BEYOND RESISTANCE: FUTURITIES AND CARCERAL LOGICS OF BLACK WORLDLESSNESS

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Abstract

In scholarly and policy discourses on socio-spatial patterns and Black well-being in Canada, little attention has been paid to how the spatialization of blackness, at the intersection of race, class, and carceral logics, shapes the lived experiences, expressive capacities, and futurities of Black residents in racialized neighbourhoods. This dissertation interrogates how Black life is both constrained and creatively negotiated within geographies marked by surveillance, neglect, and containment. Grounded in Black Radical Thought, Critical Race Theory, Critical Urban Studies, Black Geographies, and carceral studies, I examine the tactics of self-making, strategies of reclaiming Black life, and the envisioning and materialization of Black futurities among Black residents navigating what I theorize as *Black worldlessness*[1] in racialized neighbourhoods within Toronto and the Region of Peel, Ontario.

Based on 17 semi-structured interviews with self-identified Black residents (aged 18–57) across Toronto, Brampton, Caledon, and Mississauga, this study investigates how internalized and externalized racial-spatial constraints shape practices of belonging, subjectivity, and futurity. I demonstrate that dominant urban narratives, shaped by media, planning discourse, and state policy, deploy anti-Black frameworks that index Black life to social death, thereby legitimizing punitive interventions while erasing Black subjectivity and interior life from spatial imaginaries.

In response, I introduce *the Quiet,* as mobilized by Kevin Quashie (2012), as an analytic of interiority: a contemplative, affective reservoir that Black residents draw upon to navigate the psychic and material dimensions of Black life. This inner world serves as a site of both refusal and possibility. Through this framework, I identify three experiential categories: (1) residents *Quietly Holding Ground,* who are constrained, but not fully, by the internalization of anti-black stigma and systemic abandonment; (2) residents *Moving Ground,* who mobilize interior capacities and external supports to envision lives beyond the terms of Black worldlessness; and (3) residents *Making Ground,* who remain in racialized neighbourhoods by choice, forging *transfigurative futures* through acts of interior sovereignty and collective care.

Ultimately, I argue that Black life in racialized geographies cannot be apprehended solely through paradigms of resistance or structural domination. Instead, this work demands an analytic that centers Black aliveness, an orientation to being expressed through relations, dreaming, refusal, contemplation, and heterogeneity, as a legitimate mode of existence, *as is*. While anti-black spatial orders structure the external world, they do not exhaust Black lifeworlds. Attending to the practices through which Black communities envision and enact futurities, even within zones of

[1]Black worldlessness, as theorized by Fanon and expanded by Trojan (2016), refers to the colonized subject's forced rupture from both their pre-colonial past and the colonial world that rejects their full inclusion. This condition arises from interpellation, a process that scripts both colonizer and colonized into a racialized hierarchy, but ultimately fails to assimilate the colonized, leaving them rootless and alienated. The colonized, realizing they were never the intended subjects of liberal universalism, experience a deep sense of exclusion, existing without a world to truly belong to. This is the social condition of Black life in Canada.

abandonment, reveals a richer cartography of Black being, one that unsettles the epistemological limits of urban and carceral thought.

This study contributes to our understanding of how Black life unfolds within carceral urban geographies by drawing on and further developing theory at the intersections of Black Geographies, Critical Race Theory, carceral studies, and Black Radical Thought. By introducing the internal-external continuum of Black worldlessness and mobilizing the analytic of the *Quiet*, this research expands the conceptual vocabulary for understanding how Black residents navigate racialized spatial containment, not solely through resistance, but through interiority, contemplation, and quotidian acts of self-making. It offers a methodological and theoretical intervention that reorients urban and sociological scholarship toward the interior dimensions of Black livability, revealing the nuanced and heterogeneous ways Black communities imagine and enact futurities within and against the structures that seek to delimit their lives. The envisioning of Black futures serves as a reminder that we have ambitions, we desire, we pray, we hunger, we dream, we cry, and we fear; the Quiet and interiority holds all of this within.

To Shryiah Marie Brown, thank you for your existence. Thank you for sharing your wit, humour, and brilliance. I dedicate my dissertation to your stolen future, because you matter, in all ways, always.

–Love Bea

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A person is a person because of other people

–South African Proverb

I am, because you are.

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Chapter I
Introduction

Hold fast to dreams
For if dreams die
Life is a broken-winged bird
That cannot fly.

–Langston Hughes

Black Creek, dubbed as Toronto's "least livable" neighbourhood (McKnight, 2014), Flemingdon Park, charged as containing one of "Toronto's most violent high schools" (Laczko, 2014), Glenfield-Jane Heights, home to Jane and Finch, "Toronto's most dangerous place to be a kid" (Pagliaro, 2013), and Regent Park, "notorious for bedbugs and crime that badly needed intervention" (Hayes, 2016), have two things apparently in-common – they are negatively coded in the public imagination as "black[2] neighbourhoods," and they are generally discussed as sites in need of interventionist strategies which present black residents as objects to be either feared or saved (Hackworth, 2023). With hopes of strengthening the social, economic, and physical conditions of these neighbourhoods, through narratives of crisis, interventionist action planning practices and local funding investments instituted by the state have been developed to target communities labelled "the poorest neighbourhoods" inscribing territorial stigmatization. While existing scholarship lays a foundational understanding of Black spatial experiences and its impact on shaping subjectivity (Bledsoe & Wright, 2019; McKittrick, 2006; McKittrick & Woods, 2007), in discussions of Black well-being, little attention has been given to how Black residents living in economically marginalized neighbourhoods respond to the racialization of their geographies

[2] I have used black, lowercase "b" to signal imposed racialization and capital "B" to signal the political resonance of reclaiming from the racialized category. As such, terms like *Black worldlessness* and *Black life* are capitalized to reflect their critical and theoretical specificity.

(Ibrahim, 2006), how racialization impacts their sense of self (Young, 2004), and what strategies they use to reclaim Black life in their racialized neighbourhoods (Germinaro, 2024; McKittrick & Woods, 2007). This gap compels me to explore the varying responses of black residents living in these conditions, examining particularly, the experiences of residents who reside in their neighbourhoods involuntarily (due to internal and external constraints) and those who stay by choice, taking stock of how Black residents navigate, reclaim, and reimagine Black life in their racialized neighbourhoods.

Geography has come to play a significant role in the construction of self. As Shabazz (2015) contends, physical space and one's location tell us much about the "space of the subject—who we are as subjects, and the kinds of people we are, [which] are greatly influenced by our geographies" (p.1). Shabazz (2015), for example, whose work examines the impacts of carceral power in black geographies in Chicago's South Side, demonstrates through traditional archives and an analysis of kitchenettes, how mechanisms employed by the state discipline black families thought to have encroached on white geographies. These overcrowded, one room kitchenettes not only violated black dignity but stood as a stark physical reminder of their containment–symbolizing diseased bodies and the imposed belief that black life was ineligible within the boundaries of white spaces. Legally barred from white communities, not only did these housing conditions illuminate their social position, but black families were denied the possibility of self-authorizing selfhood. As such, conditioned by the narratives of racialized bodies in space, *where an* individual resides has repercussions on how identity is shaped where the narratives around belongingness are formed. As McKittrick (2006) reminds us, "the existing cartographic rules unjustly organize human hierarchies *in place*[3] and reify uneven geographies in familiar, seemingly

[3] Italics are used throughout this dissertation for emphasis and to signal key terms or conceptual categories.

natural ways [...] that constitute our present geographic organization" (p. x). Historical geographers argue that space functions as one of the most significant illustrators of uneven development, access, and social order (McKittrick, 2006; Shabazz, 2015; Woods, 2017). Space organizes how people are situated within it through codes of belonging and non-belonging that reflects social hierarchies (Virdee, Kyriakides, & Modood, 2006). It then "is not a coincidence that poor people, people of colour, immigrants, the sick, the disabled, prisoners, women, sexual minorities, and other marginalized groups live in bracketed geographies" (Shabazz, 2015, p.45). As Bray et al. (2019) note, the implication of living in bracketed geographies is its "corrosive effect on people's sense of control over their lives [...] poverty makes people "'afraid to dream" or "kills dreams and cages the dreamers" (p.17).

Environmental psychologists have similarly highlighted the critical role that place and space play in shaping human psychological development, an aspect often neglected in discussions of "physical settings and their properties in regard to self- identity" (Proshansky et al., 1983, p. 57). From this viewpoint, "physical settings [...] are inherently part of any socialization context on self-identity" and impacts how people define themselves within society (Proshansky et al., 1983, p. 58). Despite this, neighbourhood planning tools and policies that claim to advance equitable outcomes across neighbourhoods "contribute to the powerful territorial stigmatization of tenants as social and cultural deviants" (Purdy, 2005, p. 549). These narratives, reinforced by media, public officials, and institutions, pave the grounds for city managers, developers, planners and municipal authorities to transform the users of the space, without acknowledging anti-black racism as a social determinant of Black well-being (Purdy, 2005, p. 549). Public housing has long associated with "negative archetypal symbols of [...] high rises, gangs, [and] garbage," and narratives of "severe distress" and "horrific living conditions" (Bray et al., 2019; Goetz, 2011, p.

270). Wacquant's (2007) concept of territorial stigma, which builds on Goffman's (1968) foundational work, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, identifies the "blemish of place" or poor neighbourhood reputation as a type of social disability that disqualifies residents and deprives them of full social acceptance by others which lead to territorial stigmatization. Consequently, the "blemish of place" adds an additional layer of disadvantage to existing stigmas that are associated with race, class, and national or ethnic origins. In this way, territorial stigmatization is not just associated with neighbourhoods but also *persons*. Stigmatization is fluid, distinguishing between desirable and undesirable residents thus generating more complex internal divisions within communities. As such, this dissertation examines the intersection of anti-black racism, the racialization of space, and Black selfhood to provide a window into the strategies and tactics deployed by Black residents who remain in their neighbourhoods, whether involuntarily or voluntarily, examining how they navigate Black worldlessness, envision, and materialize their futures beyond the present conditions in their neighbourhoods. The experiential narratives of Black residents not only signal a wider gap in the state's capacity to address the needs of Black well-being but unearths a different kind of expressiveness of Black livability that enables a more nuanced understanding of Black life.

Black residents' responses to territorial stigmatization are varied and shaped by, but not limited to, their individual life trajectories, migratory and historical realities, age, and length of stay in their neighbourhood. These factors reveal ambivalences between the negative aspects of their environment and positive personal attributes that shape their capacity to either refuse or internalize what I term, Black worldlessness. Worldlessness, a term theorized by Fanon (1968; 2011) and expanded by Trojan (2016) refers to a rupture of one's being in and of the world, and in one's relations with and to others. Referring to a colonial diametrical relationship, Fanon (1968;

2011) contends that the institution of a colonial society, divided between colonizer and colonized, between white and racialized subjects, writes colonizers into place whereby they are granted the capacity to fully inhabit the world, engage in the "phantasms" or illusion of liberalism (Trojan, 2016, p.403). In contrast, the colonized are denied such occupation and ownership, relegated instead to a condition of worldlessness: a colonial subjectivity. Realizing that those colonized are not the intended subject of the call of liberal universalism and its promised rights and privileges it claims to stand for, Fanon argues renders them wordless, alienated, abjected from a shared world. The colonized suffers from a racial violence that uproots them from a precolonial past and, most importantly, alienates, and ejects them from a community in which they imagined themselves to belong. As Trojan (2016) explains, "to suffer the condition of the colonized is to exist fundamentally without a world, to suffer worldlessness" (p.405).

Although Black populations in North America are no longer colonized in the traditional sense, the legacies of colonization and enslavement have sustained the conditions of deracination and dejection, conditions of worldlessness, which enable me to use this concept to examine the lived experiences of Black populations in Canada. I apply the term "Black" worldlessness to describe the social condition that Black people are made to endure. By advancing Fanon's theorization, I highlight the position of the alienated and dejected black colonized subject to foreground black antagonism—what Walcott and Abdillahi (2019) call BlackLife[4], the condition marked by the endpoint of alienation and abjection from the world, deeply rooted in colonial

[4] BlackLife as one word, coined by Rinaldo Walcott and Idil Abdillahi (2019), emphasizes the ways that "living Black makes BlackLife inextricable from the mark of its flesh, both historically and in our current time [...] "Black" is not only a prefix but a precondition for how livability "in all its multiplicities" is "marked by the Black flesh" (p.9). Using the term BlackLife speaks to the ways that living Black is differentiated from normative conceptions of human life and livability.

violence. Grounded in this framing of Black worldlessness, my research explores how Black residents navigate and negotiate this condition in their everyday lives.

Throughout this research, I observed a range of responses to territorial stigmatization shaped by three core factors: the degree of internalization of degrading external discourses (i.e., relationship to the social self); the extent to which residents have accumulated what I term *resources of refusal* or *survival/protective strategies* that operate as insulating barriers against racializing structures of oppression that equip residents with the tools and resources to reject valuations of Blackness that do not align with their self-perception; and their capacities for self-creation. Residents developed distinct techniques for reclaiming Black life in their neighbourhoods. The interplay between the depth of internalization and the accumulation of resources of refusal reveals the strategies residents employ, which either foreclose or facilitate pathways toward reclaiming Black aliveness, the assertion that Black life is rich, full, and complete on *its own terms*, not in response to racism or anti-blackness. Here Black life includes everything about being human: the good, the bad, the mundane, and the extraordinary.

Significance of the Problem

My dissertation centres the lived experiences of Black residents living in Toronto and the Region of Peel and challenges mainstream accounts that (1) reduce dominant explanations of Black life to resistance, and (2) homogenize Black experiences in inner cities. Engaging with scholars such as Joy James (1996, 2023), Fred Moten (2003, 2008), Christina Sharpe (2016), Sadiya Hartman (2007), whose work explores how Black people assert their humanity, creativity, and desires even within oppressive structures, my research contributes to ongoing debates on the dangers of presenting narrow or monolithic portrayals of Black people and communities (Gilroy, 1993; & Hall et al., 2021; Wynter, 2003). Black people engage in creating life–insisting on interior

life beyond dominant explanations of resistance. I argue that Black life cannot be fully understood through public acts of defiance alone. Instead, Black life must be read and seen in the quiet moments of self-reflection, joy, mourning and dreaming, in expressions inherent to being alive, to being human. This dissertation challenges the oversimplification of the lifeways of economically marginalized Black people, shifting away from cultural determinist perspectives that assigns a pathologizing lens. Rather than framing Black life through a lens of cultural deprivation, I offer a holistic perspective that exemplifies the diversity of experiences within racialized neighbourhoods (Lewis, 1966; Moynihan, 1965; Valentine, 1968). Here, Critical Race Theory provides a valuable structural analytical framework in my work, allowing for an understanding of race as a "social structure deeply rooted, not only in ideas and beliefs, but also in institutions, fundamental patterns of inequality, social geography and the exercise of political power" (Omi and Winant, 2015, p.7). This highlights the complexity and dynamism of Black life that transcends binary frameworks, capturing the richness of Black existence in racialized spaces.

My dissertation also engages with literature on Blackness and Critical Urban Studies to interrogate its limits, particularly on how dominant urban frameworks often obscure, flatten, or pathologize Black life in racialized geographies (Lipsitz, 2011; McKittrick, 2006; Roy, 2005; Shabazz, 2015). This has practical implications for urban policy, planning, and community development, particularly in how these fields measure and address the needs and aspirations of Black residents (Ontario Professional Planners Institute, 2022). This work is critical for disrupting deficit-based readings of Black urban communities by unveiling how urban policy, planning, and scholarship often reproduce anti-black spatial logics while tuning out Black interiority, agency, and self-making practices. It contributes to the development of more just and equitable urban frameworks that centre Black humanity, resist carceral urbanism, and affirm the richness of Black

life beyond narratives of lack or crisis. My research complicates state-developed neighbourhood equity index tools and interventionist strategies that purport to invest in the well-being of Black life by asking, what would it mean for Black lives to exist in totality? To exist beyond metrics and tools that measure depravity. If we want to take seriously the well-being of Black residents, we must reframe Black life and Black geographies, recognizing that state-developed tools can reproduce the very conditions that they aim to address, territorial pathologization.

Lastly, my dissertation underscores the importance of understanding Black futurities, the ways in which Black residents envision and work towards future possibilities despite the constraints of their current conditions. By focusing on Black interiority through the concept of the Quiet, the inner domain of Black interiority, my work provides a new lens for exploring how Black life persists and thrives in the face of systemic oppression (Quashie, 2016). It offers critical insights into the ways Black communities resist, reimagine, and shape their futures. This research contributes to broader efforts to dismantle systemic racism and build more inclusive, supportive urban environments. My dissertation calls us to reconsider how we support Black life in racialized urban neighbourhoods, urging us to question how dominant narratives of unlivability shape the lived experiences of Black residents. It calls for a deeper attention to the relationship between structures of constraint in racialized geographies and Black futurities (Harris, 2023; Johnson and Lubin, 2017). Ultimately, my work is a call to urban policymakers and planners to take seriously the needs of Black residents. It is also a testament to the promise of Black futurity– a commitment to one another in a world that seeks to perpetually index them to death.

My research questions are:

1) How do Black residents respond to the racialization of their neighbourhoods?

2) How does the racialization of their neighbourhoods impact Black residents' sense of self?
3) What are the strategies for reclaiming Black life in and/or from their racialized neighborhoods?

Carcerality of Black Worldlessness

Born out of transatlantic enslavement, carceral power was central to the punitive economy of slavery and the legal codification of servitude. Without such forces, it is difficult to imagine how the "peculiar institution" would have been maintained. As black people emerged from the institution of enslavement, the technologies of cruelty used to capture, hold, and transport them were repackaged for the new carceral age. Carceral power operates as a system of enclosure and order that fuses the punitive elements of prison into the realities of Black life (Shabazz, 2015). From the transatlantic slave trade to mass incarceration, carceral logics have functioned in the very spaces where black people reside. Surveillance, policing, and containment have been, and continue to be, woven into the fabric of black environments. Locating carceral power in racialized neighbourhoods unearths the mundane ways it functions in everyday life, compelling us to reconcile the implications of this power on black livability.

Carceral tactics are employed to maintain Black world-less-ness. By this, I refer to punitive tactics, meant to establish discipline and order in prisons, that transgress the space of prisons and penetrate broader society, particularly in geographies of black residents. Here, carceral power, through its network of techniques, technologies, and mechanics of constraint and immobilization, becomes interwoven with the condition of Black life, denying Blackness the occupation and the capacity to *fully inhabit the world* –rendering black people alienated and ejected from it. As such, Black worldlessness, the primary organizing foundation of blackness, or what Mbembe (2019) refers to as "the remainder," the ultimate sign of the dissimilar, is both defined by and produces

carceral power. While carcerality is often employed as a form of social regulation that extends beyond literal incarceration to encompass surveillance and discipline across institutions and social spaces (Gilmore 2023; Foucault, 1977), I add this logic to contend that carcerality constraints (1) the envisioning of Black futures beyond the present conditions of Black worldlessness, and (2) the degree to which people can achieve those envisioned futures. Carcerality in my research moves beyond systems of power, control, and criminalization in physical and social spaces to extend into the realm of Black futurities. This is significant because it adds to how we think about the impact of carcerality (Story, 2019). The omnipresence of surveillance, policing, and containment produces environments in which the daily struggle for survival maps over the possibility of imagining a different future. As illustrated by participants in this research, the constant threat of carcerality fosters a climate of fear and insecurity that can stifle creativity, ambition, and the ability to dream beyond immediate circumstances. As scholar Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2007) argues, the organized abandonment of vulnerable populations by the state, coupled with the rise of carceral power, works to limit life chances and stifle aspirations. The pervasive reach of carceral power into the lives of economically marginalized people effectively narrows their horizons, making it increasingly difficult to aspire to a life beyond the constraints imposed by poverty and surveillance (Davis, 2003). This extension of carcerality contributes to a deeper understanding of how Black people are *held in* –emotively, materially, psychologically, and futuristically.

Internal-External Continuum of Black Worldlessness

There is wide variation in how Black residents find pathways of aliveness and envision possibilities for their futures. I have developed the *Internal-External Continuum of Black worldlessness* to represent this variance and its non-fixed, shifting nature. Categories of experiences within Black worldlessness range from those *Quietly Holding Ground*, residents who

feel involuntarily confined to those *Making Ground*, voluntary stayers. All Black residents navigate internal-external constraints, but they respond to and interpret them in diverse ways. Briefly, the Internal-External Continuum of Black worldlessness refers to the spectrum of experiences through which Black residents navigate varying degrees of internal and external constraints, shaping their agency and future envisioning. See figure 1.

