered the physical space of campus. However, as I listened and relistened to these compilations and thought demonically with McKittrick, my analysis, rather than moving neatly and linearly from perceptions to conceptions, zigzagged between them. In what follows, I write through this zigzag, listening to the resonances of spaces becoming places and places becoming spaces, attuning to how they speak and leak their sites of possibility. I invite the reader to listen to the compilations, to engage in their own zigzag (they can be found here: https://www.maureenflint.com/dissertation-home).

Leaking, Speaking, Possibility

During my study, I asked students to describe what they had thought about the University of Alabama before attending, the perceptions they had of place. Their answers linked and layered place and space:

> *I just thought I thought it was going to be like <u>real Southern</u>*
> *Just like you know, Alabama small town.*
> *That's like all I had experienced of Alabama,*
> *so that's what I thought The University of Alabama was going to be.*
> *But no, it's the complete opposite just smack dab in the middle of Tuscaloosa.*
> (Clark, a Black student in her third year)
>
> *I just like visualized it as like the Deep South.*
> *It would be a lot of old white people yelling at you as you walk past and stuff like that.*
> (Sierra, a Muslim[1] student in her third year)
>
> *I've lived in Alabama my entire life …*
> *Growing up, just kind of knowing that,*
> *in fourth grade you take Alabama history … and you're*
> *like yeah, this state was freaking racist for a long time.*
> *and it still is.*
> *So, I kind of grew up with that knowledge like living here.*
> (Angela, a White student in her senior year)

"Alabama," in these narratives, resonates as a state, as an idea, as materiality that affects the ways that students navigate the campus before ever arriving. In the quote that opened this paper, Annaliese noted that her mother had told her, "*You don't want to sound like you're from Alabama*." Alabama, the place, shaping subjectivity, "*Even though I lived in Alabama before I came here, you always have this perception of what Alabama is*," Annaliese had continued in her reflection. This was echoed by Clark who imagined Alabama as a "small town," expressing surprise when she arrived on campus that her experiences did not match the caricatured version of The South she had pictured.

In these narratives, Alabama (the University) becomes The South becomes Alabama (the state), and in the interplay between these becomings, Alabama becomes inextricably hinged to the idea of the Deep South, The South, small southern town. Leaking from these narratives is the immanence of race to place and space. We might pause with Sierra's caricaturized perception of the University where "*there would be a lot of old white people yelling at you*." Sierra's anticipation for what campus would be like is a memory embedded in place, zigzagging back in time: 1963, dozens of angry white faces jeer at Vivian Malone and James Hood as they are escorted to register for classes by the National Guard on the campus at the University of Alabama, a moment immortalized in archival footage and newspaper photographs. Over 50 years later, this moment is not located in a time-since-past, but affects Sierra's perceptions of campus in the present, folding together space and time.

As Sierra continued in her reflection, she went on to say,

[but] like what surprised me was a lot of these buildings are named after like eugenicists, and stuff like that.
I had no idea about that until like last year.
And someone said it in class, I didn't learn it in school.

Listening to the imbrications of her narrative, she works a rhetorical both/and. Old white people yelling at you are located in a time-since-past, but/and, Sierra remarks, they are still there, embodied in the names marked on buildings.

The productions of racialization are immanent in Clark and Annaliese's narratives as well, listening to Clark's emphasis as she says *real Southern*, Annaliese's wry tone as she recounts her mother's advice. White supremacy is immanently tied to place—Alabama specifically, as well as The South more broadly. The facts that make up the "*just kind of knowing*" that Angela refers to is a long history of racial and colonial trauma perpetuated and upheld by logics of white supremacy, embedded in the geography of place. There is the history of the city of Tuscaloosa, where the University is located on lands stolen from the Creek and Choctaw tribes, even as it carries the name of a Choctaw chief, Tuskaloosa. This is layered with the history of the University, built with the labor of enslaved Black people as a military campus that housed Confederate soldiers, the bricks of which were reused after the burning of the campus by Union troops to construct several buildings that stand in the present. Those buildings, and the newer ones that flank them, as Sierra noted, bear the names of white supremacists. As students consider their perceptions of campus, then, history is immanently bound up with how they consider they will encounter place.