Figure 1. Internal-External Continuum of Black worldlessness. Source: Author.

The relationship between the internal and external constraints within the continuum of Black worldlessness is one of interdependence–where the social world imposes material and symbolic limits on Black life, while the inner world carries the emotional, psychological, and experiential weight of navigating these conditions. External constraints represent the social world and force that shape and confine Black life to subordinated positions, while internal constraints refer to constraints of the inner world, encompassing thoughts, feelings, and formative experiences of Black residents, articulated through the concept of the Quiet. The Quiet can be understood in four components: (1) the source of human action, where anything we do is shaped by the range of desires and capacities of our inner life (Quashie, 2012, p.8); (2) a storehouse that can be filled, emptied, or refilled with resources used for self-creation; (3) a storehouse of experiential resources

accumulated over time; and (4) a domain of contemplation where Black people engage in a range of feelings and thoughts, reflecting on the world around them. The Quiet is a resource available to all Black people, as it is tethered to the vitality of being alive. However, the capacity to tap into the Quiet, the resources available in the Quiet, and the safeguarding of the Quiet, varies among Black residents. The Quiet provides "glimpses of Black aliveness, moments of something more than what exists inside of the dire conditions of our present Black unfreedom" (Quashie, 2021, p.2). Black aliveness, as mobilized by Quashie (2021), is a framework of being in which,

> the racial logics and harming predilections of anti-Blackness are inverted [...] investing in the richness of Blackness in totality where everything is of people who are Black–every capable thing, every small or harmful thing, every extraordinary thing of bad feeling [...] all of it is of Blackness (p.5).

Here Black being is neither created nor encompassed by anti-Blackness. "Black aliveness is. It is" (Quashie, 2021, p.47).

For participants in my study who land on the left side of the spectrum, they tend to possess fewer internal and external resources that support navigating Black worldlessness. This renders these residents vulnerable to a compromised sense of self internalizing and resigning to the stigma of their neighbourhoods. With few mechanisms and accumulated resources of refusal that would enable them to find livability in their neighbourhoods, these residents struggle with dreaming of a life otherwise. Here, structural limitations are understood and manifest as internal constraints. Their self-concept becomes determined, though not entirely, by negative racializing evaluations of their neighbourhoods, disrupting their agency, how they envision their futures, their capacities for self-creation, and the possibilities of reclaiming Black life in their neighbourhoods.

Participants who land on the right side of the spectrum illustrate greater capacities and access to both internal and external resources allowing for the storehouse of the Quiet to be filled.

While they may not view their neighbourhoods as having the capacity to fully hold and materialize their dreams, external constraints primarily hold them in place. These residents possess protective mechanisms and have accumulated resources of refusal that enable them to find pockets of livability in their neighbourhoods and dream of a life otherwise. For these residents, the ghettoization and pathologized constructions of their neighbourhoods impact the ways they feel about living in their neighbourhoods, however, they do not become internalized as part of the social self, allowing these residents to dream of futurity beyond the limitations of Black worldlessness and enable them to more fully realize their agency, envision their futures, and curate capacities for self-creation and reclaim Black life in their neighbourhoods.

It is important to note that Black residents are always negotiating the Internal-External Continuum of Black worldlessness. Residents are not solely internally or externally constrained but experience a dynamic interplay of both. This interplay informs their strategies for navigating Black worldlessness and imagining future possibilities. In theorizing Black residents' experience navigating Black worldlessness; three conditions or expressions of future possibilities arise:

1) Residents who are *Quietly Holding Ground within the carcerality of Black worldlessness*. These residents feel both internally and externally held in their neighborhoods by Black worldlessness and thus struggle to realize their futures within or beyond these conditions. These residents become more vulnerable to internalizing the structures of Black worldlessness, gradually eroding, though not entirely, Black aliveness. For these residents, Black worldlessness seeps into the internal, fostering a debilitating and palpable construction of the social self–formed through social interaction, that interrupts the possibilities of Black aliveness. Here, the capacity to realize their agency, to act and make meaning, envision their futures and self-create is stunted. Rather than fully succumbing to the erasures of Black worldlessness, they embody a mode of being

that *quietly* maintains dignity, presence, and a sense of self in conditions meant to diminish them. Nonetheless, these Black residents feel as if they are held *in space*.

2) Residents who are *Moving Ground within and beyond the carcerality of Black worldlessness*. This refers to residents who feel externally held in by Black worldlessness, however, can realize their futures beyond Black worldlessness. The internal and external resourcing accumulated provide these residents with the capacity to reject valuations of Blackness that do not align with their self-perception. For this group, protective strategies serve as a buffer during the most challenging periods, empowering residents to reorient their futures beyond Black worldlessness. These strategies enable them to realize their agency, carve out inlets of possibilities, and reinscribe livability, all while cultivating expansive future imaginings beyond their neighbourhoods. Their effort to move out—is reflected in the creation of new meanings, attachments, and a sustained orientation toward futurity within and beyond the boundaries of Black worldlessness.

3) Residents who are *Making Ground curating transfigurative futures within the carcerality of Black worldlessness*. This refers to residents who do not feel internally nor externally *held in* by Black worldlessness, rather they voluntarily choose to remain in their neighbourhoods despite the conditions of Black worldlessness. The internal and external resourcing provides these residents with the capacity to not only reject valuations of Blackness that do not align with their self-perception but actively challenge the forces of territorial stigmatization. These residents dream of futurities within the carcerality of Black worldlessness mapping out how they come to develop an orientation towards Black livability and futurity in their racialized neighborhoods. Through the lens of transfigurative futurity, they invert dehumanizing structures to cultivate new ways of being,

asserting that Black life not only resists but also dreams, builds, and thrives—even within carceral geographies, welcoming interiorities that are their own.

I wish to underscore that the conditions described by residents are by no means fixed. Rather, they represent a spectrum of experiences and understandings of futurities that illustrate the diverse ways in which Black residents respond, navigate, and seek pathways within and beyond Black worldlessness in their racialized neighbourhoods. The analytical expressions proposed here should be viewed as flexible frameworks, containing a productive tension that allow for movement between different analytical futures. This is not to suggest that these residents are confined to specific geographies; rather, their experiences are dynamic, allowing for mobility among the various experiences. What I aim to present is a snapshot of how these residents envision their social selves and their futurities. They possess the capacity to traverse different analytical futures, yet they categorize their experiences in such a way that highlights the heterogeneity of life in racialized neighbourhoods. This dissertation aims to illuminate these designations as markers that speak to the current experience of Black residents living in racialized neighbourhoods *today.*

We Can Be Like Moss

Thrives along crevice
Sage, coral cracks concrete
Calmly forest floor
Sprouts sprinkled life forms commune
Unity at the edge

–Kleaver Cruz

The Quiet

Scholarship in Black Studies traces understandings of black (un)livablity through the slave trade, where the mathematics of Black life, including killability, dehumanization, and devaluation

of Blackness, underpins black (un)livability (Sharpe, 2016, p. 30). However, despite domination and white supremacy, as Fred Moten (2003) states in the opening statements of *In the Break*, "the history of Blackness is a testament to the fact that objects can and do resist" (p.1). Black people assert their beingness through an expressiveness of the Quiet.

Refusal–a mattering of the interior, is defined as

> a rejection of the status quo as livable and the creation of possibility in the face of negation i.e. a refusal to recognize a system that renders you fundamentally illegible and unintelligible; the decision to reject the terms of diminished subjecthood with which one is presented, using negation as a generative and creative source of disorderly power to embrace the possibility of living otherwise (Campt, 2017)

The use of the Quiet in this thesis holds that Black life is not reducible to the structures of racialization or the agentic actions of resistance but *just is*–in all its modalities. Domination and hegemony are not understood to be the primary, stable, or all-encompassing. Taking seriously the standpoint that racialized margins sit as fertile grounds for knowledge building and transformative openings means, "shifting in how we read, what we look for and what we expect, even what we remain open to" within and beyond carceral logics within racialized neighbourhoods (Quashie, 2016, p.6).

In these chapters, the Quiet is mobilized in ways that invite surprises that interrupt dominant narratives that are ascribed to Black residents living in racialized neighbourhoods. I let the unexpected be possible, inviting the inner reservoirs of thoughts and feelings that are shaped by the range of desires and capacities of a human self. These chapters explore the ambitions, vulnerabilities, and dreams of the study's participants, paying particular attention to internal endeavors, spirituality, advocacy while also exploring resistance. Resistance in context–not in essence (Quashie, 2016, p. 24).

Imagining Black Aliveness

Writing from the imperative to imagine a Black world, Kevin Quashie (2021) offers "Black aliveness" as a framework of being where "the racial logics and harming predilections of anti-Blackness are inverted" investing instead in the richness and fullness of Blackness "in totality, where everything is of people who are Black–every capable thing, every small or harmful thing, every extraordinary thing of bad feeling [...] all of it is of Blackness" (p.5). Here Black being is neither created nor limited by anti-Blackness. The ethic of aliveness is one of self-regard, epistemological abundance, and ontological presence; this is central to Quashie's philosophical intervention is his relationship to Afropessimism. As such, aliveness calls for a non-normative ethical framing of Black being as a normative frame. Quashie (2021) eloquently states,

> [i]n an anti Black world, the Black subject is essentially non relational. In an anti Black world, there is no ethical possibility for the one who is Black: there is no figuring through one's humanity because one's humanity is figured already as marginal, subjected, diminished (p.108).

Quashie invites us to a Black worldmaking that hosts all the conditions of Black life, where ideologies are created of and for a world that can embrace Blackness. Blackness not as a calculus of inferiority, but beyond this racist discourse–Blackness as totality. This is a world of heterogeneity, of "freeness, where Blackness can be of being, where no argument can be made, where there is no speaking to or against an audience because we are all the audience there is" (p. 10). Guided by the conceptual lens of Black aliveness, the following six chapters take up the everyday lives of Black residents in Toronto and the Region of Peel, tracing how they negotiate the racialization of their neighbourhoods, navigate constraints on their selfhood, and curate strategies for reclaiming Black life within and beyond the logics of Black worldlessness.

Importantly, this vision does not call for assimilation into the Western liberal conception of the human but rather is an invitation to an ethical and political reorientation– a wakefulness to alternative ways of knowing. This approach advocates for a praxis of care and methodology for "attending to Black life and Black suffering that avails us particular ways of reimagining the world" that might be used "in responses to the varied and various ways that Black lives are lived unlivable" and reimagined otherwise (Sharpe, 2016, p. 22).

Outline of the Study

This thesis consists of eight chapters. Chapter I, introduces the research topic, establishes the significance of the problem, and outlines the central analytical concepts guiding this study, including the carcerality of Black worldlessness, the Internal-External Continuum of Black worldlessness, and the Quiet, concluding with a discussion of Black Aliveness. Chapter II, presents a review of the literature, offering a fuller discussion of scholarship that explores Black life and the city. It examines the interplay between racialization, spatialized carceral organization, and the modalities of Black expressiveness in racialized geographies, providing the reader with a theoretical roadmap followed in the empirical chapters. Chapter III, situates this thesis within the field of the Black Radical Tradition, outlining key conceptual and ontological frameworks, concluding with a discussion of the field context. Chapter IV, outlines the methodological approach employed in this research, including the research design and analysis, and concludes with a reflection on my positionality, ethical considerations and limitations of the study. Chapters V through VII, consist of combined findings and discussions. I identify three distinct categories of experiences within racialized neighbourhoods, each discussed in its own chapter. Chapter V, *Quietly Holding Ground: Futurities Within and Beyond the Carcerality of Black Worldlessness,* offers a rich description of Black residents I refer to as *Quietly Holding Ground.* While situated

within the constraints of racialized carcerality, they sustain a quiet form of presence. Their experiences reflect a dual reality: how structural degradation and internalized stigma fracture the self, yet these residents also illuminate the fragile persistence, an interior act of grounding themselves within these spaces. Black futurity is not defined by overt defiance or resistance, but by constrained, quiet acts of holding on–a quiet insistence on life. Chapter VI, *Moving Ground: Futurities Beyond the Carcerality of Black Worldlessness,* builds on the expression of those *Quietly Holding Ground* to explore the second analytical category, *Moving Ground.* While involuntarily positioned within racialized neighbourhoods due to the external constraints of Black worldlessness, these residents cultivate an interior life that resists the imposed meanings of their surroundings. Through the storehouse of the Quiet, they transform space into place, articulating futurities grounded in dignity, care, and a refusal to be overdetermined by the structures that confine them. They imagine futures beyond the carcerality of Black worldlessness. Chapter VII, *Making Ground: Transfigurative Futurities Within the Carcerality of Black Worldlessness*, explores the third analytical category, *Making Ground*. Building on the expressions of those *Moving Ground*, this chapter focuses on residents who, despite the enduring condition of Black worldlessness, choose to remain in their racialized neighbourhoods and actively reimagine them as sites of Black livability, dignity, and futurity. Through the lens of transfigurative futurity, they invert dehumanizing structures to cultivate new ways of being. Finally, Chapter VIII serves as the concluding chapter, summarizing the key findings and reflecting on the broader implications and significance of this work.

Chapter II
Literature Review: Black Life and the City

In this chapter, I begin by examining the interplay between racialization, spatialized carceral organization, and Black selfhood in racialized geographies. I explore how spatial configurations and carceral logics shape, produce, and reinforce marginalized identities, with social space operating as a medium for the management of black bodies. Grounded in Black Studies and Critical theory, I draw on the work of Foucault (1977), Nelson (2002), Maynard (2017), and Shabazz (2015) to analyze the socio-spatial constraints imposed on black communities and geographies that function to contain and marginalize black lives. Carceral practices are shown to transgress the walls of prisons to enact social control, forming what scholars contend is the continuation of oppressive power structures rooted in historical racial hierarchies and colonial exploitation (Camp 2016; Gilmore 2007). This literature highlights the persistence of these spatial dynamics, linking them to both contemporary forms of racialized exclusion and historical patterns of domination. The chapter then turns to a critical examination of mainstream depictions and harmful representations of black residents that further entrench a discourse of Black unlivability. It is within this *framing* that the analysis addresses how city planners confront the so-called "black problem" through various intervention tactics. The discussion moves into a brief exploration of Black worldlessness; a Fanonian framework that undergirds the social condition of Black life, to provide the backdrop of this dissertation. I conclude this chapter with a discussion of Black public life, often theorized through logics of death and resistance. Moving beyond these paradigms, attention is given to scholarship that re-centers alternative theorizations of Black life wherein the interiority of Black residents emerges within racialized urban spaces as a site of aliveness and futurity.

Socio-spatial Approach

Space plays an imminent role in the production of identities. Personal habits, the kinds of food consumed, the susceptibility to diseases, sexual practices, languages spoken, and cultural conventions are products of the space which people inhabit (Shabazz, 2015). Space is fundamental to identity and "people depend on it to help construct meaning, to explain the world around them, and to highlight what is particular about their being-ness" (Shabazz, 2015, p. 46). People are greatly influenced by their geographies. As highlighted in research on place and identity (Cresswell, 2004; Proshansky, 1983), group identities are formed and deeply shaped in relation to the space it inhabits or controls. In this vein, it is important to recognize that the quality of life across regional space is vital to how people perceive themselves and their social conditions. There is a dialectical relationship between groups in space and their formation of identities. Literature examining the racialized production of space and the management of Black life speak to the "ghettoization" and demonization of black geographies (Kirkness & Tije-Dra, 2017). As Purdy (2005) contends, such stigmatizing renderings are not free-floating ideological and spatial representations, but reflect and reinforce real, spatial, and social divisions in cities and have concrete political, economic, social, and personal consequences for black people and communities (Purdy, 2005, p.524). "While not determining one's identity, space and place do create a vehicle through which the mode and manner of behaviour are expressed" (Shabazz, 2015, p. 45).

As Nelson (2002) contends, black spaces are oftentimes manufactured as isolated geographies and as problems to be solved, deserving of particular attention (p. 229). Exploring this notion, Nelson (2002) asserts that "narratives of poverty and racial marginality are rarely distinguishable from one another"; rather, both elements are deeply infused with judgements about respectable family life, gender, and moral codes, and the need for discipline and regulation (p.

229). Various theorists have traced the production and management of low-income, racialized, and spatially segregated communities as they have shifted forms and continued over time (McKittrick, 2006; Nelson, 2002). Goldberg (1993) writes that the conflation of the physical conditions of the slum with immorality, in conversation with race, further infuses racial dehumanization in representations of the slum. Here, "the racial slum is doubly determined, as the metaphorical stigma of a black blotch on the city space that bears the added connotations of moral degeneracy, natural inferiority, and repulsiveness [...] the slum locates the racial underclass" (Goldberg, 1993, pp. 51-52). And so, these constructions become easily sutured onto the black body, marking spaces of the racially marginalized as zones where lawlessness prevails, requiring intensive regulation, policing, and guidance towards reform by dominant classes and races (McKittrick, 2006; Razack 2002, p.126)

In exploring the interlocking production of identities in Black geographies, Nelson (2002) takes up the now dismantled Africville as a site of spatial analysis. Nelson (2002) contends that "discourses about poverty, deviance, and criminality, as well as 'the slum' and Blackness itself, served to position Africville as a place outside society that bolstered the predominant view that the community's destruction was both necessary and imminent" (p. 223). The residents of Africville were not only black, but they were also poor—this justified the refusal to supply the community with essential needs (e.g., sewage, water, garbage collection, fire protection, and building permits to maintain homes) creating "a cycle of systemic neglect" (p. 223). Thus, the different operating systems of oppression, through understandings of both racialization and poverty, come to not only inform the geography of Africville, but how community members understand their own sense of self. Similarly, dominant white racial discourses that were infused into the understandings of how the slum and people of Africville came to be understood rendered their containment and

destruction as necessary (Nelson, 2002). In this context, race and the process of racialization were central in "shaping the understandings of deviance and immorality that enabled the community's particular configuration as a slum" (p. 232).

In the contemporary context, historical racist spatial regulations continue to seep into the management of black bodies in space. Black people are not imagined as being able to actualize the principles of self-determination, guided by an interior consciousness able to rationalize and analyze, rather; instead, they are understood to be governed by instinct, suffering from the condition of being subjected to both "natural conditions" of deviance and to others' power. Space here does not only explain and naturalize subordination; it was and continues to be central to engineering some of the most violent forms of exploitation. Violent spatial practices are not then attributed to colonial exploitation, but to a population's supposed intrinsic inferiority (Cacho, 2012, p.74). In the contemporary era, such spatial practices enable exploitation in neighbourhoods targeted for surveillance that are home to racialized people, including immigrants, refugees, and more specifically black people.

As Maynard (2017) contends, "despite the end of slavery as a legal form of controlling Black movement and curtailing Black freedom, the enduring association of Blackness with danger and criminality is further consolidated, and new forms of policing Black people's lives have emerged. [...] Emancipation required new expressions of racial logics" (p. 9). Throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries, criminality, danger, and deviance became more fully assigned to Blackness. Black and white Canadians appear to commit relatively equal levels of most crimes, yet the black population, viewed as dangerous, continues to bear the burden of the "criminal" stigma (Maynard, 2017). Canadian politicians, police, and newspapers have, for centuries, linked blackness or black "cultures" to criminality and danger. They have and continue to be treated as

menaces to be kept out, locked up, or removed. Cacho (2012) writes, racial "stereotypes are not degrading because race is devalued," rather stereotypes are degrading because they "link race to other categories of devaluation, just as race is redeemed when linked to other properties of personhood universalized as socially valuable" (p.3). Cacho (2012) continues contending that the "black body", as a criminal figure, is also a signifier of a fictional figure that people have made real and consequential. The black body is given a life of its own, bloated and affixed with an amoral nature and ascribed shameful imaginings that justify why certain people need to be targets of state violence, abandonment, and neglect. The Negro invention thus fulfils its function for "the humanist dream" as "an available equipment in human form", thus producing *the fact-of-blackness* (Warren, 2018, p. 6). This fabrication of criminality and disposability not only renders Black life hyper-visible through surveillance and punishment but simultaneously renders it socially and politically illegible—an existence disqualified from recognition, value, or care.

Borrowing Butler and Athanasiou (2013) theorizations on dispossession and (un)belonging, they contend that "an ungrievable life is one that cannot be mourned because it has never lived, that is, it has never counted as a life at all" (p. 38). Black lives do not appear in danger, as they are danger. Their precariousness does not warrant recognition, as they are not recognized as lives at all—the emptying, but fragmented remaking of their existence has rendered them socially *dead*. Butler and Athanasiou (2013) and Sharpe (2016) hold that the racialization of black identities, already sanctioned bodies, are built from a logic that holds blackness as already dead, as a frozen spooky caricature forever unincorporated into the genre of the Human. Building on this understanding of Black lives as ungrievable and perpetually marginalized, the concept of spatialized carceral organization further illustrates how the mechanisms of imprisonment, such as

surveillance and policing, are then justifiable tools to manage not so much the imago[5] spun through with myths, anecdotes, and stories, but the shadow or stain that is sensed behind it and that disturbs well-being, the "residue of the human that cannot be incorporated" (Marriott, 2007, p.1).

The sense in which carcerality is inseparable from the prison is reinforced by the influential work of Michael Foucault. In *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Foucault described a "carceral system" that reaches far beyond the prison, drawing on disciplinary control that encompasses the most "coercive technologies of behaviour" (Foucault, 1977, p. 293). Foucault identified colonies for the poor, institutions for abandoned children and factory-convents flowing out from, and adopting aspects of, the 'compact', institutional, carceral model. Moving "still further away from penality in its strictest sense", he argued, "the carceral circles widen and the form of the prison slowly diminishes and finally disappears altogether" (Foucault, 1977, p. 298) transmitted beyond the space of prisons and obeyed through general norms within broader society (Moran et al., 2018). However, missing from this theorization, which has been criticized by Joy James (1996), Shabazz (2015) and other theorists, is the idea that Foucault erases the "long history people of color have with carceral power" (Shabazz, 2015, p. 6). More than just a critique of Foucault, James' analysis demonstrates that carceral power is deeply interwoven with racism (Shabazz, 2015, p.6). Injecting race into the theorization of carceral systems allows for an exploration of the way race informs and structures carceral punishment and racialized geographies.

Shabazz (2015) explores policing, surveillance, and architectures of confinement in Chicago, contending that mechanisms of constraint are built into architecture, urban planning, and systems of control, to establish borders, quite literally and figuratively, creating a prison-like

[5] Drawing from David Mariott (2007), I use the term to describe the racialized, psychic-visual schema that frames blackness as always already known, always visible, yet never seen as human. It is an image through which Black life is captured and constrained as a fixed, racializing fantasy in the white imagination.

environment (p. 2). Extending this argument to the Canadian context, we can identify ways that carceral power contains and arrests Black communities in place (Maynard, 2017). Shabazz (2015) names these spatial dynamics through architecture, planning, the implementation of chain link fencing, policing video surveillance, perimeter patrols, controlled visitation, curfews, apartment sweeps, metal detectors, stop and frisk techniques, turnstiles, onsite courts and the residential identification program, techniques that illustrate the ways that mechanisms of constraint are built into systems of control that draw attention to the ways that traditional geographies continually arrange uneven spatial practices evoking the fissures of existing landscapes (Shabazz, 2015). Echoing these sentiments, McKittrick (2007) contends that Black geographies are sites of violent subjugation that reveals, rather than conceals the location of Black cultures in the face of unfreedoms. McKittrick (2006) argues that Black geographies help in explicating the processes of racialization in the production of space. Black geographies bring into focus networks and relations of power, histories of resistance and the everyday, rather than locations that are simply subjugated, perpetually ghettoized or ungeographic. Black geographies expose traditional geographies as upholding language of insides and outsides, borders and belongings, and inclusions and exclusions, exposing domination as a viable spatial project that "organizes, names, and sees social difference and determines where social order happens" (p. xiv). This illuminates not only how the racialized production of space takes place but brings into focus the engagement with carceral power underwritten by the terrors of enslavement (McKittrick, 2006, p. xix). While carcerality is not completely definitive of the experiences of Black residents, I am using the concept to contribute to the theorizations of scholars who explore the new range of strategies of social control, technologies of cruelty, and coercion in everyday geographical experiences that are repackaged for the new carceral age (Cacho, 2012; Gilmore et al., 2022; McKittrick, 2007; Shabazz, 2015).

Mainstream Depictions and Harmful Predilections

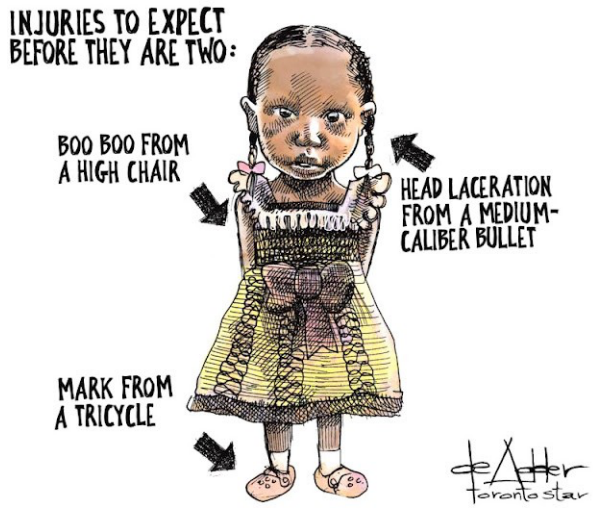

Figure 2. Injuries to Expect Before They Are Two. Source: Rajeswaran, D. (2018). Prioritized: That ghetto dude from Malvern. *Journal of Critical Race Inquiry*, *5*(1), 50–73. Photo Credit: Michael de Adder, Toronto Star)

The image above featured in the *Toronto Star* in response to the July 16th, 2012, Scarborough shooting[6] is that of a little Black girl standing with her hands behind her back as arrows point to various injuries that are not visible. The invisibilized wounds include a head laceration from a "medium caliber bullet", a mark from a tricycle, and a "boo boo" on her arm produced from a presumed fall from a high-chair (Casey et al., 2012). This image, which received necessary push back from Toronto residents, made clear how blackness was and continues to be represented in the Canadian imagination. The predilection of representing Black life through violence, pathologizing and criminalizing all–even children is evident. de Adder's image of the unmarked body but marked through its inscriptions, anticipates and foreshadows Black violence

[6] On July 16, 2012, at an outdoor community barbeque in south Scarborough, Ontario. Two people were killed and 23 wounded, including a 22-month-old child hurt by the gunfire.
Retrieved from https://toronto.citynews.ca/2012/07/17/2-dead-23-wounded-at-community-bbq-in-scarborough/

and literally scripts it onto the lives of little Black girls concealing their humanity through a flattened, broad lens of anti-Black violence.

Without having to think critically about Malvern[7] (the location of the shooting) Mohanram (1999) contends that "this cartoon allows outsiders to enter the zone of Blackness" (p.65). To read, believe, and internalize the dominant expectation they have of Black culture. As Quashie (2012) contends, "this expectation is so widely familiar that it does not require explanation or qualification; it is practically unconscious" (p. 3).

Rajeswaran (2018) examining the racial project of Malvern, Ontario, contends that Malvern's representations assign meaning to race, created not only through racist and classist planning, but also through the ways that Malvern is shared in the larger public, through media representations of Malvern, and the complex experiences and realities of its residents. Populated almost entirely by visible minorities, the mapping of criminal deviance alongside racialized individuals has ensured that Malvern and its residents continue to be marred by stigma and stereotypes, leaving residents feeling conflicted with internalized and arguably perverse understandings of themselves, and without the necessary support that disadvantaged neighbourhoods should receive. Today, Malvern is the product of purposeful, structural violence, with the people of Malvern perceived as lacking the civility to maintain the ideal space that was created for them.

[7] Malvern is a highly racialized (over 90% of residents identifying as visible minorities), working-class neighbourhood in northeast Scarborough, Toronto, originally planned in the 1970s as a "model community" for affordable housing. Malvern has a high percentage of immigrant households with a large concentration of public or subsidized housing. Over time, however, Malvern became stigmatized through racialized planning, media portrayals, and policy neglect that reinforced its image as a site of violence and disorder. Despite empirical data that challenge these assumptions, Malvern remains overpoliced and under-resourced, with its residents often viewed as problems rather than as people shaped by systemic inequities. Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population

Using the work of Henri Lefebvre, Rajeswaran (2018) analyzes Malvern as a racial project, highlighting the dichotomy between crimes committed in Malvern and that of the Financial District, also known as the Bay Street Corridor. Rajeswaran (2018) contends that although Malvern is perceived as dangerous in terms of serious crimes, Malvern is not ranked as a top crime area, contrasting the Financial District, which despite being ranked as the most dangerous in terms of assaults and robbery, is viewed as safe due to its affluence. This disparity illustrates how systemic inequalities and media narratives produce geographies of hierarchies and perpetuates the notion of Malvern as a "ghetto" pathologizing black residents who are constructed as the problem rather than the space itself. Rajeswaran (2018) contends that without reasoning, the media continues to demonize Malvern through its publications. In a 2015 internet search for "Malvern, Scarborough" using Google to search across the big news broadcasting networks in Toronto (including the CBC, CTV, CITY TV, and GLOBAL), Rajeswaran (2018) found that 75% of the news stories about Malvern revolved around crime. The media's focus on crime in Malvern further entrenched the discourse of Black life as unlivable, while wealthier dominant geographies escape such scrutiny. Black residents are framed as existential threats rather than as living populations that are products of racist planning measures, policies, and representations not of their own choosing (Rajeswaran 2018, p. 68). As Cacho (2012) contends, "people of colour are represented as products of environments that are identified as the cause, rationale, and evidence not only for a population's inability to access political and economic equality but also for its vulnerability to state-sanctioned violence" (p. 73). Extending Cacho's argument, the act of framing itself becomes a powerful mechanism through which blackness is not only criminalized but constructed as inherently disposable, an insight that Judith Butler (2010) develops further in her analysis of the visual and discursive apparatuses that determine which lives are seen as grievable and which are not.

In *Frames of War*, Butler (2010) invites readers to take seriously the representational frames through which lives are rendered grievable, and which are not, and how cameras work as literal instruments of war, both framing and forming the human and the non-human target. Though her analysis centres heavily on the politics of war and media, I adapt her framing to explore how racialized neighbourhoods, particularly Black geographies, are framed through public discourse, visual representations, policy, and institutional surveillance in ways that wage a symbolic and material war on Black life. The frame, as Butler (2010) theorizes it, is not only a visual apparatus, but a regulatory mechanism that governs perception itself delimiting what others see and what becomes intelligible as a threat. In this study, I extend this concept to argue that the discursive and structural framing of racialized neighbourhoods as disorderly or criminal, not only disciplines the people who live within them, but also mobilizes state and public responses that operate as technologies of containment and punishment. The frame, thus, becomes an instrument of war, targeting entire geographies, rendering Black life as both hyper-visible and disposable within the nation's imaginary. The public sphere thus is constituted by instruments of destruction that are an extension of state violence contributing to the external constraints of Black worldlessness. Butler (2010) contends that when we listen, or buy into public narratives and discourses, we become recruited, recruited into a certain framing of reality that constricts both the reality of those who are confined and live in these spaces and those who are spectators. This framing actively contributes to a strategy of containment, selectively producing and enforcing what counts as reality, even outside the field of the camera's gaze. As Black life remind us, framing cannot always be contained in what it seeks to make visible or legible, but it remains structured by the aims of instrumentalizing certain versions of reality. This means that the "frame is always throwing something away, always keeping something out, always de-realizing and delegitimizing alternative versions of reality,

discarded negatives of the official version" (p. xiii). In the context of racialized geographies, framing functions as a ban on mourning. There is no death because there is no life; no destruction, since there is no creation; no loss, as there is nothing deemed worth losing, no love, because these lives are marked by death; and no joy, as these places are imagined as sites of inherent suffering, zones of ungrievable lives. As Butler (2010) contends,

> ungrievable lives […] are those that cannot be lost and cannot be destroyed because they already inhabit a lost and destroyed zone; they are ontologically, and from the start, already lost and destroyed (p.xix).

This means that within racialized neighbourhoods, *nothing is destroyed*. These frameworks operate to distinguish from the outset who counts as living and who does not. Butler's (2010) work is crucial here for drawing a connection between representational and/or discursive framing and material consequences. An exploration of this framing, established by the state, reveals the tactics through which populations are constructed and regulated and how social norms around life, death, and value are communicated and enforced.

Racialized Urban Spaces: Confronting the "Black Problem" in City Planning

Tyner (2007) argues that urban planning has not fully come to terms with its "Black problem" (p. 224) nor has it confronted the normative conceptions of livability that continue to articulate what Ted Rutland (2018) describes as a "deep-rooted structure of anti-Blackness and settler colonialism" (p. 4). Julie Tomiak (2016) argues that normative conceptions of what constitutes the city "rely on a common sense that asserts space from a white settler point of view" whereby the city is understood as "an innocent container of social relations" (p. 10). As Tomiak (2016) points out, such a perspective neglects the ways that cities, in their various conceptualizations, become sites of erasure, displacement, and dispossession for black and Indigenous peoples. In settler colonial cities like Toronto, city building practices and discourses

of livability have been and continue to create a paradox of (un)livability for low-income, Indigenous, black and racialized "others" (Tomiak, 2016, p. 9). Moreover, as Tomiak (2016) contends, normative conceptions of "the city" ignore the realities of these spaces as a "deeply contested ground" marked by "persistent anti-colonial Indigenous [and Black] struggles for life, land, and self-determination" and the various ways that Black and Indigenous communities think of cities and the social relations that govern these spaces (p. 9).

To address the concentration of extreme poverty in black neighbourhoods, Hulchanski (1993) attributes this spatial inequity to unequal access to rental housing, rooted in systemic racial discrimination. He argues that a comprehensive analysis of this phenomenon must consider the interconnectedness of residential segregation, economic disparities, housing conditions, and the persistent racial stereotypes held by white households, housing agents, appraisers, and loan officers, all of which shape and sustain exclusionary housing practices (p.1). In a study documenting and evaluating the differences in social composition between Metropolitan Toronto's public sector housing and the rest of Toronto Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) for 1971 and 1986, Murdie (1994) found that "recent immigrants, visible minorities and crowded households were much more overrepresented in 1986 than in 1971" (p. 443). This study also revealed that visible minority groups, particularly black residents and single-parent families, became increasingly segregated within the public housing stock. Specifically, the Metropolitan Toronto Housing Authority (MTHA) family projects housed a disproportionately large number of single-parent families and black residents. This empirical study provided clear findings that visible minorities and other disadvantaged groups face substantial barriers finding suitable housing in Metro Toronto's private rental market, leading to a higher degree of spatial segregation along racial and family status lines (single-parent families) (Murdie, 1994, p. 443).

Likewise, in Toronto's Vital Signs Report (Toronto Foundation, 2019), researchers found that neighbourhoods in Toronto are ethnically segregated. They note that as people come to Canada, they are increasingly ethnically concentrated. In high-income neighbourhoods, 73% of residents are white compared to only 31% in low-income neighbourhoods, and this has become more concentrated over time (Toronto Foundation, 2019). According to this report, part of this concentration has happened because white people in Toronto have had their inflation-adjusted average income grow by 60% over the last 30 years, as compared with the 1% for racialized populations. Processes of neighbourhood stratification and segregation based on income become increasingly apparent (Toronto Foundation, 2019).

Although the Metropolitan Toronto Housing Authority (MTHA) claims that there are no deliberate efforts to segregate or discriminate against black residents in public housing (Mensah, 2005), there are several indicators that suggest that many black people are experiencing considerable social exclusion and discrimination in education, employment, and housing in Toronto. MTHA asserts that black people usually prefer complexes with a relatively high proportion of black residents, while white people tend to move out such buildings; the share of Black people in MTHA housing increased from 4.2% in 1971 to as high as 27.4% by 1986. Similarly, Murdie (1994) found some level of spatial concentration of Black people within MTHA housing especially in suburban high-rise projects such as Firgrove, Yorkwoods, and Jane/Milo projects in North York; the Galloway/Lawrence and Kingston Road complexes in Scarborough; and the Islington/St. Andrews project in Etobicoke noting that the spatial concentration of Black folks in Toronto's public housing has more to do with "constrained choices" than any "racial grading" (p. 443). However, this argument does not capture nor effectively unpack the spatial

concentration of Black folks in low-income neighborhoods where there are low concentrations of public housing (Stapleton et al., 2019). As Stapleton et al. (2019) contends,

> even though northern Scarborough has seven of the poorest of Toronto's 140 neighbourhoods, not one has a Neighbourhood Improvement Areas designation (a designation that allows the city to give extra funding and attention): not Malvern (9th poorest); neither Agincourt North (29th); not Agincourt South-Malvern West (32nd); not L'Amoreaux (34th) (p. 5)

Thus, the implications of masking unequal spatial distribution as a "constrained [individual] choice" where residents are conceived to have *opted* for public housing rather than a process of housing segregation that extends beyond spaces of public housing, further alienates residents of low income and poor market rent payers, expunging them from the theorizations of housing segregation that consequently omits and dismisses the systemic ways that racialization seeps into the management of space.

In attending to the question *for whom is the livable city planned,* Ash Amin (2013) argues that livability objectives applied in modern planning practices fail to meet the diverse needs in the city as they rely on these normative conceptions that "cater to wealthy, educated, cultural elites that cast aside the diversity of human needs present in cities" (p. 479-480; Silver et. al, 2023). The consistent negation of Black life in modern planning has resulted in the reproduction of an incomplete conceptualization of livability that renders the "pain that Black people are collectively living with and under [...] mostly out of view" (Rutland, 2018; Walcott and Abdillahi, 2019, p. 72).

Territorial stigmatization is increasingly fixed on Toronto's inner suburbs, and monikers such as Jamestown, Jane-Finch, Rexdale, and Malvern, which now conjure images of racialized poverty and gang violence (Siciliano, 2010, p. 40). As Ezeonu (2008) makes clear, Black people,

primarily community members in the City of Toronto trace the problem of violence and social deprivation to socially disorganized neighborhoods. In Toronto's public housing complexes, where many Black families live, Black residents "[...] are among the poorest racial groups in Toronto, and as a result, reside predominantly in poor neighbourhoods and government-subsidized housing projects (p. 204) [...] often characterized by gang activities, illicit drug trafficking, and pervasive violence (p. 205). Although Toronto does not have American-style inner-city neighbourhoods (e.g., ghettos) some of these neighbourhoods, appear to have some elements of American inner-city neighborhoods, such as high level of unemployment, crime, poverty, and lone-parent (especially female-headed) families (Bourne & Walks, 2006; Mensah, 2002). Such neighbourhoods in Toronto include Jane and Finch, Rexdale, Regent Park (which is now shifting due to gentrification), St James Town, Lawrence Heights, Jane and Wilson, East York and some parts of Scarborough. In the United States, similar neighbourhoods have been linked to high incidents of violent crimes, especially among Black youths (Ezeonu, 2008; Massey, 1995). Li (1988) contends that "amongst all visible minorities, blacks are most likely to live in neighbourhoods surrounded by the worst social environment". Interestingly, Li (1988) mentions that even when black residents are living in areas with expensive housing, the neighbourhood qualities that they occupy continue to be perceived as less desirable. And so, Li (1988) asserts that this stable hierarchy of neighbourhood qualities may in turn strongly affect the aspirations and expectations of children living in particular neighbourhoods (p. 595).

From Priority Neighbourhoods to Neighbourhood Improvement Areas: Revitalization or recolonization?

Identified by the City of Toronto Council and United Way in 2005, *Priority Neighbourhood Areas for Investment* were introduced to reduce crime, increase opportunities for

young people and improve the services for people in underserved areas (United Way Toronto, 2005). The plan prioritized nine Toronto neighbourhoods where social services were most out-of-step with growing needs. According to Frances Lankin, President and CEO of United Way of Greater Toronto, targeting these neighbourhoods was only meant "to provide governments and other funders with a starting point" (United Way of Toronto, 2005, p. 3). Neighbourhoods were measured for key services, including libraries, schools, community centres, settlement, and employment services as well as median household income, education levels, and knowledge of English and French. Initially, nine priority neighbourhoods were targeted, however, this was later expanded to 13 neighbourhoods including: Jamestown, Jane-Finch, Malvern, Kingston-Galloway, Lawrence Heights, Steeles-L'Amoreaux, Eglinton East-Kennedy Park, Crescent Town, Weston-Mt Dennis, Dorset Park, Scarborough Village, Flemington Park-Victoria Village, and Westminster-Branson. Although Mayor David Miller argued that the designations of the neighbourhoods as "needing help" was not intended to stigmatize them, stating, "this doesn't say that a particular neighbourhood is a problem, what it says is that services don't meet the needs" (Gray, 2005), in 2014, under Mayor Rob Ford, the designation *Priority Neighbourhood* was replaced with *Neighbourhood Improvement Area* (NIA). This change was largely in response to residents' concerns that the original label reinforced stigma and perpetuated the notion of a *Black problem* (Monsebraaten, 2023).