There is a specificity to the way that students consider their perception of campus, specific histories tied to the specific place, such as Sierra's "memory" of 1963 influencing how she thought about campus in the present. And yet, even as these events are specific to the place of the University of Alabama, they are refrains of histories of other Southern campuses. They are specific to place (the University of Alabama) at the same time as they (re)produce space (The South) in their repetitions across geographies. As Elizabeth, a white woman in her junior year at the time noted:

That [race] is such a thing here at the University of Alabama.
Especially with like, I mean it is in the Deep South,
and the 1800s or whatever early 1900s it was …
And that is the history, and there's,
there's nothing you can do to change that.

"It is the Deep South," she says, mapping again the immanence of race and space. She understands this relationship as inevitable, "*There's nothing you can do to change it*," she reflected, pointing to the history, but also, ostensibly, the production of race and whiteness and the history in the present. Annaliese had a similar reflection,

I know there were comments made when I was decided to go here from family members and family friends asking why I would go here, knowing the history of Alabama.
And I was thinking,
yeah there's history of Alabama,

but there's also the history of Auburn,
and there's also the history of every other school in this country.
(sighs)

Annaliese again makes a hinge, a linkage between Alabama (the University) and Alabama the state (through the connection to Auburn, another large public school in the State). In this linking, she both notes that there is something specific about this place (Alabama, the University, Alabama, the state) but/and troubles the assumption that this is somehow unique to this geography, "*There's also the history of every other school in this country*."

Annaliese troubles the assumption that the linkage between place and race is somehow unique to Alabama, The South, to the University. Indeed, as others have mapped, to examine the history of the United States is to examine the ways in which race is deeply imbricated in the very fabric and founding of the country (Kendi & Blain, 2021; Lepore, 2018; Wells, 2020). You can feel the weight of this history in Annaliese's sigh, the trauma folding past and present. And yet, *you don't want to sound like you're from Alabama.*

Aporias and Impasses

In addition to moments of unconscious slippage or synonymity between Alabama/The South/The University in student narratives, there were also moments of aporia or contradiction, impasses between these slips—*this is just how it is*—coming into contact with other physical and discursive geographies of place. Sierra maps to this in her rhetorical distancing from a time-since-past at the same time that she points to the buildings, bearing names of eugenicists. A similar impasse was gestured to by Bruce, a White student who was in his junior year at the time. He reflected,

It's important to not erase the signs of the things that were wrong that happened.
Especially here in the past.
Because you can't change the fact that it happened.
And covering up the fact that it happened
or ignoring the fact that it happened is only going to make it—
I guess you're never going to learn from history that way.
So, it…
[10-second pause]
So, I think it's important for people to be conscious
of the way like racism and stuff was so prevalent on this campus,
but I don't think that the way that we build buildings in a classical style
and kind of maintain the way that things have been done for 150 years.
I don't think that just because these terrible things happened means that we should change how we do everything,
to say like we're making this total separation from that time.

It's important not to erase it … you can't change the fact that it happened … that doesn't change how we should do things [build buildings in a classical style] Bruce says. In the audio, Bruce pauses for long moments, working a both/and—noting that campus buildings and their style both

echo the history of campus because of their connections to the old South at the same time as he refutes that this has a material effect on the campus. This architecture, (re)produces a sense of "Southern" that is not accidental, but rather codified in the policy of the institution: new buildings are required to reproduce the neoclassical style of the antebellum period (Elbein, 2015; The University of Alabama, 2015). As McKittrick (2006) writes, "Geography is not, however, secure and unwavering; We produce space, we produce those meetings, and we work very hard to make geography what it is" (p. xi).