NIAs which were created with the City of Toronto and the United Way, were developed from a new framework called the Urban Health Equity Assessment and Response Tool (HEART) which examined six areas including physical environment and infrastructure, social and human development, economic opportunity, governance, population health and disease-specific concerns. The various areas are used to determine the best measures of neighbourhood equity in Toronto. In

2012, the city adopted the Toronto Strong Neighbourhood Strategy 2020 (TSNS) as an action plan for ensuring that each of Toronto's 140 neighbourhoods can "succeed and thrive." The equity strategy developed by residents, city councilors, community agencies, funders and multiple service decision-makers across the City of Toronto aimed to achieve neighbourhood equity by removing differences between their neighbourhoods that were deemed "unjust, unnecessary, and unfair" (City of Toronto, 2020, p. 4)

The *Toronto Strong Neighbourhood Strategy 2020* thus has been put in place to rectify Toronto's identity which is "built on a tradition of great neighbourhoods" (City of Toronto, 2012). As Frances Lankin, President and CEO of United Way of Greater Toronto reminds us, poverty which was an inner-city problem,

> has moved outwards, to the inner suburbs, to places once seen as havens from inner-city problems [where] our social services simply have not kept up and this means that, more than ever, people are disadvantaged by the neighbourhood where they live [...] Toronto's most distressed neighbourhoods all lack access to public space and community hubs where residents can come together to access programs, link to neighbourhood resources and have the opportunity to influence and shape how their communities evolve," [...] this is why establishing community hubs is a critical first step in revitalizing these neighbourhoods (United Way of Greater Toronto, 2005).

The *Toronto Strong Neighbourhood Strategy* thus functions as a tool to advance the city's revitalization agenda. However, as one of my participants living in Jane and Finch observed, rather than feeling like a project of revitalization, it *"*feels like there's a gentrification coming.*"* Echoing these sentiments, Kipfer and Petrunia (2009) contend that revitalizing neighbourhoods considered "priority neighbourhoods" is a process of re-commodification which involves social recolonization that requires a profound recomposition of the resident population on site (p. 123). Kipfer and Petrunia (2009) contend that social mixing is more than a pragmatic way of bringing "resources" to a poor area. It is understood as a way of socializing public housing tenants, precarious and

property-less residents of mostly non-European descent, into what is assumed to be responsible moral behaviour. Such socialization is deemed impossible without the example of outsiders: middle-class or deserving working-class people with property, a much larger proportion of whom are likely to be Euro-Canadians (p. 128). For many residents of Regent Park, for example, this leads to the suspicion that Toronto Community Housing Corporation is "counting on many not coming back" to Regent Park. As Kipfer and Petrunia (2009) contend it becomes quite clear that cultural characteristics of poor people's housing (public housing) cannot produce "proper communities", that instead their housing deserves to be torn down and replaced by urban forms that are assumed to be better at "reforming" the most precarious factions of the working class (p. 125). Tracing the shifts from Priority Neighbourhoods to Neighbourhood Improvement Areas uncovers how state-sanctioned interventions reproduce territorial stigmatization and spatial containment, particularly for Black residents. These policies operate not only to manage perceived disorder, but to restructure urban space in ways that facilitate social cleansing under the guise of investment and inclusion. By critically examining these strategies through participant accounts and scholarly critique, this section illustrates how spatialized governance works in tandem to regulate Black life and futurity.

Condition of Black Life: Black Worldlessness

Worldlessness, theorized by Fanon (1968; 2011) and expanded upon by Trojan (2016) refers to a rupturing of one's being-in-the-world and in relations with others. This condition is a result of colonization that produces a state of worldlessness. Referring to a colonial diametrical relationship, Fanon (1968; 2011) contends that the institution of a colonial society – one divided between colonizer and colonized, between white and racialized, writes colonizers into place whereby they are granted the capacity to fully inhabit the world, engage in the phantasms of

liberalism (Trojan, 2016, p. 403). While in contrast, the colonized, are denied such occupation and ownership instituting a state of worldlessness, a colonial subjectivity.

Fanon names the process through which both the colonizer and colonized become ruptured from self and scripted into the "dominant ethical values" is through interpellation (Fanon, 2011, pp. 216–219). However, the path to interpellation is torturous as it inflicts a double trauma on the psyche of the colonized, deracination and dejection. The envelopment of the colonized into the colonial culture inflicts a radical separation of self from any indigenous past. The colonial encounter deracinates their customs and the psychic structures to which the colonized finds themselves in contradiction with an unknown civilization that superimposes itself on the Other (Fanon, 2011; Trojan, 2016, p. 404). This *rootlessness; a produced inferiority complex resulting from cultural loss–forms the landscape that, for Fanon, constitutes very definition of all colonized people*. "The elemental rupture that is the modern colonial encounter, renders the colonized fundamentally adrift" (Trojan, 2016). While rootlessness provides the preliminary condition for the pathology of colonization, the second consequence of colonization, the act that produces the definitive condition of worldlessness is the *failed interpellation of the colonized into the colonizer's world; the misinterpellated subject.* Dejection, arising from the failed misinterpellation, is the visceral disorientation experienced when the colonized realizes they are not a subject in the general, universal sense, but rather a subject of an altogether peculiar sort, a subject of colour–belonging to a different "world". The call to the liberal subject that the colonized answers is not *fully* intended for them; instead, they are the unwanted, the unexpected, rhetorically disrupting the very scene of interpellation (Martel, 2015). Fanon argues that this realization, that the colonized were never the intended recipients of liberal universalism and the rights and privileges it purports to uphold, renders them wordless: alienated and abjected from the common

world. Thus, the colonized endures a colonial violence that uproots them from their precolonial past and alienates them, ejecting the colonized from the sense of community to which they had thought they belonged. As Trojan (2016) recounts, to occupy the condition of the colonized is to exist inherently without a world, "to suffer worldlessness" (p. 405).

My contribution of adding the prefix of "Black" in front of worldlessness is employed to describe the social condition that Black people are made to survive. W.E.B Du Bois (2004) in *The Souls of Black Folks* describes this through the concept of "double consciousness:"

> After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, – a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (p. 2).

Here, DuBois is describing the internal conflict experienced by African Americans, who incessantly have to see themselves in the eyes of whiteness, from a society that produces an alienated subject; a subject that struggles to reconcile their *dual* identities as both Black (uprooted from their African heritage) and "American". Ultimately, Du Bois theorizes that African Americans are denied true self-consciousness and are compelled to see themselves through the lens of a society that does not fully accept them; *ejected from a space of community within which they had thought they belonged.* Extending this, Sharpe (2016) contends, "the means and modes of Black subjection may have changed, but the fact and structure of that subjection remain" highlighting the perpetuity of Black worldlessness (p. 12). Echoing these sentiments, Hartman (2007) contends,

> If slavery persists as an issue in the political life of Black America, it is not because of an antiquarian obsession with bygone days or the burden of a too-long memory, but because black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago. This is the afterlife of slavery—skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment. I, too, am the afterlife of slavery. (Hartman, p. 6)

It becomes quite evident that Black people live in and are produced by the contemporary conditions of Black life as it is lived near death and characterized as deathliness. Black worldlessness thus functions as a system of constraints that delimits the possibilities of Black aliveness and futurities. It is a landscape constituted largely out of deeply consequential fantasizing (Fanon, 2011).

Quiet Life and Futurities

Critical geography, Critical Urban Studies, and Cultural Studies scholarship have demonstrated that to live and reclaim Black life and joy in racialized communities is to confront loss, the loss of social infrastructure (Hulchanski, 2010; Kwakywah, 2022); it is to survive, surviving poverty (Wilson, et al., 2011), surviving the ongoing inscription of death (McKittrick, 2007; Sharpe, 2016) and it is to resist, resisting carceral-infused geographies (Gilmore, 2023; Shabazz, 2015; Walcott, 2021), and resisting the spatiality of injustice (Gordon 2015; Story, 2019; Walcott, 2003). The modalities of Black expressiveness, life, and futurity are too often reduced to essentializing Black life to decay and dominant narratives that overwhelm the breadth of Black humanity. We need not undermine the realities of death and the value of resistance, "since it has been so essential to every Black freedom movement," however, it has been the "catch-all for a whole range of behaviours and ambitions" that fails to make way for the totality of Black livability and expression (Quashie, 2012, p. 4).

Even when conceptualizing Black joy, we often return to resistance. Cruz (2023), in *The Black Joy Project*, in attempting to shift the metanarrative of Black life from one of agony and grief to that of joy, unintentionally produces an underlying framework of resistance arguing,

> Blackness has been too equated with agony and grief. Persistence and determined fights for racial equity have challenged and made shifts to this old narrative, but the world around us continues to reinforce the worst [...] but we know better. We know about bursts of laughter over home-cooked sancocho with family and arguments over the best jollof rice. We know about rousing, poignant protest music during marches for justice on behalf of all Black people. We know about cornrows, twist-outs, box braids, high-top fades, the right 'fits, Telfar bags, and dope kicks–hard-bottoms, sneakers and everything in between–that influence culture around the world [...] we know the affirmations our elders speak into us that fortify us each day. That is how Black joy works. It consistently runs alongside the suffering, pain, trials and tribulations we have endured throughout history and that we endure today (pp. 1-2).

What frames Cruz' (2023) argument and woven throughout this text is resistance, Black joy is *an act of resistance*. Even in our joy, the language of resistance is forced to show up against "all that works to eliminate our joy" in public spaces designed to work against Black livability. While Cruz (2023) aims to illustrate the "full context of Black life without having to start with our trauma" holding space for Black imagination, interpretations of joy, art, and livability we don't escape the primary expressiveness of Black life through public assertiveness, dramaticness, and loudness (p.12). Joy which can be conceptualized through resistance is also intimate, a sublimity that is often barely acknowledged. While there are moments that speak to this intimacy, i.e., simply enjoying the sun and letting it kiss our skin, deep belly laughs or divine connections, resistance and joy is continuously affirmed to "go hand in hand, fist in fist" (p. 55), however, they are not synonyms.

As Quashie (2012) contends, "after all, all living is political–every human action means something– but all living is not in protest; to assume such is to disregard the richness of life" (p.

9). Quashie reminds us that while politics is an important part of life, it is not the only lens through which we should view our experiences. Our lives are complex, filled with diverse experiences, joys, and sadness that go beyond activism. Joy can and is a stand alone. Black lives are not shaped entirely by their engagement with resistance to a racist institution; life existed before these institutions and will continue to do so beyond it. Blackness is of beingness. There doesn't have to be a speaking to or against an audience. Moving beyond resistance allows us to reckon with our being as is–as alive–because not all that we do or are is in resistance and as explored through critical geography and cultural studies, reclaiming Black life is often too theorized through resistance frameworks.

This tension is evident in Ramsaroop's (2016) *Murals Talk Back,* which explores the use of public art, specifically murals as sites of belonging and pride for marginalized community members living in Jane and Finch. Underpinned by a politics of resistance, Ramsaroop (2016) contends that murals are not neutral; they carry political messages, serve as education, foster solidarity, and offer counter-narratives that challenge the stigma attached to Jane and Finch by the broader public. In exploring the motivations of those who participated in the creation of the murals, Ramsaroop (2016) found that participants did not commission the murals for

> the sole purpose of beautifying or creating an aesthetically pleasing painting. Instead, they wanted the murals to send messages to the community and to society in general–they saw the murals "as a medium to voice community concerns around social justice issues, food justice, gender-based violence and to counter the stigma associated with Jane and Finch–they were extensions of the lived realities of communities, and stress the importance of publicly expressing them (p.28).

These murals were also a response to the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) safety report that "drew excessively on examples from Jane and Finch even though the report was supposed to depict violence in schools *throughout* TDSB reinforcing the labels of deviance and

violence traditionally associated with the community. In this context, mural-making is an intentional act of resistance, a reclamation of public space. As sites of "free space," murals represent "one of the few spaces in Jane and Finch which youth have reclaimed. Through the process of creating the murals, a forum for dialogue opens and the imagining of alternative environments and lives are birthed" (Conrad, 1995, p. 116). However, as Conrad (1995) cautions, such counternarratives often spend excessive time "teaching outsiders about the struggles of traditionally oppressed people" (p. 116). In doing so, they may unwittingly reaffirm the publicness of blackness, where worth is measured through recognition politics. While the murals represent the experiences of living in urban neighbourhoods, the overemphasis on resistance and recognition as critical discourses that provide a sense of belonging and Black life, risks eclipsing the Quiet dimensions of Black life, forcing us to read the murals in very specific ways, leaving the Quiet, quite unimaginable. This is where my dissertation intervenes. It seeks to illuminate a broader expressiveness of Black life, the ambitions, desires, hungers, vulnerabilities, fears; all the interstices that are essential to being human. The beautiful parts of being human are not wholly captured by resistance politics, publicness, and counternarratives. It turns to the intimate, the Quiet, the internal landscapes of Black being that are often overlooked in academic and public discourse alike. And in doing so, offers an alternative narrative—one that affirms Black livability in its full, complex, and unruly humanity.

Mogadime (2005) in *South African Canadian women reclaiming revolutionary storytelling through grandmother's warrior eyes,* offers a salient illustration of the kind of interior, expressive life that my dissertation seeks to centre. Mogadime's (2005) work reflects a praxis of narration that does more than resist, it cultivates a space of self-definition and embodied knowing. The matrilineal praise poems, passed down through Mogadime's mother's community are not only

used to do upliftment work, but reflect their inner values and understanding of the female self. Mogadime (2005) contends that knowledge of a counter consciousness, one that resists racial and sexual oppression, holds transformative possibilities for the listener or daughter, enabling them or her to "know and speak [themselves or] herself as subject" (p. 77). Crucially, storytelling is not merely a trajectory of survival or resistance; it is a site of agency and an expansive mode of being accessed through the interiority. As Mogadime (2005) states, "storytelling conveys both the thought process Black women construct of their everyday experiences and their conscious movement from object to subject" (p. 84). These narratives are stories that contribute toward building empowered self-definition which is rooted in a community ethic of social responsibility which, Black feminists argue is vital for Black women to develop. Mogadime (2005) contends that "South African women's stories need to be actively told in order to contribute to [these] transnational dialogues about Black women's culture of resistance (through praxis) and [their] dynamic leadership and contribution to racial uplift and community building" (p. 77). Through storytelling, Mogadime (2005) privileges the interior sensibility of her grandmother. This work is not only a production curated in the name of resistance but is a poetic catalog that cues the reader to the broadness, the depth of her grandma's self and life not in social terms or prescriptions of social identities but for herself in human terms. This is her aliveness, "what she longs for and values, what she finds to be beautiful and inspiring. In short, her capacity to notice and appreciate her agency." In Mogadime's (2005) essay, in retelling this story, she is actively accessing, adopting, and cultivating a critical voice while developing a self-definition of womanhood that includes herself. This recognition of everyday interiority, emotion, and reflective life aligns closely with what Quashie (2012) calls the ethic of Quiet, "the sense that the interior can inform a way of

being in the world that is not consumed by publicness but that is expressive and dynamic anyway" (Quashie, 2012, p. 52).

By engaging this mode of storytelling, Mogadime's narrative stands as a poetic meditation on Black humanity—not in reaction to the social world, but on its own terms. This is precisely the gap my dissertation seeks to fill: to shift focus from the persistent framing of Black life through resistance or publicness, toward a broader understanding of Black being as expressive, intimate, and irreducibly human. As Baldwin (1955) reminds us, "our humanity is our burden, our life; we need not battle for it; we need only to do what is infinitely more difficult—that is, accept it" (p. 23). It is within this reclamation of interiority and refusal to define Black life solely through struggle, that my dissertation finds resonance with a growing body of work committed to foregrounding the inner, expressive lives of Black people.

In a radical commitment to Black interiority, Kevin Quashie, in *The Sovereignty of Quiet* (2012) introduces the concept of "the Quiet". Quiet, understood as a quality or a sensibility of being is a manner of expression concerned with the expressiveness of the interior. That is, the Quiet of a person represents the broad scope of their inner life; a "personal inwardness that is expressive and sovereign but not intentional" (p. 21). Quashie (2012) contends that common understandings of Blackness is mobilized through the lens of publicness and resistance. Resistance, the catch-all for Black life, the dominant script of Blackness, becomes all encompassing, and in doing so, eradicates the inner life and the nuances of Blackness perpetuating a practice of dehumanization, thwarting other ways of reading Black life. As an exit out of discourses on nonbeing and unfreedom that yields Black life to the power of death and nihilism, Quashie's Quiet welcomes the whimsical nature of the interior and aliveness of Black life that allows for the unexpected to be possible. The Quiet compels us to use a different lens to read Black

living beyond death and resistance. It stresses the many modalities of Black life beyond the bounds of such registers, and to do otherwise is to limit and neglect all the possibilities of Black livability and futurities. This scholarship compels us to attend to the complexity of Black living, even in contained spaces within proximity to death. This work compels us to ask; how can we know and understand agency beyond the framing of resistance? Shifting our lens to the quotidian and everyday forms of living paying attention to the "quality of being human" an invitation to explore Black interiority. I take this concept which he uses to read Black expressiveness in Black culture to explore Black life in racialized neighbourhoods, examining Black social life in geography to remind us of the wealth, depth, and breadth of Black humanity.

In sum, the racialization of Black residents as inherently knowable, while simultaneously holding destructive dangerous capacities has justified an arsenal of carceral power, compounded by racialization as a system of management in racialized neighbourhoods. Managing Blackness as "the carriers of terror, terror's embodiment, and not the primary objects of terror's multiple enactments; [but rather] the ground of terror's possibility globally" means that in addition to crude processes of racialization, interventionist strategies become a reasonable tool of containing the violent, forever unincorporated caricature into fuller hegemonic view (Sharpe, 2016). Ironically, interventionist strategies that claim to be invested in the well-being of Black life, produce the very conditions that they aim to address, failing to account for the impact of territorial pathologization and the conditions of Black worldlessness on Black selfhood and well-being. My intervention in this dissertation demonstrates how Black residents engage with and respond to perceived calls (calls to freedom, calls to sacrifice, calls to justice, calls to participation, calls to identity) that are not meant for them, and how they show up anyways. I ask, what does it mean when the uninvited subject, thinking that she has been called, shows up and refuses to go away? What strategies are

taken up by these residents to navigate and negotiate the conditions Black worldlessness and how do they carve out pockets of aliveness within and beyond these conditions? As I contend in the previous section, to do this work requires a lens that compels us to read Black life differently, to be open to the unfamiliar. The responses of Black residents to racialization and spatialized carceral organization of their neighbourhoods on self, demonstrate that Black life in urban racialized neighbourhoods are not homogenized–in fact, they are dynamic and varied. Despite obstacles to self-creation in their neighbourhoods, Black residents survive and thrive by surrendering to their inner life. My dissertation pays particular attention to the varying categories of experiences exploring how Black residents conceptualize themselves, their futures, and the strategies they use to reclaim Black life in their geographies. Before directly engaging with the empirics of this dissertation, I begin by situating the field, followed by a discussion of the methodology, and conclude with the research design.

Chapter III
Situating the Field: Theoretical Frameworks and Contextualizing the Field

This qualitative study is grounded in Black Radical Tradition (BRT) and is theoretically informed by Black Optimism, which emerges as a critical and creative response to frameworks like Afropessimism. I draw on Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Urban Studies, alongside Black Geographies, as conceptual frameworks to ground my analysis. Engaging with CRT, I examine how systemic structures of power and privilege are constructed and maintained through legal, social, and institutional practices that perpetuate racial inequality and exclusion. Critical Urban Studies offers a vital framework for understanding how urban space is produced through relations of power, capital, and racial governance. Rather than treating cities as neutral sites of policy intervention or economic development, critical urban theorists foreground the role of neoliberalism, racial capitalism, and state control in shaping urban life and spatial inequality (Dreier et al., 2001; Harvey, 1989; Peck & Tickell, 2002; Soja, 2010). Complementing this, Black Geographies offers a spatial lens to understand how social spaces and places are constituted by modes of racialized practices that normalize whiteness and marginalize Black life. As McKittrick (2006) asserts, these "geographies of domination" reveal how space itself is produced and contested, revealing both the mechanisms of spatial oppression and the possibilities for Black resistance and reclamation (Gilmore et al., 2022; McKittrick, 2006; McKittrick & Wood, 2007, p.2).

I also draw on perspectives within Black Cultural Studies (Quashie, 2021). While not always directly aligning within Black Radical Tradition, as Black Cultural Studies focuses on the representation, cultural production, and meaning of cultural texts (Hall et al., 2021; hooks, 1995), Black Cultural Studies still constitutes the overarching aim of Black Radical Tradition which is

"the continuing development of a collective consciousness informed by the historical struggles for liberation and motivated by the shared sense of obligation to preserve the collective being, the ontological totality" (Robinson, 2000, p. 171). While Black Radical Tradition provides a political horizon of liberation, Black Cultural Studies provides the tools to analyze how Black life is represented, mediated or resisted in cultural forms. Analytically, my work is situated at the intersections of Black Studies, the sociology of race and racism and carceral geography.