Leo, a Back student in his senior year, offered another reading, suggesting that the buildings and monuments on campus might reinforce the ways in which the University and The South were co-constituted. He reflected,

And I'm thinking about it as we're walking,
and like realizing that one big draw of people to the University is our campus though,
and the traditional college campus and style of buildings.
Like, I have to say it's really like you know,
our campus is beautiful, and I can never take that away,
but it's also very reminiscent of like the old South you know,
and that in itself is whether conscious or unconscious draw to our campus, you know?

The buildings produce place not just in their connection and mirroring of the old South (aesthetically and through their namesakes), but through what they do—through being reminiscent of the old South, buildings then draw or pull prospective students to the campus. The idea that students might come to campus because it was The South was another aporia echoed by students throughout their narratives. For example, Leo continued in his interview,

I've heard people say it before too,
like I came down here
because I knew it was The South,
I knew it was different, and I wanted to be in an environment that was different.
And you know for everyone that difference is—
I don't know, they have different things that they're prioritizing with that.
So, some are like:
"I can finally be as bigoted or ignorant or whatever you want to call it."
They can do it because it's The South, right?…
Because of the whole idea of what Alabama is.
Not just the campus, but the State.
People who have never been here think that when you come to Alabama it's just going to be a place of complete backwards-ness.
It's just going to be you know,
hillbillies everywhere and n-words flying like no other, but it's not like that.

In this telling, Leo maps the linkages between The South, Alabama, the State, the University, held together with the thread of race. Within these linkages lies an aporia, a contradiction—*It's not like that,* Leo says, even as he next shared a story of an Alabama sorority woman who had received national media attention earlier that year for using the n-word in a social media post and saying, "I'm in The South now, bitch … So everyone can [explicative] off" (Anapol, 2018). Annaliese

also recounted this same news story, complicating it further as she considered it in relation to broader understandings of Alabama and The South, the discursive links between place and race(ism),

> *Nobody thinks of Alabama as important.*
> *Like we're a right-wing, conservative, extremely conservative.*
> *But for a place like that, we have a lot of things that make the headlines …*
> *and every year like something big happens and there's this big hullaballoo and everyone is like*
> *"I can't believe UA would do something like this, I can't believe this …"*
> *Like if we talk about the Harley Barber incident,*
> *And then how everybody in the sororities were like,*
> *I didn't know she was like this like I can't believe, I can't believe,*
> *… she didn't start off all of the sudden saying the n word,*
> *like this wasn't new to her*

In the audio, as Annaliese spoke, her voice drips with irony at this last section, connotating that, in fact, she can believe it, and yet we (as the University as a whole, individual students, student organizations, the administration) continue to not believe it, expressing surprise each time a new event happens, proclaiming to the national audience that "*I can't believe this*." Alabama, then, is produced as a place that is both small and resonant—easily looked over in the national consciousness, blurred and slipped into broader narratives of The South, even as the specificity of Alabama and what happens there makes national headlines. Annaliese pinpoints a spatial aporia in the sounds of her telling—I can't believe this; I can't *not* believe this.

Yet these perceptions did not produce a one-way encounter with geography. For example, after Annaliese recounted her mother's advice (you don't want to sound like you're from Alabama), she reflected on her surprise at the flags touting achievements of Fulbright and Merit scholars on the central square of the campus, continuing:

> *but you see all these amazing things that you see people do,*
> *and they have done and that you want to include yourself in.*
> *And you kind of think of Alabama as the underdog …*

Alabama works in multiple ways—affecting her speech—pushing her away, distancing her from place, while simultaneously pulling, Alabama as a place she wants to be included in, wants to be a part of, wants to belong to—complicatedly, it is also about place and race.