The approach to Black Studies akin to Weheliye (2014b) "brings to the fore blackness [...] as one of the major political, cultural, social, and economic spaces of exception [...] within modern western humanity" (p. 3). Black Studies represents a critique of western modernity [...] and investigates processes of racialization with a particular emphasis on the shifting configurations of Blackness (Weheliye, 2014b, p. 6). A core commitment of Black Studies is in the work of understanding that race, racialization, and racial identities are construed as ongoing sets of political relations that require constant perpetuation via ideologies, institutions, discourses, practices, desires, cultural artifacts, and the barring of non-white subjects from the category of the human as it is performed in the modern west. Black Studies' theoretical and methodological protocols provide explanations of how techniques of domination, dispossession, expropriation, exploitation, and violence are predicated upon the hierarchical ordering of racial, gender, sexual, economic, religious, and national differences (Weheliye, 2014b).

The uptake of Black Studies takes seriously a deeper engagement with race, racism, and racialization, one that moves beyond theorizing race solely through a logic of difference and particularity, or conceptualizing whiteness and white supremacy as the only organizing principle (Omi & Winant, 2015; Weheliye, 2014a) to one anchored in a political positionality that takes up anti-blackness as a structuring force of the modern that co-constructs the racial grounds of

subjectification and the hierarchization of being-ness (Hartman, 1997; Moten, 2003; Patterson, 1982; Weddington, 2019; Weheliye, 2014a; Wilderson, 2010). Most importantly, Black Studies pursues a global liberation beyond the genocidal shackles of Man, which my work leans into. I explore how Black residents attempt to move beyond the carcerality of Black life in hopes of restoring their selfhood and humanity (Weheliye, 2014a, p.4). Similarly, my undertaking of the sociology of race and racism examines how race is socially constructed, how racism functions in societies, and how inequalities and disparities are embedded in attitudes, policies, practices, institutions, culture, and power structures. Race and racial meanings are neither stable nor consistent. In this way, I recognize the organizing role of race in social relations, the multiple levels upon which racial dynamics operate (micro, meso, and macro), the evolving and contested nature of racial categories, and the persistent impact of centuries of structural racism (Taylor & Anderson, 2004; Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Lewis et.al., 2019, p. 39). I draw on carceral geography as a theoretical approach to understand how carceral logics are spatialized through racialized infrastructures and everyday modes of surveillance and control reminiscent of the diffuse carceral model (the idea that carceral elements extend beyond traditional prison walls into other social spaces) (Moran et al., 2018). This scholarship, which frames the conditions of Black worldlessness as well as the neighbourhoods of the participants, examines how techniques and technologies of confinement, surveillance, and punishment leach into everyday domestic, street and institutional spaces (Moran, 2015; Shabazz, 2015). Carceral geographers have long argued that the carceral does not require a spatial fix; rather, it can operate through "forms of confinement that burst internment structures and deliver carceral effects without physical immobilization" (Moran et al., 2018, p. 650). In this vein, the stretching of "carceral" spaces beyond the prison has led to the development of carceral qualifiers that

indicate gradations of confinement. These spatial expansions include concepts like *graduated incarceration*, used to describe microgeographies of occupation in the West Bank; *hyper-carceral*, as in militarized lockdowns during global mega-events (Coaffee, 2014; Davis, 2003) or spaces like Abu Ghraib (Stevens, 2008; Gregory, 2007); *transcarceral*, referring to forms of reconfinement post-release (Allspach, 2010); and *quasi-carceral*, such as home visits for prisoners or repurposed carceral infrastructures (Moran & Keinänen, 2012; Morin, 2015).

While I draw from this framing of carcerality as mappable, my work proposes an expansive understanding of containment that directs attention to the *continuities* of carceral power, particularly concerning Black futurities. I contend that carcerality not only structures physical and social spaces through mechanisms of surveillance, discipline, and control, but also constrains the *imagination* of life beyond those systems. Specifically, carcerality constrains: (1) the envisioning of Black futures beyond the present conditions of Black worldlessness, and (2) the capacity of individuals to realize those envisioned futures. In this sense, my research extends beyond the institutional analysis of punishment to interrogate how the *omnipresence* of policing (e.g., over-surveillance, racial profiling, surveillance technologies, community-police relationships), spatial containment (e.g., architectural isolation, infrastructural underdevelopment, legacies of racialized planning), and the criminalization of daily life (e.g., regulation of public space, male criminalization) create conditions where the *struggle to survive* overwhelms the possibility of dreaming otherwise. This configuration of carceral power not only restricts movement or opportunity, but it cultivates *hopelessness*, as participants in my study reflect. In this way, the carceral emerges not only as a system of repression, but as a technology that stifles creativity, ambitions, and the ability to imagine alternative futures.

As Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2007) argues, the organized abandonment of vulnerable communities by the state is deeply intertwined with the expansion of carceral control. Similarly, Davis (2003) notes how the reach of carceral power into the lives of poor and racialized people narrows life possibilities and stifles aspirations. My contribution is to trace this foreclosure not only as material but as imaginative, revealing how carcerality becomes a barrier to envisioning futurity itself. This extension of carcerality contributes to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of how Black people are *held in*, emotively, materially, psychologically, and futuristically. And yet, they cannot be fully held in space, for within and against these constraints resides the Quiet, reminding us that Black being is not exhausted by the logics of containment. The following sections provide a deeper engagement with these theoretical frameworks.

Theoretical Paradigm

As an intellectual tradition, Black radicalism is a broad philosophical, intellectual and set of political ideologies that encompasses various strands of thought, activism, and cultural production, with the goal of dismantling and disrupting racial oppression, colonialism, and global systems of capitalism. Black radicalism is often associated with Black and Africana liberation movements and is rooted in the lived experiences and struggles of Black people across the world. Black Radical Tradition (BRT) is a deconstructive response to white supremacy, European modernity, the African holocaust, racial enslavement, racial colonialism and racist capitalism produced by Black folks and the black experience, and Africana history and thought (Rabaka, 2009). The development of Black radicalism spans several key historical periods and movements, including abolitionism, Pan-Africanism, the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, and contemporary movements like Black Lives Matter. I use Black Radical Tradition as the bedrock for this dissertation because its diverse political ideologies are united by a shared commitment to

restoring Black dignity, not by responding to the aspersions cast upon Black life, as has been the tendency in many political and cultural movements, but by recognizing and confronting the system itself as the root of the problem. In the wake of enslavement and colonialism, "there can be no reform, no adjustments to be made" for the battleground is to "end the system of oppression and create the world in a new image" (Andrews, 2021, p. xvii). There can be no reform because in the radical tradition the system *is the* problem. The Black Radical Tradition provides both the language and theoretical grounding to examine lawlessness that is not only inscribed upon the Black body but produces a kind of being positioned as inherently outside the law. Moten (2003), alongside other theorists within this field, call us to cultivate an imagination that challenges established norms and structures of power, by rejecting their frameworks entirely (Andrews, 2021; Ervin, 2021; Gilmore, 2007). This radical imagination disrupts the binaries of legality and criminality imposed by colonial and racial logics, offering instead a vision for living otherwise. BRT opens possibilities for reclaiming autonomy and forging new social and political configurations that center Black life, joy, and freedom. Through this lens, lawlessness is refigured not as deviance, but generative refusal– a radical assertion of Black possibilities that exists beyond the terms of racialized discipline and domination (Lloyd, 2020).

Critical Urban Studies interrogates how urban planning, housing policy, and revitalization agendas often function as mechanisms of dispossession, marginalization, and social control, particularly for racialized and working-class communities (Davies, 2010; Davies and Imbroscio, 2010). Scholars in this tradition emphasize the importance of spatial justice, resistance, and the everyday ways residents contest the terms of their containment and exclusion (Purcell, 2008; Soja, 2010). Critical Urban Studies provides a lens through which to analyze Toronto and Peel's neighbourhood improvement strategies, discussed later in this chapter, not simply as efforts toward

equity, but as spatial projects deeply embedded in social structure or more appropriately terms systemic power. This power rests in the hands of private interests, corporations, and city governments, that are not only revenue producing but also participate in the remaking of space that re-inscribes carceral logics, territorial stigma, and racialized displacement. My intervention in this field is through examining the relationship between Black expressive culture and Critical Urban Studies. I ask, what does Black expressiveness in its full capacity tell us about living in racialized neighbourhoods? How does space shape Black futurities and how does Black futurities shape space into place?

Black geographies, an additional theoretical framework used, highlights the spaces and places of Black histories to make visible social-spatial lives that are often displaced and rendered ungeographic (McKittrick and Woods, 2007, p. x). Black geographies bring into focus networks and relations of power, histories of resistance and the everyday, rather than locations that are simply subjugated, perpetually ghettoized or rendered (un)geographic. Black geographies expose traditional geographies as upholding language of insiders and outsiders, borders and belongings, and inclusions and exclusions. Using a Black geographic lens enables me to highlight how the racialized production of space takes shape and how it is maintained exposing "geographies of domination" as a viable spatial project that "organizes, names, and sees social difference and determines where social order happens" cementing white bodies and histories into place via the abjection, expulsion, and/or erasure of Black geographies (McKittrick and Woods, 2007, p. xiv). Feminist projects often analyze the body as a site of spatial and political struggle. Similarly, Black geographies attend to how black bodies are racialized and gendered in space, particularly through practices of surveillance, containment, and violence. Black feminist geographies, specifically, explore how everyday practices of care, community, and resistance challenge spatial oppression.

Both Black and feminist geographies envision spaces not only as sites of oppression but also as sites of possibility and liberation. Black geographies, engage in radical reimaginings of space where marginalized groups can thrive outside of dominant frameworks (Eaves, 2017; McKittrick and Woods, 2007). Black geographies theorize alternative spaces, or speculative spaces of liberation, where Black women often play central roles in imagining futures free of oppression. Building on this spatial orientation of Black life, Black Cultural Studies offers another salient framework that centres language, representation, and production as key sites through which identity, power, and resistance is negotiated.

The entry point into Black Cultural Studies is through the examination of language, cultural practices, media representations, the social production of news, and social experiences of Black people and Blackness, honing into how cultural systems intersect with systems of power including classism, racism, colonialism, and capitalism. This field is salient to my work as it interrogates, and challenges received and conventional disciplinary paradigms in the construction and production of knowledge through its multidisciplinary and cross-cultural focus. It explores how mass media processes structure our experience of everyday reality (i.e., how Black people are experienced on television, music, and etc.) and how we become consumers and respond to the common memory images that becomes habituated while situating them within broader historical, political, and social contexts (Gilroy, 1993; Hall, 1978; Henderson, 1996; Mercer, 1994). As hooks contends, there is a linkage between the internalized self-hatred of black folks and the constant consumption of hateful representations. Black Cultural Studies provides conceptual tools, language, theories, and methods for analyzing the complexities of Black life, culture, and identity in historical and contemporary contexts. This approach enables me to explore the Quiet as a critical tool mobilized against both the erasure and negative media representations of Blackness,

reclaiming and reframing Black livability within the socio-spatial landscapes of Toronto and the Region of Peel. Through cultural expressions such as literature, music, and political activism, Black Cultural Studies highlights the functionality of the Quiet in challenging systemic injustices and fostering empowerment.

Ontological Framework

There are two principles that emerge in an antiblack society.
They are "be white!" and avoid blackness!

–Lewis Gordon

My dissertation is in conversation with political scientists, historians, philosophers, literary scholars and others who have questioned the endurance of racial inequality after judicial emancipation and civil rights, and those who have interrogated the conflation of blackness and Black people as the ontological negation of being. In this way, my dissertation joins the likes of Sylvia Wynter (2003) and Zakiyyah Iman Jackson (2021), who interrogate the ontological dimensions of a Black(ened) humanity–a nonbeing, an empty vessel, revealing how blackness is positioned as the limit of the human, its constitutive outside. Their work insists that anti-blackness is not merely a social or political condition, but a foundational structure of modern being, abjected from the realism of the human. However, my work departs in that I look to forms of Black expressive culture that does not seek to reinscribe or inaugurate the legitimization of Black non-life. Instead, my work aims to depict and makes space for the impossible by representing the paradoxes of blackness after the legacies of slavery's denial of Black humanity.

The overarching goal of my project is to explore the tactics of self-making, the strategies of reclaiming Black life and the envisioning and the materialization of Black futures by residents navigating Black worldlessness in the City of Toronto and the Region of Peel. More specifically, *Black worldlessness and Black optimism* serves as well-placed frameworks through which I engage with questions of Black selfhood, Black life, and Black futurity. Black worldlessness and Black optimism, two sides of the same coin, captures both the conditions of Black social life as "the artifact of imposition and negation and the other an operation, a performance against a perduring antiblackness; a narrative that sustains hope and the capacity to imagine things otherwise" (Hart, 2018, p. 31). Here, Black life sits somewhere in-between these paradigms that oftentimes do not emerge in close conversation with one another. Through regimes of racial socio-spatial management, the study of resistance, the Quiet, and exploration of racialized urban spaces, I aim to fill in this gap.

Hart (2018) argues that Afropessimism and Black Optimism share the same conceptual roots but blossom into different flowers. Though they depend on and are ensconced in the same traditions of thought and share interrelated understandings of the relationship between capitalism, racism, and white supremacy, Afropessimism and Black Optimism represent competing responses to anti-blackness (Hart, 2018, p. 16). Afropessimists see the present order of things as radically anti-black, as constitutively incapable of apprehending the humanity of black people. In this vein, blackness is analogous with abjection (Wilderson, 2010). As Hart (2018) contends

> blackness is what whiteness throws out; treats as aboriginal trash; the normative trashiness against which that abnormality called white trash is imagined. Within this white supremacist order, black people are socially dead. Trapped in recursive "scenes of subjection," they are locked into the objecthood that Frantz Fanon (2011) describes as the *fact of blackness"* (p. 17-18; Hartman,1997).

Affectively and normatively then, black people are not and cannot be citizens of this humanist order. As Wilderson II (2010) contends, “being can be thought of, in the first ontological instance, as non-niggerness, and slavery then as niggerness”, [becomes a] mechanism [that] elaborates the division between the non-niggerness and slavery [niggerness], the difference between the living and the dead” (p. 37). The transatlantic ship thus becomes the vehicle that allows for the construction of blackness to fester through the breaking of life. Slavery, a mechanism that generated non-existence, thus supplies the economic, psychic, cultural, reproductive, and fleshy foundation of the humanist project, where forced onto ships, Africans were violently ejected out as Blacks with the impossibility of Being. Here, Blackness, the product of a fictive narrative functions as the afterthought of the torturous process of ontological excavation, the dual process of emptying the African, and the bloating of the Negro, “into which new interpretations could be placed”, according to Wilderson is a space of metaphysical oblivion, a space-time of living death, a zone of nonbeing. (Hart p. 18).

Contrastingly, as a covert operation, “Black Op” is an optimistic will, born of a pessimistic intellect (Hart, 2018, p. 7). As coined by Fred Moten (2008), Black Op is a fugitive optimism and operation that roots in the slave experience and its contemporary afterlife as anti-black surveillance, discipline, and incarceration, in short, its foundation is rooted the anti-black carceral state (Hart, 2018, p. 17). This shift in orientation is, in turn, informed by the Black Radical Tradition’s insistence on the internal ontological totality of Blackness, which resists the thingification of Blackness while still taking seriously the Afro-pessimist provocation that slavery produced a unique structure of suffering irreducible to economic exploitation which must be acknowledged to fully understand Black experiences (Amponsah, 2023).

The difference between Black Op and Afropessimism, as articulated by Moten (2008) rests on divergent interpretations of Frantz Fanon's account of the lived experience of black people. Moten rejects the notion that Black people, as the historical subjects of enslavement and colonialism, are pure absence; the artifact of imposition and negation; a socially dead, nonhuman, pathogen without remainder (Hart, 2018; Mbembe, 2003). Hart (2018) argues that while Fanon's analysis invites this interpretation, it ignores a fugitive movement of escape within his own account. When we overlook Fanon's disavowal, what we see in Black social life is a capacity to imagine things otherwise and a fugitive practice of freedom: a Black operation against the capture, enclosure, and pathologies of social death. In short,

> black social life is a stolen life; a "criminal" operation, by those designated as criminals, against the social death of slavery and anti-blackness. It is a theft of being: a form of ontological resistance to anti blackness (Hart, 2018, p. 24).

This fugitive resistance is Black Op: Black optimism that manifests as an operation, a performance against a persistent anti-blackness. This optimism recognizes the paraontological difference between Black people and blackness, between Blackness as fugitive social life and anti-blackness as social death.

Black optimism is a salient framework in my dissertation because it reflects the lives of Black people both in the diaspora and in the continent. Black, African people and communities find lines of escape in the fugitive. "The slave may be socially dead, but she can imagine things otherwise; she can run, hide, and engage in fugitive and insurgent actions against anti-blackness" (Hart 2018, p. 32). Black optimism is required for the survival of Black life. The insistence of Black life through survival rips from the hands of afro-pessimism, "without disavowing the strength and deep wisdom in their grasp" (Hart, 2018, p. 32). This kind of optimism stands in the shadow of Afro-pessimism but never loses sight of the light, the prospect of freedom, the dream

of dancing in the moonlight. As Moten puts it, “there is cause for optimism as long as there is a need for optimism. Cause and need converge in the bent school or marginal church in which we gather together to be in the name of being otherwise” (Hart, 2018, p. 31; Moten, 2008 p. 1747).

As such, “Black optimism is about hope,” hope that is longed for in the interiority of Black life.

> Hope serves as the catalyst for our desires. It initiates the spark within us, igniting our imagination and yearning for something greater. Hope allows us to dream and envision a different reality, planting the seeds of what we wish to manifest. Whether hope alone can manifest our desires; is another story–but it tells us that no –we are not wordless lizards, soaking up sun on a rock–but “imagine things otherwise”-an escape from social death (Hart, 2018, p. 33)

While Afropessimism adopts an abstracted perspective, privileging the macropolitical field as a reference point for understanding Black social life, Black optimism holds space for the agency inherent in Black social life accounting for the materiality of Black life that insists on a possibility of Black existence. By privileging the micropolitical, Black optimism opens “a whole range of possible avenues of analysis” allowing for a deeper exploration of Black life’s resilience, Quiet, and creativity (Kline 2017, p. 57; Moten, 2003). Black optimism turns our attention to the everyday practices of survival, creativity, and refusal that constitutes Black social life that is often overlooked. This orientation grounds my inquiry in the material realities of Black life in racialized neighbourhoods prompting both the use and critique of tools such as the Neighbourhood Equity Index (NEI) and the Neighbourhood Information Tool (NIT) to contextualize and assess the socio-spatial conditions shaping Black residents' lives (City of Toronto, 2020, 2014). In the next section, I will be exploring the tools used not only to frame racialized neighbourhoods as “problems,” but as tools that produce knowledge about Black life in space.

Field Context

Prior to the 2005 introduction of Priority Neighbourhoods, the City of Toronto's approach to poverty, newcomer settlement, community development, and well-being was reactive, fragmented, and lacked a cohesive, city-wide strategy. In the decades leading up to 2005, Toronto experienced a significant rise in poverty, particularly among racialized communities (Hulchanski, 2010; Walks and Bourne, 2006). Hulchanski's (2010) research exploring income polarization from 1970 to 2005, found that the proportion of low-income neighborhoods in Toronto increased from 19% to 53%, with poverty, immigration, and visible minorities becoming increasingly concentrated in specific areas. This spatial concentration of poverty disproportionately affected racialized groups, with systemic inequities in employment and income contributing to the racialization of poverty. During this period, the city's responses were primarily limited to isolated initiatives, such as the distribution of public social housing projects across all parts of Metropolitan Toronto like Regent Park and Jane-Finch as a way of integrating tenants into communities rather than concentrating them into large projects (Common Bond Collective, 2024).

These projects aimed to address housing shortages however, they often lacked the necessary social infrastructure, funding, and local support, leading to challenges like overcrowded schools, inadequate recreational facilities, and disconnected social services. As a result, these areas became associated with various social problems, where “public opposition hardened not just toward social housing, but toward all forms of low-rental, multiple-unit housing in most parts of the region” (Frisken, 2007, pp. 131-132). It is important to note that from the late 1970s and onwards, local organizations and community-based activism was the vehicle that responded to the issues that were impacting folks in racialized communities (Common Bond Collective, 2024). However, after years of activism, rising concentration of poverty, lack of access to services,

increased violence and crime, in April 2003, the Toronto City Summit Alliance released its report, *Enough Talk*. *Enough Talk* called the Prime Minister and Premier to implement a new fiscal deal for municipalities, and to immediately address the urgent need for new social infrastructure in the City's poorest neighborhoods (United Way Toronto, 2005). This call for renewed investment in community services and facilities reinforced the central message that, "neighborhood playgrounds, community centres, libraries and services for newcomers, the unemployed, and seniors [were] just as important as roads and sewers" (United Way Toronto, 2005, p. 5). The Strong Neighbourhood Task Force was formed in April 2004 to take up the challenge of *Enough Talk*. A joint initiative of the United Way of Greater Toronto and the City of Toronto, and with the support of the Government of Canada and the Province of Ontario, the goal of the Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force was to build an action plan for revitalizing Toronto Neighbourhoods.

Launched in 2021, Peel's Neighbourhood Information Tool, was developed through municipal and regional partnerships with the City of Brampton, the City of Mississauga, and the Town of Caledon. The tool provides a comprehensive snapshot of neighbourhood well-being and identifies neighbourhoods considered "at risk," enabling governments, service providers, community groups and residents to plan and act together towards thriving communities (Region of Peel, n.d.; Region of Peel, 2019). Building on this policy legacy and shift towards data-driven strategies for addressing spatialized inequities, my study draws on the Neighbourhood Equity Index (NEI) and Neighbourhood Information Tool (NIT) to evaluate how these tools capture the lived conditions of Black residents in racialized neighbourhoods.

To understand and assess the conditions of Black residents living in racialized neighbourhoods, I used both the Neighbourhood Equity Index (NEI) and Neighbourhood Information Tool (NIT), to provide individual snapshots of neighbourhood well-being (City of

Toronto, 2014; City of Toronto, 2020; Region of Peel, n.d.). These neighbourhood indexes are meant to signal broad quantitative and qualitative assessments of neighbourhood well-being in the City of Toronto and Region of Peel, including Brampton, Caledon, and Mississauga while also identifying neighbourhoods that may require more targeted support and intervention. The NEI was specifically developed as an updated strategy to replace the former Priority Neighbourhood Areas of Investment (PNIs) methodology. It incorporates new selection tools to identify and recommend Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs), signaling the overall burden of inequality faced by neighbourhoods requiring immediate intervention (City and Toronto, 2014; City of Toronto, 2017; City of Toronto, 2020; Region of Peel, n.d.). Both these tools combine quantitative and qualitative data mapping assets across different domains of neighbourhoods. Although both indexes assess the well-being of neighbourhoods in their respective cities, the domains and indicators slightly differ, as the criteria reflect varying *strategic goals* within their respective cities. Both indexes assess Census Tracts (CTs) using domains and indicators, which are combined to create the index score. Domains represent the conceptually important aspects of neighbourhoods for the index, whereas indicators are used to paint a picture of neighbourhoods. The NEI, is developed in part by the Urban Health Equity Assessment and Response Tool (HEART)@Toronto research initiative said to be built off work developed by the World Health Organization (City of Toronto, 2017). In 2010, the World Health Organization launched Urban HEART to help city leaders and their communities identify and resolve health and social inequities. Comparably, Peel's NIT gathers information from the Census, the cities of Brampton, Mississauga, and Caledon, Environics Analytics and other local datasets (Region of Peel, n.d.).

In the Toronto Strong Neighbourhood Strategy (TSNS), the NEI indicators are divided across five domains. Below, the figures in brackets indicate the number of points out of 100 that contribute to the overall score.

1. Economic Opportunities (30) – Indicators: Unemployment, Low income, Social assistance
2. Social Development (28) – Indicators: High school graduation, Marginalization, Postsecondary completion
3. Participation in Decision-Making (5) – Indicators: Municipal Voting rate
4. Physical Surroundings (7) – Indicators: Community Places for meeting, Walkability, Healthy Food Stores, Green space
5. Healthy Lives (30) – Indicators: Premature Mortality, Mental Health, Preventable Hospitalizations, Diabetes (City of Toronto, 2014)

The Peel Neighbourhood Information Tool indicators are divided across six domains.

1. Socio-demographics of the space – Indicators: Population information such as age, immigration, and ethnicity
2. Economic opportunity – Indicators: Income, Housing costs, Employment and Education)
3. Residential engagement and community belonging – Indicators: Refers to information about how connected people feel to their neighbourhood
4. Safety – Indicators: Crime rate in the neighbourhood
5. Health – Indicators: How healthy people feel and children's readiness for school
6. Physical Environment – Indicators: Housing conditions and how close people live to places like grocery stores (Region of Peel, n.d.).

It is important to note that both the Neighbourhood Equity Index and Neighbourhood Information Tool scores are composite scores derived from a series of benchmark values

municipally led with some input from community groups, residents, funders and key stakeholders that delineates and defines parameters of neighbourhood equity that are not necessarily specific to Black folks or encompass Black iterations of neighbourhood equity (Jane-Finch TSNS Task Force, 2015). However, I mobilize these municipally led benchmarks not as definitive measures of community well-being, but as tools to better understand the institutional logics that frame racialized neighbourhoods and their impacts on Black livability in these spaces. These benchmarks as categories of analyses, allow me to critique understandings of "well-being" that re-inscribe discourses of pathologization that contribute to the powerful territorial stigmatization of Black residents informing meaning- making of/in space (Jane-finch TSNS Task Force, 2015). Although these indexes are not comprehensive, and do not effectively capture the well-being of Black life in racialized geographies, it not only provides a framework for understanding how spatial boundaries and processes of racialization are mapped and scripted onto neighbourhoods and the consciousness of people, but serves as an entry point for (re)framing and (re)developing wellness indexes as it pertains to Black life. I do not undertake a detailed analysis of the indexes in my chapters, as my intent is not to evaluate the efficacy of these tools, but rather to use them as indicators of how institutions conceptualize and spatialize well-being. These tools serve here as a means of situating the field and revealing the broader logics that inform how racialized neighbourhoods are framed by the City of Toronto and Peel Region. My primary concern lies in how these institutional logics frame racialized geographies, logics that will be further interrogated through the lived experiences of participants and discussed in depth in the analytical chapters.

These theoretical and ontological frameworks in conjunction with these neighbourhood tools inform both the design and execution of this study. In the following chapter, I outline the

methodology used to explore Black life in racialized neighbourhoods, including participant recruitment, data collection, and analysis strategies mobilizing a critical constructivist approach.

Chapter IV

Methodology and Research Design

Methodological Approach

This qualitative study uses a critical constructivism approach, that merges the interpretive focus of constructivist and constructionist views with critical epistemology. Campos et al. (2009) defines critical constructivism as

> combining the ideas related to how people think while interacting with the social environment (constructivist) or how meanings are socially derived (constructionist) with critical theory that examines the impact of power structures in society, as well as the ethical consequences of people's choices (p. 216).

Critical constructivism extends traditional constructivism by understanding that knowledge of the world is not neutral or universal but rather is an interpretation between people that is crafted in a contextualized space or as Kincheloe (2005a) contends, "what dominant groups of humans perceive it to be" (p. 8). In this vein, there is no "objective" social reality "out there," rather knowledge is co-constructed between the knower and the respondent. Knowledge is an ongoing dialogue shaped by social location, culture, institutions, and historical contexts that in turn construct our perspectives on the world, self, and others (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Hesse-Biber, 2010, p. 7; Kincheloe, 2005a).

Drawing from Kincheloe (2005a), I work from the premise that: (1) all knowing involves a knower; (2) how the knower constructs the known constitutes what they think of as reality; (3) all knowers are historical and social subjects, [and as such] spatial and temporal settings always shape the nature of their constructions of the world; (4) not only is the world socially and historically constructed, but so are people and the knowledge people possess; (5) knowers create themselves with the cultural tools at hand; and (6) [...] because context shapes perceptions,

interpretations cannot be separated from the interpreter's location in the web of reality (p. 24). In other words, nothing represents a neutral perspective, "what appears as objective reality is merely what [the] mind constructs and what [knowers] are accustomed to seeing" (Kincheloe, 2005a, p. 8).

In my research, critical constructivism provides a framework for analyzing how dominant constructions of space are saturated with power dynamics and structural forces mediated by race and class that shape the representation of those who occupy those spaces and influences how people construct their sense of self and place. This perspective allows me to attend to the agency of participants in constructing meaning from their lived experiences, and the ways that meaning is shaped, constrained, or acted upon in relation to dominant ideologies and carceral spatial logics. Rather than seeking a singular "truth," this study is concerned with representational and affective realities—how people understand, experience, and narrate their social worlds within structures of power. By focusing on the dialectical relationship between knowledge and reality, critical constructivism enables an exploration of how Black life is lived, contested, and reimagined within racialized geographies (Hesse-Biber, 2010, p. 455).

Multi-sited Field of Investigation

The field of investigation for this project was multi-sited. I interviewed 35 Black residents in neighbourhoods within the City of Toronto and the Region of Peel, which includes Brampton, Caledon, and Mississauga; however, the analysis presented here is based on a purposive selection of 17 interviews, reflecting a refined analytical focus discussed in the "Understanding My Sample" section of this chapter. This selection of sites is supported by demographic data, as according to Statistics Canada (2016b), the census subdivision with a population of 5,000 or more with the

highest proportion of visible minorities are in Markham (77.9%), Brampton (73.3%), Mississauga (57.2%), Toronto (51.5%) and Ottawa (26.3%) (Statistics Canada, 2016). In 2016, the Region of Peel had the highest percentage of visible minorities within the Greater Toronto Area with 62.3%, followed by Toronto with 51.5%. Of these highest proportions of visible minorities, the highest percentage of Black residents live in Peel Region (Region of Peel, 2016). Black residents make up the second highest percentage of visible minorities in Peel with 15.3% (Region of Peel, 2016). In Brampton, Black residents are the third highest population of visible minorities, comprising 13.9% of Brampton's visible minority population (Region of Peel, 2016). In Mississauga, Black residents are also the third highest population of visible minorities, comprising 6.6% visible minority population (Region of Peel, 2016; Statistics Canada, 2016a). Caledon with the lowest population of Black residents in Peel at 2.8%, is the second highest population of visible minorities (Region of Peel, 2016). In Toronto, Black residents are the third highest population of visible minorities comprising 7.5% of Toronto's visible minority population (Region of Peel, 2016). With these supporting statistics, it was clear that to meaningfully explore the experiences of Black residents, I needed to situate my research within geographies central to Black social life.

Research Design and Analysis

In total, I conducted 35 semi-structured interviews with residents living in the City of Toronto and the Region of Peel. However, as the research evolved, I refined my analytical focus to centre on 17 of these interviews. This selected sample reflects the pivot in my study's conceptual and methodological priorities, which I elaborate upon in the "Understanding My Sample" section in this chapter. Due to health and safety precautions implemented as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews were conducted over the online conferencing platform Zoom. Audio and video recordings were also collected with the consent of participants and later stored on a

password-secure third-party iCloud software. The interviews occurred from January 2021-October 2021. In the following sections, I will begin with a discussion of the recruitment process and corresponding analysis, followed by a brief overview of the sample. I conclude with reflections on positionality, reflexivity, ethical considerations, and study limitations.

Recruitment

I began recruiting research participants in December 2021, after I received ethics approval from the Research Ethics Board at York University. A purposive sampling strategy was deployed for selecting participants for interviews. Purposive sampling occurs when "a researcher chooses a particular group or place to study because it is known to be of the type that is wanted" (McNeill & Chapman, 2005, p. 50). To recruit Black residents living in Toronto and Peel Region, I began circulating recruitment posters in highly racialized neighbourhoods, focusing on neighbourhoods with low index scores (lower than 42.89 in Toronto and lower than 45 in Peel Region) listed on the Neighbourhood Equity Index and the Neighbourhood Information Tool. Once I identified several participants who properly fit the criteria, using snowball sampling, I asked them to identify other participants that would fit my criteria as well. Snowball sampling "involves identifying certain key individuals in a population, interviewing them, and then asking them to suggest others who might also be interviewed" (McNeill & Chapman, 2005, p. 51). In this way, "the original small nucleus of people grows by adding people to it in stages, much as a snowball can be built up by rolling it along the snow on the ground" (McNeill & Chapman, 2005, p. 51). However, after yielding few responses, I decided to use my personal networks via social media, specifically Instagram and Facebook as a platform to recruit participants. I circulated my recruitment poster on my personal Facebook and Instagram page. I used the Instagram "boost" feature that allows you to pay for a predetermined set of days to promote a given post among a specific demographic

that is outside of your personal network. I used this feature twice during the recruitment phases, with the following parameters (Figure 3):

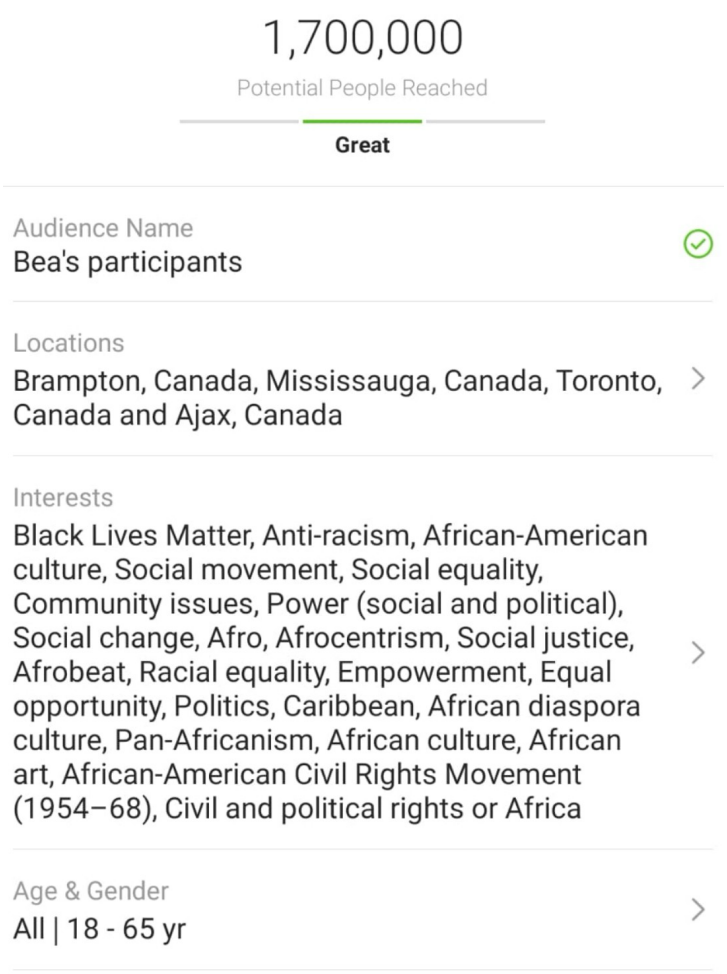

Figure 3. Instagram recruitment Information (screenshot). Source: (@newsoc_journal)

I recruited 17 participants with the following criteria: they identified as Black residents between the ages of 20-57 and had lived in neighborhoods with index scores 42.89 or lower in Toronto and 45 or lower in Peel Region[8]. Of these participants, ten resided in Toronto and seven in Peel Region, with six in Brampton and one in Mississauga. More participants identified as

[8] Methodological Note: Although the selection criteria focused on neighborhoods with index scores of 42.89 or lower (Toronto) and 45 or lower (Peel Region), a small number of participants (N=4; Toronto=3; Region of Peel=1) resided in neighborhoods with scores marginally above these thresholds. Given the close proximity of these scores to the defined cut-off points, and the continued classification of these neighborhoods as socioeconomically disadvantaged within municipal and regional reports, these participants were retained in the study. Their inclusion enriches the analysis by capturing experiences in neighborhoods that similarly exhibit patterns of structural vulnerability and targeted intervention needs.

female (N=9) than male (N=8). Participants reported their racial-ethnic backgrounds as Caribbean (N=9) and Continental African (N=8).

It was important to me that participants lived in neighborhoods with index scores 42.89 or lower, as this figure represents the NEI benchmark score for designating Neighbourhood Improvement Areas in Toronto (City of Toronto, 2020). Similarly, in Peel Region, neighborhoods with scores between 23 and 45, on the Neighbourhood Information Tool were classified as requiring more targeted support. To ensure participants had substantial and recent knowledge of their neighborhoods, I required that they had lived in Toronto and or the Region of Peel for a minimum of 10 years.

The neighborhoods represented by participants included:

Toronto Neighbourhoods

1) Black Creek
2) Elms-Old Rexdale
3) Malvern
4) Mount Olive-Silverstone Jamestown
5) Rockcliffe-Smythe
6) Yorkdale-Glen Park (specifically Lawrence Heights)

Peel Region Neighbourhoods

7) Bramalea (Section F)
8) Brampton Flowertown
9) Dixie[9]
10) Downtown Brampton
11) Springdale (See footnote [9])

[9] Although the primary inclusion criteria for participant recruitment specified residency in neighborhoods with municipal index scores of 42.89 or lower in Toronto and 45 or lower in Peel Region, three participants resided in neighborhoods with significantly higher index scores (in the 70s range). Rather than excluding these participants, their contributions are deliberately retained and analytically repositioned. Their inclusion provides a critical counterpoint that highlights the limitations of index-based measures of disadvantage. While such indexes offer a structural benchmark, they do not fully capture the complex realities of Black life, belonging, or systemic marginalization across urban geographies. The experiences shared by these participants complicate assumptions that higher-scoring neighborhoods necessarily translate into equitable living conditions for Black residents. Accordingly, while the primary thematic analysis centers the voices of participants living within the defined thresholds, the insights from these three participants are integrated separately to critically interrogate the utility and shortcomings of neighborhood classification metrics in capturing the nuances of structural vulnerability.

To ascertain whether the initially identified candidates met the geographical criterion, I required that each potential participant complete a five-minute demographic questionnaire (see Appendix A). This questionnaire collected descriptive information including participants' preferred pseudonym, age, racial-ethnic identity, gender identity, current city and neighbourhood of residence, length of time at their current residence, and details of any previous residences. This questionnaire was used to identify potential participants and their suitability for the study.

Data collection

The data were collected through one-hour semi-structured, individual conversational interviews. I selected in-depth, one-on-one conversational interviews to access deep, situated knowledge necessary to understanding the complexity of living in neighbourhoods mapped through racial and carceral logics. This approach is grounded in what Fontana and Frey (2005) describe as "empathetic interviewing" and what Rapport (2012) terms a "talking-partnership," marked by reciprocity, complementarity, and collaboration. In this conversational approach, the interviews were informal, guided conversations that encouraged dialogue to a jointly created *arrival,* moving away from extraction to co-creation (Fontana & Frey, 2005; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). While the interviews followed a conversational approach, the questions were sequenced and themed moving from general to specific questions and framed positively before exploring more difficult or negative experiences. My interview questions took on a constructivist and interpretive framework emphasizing participants' subjective experiences focusing on everyday meaning-making practices in their neighbourhoods (Campos et al., 2009). To best understand how residents make sense of their social worlds, I began by broadly asking residents to describe their neighbourhoods, highlighting both the positive and negative aspects. Shaped by a critical race perspective, I then moved into deeper discussions of micro-dynamics of their neighborhoods,

focusing on belonging, structural barriers, and racialization which aim to capture deep and contextualized narratives analyzing how race, space, and place intersect to impact Black life. To account for spatial mobility and its implications for place-making and livability, the interview guide included distinct questions for participants who had moved within the last ten years versus those who had not. I then concluded with reflections on self and futurities–how participants imagine their futures, mobility, and the meaning of "home." Upon the completion of all the interviews, the participants were given $40.00 as compensation for their time and participation.

Data Analysis

From November 2021-January 2022, I transcribed and coded all my interviews. Transcripts were coded using one-line, open coding, in which I read through each transcript, line by line, and noted patterns, relationships, and divergences that emerged from the data keeping my research questions in mind, while also trying to remain open to unexpected findings or ideas (Blackstone, 2012; Creswell, 2013). As I read through more of the transcripts, I identified themes of residents' experiences in the data, where participants would broadly touch on comparable ideas and/or share similar observations. I also paid close attention to how the narratives were delivered, including tone, linguistic choices, emotions, and identity construction.