Hutt et al. (2010) described how The University of Alabama shifted recruitment strategies between 2005–2010 to increase enrollment. One example of the rhetoric included in this shift is the "*Crimson Is"* marketing campaign, which used narratives from students and alumni to emphasize the strong southern tradition and prestige of the University. Southern-ness in these ads is a recruitment strategy for enrolling high-achieving students from the North who do not qualify for financial aid—a recruitment strategy which also included a $92.3 million increase in merit aid (up from $8.3 million in 2006), 64 new buildings, and an "army of recruiters" (Pappano, 2016). This campaign was followed by "*Touching Lives*," which ran from 2009–2015, and "*Where Legends are Made"* (2016–present). In each of these subsequent campaigns, "tradition" morphed and shifted slightly, moving away from explicit mentions of The South to capitalize on a more

recent "Southern" tradition: football. *Touching Lives*, for example was "designed to have more appeal nationally as the university expand[ed] recruitment efforts to more states and Crimson Tide [football] games [were] seen on more TVs across the country with the Southeastern Conference's new media agreements" (Jones, 2009, para. 15). The South/Alabama/football/Southeastern Conference, tightly connected through the ways in which the University branded itself as competitive in athletics and in academics. *Where Legends are Made* built on this connection further, launching in a 30-second TV commercial during the 2016 football season opener and featuring profiles from "legends"—notable alumni or figures associated with the school such as Harper Lee, Betsy Plank, and Joe Scarborough, clips of neatly manicured campus lawns and antebellum buildings, and touting the University's merit scholars and statistics of high achieving students. Through these campaigns, the slippage between The South and The University of Alabama and race is not accidental or unconscious, but rather, an intentional and focused marketing effort to link The South/football/Alabama and brand the University as prestigious and selective, a fitting place for competitive students with nationally recognized scholarships and high-test scores.

The focus and implications of national attention have become increasingly prevalent in recent years as the University of Alabama has won multiple national college football championships. The Crimson Tide, Nick Saban, and Roll Tide entangle with the racialized productions of The South and Alabama. For example, in December 2016, Saturday Night Live featured a sketch that included a guest appearance from John Cena. Cena played an Alabama football player who needed to get an A+ on his science project to be able to play in the "big game." Narratives converge, as Cena presented his research on bananas by displaying a piece of plywood with "bananas" nailed to it (one is an orange) and lists five facts he learned about bananas (including: "they are yummy") to a panel of Alabama football-gear wearing professors who have pledged not to give him "special treatment." Football matters, then, in how Alabama is understood and produced in national understandings. Furthermore, interconnecting and entangling with other understandings of The South, this particular portrayal of Alabama becomes differently, matters differently than had this sketch been of another team. This portrayal only becomes possible through the specific material configuration of Alabama/football/whiteness/The South. Leo reflected on the intersection between national and local spaces regarding his participation in an organization protesting the playing of the national anthem at football games, noting: *"because we're such a football school we're in a national spotlight. It [becomes] a national conversation too."* Football zigzags out from the campus, producing Alabama (and The University in turn) as visible in national conversations. For Leo, this meant that his involvement with protests and advocacy on campus as a student of color became compounded and multiplicitous. His involvement with the protests became not just about Alabama football, but the national conversation around Black lives and nationalism and sports, and this mattered for Leo's experience on campus because of the specific material configuration of place. This affects Leo's navigation, his embodied and embedded reality on campus. The anthem and protesting the anthem matter differently in context and enfold and resonate with other questions—Leo wondered "*Has it represented <u>you</u>?*" This question enfolds with the context of the University, the place of the protests. He continued, wondering: *Does the anthem represent you? Does the University represent you?* In this material-discursive configuration, the place of The University of Alabama, sitting or standing at the football game during a national anthem matters in ways that would be different or distinct from the same actions at another school.

The production of Alabama as a state and the University in local, national, and international consciousness, the socio-historical understandings of The South, and the reputation of the University of Alabama as a flagship institution of higher education and as a football school maps multiple slippages in the production of place.

Geographic Listening

Initially listening to the narratives of students through the audio compilations, I was pulled to the seemingly unconscious discursive replications and repetitions, how The South and Alabama became synonymous, used in place of the other interchangeably, as well as how they became explanatory for the other: Alabama is this way because it is The South, The University of Alabama comes to stand in for Alabama (the state) or The South. Simultaneously, The University, the State, the region became self-referential: because it's Alabama, because it's The South. In the subtext between these linkages is their inevitability—*but of course this is the way it is*, a subtext, said with a shrug, a sigh, an ironic and wry tone. However, listening to these narratives, other origins of these slippages become visible: monuments, recruitment strategies, the University's response to racist incidents, college football.