While listening to the interviews, I quickly recognized a common thread across all resident experiences: a devalorization of their geographies. I began my coding process by highlighting quotes that reflected similar ideas using colour coding. I then revisited these quotes to identify recurring themes that appeared across the data, often in complementary manner ways, focusing on how participants responded to the devalourization of their neighbourhoods. These responses fell into three primary categories: (1) those who left their neighbourhoods voluntarily, (2) those who

stayed involuntarily and their survival tactics, and (3) those who stayed voluntarily and their strategies for persistence. Through this process, I uncovered patterns and insights into the experience of living in these neighbourhoods. As these themes developed, codes about their lived experiences began to emerge where I intuitively identified and consolidated smaller codes into larger thematic categories. The primary themes included: (1) systemic neglect, which I later reframed as organized abandonment (2) rightlessness, and (3) anti-black racism, specifically as experienced by people of South Asian descent. I then labelled these three themes of analysis as the "beams of Black worldlessness." I chose the word "beams" because, like beams in structural engineering, they are fundamental to the integrity of a structure. Similarly, I view these three themes as structural frames emerging from the data, ultimately supporting and framing the condition of Black worldlessness in racialized neighbourhoods, akin to infrastructure. This framing emerged through the conversational and reflective nature of the qualitative interview process. The development of the category of experiences guided the writing of my dissertation, while the quotes of my participants' lived experiences in their neighbourhoods informed the conceptualization of Black worldlessness and my adoption of the concept of the Quiet.

Narrative Analysis

The analytical framework employed to analyze the data collected followed a Narrative Analysis (NA) approach. Borrowing from Gazso and Bischoping (2016), NA involves centering the standpoint of individuals' perceptions, experiences, and interpretations of their circumstances with the quest for meaning, As Gazso and Bischoping (2016) contend, not only do narratives reflect social norms, mores, and values, but because they are situated in broader and changing contexts it offers micro and macro levels of experiences of social structures, and institutions. And so, it allows for a deeper understanding of how Black people interpret the world, and their place

within it. What makes narrative analysis valuable is that it is accessible to epistemologies that have been marginalized, unsung, or overlooked (Gazso & Bischoping, 2016, p. 7). More specifically, the focus of analysis concentrated on analyzing talk data through narratives that showcased the lives of my participants as they unfolded and changed—commonly understood through the terms "life history" or "life course" (p. 19). These terms that are often interchanged (life history and life course) is rooted in Chicago School of Sociology, which is "concerned with how social interaction was shaped by [...] symbolic interactionism" (Gazso & Bischoping, 2016, p. 20).

In this approach, "humans are perceived as exercising agency, ongoingly constructing their social worlds and transforming their environments through shared symbols and acts of meaning" (Gazso & Bischoping, 2016, p. 20). Through this methodology, perceptions and interpretations, rather than objective reality determines social action. In other words, if people determine situations as real, they are real in their consequences. Individuals' choice and their opportunities to exercise personal agency, are simultaneously conditioned by their contexts and by the lives of others to whom they are linked (i.e. an individual's decision to move out of a neighbourhood with a lower index score must be understood in the contexts of the neighbourhood, their family's attitude, financial employment and the social repercussions for being in that neighbourhood). Coupling the insights of these perspectives, I understand that an individual's story must be understood through individual perception and agency at the same as it is shaped by historical and social structures (Gazso & Bischoping, 2016, p. 20). And so, the use of narrative analysis was key for making sense of the process of racialization in the experiences of Black life, as it pertains to constructions of self and Black livability.

Interpretative Emergence of "The Quiet"

The concept of *The Quiet* emerged inductively through the interpretive analysis of participants' narratives. As I engaged with the data, I became attuned to the subtle, often understated articulations of interiority. In this study, the Quiet operates as both an analytic tool and a reading practice that foregrounds the inward dimensions of Black life, offering an alternative interpretation of participants' lived experiences, one that gestures towards their inwardness and inner worlds, beyond the public's often limited imaginations.

Listening for lower frequencies, "we might capture the quieter, often overlooked notes of refusal within those aspects hegemonically registered as compliance or abjection" (Campt, 2017, p. 82). Through this interpretive lens, the Quiet, provides a more comprehensive understanding of Black humanity challenging the dominant narrative that centres resistance and publicness as the primary framework of Black life. Instead, it allows for a fuller exploration of inner life, where Black existence is understood through narratives of dignity, futurity, refusal, desires, ambitions, hungers, vulnerabilities, and fears. Crucially, this delineation does not negate the threat and violence of racism and the importance of resistance and protest to Black life, but instead, the Quiet compels us to ask, *what else?* What other capacities does Black life have? As if to remind us of our humanity. Following Quashie (2016), I recognize that interiority, the Quiet, is inevitable. It is essential and a beautiful part of what it means to be alive. Yet the social world has attempted to make Blackness incompatible with Quietness. As such, to notice and understand the Quiet, requires a re-reading, a shift in what we look for, expect, and remain open to see. It demands a different kind of attention, one attuned to the sovereign interiorities where Black life blooms, making space for sites of joy, peace, mediocracy, and the broader fullness of Black life and possibilities. In this way, the Quiet provides an interpretive framework through which Black life is not co-opted, nor solely defined by its public expression, but by a dynamic and rich interiority.

An inner life that is an essential, inevitable, fundamental, and a beautiful aspect of being alive that is often rendered unavailable to Black people. This framework offers a necessary glimpse of Black humanity that reminds us of the full scope of what it means to be human–as already alive.

Understanding My Sample

Sample Criteria

In this section, I elaborate on the initial 35 interviews I conducted to provide context for why I ultimately narrowed my analytical focus to 17 interviews. My initial research design proposal, which later pivoted to a different sample size, consisted of 35 one-hour semi-structured conversational interviews, with self-identified Black residents between the ages of 20-67, living in neighborhoods with index scores lower than 42.89 in Toronto and lower than 45 in Peel Region (See footnote [8]). The design included two cohorts, one cohort of 13 residents in Toronto and another of 12 residents in Peel Region, with 9 residents in Brampton and 3 in Mississauga. I also included a 10-person booster sample of participants who had moved to higher-indexed neighborhoods within the past decade which will be further explored below. Most participants identified as female (N=20), followed by male (N=14), and Two-Spirit (N=1). Participants reported their racial-ethnic backgrounds as Caribbean (N=16), Continental African (N=17), and Afro-Indigenous (N=2). As previously noted, my recruitment focused on Black residents living in neighborhoods with index scores below 42.89 in Toronto and below 45 in Peel Region. These thresholds were selected for two key reasons. First, in Toronto, a score of 42.89 on the Neighbourhood Equity Index (NEI) marks the official benchmark for designating Neighbourhood Improvement Areas, zones identified as facing deep structural inequities warranting immediate intervention. Similarly, in the Region of Peel, the Neighbourhood Information Tool classifies areas

with scores between 23 and 45 as exhibiting low levels of neighborhood well-being and in need of targeted support. Second, neighborhoods with low index scores tend to have disproportionately high populations of visible minorities. These spatial concentrations often correlate with broader processes of racialization and social exclusion, producing what I refer to as *codes of non-belonging*. According to the TSNS 2020 Strategy, 66% of neighborhoods that fall below the NEI benchmark were home to a disproportionate number of visible minorities, reinforcing the spatialized dimensions of race and its relationship with social and health outcomes (City of Toronto, 2014). Given my interest in exploring Black well-being and how Black residents navigate and interpret life in racialized neighborhoods often labeled "the poorest neighbourhoods," it was methodologically consistent to prioritize participants living in areas with lower index scores. To ensure participants had sustained relationships with their communities, I included only those who had lived in Toronto and/or the Region of Peel for a minimum of 10 years.

As previously noted, I included a 10-person booster sample of participants who had moved to higher-index neighborhoods within the past decade. The purpose of this group was to explore how, and understand why, they left their previous low-indexed neighborhoods, and how they interpret both their previous and current living environments. Drawing from existing literature that suggests that pathways out of these racialized communities are often facilitated through class mobility, homeownership, and residential displacement, I sought to understand whether residential mobility to so-called "higher status or high indexed" neighborhoods also entailed a shift away from the spatial logics of racialization, or whether those logics persist and reconstitute themselves elsewhere (Rosenbaum & Popkin, 1991; South & Crowder, 1998). Specifically, I was interested in whether the racialized dynamics of exclusion, regulation, and carceral logics evident in marginalized neighborhoods were reproduced in more advantaged areas, and how Black residents

make sense of the potential continuities or ruptures on their selfhood. This 10-person cohort was to reflect the diversity of Black residents living across Toronto and the Region of Peel, while also capturing varied experiences of neighborhood attachment, transition, and displacement.

Refining Analytical Focus

During the data analysis, it became increasingly clear that the richness and complexity of the experiences shared by those who remained in their neighborhoods, the "stayers", warranted focused analytic attention. Their narratives provided a depth of insight that resisted the homogenization of Black life in racialized neighbourhoods and highlighted the nuanced strategies Black residents employ to navigate the persistent conditions of what I refer to as Black worldlessness. As Charmz (2014), a constructivist grounded theorist, and other qualitative methodologists argue, qualitative inquiry is inherently emergent and responsive to the lived realities of participants, as such, shifts in focus and adaptations in research are not only permissible, but expected as new insights emerge through consistent engagement with data (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell and Poth, 2018; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019). In line with this approach, reflecting an improved understanding of my participants and specificity of their accounts, rather than continuing with a broader sample, I made the decision to limit the scope of this project to the 17 participants who remained in their neighborhoods[10]. This is represented by the neighbourhoods presented in the recruitment section. The saliency of this study stems from the quality of the data, the depth of participant engagement, and the theoretical insights produced by a sustained attention to their inner worlds. While I do not claim to represent the experiences of all Black Canadians, this

[10] I chose to exclude the 10-person booster sample of participants who had moved to higher-index neighborhoods from this analysis to focus more precisely on the experiences of stayers. The richness of the narratives of the stayers, and their relevance to the study's central questions about spatial containment and Black livability, justified this narrowing of scope. The excluded interviews will be addressed in a subsequent study dedicated to mobility, transition, and the persistence (or disruption) of carceral geographies.

pivot allowed me to and to preserve the integrity of their narratives and engage in more precise and rigorous micro-analytic explorations, capturing the underexplored dimensions of how racialized spatiality shapes Black selfhood and the strategies of reclaiming life under conditions of constraint in Toronto and Peel neighborhoods reaching saturation.

My next project will take up the interviews with residents who moved to higher-indexed neighborhoods. That study will explore whether, and how, Black worldlessness persists after relocation, and whether such moves yield greater well-being or a reconfigured sense of self.

Profile of Participants

While all identified racially as Black, my research participants were ethnically heterogeneous, tracing their ancestry to the Caribbean (N=9) and Continental Africa (N=8). My participants' ancestry surfaced in two key ways: (1) through expressions of non-belonging, where individuals explicitly stated a desire to "go back home," and (2) through references to an ancestral elsewhere that provided a meaningful point of connection– a place to name, a referential to draw from in imaging future possibilities. I found this reference point to be most salient with those *Moving Ground* who saw futurities beyond the carcerality Black worldlessness. The experience of a world otherwise, appeared to provide a sensibility or buffer against the internalization of the negative prescriptions associated with living in their neighbourhoods. They drew on this resource to not only repel against anti-Black violence, asserting a selfhood beyond blackness, but to remember a world otherwise. In future iterations of this work, I plan to explore in greater depth how ethnic identity acts as either a buffer or intensifies the experiences of worldlessness in neighbourhoods mapped through carceral logics.

In my analysis, I found that gender shaped both the sites and strategies of self-making and reclaiming life. As McKittrick (2006) contends in *Demonic Grounds*, Black women have historically resisted spatial domination by creating alternative geographies that prioritizes survival, community, and liberation. Similarly, the women in my study create alternative geographies within the home centering their children and community. The women in my study were at the forefront of resisting the conditions of Black worldlessness, and how they negotiated these conditions through a myriad of ways; such as sending their children out of their neighbourhoods and closely monitoring their social circles. My research holds space for the contributions of Black women to spatial theory and resistance practices. It also recognizes how Black women navigate and transform spaces of oppression into sites of creativity, resistance, and survival. Men on the other hand, spent more time navigating or had primary concerns around policing, carceral logics, and surveillance. For fathers, they had more fear for their sons, so their strategies for self-making or aliveness oftentimes revolved around protection–keeping the family alive, finding ways to build insular communities, or dream of futurities outside of their neighbourhoods that they deemed unlivable.

Positionality, Reflexivity, Ethical Considerations and Limitations

My ability to access *The Quiet* and reach the parts of Black life that are often overlooked and undermined in an intimate manner was largely rooted in my "insider position," the shared identification as "Black and African." This standpoint provides immediacy and a sense of connection with the participants in my study (Prus, 1996). I contend that this relative "insider positionality" allows for a "nuanced perspective for observation and interpretation" offering "insight into the linguistic, cognitive, emotional, sensory and psychological principles of participants" (Chavez, 2008, p. 479). In other words, this shared positionality enabled me to better

hear, recognize, interpret, and represent the lived experiences of Black residents in the Region of Peel and Toronto.

However, I remained critically aware of the ways that my "insiderness" could thwart my research, particularly, through the perceived or actual closeness to participants based on shared experience or social identities (Chavez, 2008). I recognize that a conceptualization of insiderness must consider "the complexity with which insiders have come to understand the researcher's role" (Chavez, 2008, p. 476). Insider and outsider positionalities are fluid and permeable social locations that are differently experienced and expressed by community members (Chavez, 2008, p. 476; Greene, 2014). As Kvale (2006) and others have highlighted, power dynamics in research interviews are asymmetrical (Kvale, 2006; Marx, 2001). These dynamics can emerge in interview situations and exacerbate insider and outsider positionalities. To address this, it was vital for me to practice reflexivity, to recalibrate the power relations and to cultivate a co-constitutive space, highlighting the generative possibilities of Black life at the margins. As Richardson (1997) contends, researchers themselves represent social and cultural products while producing social and cultural products as such.

During interviews, my role extended beyond that of a researcher. I became a medium through which Black residents expressed their pains and resilience. For many, the process was therapeutic. Many residents shared that they rarely had the time nor the space to talk about their experiences in their neighbourhoods, to examine how the constructions of their neighborhoods shaped their psyche and sense of self. Reflecting on our interview, one participant King Songan, insightfully articulated the connection between self-perception and spirit.

> It feels very deep. I mean we, as a people are very, very connected to spirit. We just don't realize just how much. And that spirit really affects our subconscious

> reasoning and, and how we, look at ourselves and how we look at each other. It really affects us a lot. I'd like to get to a point where, you know, I have a school where the kids are actually getting counseling on a daily basis, you know, especially, especially the children, you know, black children, racialized children, they're getting a daily counseling on how they feel about their neighborhood, about they feel about themselves because we really, really have to put our children in a situation where they're protected a lot more than they are right now.

As the interviews progressed, I felt a deepened responsibility to accurately represent participants' experiences and remain accountable to the goal of achieving material results. The energy and resilience of my participants reinvigorated my energy, fueling my commitment to meaningful policy changes. The weight of systemic oppression, coupled with the narratives of Black worldlessness, made the writing process not only intellectually exciting, but emotionally challenging. As Coffey (1999) contends, "emotional connectedness to the process and practices of fieldwork, to analysis and writing is normal and appropriate and should be acknowledged, reflected upon and seen as a fundamental feature of well-executed research" (p. 158). I navigated these emotions by being self-aware and honest, reflecting on my actions, my impact, and its translation to this work. By acknowledging the role of my emotions in this research process breaks down the artificial division between researchers and participants and brings to the forefront the saliency of constant reflection in research (Loughran & Mannay, 2018).

As a researcher, I am conscious of the ways that state interventionist programs and tools negatively impact communities wherein Blackness occupies. I am conscious of not developing data that will be used to justify, as the Jane and Finch TSNS (2015) so eloquently puts it, "crisis-based-interventions and solutions that do not take into account the security, needs, and demands of the existing community" (p. 10). Oftentimes in marginalized communities, particularly in Jane and Finch, narratives of crisis and security not only propagate fear and racism, but apply broad negative stereotypes to residents, and downplay or mute all of the positive aspects of the

community in order to justify interventionist government policies such as revitalization initiatives (that fails to deal with issues underpinning concentrated poverty) and programs like Toronto Anti-Violence Intervention Strategy that has only aided in increasing the tension between police and residents of "high crime neighbourhoods" (Jane-Finch TSNS Task Force, 2015, p. 8). The implications of the public depiction of "high in need" neighbourhoods, due to equity scores and benchmarks, can contribute to highly problematic consequences. Spaces hold more than physical attributes; they carry symbolic meaning which is illustrated in *The Toronto Star* published an article entitled, "Black Creek neighbourhood deemed Toronto's least livable" (Barajas & Ronnkvist, 2007; McKnight, 2014). The demarcation of the "least livable" neighbourhood marks the lives of residents and bounds them up in narratives of death that overwrite their existence. As Berisha (2023) contends, "bodies and spaces are read as extensions of one another in ways that reproduce or disrupt existing racialized formations" (p. 64). These neighbourhoods that are then arrested with lower neighbourhood index scores become a target, "a laboratory for academics and researchers seeking to examine marginalization, poverty, stigma, and associated blight [...] leading to more harm than structural good" (Jane Finch TSNS (2015, p. 24).

Taking a cue from the *Jane and Finch TSNS Task Force, Community Response Report* (2015), what I refuse to do is replicate or offer short-term solutions that ignore the voices of those within the community. Canadian governments and municipalities have long histories of disregarding the recommendations emerging from these kinds of "reports," reflecting a chronic lack of sustained funding, long-term improvement goals, success-gauging benchmarks, and any meaningful cultural strategy of resourcing (Jane-finch TSNS Task Force, 2015, p. 24). It is vital to interrogate the limitations of the assessment tools themselves. As noted in the report, there exists a "critical disjuncture between the TSNS priority indicators" and the "specific needs identified by

the community, and the ability of the city to address those needs" (Jane-finch TSNS Task Force, 2015, p. 16). According to the City of Toronto (2014), the NEI, driven by the need to be immediately implementable, omits several indicators raised through community consultations. High-quality equity indicators at the neighbourhood level for housing, safety and transit were flagged as important when evaluating how neighbourhoods in Toronto are doing. Equity indicators for participation in decision- making, racism, and the strength of the community service system were also flagged as essential. City-led interventionist programs often present themselves as race-neutral initiatives designed to enhance community well-being. However, the tools and metrics used to identify so-called "priority" areas are deeply rooted in histories of racial exclusion (Shindler, 2015). As Lipsitz (2007) and Ahmed (2006) argue, these urban interventions are shaped by a white spatial imaginary that centres white norms and visions of safety, order, and development. This imaginary not only governs which communities are deemed as "in need," socially engineering structural advantages and disadvantages, but also authorizes institutional actors to diagnose the problem and prescribe solutions. Within this schema, whiteness functions not only as a demographic identity, but as a governing rationality — a framework that legitimizes who gets to observe, speak, and intervene. Under this logic, spatial interventions to "improve" or "revitalize" marginalized communities often carry racialized logics that reproduce social control, surveillance, dispossession, and containment, all under the guise of care (DeFilipppis and Fraser, 2010; Lipsitz, 2007; McKittrick, 2011). This propels me to ask, what gets erased through these forms of measurement? Whose narratives and experiences are left untold or deemed illegible? While the TSNS priority indicators do raise important structural concerns, their limitations also open the door for more critical and expansive engagement with Black wellness, selfhood, and the lived realities of those navigating racialized geographies.

Another limitation worth noting involves the neighbourhood index tools. As previously mentioned, Toronto's Neighbourhood Equity Index was introduced as a tool to "change the way Toronto's 140 neighbourhoods are evaluated," allowing City staff to decide where to direct their services. However, as Stapleton et al. (2019) points out, with the adoption of the Neighbourhood Equity Index came the renaming of "Priority Neighbourhoods" (PN) to "Neighbourhood Improvement Areas" (NIA), which rezoned, reallocated, and in many cases, severed services to many parts of Toronto, specifically Scarborough, which hosts 10 of the 17 poorest neighbourhoods in Toronto. Stapleton et al. (2019) contends that this Urban HEART tool used to determine low income and equity in the city is deeply faulty. This was also illustrated with one of my participants who before the renaming and rezoning of Toronto neighbourhoods, lived in a priority neighborhood–Lawrence Heights, meeting the threshold for city resources. Now reassessed with a higher index score, ineligible for the same city supports, this residents' lived experiences does not reflect the "increased" well-being score. This raises the urgent question: whose well-being are we measuring? Stapleton et al. (2019) further asserts that this tool favours neighbourhoods with high concentrations of public housing, whilst also focusing on neighbourhoods where data is available, again, typically neighbourhoods with high concentrations of public housing. As such, this tool inappropriately defaults a better health status to neighbourhoods with low proportions of public housing overlooking poverty in these geographies. As a result, these designations create a "double or nothing" service, where high levels of subsidized housing are likely to get NIA status benefitting from this tool, whereas large areas of the city that are in dire need of NIA resources are not provided with resources because they have very little subsidized housing. Here we see the implications of municipality-led tools that assume the scope of poverty as centralized to spaces of public housing (relying solely on easily accessible data) producing wide discrepancies in the

collection and quality of health and wellness data among poor neighbourhoods (Stapleton et al., 2009, p.16). With the Neighbourhood Equity tools, it becomes quite evident that they are "situated and come out of a broader context of neoliberalism characterized by unstable federal commitments to urban development, concentrated poverty, and gentrification that result in insufficient resources" (Jane Finch TSNS, 2015).