In higher education literature, space is often treated as a container, a blank slate where things "happen," methodologically neutralized or smoothed over to control for the effect of experiences and inputs. What this analysis has demonstrated is that the production of space does not suddenly begin when students arrive on campus. This is evident when listening to the audio compilations, the aural and discursive mappings of place in students' encounters with the space of The University of Alabama's campus. These geographies are produced through national news, histories, and associations with The South, and these perceptions fold into how students think about belongingness before and after arriving on campus, how they think they will join up with spatial narratives, and how they navigate campus space once arriving. Alabama is not a neutral place but rather exists in the imaginary of the nation in particular and specific ways. Zigzagging between sonic and discursive narratives—the resonances between perceptions and conceptions—makes possible understandings of how to intervene and how to re-make place and space. In other words, to listen to the tensions between perceptions and conceptions of campus and The South is to orient to space as more than just a container, more than something that "just is." This is to orient to space as something that is fundamentally alterable, able to be otherwise.

An entry point to become otherwise can be found in the ways that students tell stories about learning about the campus history. Threaded through both audio compilations, students talk about "knowing" about the history of campus before arriving, through news articles, family members, knowledge of U.S. History, or just an idea about what The South or Alabama is. When they share about their encounters with racial histories after arriving on campus, they often position it as illicit, as something secret, standing in contrast to the narratives of the University told by campus tours and university brochures and marketing campaigns. As Sierra reflected as she learned about the history of building names, "*I had no idea about that until like last year, and someone said it in class, I didn't learn it in school*." In Sierra's narrative, she didn't learn it in school, as from the University, but rather through another student mentioning it to her outside of the curriculum. Annaliese and Vivian (a white student in her first year) also remarked on this in their focus group. Annaliese reflected that, "*I would never have known this [the history of enslavement on campus] existed if I had never taken that class*," and Vivian remarked that a tour by faculty documenting

the history of slavery on campus had been assigned as an optional assignment in her anthropology course. In each of these reflections, the sanctioned narrative of campus as one that sterilizes history into "tradition" and "prestige" comes up against students' encounters with the trauma and violence of the past in "unsanctioned" spaces. As Leo remarked,

> *On tours, that's such a huge point, all these little details that no one really cares about.*
> *You're in the president's mansion,*
> *okay, we don't really care that this chair is made out of mahogany from 1760.*
> *In in other areas, we just kind of gloss over you know, …*
> *unless you take the time to dig deep,*
> *you never really know what the full history of the campus.*

Even as students knew or had an idea of the racialized past and how it might impact or influence their experience of campus before arriving, they felt betrayed by the University when they did learn about these histories. Jones and Okun (2001) describe a key characteristic of white supremacy as a fear of open conflict and the right to comfort. By not grappling with their socio-historical contexts of race (and other inequities), while still capitalizing on them for recruitment and marketing, the University persists in reproducing white supremacist spaces. Thus, to name and take responsibility for these histories is to begin to "advance complex re-spatializations that can perhaps move beyond descriptive paradoxical geographies (McKittrick, 2006, p. 144). This is not easy work, as has been demonstrated repeatedly by other campuses and communities seeking conversations about monuments and histories in their spaces, but it means asking critical questions about what materialities do to spaces and how they work, how traumas are embedded in place, and how we might listen to them. Listening, then, might as McKittrick (2006) suggests, "offers a different entry point into human geography: one that recognizes the alterability of humanness, space, and place, and one that imparts the understanding that this alter-ability is a pathway into new geographic practices" (p. 146).

Notes

1. Students in the original study were asked to self-identify salient demographic categories for themselves. While most students identified their race or ethnicity and gender, Sierra identified her religious identity as most salient.

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