The Peel Neighbourhood Information Tool also falls short. According to the Region of Peel (n.d.), the Neighbourhood Index domains represent "the conceptually important aspects of neighbourhoods." However, this begs the epistemological question, *conceptually important to whom?* It is unclear how much feedback from community members is regarded in the domains and indicators that reflect understanding of well-being. Akin to Toronto's Neighbourhood Equity Index, low neighbourhood index scores represent a "high level indication" of areas that require more "targeted supports to improve neighbourhood conditions" which as mentioned earlier, oftentimes justifies state intervention that further marginalizes Black communities through narratives of crisis (Jane Finch TSNS, 2015). Ironically, Peel's index tool is advertised to be used alongside other local information and data sources including Peel Regional Police Crime Map, implicitly mapping and reinforcing the links between criminality and geographical location.

Finally, I want to draw attention to the differences in urban planning and historical development that shape the construction of neighbourhoods in Toronto and the Region of Peel. Toronto's neighbourhood system has been shaped by a long history of political and civic engagement, municipal amalgamations, and annexations that have led to more finely tuned city planning, mapping, and the official recognition of 140 neighbourhoods (Hulchanski, 2010). In contrast, Peel Region is largely suburbanized, characterized by car-centric planning and urban sprawl (Keil and Üçoğlu, 2021). This planning logic has produced wide, often undifferentiated

residential zones not subdivided into smaller, official neighbourhoods. As a result, neighbourhood boundaries in Peel tend to be much broader and may encompass residents from vastly diverse socio-economic, racial, and experiential realities. Even within a single named area, these differences can be significant, making it difficult to generalize findings. Consequently, the data may flatten distinctions that exist within these large spatial geographies, masking intra-neighbourhood heterogeneity and obscuring variations in surveillance, containment, and Black aliveness (Neighbourhood Guide, n.d.).

In this vein, I acknowledge the unevenness of what constitutes a "neighbourhood" and how official boundaries often fail to correspond with lived spatial experience. The reliance on these bureaucratically defined boundaries reflects what Gilmore (2007) critiques as "abstract space," a spatial logic that enables racial capitalism and carceral geographies to obscure and manage difference. To mitigate this limitation, I incorporate census tracts and the conceptual framework of the Quiet. This mixed approach allows for greater granularity and specificity in capturing residents' spatial experiences and to resist the abstraction that flattens Black life.

To conclude, my research does not purport to speak for all Black residents in Toronto or Peel neighbourhoods, nor does this research carry the representative robustness necessary to make any comprehensive claims. Instead, mobilizing a critical constructivist approach in conjunction with a narrative and grounded analysis, carefully brings to light the dynamics of emerging social processes through a close exploration of racialization, spatialized carceral organization, and Black possibility in racialized neighbourhoods.

Chapter V

Quietly Holding Ground: Futurities Within and Beyond the Carcerality of Black Worldlessness

Throughout this dissertation, a clear need emerged from the data; a need to de-homogenize Black experience, without relinquishing the power of what makes the experience of worldlessness Black. This imperative implies a further strategy, to avoid employing analytical methods that unwittingly "fix" Black experiences as determinate and unchangeable in ways that reproduce the very racialization we seek to combat. The narratives of Black resident's shout this out loud and clear – we are not definable by the categories hitherto employed to describe us. The narratives of residents make evident that experiences of Black worldlessness are not passive or monolithic, but interwoven with strategies of Black aliveness, strategies that cannot be reduced to or thought-of within a one-dimensional framework of "resistance." Indeed, such frameworks often impose a burdensome standard, measuring Black life against ideological expectations of struggle, defiance, or liberation, and interpreting a gap or failure on the part of racialized groups. Racialized carcerality homogenizes "black"; speaking back to racialization requires the unpacking of experiential nuance underpinned by Black aliveness.

The analytical response utilized here, presents experiences not as those of a racialized, homogenous black group, but to underline the significance of demonstrating that not all Black folks experience or respond to Black worldlessness in the same way(s); more significantly, experiences and strategies can change, we are not fixed in space as unchangeable objects to be done to, "intervened in" to be policed or saved. All the respondents interviewed, underscore that the racialized carcerality of Black worldlessness is real; what they also demonstrate is that Black aliveness seeks different pathways within Black worldlessness, even within the same

neighbourhood (see *Moving Ground*). Consequently, the powerful need to de-homogenize "Black experience" so as to speak back to the reductionism of racialized carcerality, also enables us to take up the homogenization of "the racially stigmatized neighbourhood."

In this chapter, I draw attention to the experience of what I refer to as *Quietly Holding Ground*. The experiential category alerts us to both the positioning of black bodies within racialized carcerality and quiet insistence on life that orients pathways of aliveness within Black worldlessness. Quietly Holding Ground speaks not to a one-dimensionally forced positioning in racialized space, but to embodying a mode of being that quietly maintains presence and a constrained sense of self within the confines of racialized neighbourhoods. The narratives that emerge reveal a futural imagination shaped by constraint but not extinguished by it. For those Quietly Holding Ground, the Quiet becomes a practice of holding on, a soft but resolute stance against social death. The experiential category of those Quietly Holding Ground within Black worldlessness, is what this chapter seeks to present.

> Black people in diaspora, are held and held in and by the "brittle gnawed life we live," unprotected from the terrible except by eyelashes. To be in the hold, on the ship, on the shore and in the contemporary. We inhabit and are inhabited by the hold.
>
> –Christina Sharpe, In the Wake: On Blackness and Being (2016)

This chapter introduces a category of experience that centres the subjectivities of Black residents who involuntarily reside in racialized neighbourhoods and who aspire to move out of their neighbourhoods but are constrained by the lack of social and economic resources to do so. Their involuntary permanence fosters a worldview shaped by hopelessness, frustration, and constrained agency. Rather than positioning these residents as wholly defeated, fully surrendered to the internalization of the negative racializing structures of their neighbourhoods, I explore how their experiences reflect an interplay between racializing structures of Black worldlessness,

defined as organized abandonment, rightlessness, and anti-Black racism, and the interiority of life, where aspirations towards Black livability is complex.

This experiential category raises key questions about Black worldlessness, not only as externally imposed but also internalized. As Arthurson (2013) explains, the experience of living in stigmatized neighbourhoods results in "a downward spiral into despondency that often comprises lack of pride in oneself, feelings of shame and exclusion from mainstream society along with the curtaining of educational prospects and personal ambitions and experiencing negative health related effects" (p. 433). Drawing on the insights of George Herbert Mead (1934), I consider how the social aspect of self (how residents think others see them) colonizes, but not completely, their personal self (the self that acts based on personal desires and impulses), such that the structures of racialized Black worldlessness become assumed as personal limitations.

I examine how Black worldlessness is experienced as an atmospheric condition that weathers all aspects of their lives. As Khogali (2018) contends, anti-Black racism, a symptom of Black worldlessness, "assaults us at every turn, individualizing and isolating our lives and our spirits, leaving us to tend to our own suffering while surviving in loneliness" (p. 41). The following sections explore how residents describe the relationship of living in their neighbourhoods as being "stuck", "frustrating" and "defeating" and how the perceived inability to leave these geographies propels self-loathing and negative self-evaluations. In doing so, I illustrate how the hyper-internalization of racialized spatial stigma and limited protective resources (e.g., community relationships), not only interrupts their possibilities of Black aliveness and exhausts their agentive capacities but inhibits the safeguarding of the social self, becoming more susceptible to the internalization of the conditions of Black worldlessness thus debilitating the condition of being alive. Ultimately, I argue that this category of experience reveals how Black residents contend with

the internal and external constraints of Black worldlessness and how these dynamics interrupt possibilities for Black aliveness.

> “To be honest, I don't see anything positive [about] living here.”
> –Cathy

The above response is a quote from Cathy, a Lawrence Heights resident, who struggles to name positive aspects of her neighbourhood. Despite this sentiment, she supports the neighborhood’s revitalization project, explaining,

> I think it’s positive, they're going to have people from different economic statuses, so it just won’t be the same people, it's good to get a mixture [...] I mean it just motivates you, you’re not living in this dead space [...]. In neighborhoods like this where if you are not motivated or aren’t a go-getter, you’d be stuck here [...] in this kind of environment it's hard. So, you really have to have the passion within.

Cathy’s description of her neighbourhood as a “dead space,” a result of what Gilmore (2023) terms “organized abandonment”, refers to “places that have experienced the abandonment characteristic of contemporary capitalism and neoliberal state reorganization” (p. 304). This spatial ordering is influenced not only by market-driven displacement, but also by “legally imposed spatial exclusion” (Roy, 2019). In such environments, *dead space* fosters idleness and apathy, stunting residents’ growth and development, while rupturing the many possibilities of reclaiming Black life in these neighbourhoods. By asking Cathy to identify positive aspects of her neighbourhood, I inadvertently posed an untenable response. For Cathy, her neighbourhood offers no fertile grounds for optimism, making it difficult, but not impossible to conjure a hopeful future. Exhausted by the daily violence of degradation and racism, combined with the spatial and carceral social organization of her neighbourhood, the conditions she faces disappears whole ways of life, limiting possibilities for Black futurities. Drawing on Sharpe’s (2016) conceptualization of anti-blackness as “weather,” a totalizing and pervasive climate that produces environments in which

the push is always to Black death, I am compelled to ask, what capacities might these residents animate, and at what scales, do they reclaim Black life in their racialized neighbourhoods to make their future better than the present?

This chapter begins with an exploration of how Black residents living in Lawrence Heights and Bramalea (section F) make sense of and act within and against the condition of Black worldlessness in their racialized neighbourhoods. Black worldlessness undergirded by Fanonian thought is employed to describe the social condition and the day-to-day atmosphere that Black people are made to survive. Here, the capillaries of Black worldlessness functions as a system of constraints that delimits the possibilities of Black aliveness and futurities. I contend that Black people are denied occupation and the capacity to *fully inhabit the world* and engage in the illusion of liberalism. By the illusion of liberalism, I refer to the call of liberal universalism and the rights and privileges it claims to stand for –freedom for all. However, for Black people they are rendered worldless, alienated and ejected from this common world where there is no place to *be* in the world. For residents in this chapter, Black worldlessness is experienced as insurmountable. It seeps into their internal sense of self fostering a debilitating and palpable construction of the social self that interrupts the possibilities of Black aliveness. Black aliveness is defined as a mode of being that foregrounds the rich and dimensional interiority of Black subjectivities, and futurity beyond the carceral logics of Black worldlessness (Quashie, 2021). This category of experience that emerges from my data refers to residents who are Quietly Holding Ground within their racialized neighbourhoods. Those who are Quietly Holding Ground are Black residents who, while situated within the constraints of Black worldlessness, sustain a quiet form of self-possession and presence. Their experience reflects a dual reality: they are both subjected to structural abandonment and yet engaged in a deliberate, interior act of grounding themselves within these spaces. Rather than fully

succumbing to the erasures of Black worldlessness, they embody a mode of being that quietly maintains a sense of self in conditions meant to diminish them. To answer the question of how Black residents respond to the racialization and spatialized carceral organization of their neighbourhoods and its impact on their sense of self, I begin by outlining distinctive properties in the subjectivities of these residents. I then demonstrate how they navigate and negotiate the internal-external continuum of Black worldlessness, a conceptual tool I developed while carrying out my analysis that captures the diverse and fluid ways Black residents interpret and respond to the structural and psychic constraints of living in racialized neighbourhoods. By foregrounding the interplay between environmental forces and inner life, the continuum offers a more nuanced understanding of Black agency, aliveness, and self-creation within spaces shaped by territorial stigmatization and anti-Blackness. I then move into the role of territorial stigmatization in the conceptualization of these residents' social self and its impact on the envisioning of their futures. Lastly, I move into an analysis examining the strategies, namely the Quiet, that these residents mobilize to create possibilities of self-creation, suggesting that Black residents use what is available to make *place* in their neighbourhoods.

Distinctive properties

In narrating the lived experiences of those I categorize as Quietly Holding Ground; residents living in Lawrence Heights and Bramalea (Section F), these interviews reveal three salient themes that characterize this mode of inhabiting and interpreting their neighbourhoods.

1) Negative self-concept

2) Fractured sense of belonging and social alienation

3) Overcoming racializing structures as an im/possible challenge

1. *Negative Self-Concept/Low Self-esteem Through the Denigration of Residents and Geographies*

In a comparative analysis exploring spatial marginalization in the United States and the European Union, Wacquant (2007) found that living in stigmatized, (sub)proletarian neighbourhoods produced a "muted sentiment of guilt and shame" (Wacquant, 2007, p. 68). These sentiments manifested in behaviours including commonly hiding addresses, avoiding home visits from family and friends, and need to make excuses for residing in marked locales that stained the image of residents (Wacquant, 2007). Similarly, in my study, those Quietly Holding Ground, developed a negative self-concept shaped by how others viewed and treated them in relation to their neighbourhoods. As Wacquant (2007) notes, "stigmatized neighbourhoods symbolically degrades those who live in [them]" collapsing the boundary between geographical neighbourhoods and the people who occupy them (p. 68). This symbolic degradation is not only sustained by interpersonal treatment but also felt and reinforced at the level of public policy and media narratives that label Black residents as markers of amorality and social failure. When asked, how she believed Black people in her neighbourhood were perceived, Cathy, responded,

> that we are all some kind of government handouts recipients. For sure uneducated, stay at home all day long and do nothing kind of thing, and lazy. [...] From the police, oh that's even worse, everyone is a suspect in the neighbourhood.

This excerpt clearly illustrates how Cathy internalizes external stereotypes—repeating tropes of dependency, laziness, and criminal suspicion. These explanations are not neutral observations but reflect how Cathy sees herself being positioned within a racialized moral hierarchy. Speaking further to her self-perception, she states:

> Everything is a challenge living in these neighbourhoods–"Like everything really..[people] look at [you] differently, even the management they treat you differently, the super[intendent] treats you differently and now it's getting a little better […] "it [negative public perceptions] makes me feel bad [about myself] which I try not to but it makes me feel like a second-class citizen, you know, like if I lived on the other side of the neighbourhood. Let's say, in the Jewish area, I would

> be treated completely differently. It makes me feel belittled. Like a second-class citizen.

Here, Cathy explicitly identifies a diminished self-worth (i.e., “makes me feel bad about myself”), and articulates feelings of inferiority (i.e., “like a second-class citizen”), which reflect a fractured social identity shaped by the denigration of her community. She not only recognizes the stigma but acknowledges its emotional and psychological toll on her sense of self. As Blokland (2008) contends, “public housing serves as a constant reminder to its tenants and everyone else that [it is] a grudging welfare program.” (p. 39), further embedding feelings of shame, inferiority and undeservedness–distorting human relations and self-perception. For residents like Cathy, the internalization of negative racializing evaluations fosters a negative self-concept rooted in structural denigration. Even those who attempt to refuse these racializing evaluations, often find these narratives seeping into their self-concept, manifesting in feelings of hopelessness, shame, and a sense of diminished human value.

Miss Neo, a Bramalea (Section F) resident, articulates a deep sense of disconnection and internalized stigma stating,

> I don't feel a sense of accomplishment [...] I hate living here. I really do. I feel stuck and frustrated [...] I feel like it's a downgrade from where we were living before. I feel financially stressed out and so that's a constant frustration. I work a good job. I have a stable income. But I'm still living paycheck to paycheck. We hear stories about the working poor and I feel like I fall into that category [...] it's embarrassing to be here. I don't like to have visitors over here. I don't. My children will have like one or two friends who come over here [...] but I don't want nobody here.

This reflection reveals how Miss Neo’s economic stability does not shield her from the psychic toll of Black worldlessness. Her experiences align with Wacquant’s (2007) argument that residents of poor and racialized neighbourhoods often experience guilt and shame, manifesting in avoidant behaviours and emotional withdrawal. By expressing embarrassment and an aversion to

having visitors, Miss Neo exemplifies how spatial stigma distorts self-perception and restricts social engagement.

Kearns and Parkinson (2001) note that residents' sense of place is informed by the degree of choice they feel as it relates to their housing. Residents who feel like they are given some choice of location, to opt to remain or depart, rather than simply "end up" in their neighbourhoods, tend to develop a more positive sense of the community and self. However, it is when residents perceive a neighbourhood as an entrapment, that negative internalizations and feelings of failure arise (p. 2105). If these housing projects are meant to temporarily shelter "failures", and failure is a personal shortcoming, it then is not surprising that (a) folks aspire to move out (b) the inability to move out fosters the internalization of negative feelings (Blokland, 2008). As Miss Neo puts it, "I feel stuck," positions her experience within the logic of entrapment that forecloses positive identification with space and self. Black residents and their geopolitical concerns are conveniently obscured and construed as operating on the margins of Canadian geographies. As Cathy describes, the uneven development produces "dead space(s)," carceral geographies and slow deaths where people who are vulnerable, sustained by organized violence, are left to die or compelled to die. For Cathy, there is an awakening of the state of death that becomes internalized where she states, *it's depressing*.

Echoing similar sentiments, Miss Neo states,

> I really don't affirm myself in this [neighbourhood]. Like I don't, I don't interact with anybody. I don't, I don't do anything socially with anybody in this neighbourhood [...] as for confidence in building my self-esteem, no, I don't feel that at all. Like I said, I don't want people here. I don't have any friends in this neighborhood. I don't have any people that I connect with. You know, the people that I park next to in my parking spot, I say, hi and bye to them. And that's it. I don't have any kind of, 'so how was your day today and how are the kids?' Like, I don't even know their names. They hit my car one time. It got repaired and that's the extent of our interaction.

The affective toll of living in stigmatized housing is deeply internalized. Miss Neo words reflect a diminished sense of social integration and belonging, highlighting how external degradation is internalized as personal inadequacy. Rather than producing community cohesion, the experience of living in subsidized housing appears to generate alienation and erosion of self-worth.

The negative self-concept of residents is further compounded by the persistent devaluation and abhorrent treatment of tenants living in "housing" (city community housing) by institutional actors. As subsidized renters, their rental status oftentimes precludes them any rights being owed to them. The *2021 Toronto Community Housing (TCHC) Confronting Anti-Black Racism Strategy,* acknowledges the failures to address the realities of anti-black racism within its housing governance and infrastructure that have led to the cycle of criminalization, deteriorating building conditions, and the perpetuation of harmful social realities that are captured through logics that blame residents for their socioeconomic conditions. This is supported by a tenant interviewed in the TCHC report who articulates,

> The handymen crew won't respect people's households or cultures. They refuse to take their shoes off when they enter our houses and then step on our prayer mats even when we tell them not to. These same staff that will disrespect people's homes then try and scare us with the threat of reporting us as difficult. (p.16)

Echoing similar sentiments, Miss Neo recounts an incident on how property management handled a mold infestation in her bathroom,

> And I spoke to them [property management], whole weeks went by. They didn't do anything about it. And I was like, okay, my children, my health are at risk. You know, this is black mold. I'll call in the health inspector and put the cost to you. And then they responded within 24 hours. But then why did three weeks go by before? And, they didn't even clean the mold. What they did was just paint over it [...] you're not addressing the problem. You're just putting a band aid over it [...] It's frustrating because it's like, they don't care.

This perceived abandonment (re)produces and reaffirms the marginality of these residents watering the seed of negativity that is internally planted. The blemish of place is reified through structural stigma and the producers of stigma that target these residents. Rather than developing what Wacquant (1996) describes as a "high degree of mutually supportive behaviours" that scholars have contended is a notable effect of discrimination of place, these residents exhibit the radical opposite – an erosion of place and belonging, compounding residents' internalized sense of marginality and reinforcing a negative self-concept deeply shaping their worth and their futures.

2. Fractured sense of Belonging (Physical/Social Isolation and Disconnection)

For residents Quietly Holding Ground, their experience of belonging is marked by loss and fragmentation. Rather than *places* of belonging and connection, their neighbourhoods are experienced as sites of "survival." As Wacquant (1996) notes, "places are full and fixed, stable arenas whereas spaces are potential voids, possible threats, areas that have to be feared, secured or fled" (p. 126). The symbolic degradation of place, particularly through territorial stigmatization, leads to what Wacquant (2007) describes as the dissolution of "place," the loss of a culturally familiar, relatively safe home. For these residents, the dissolution of place is fed by social fragmentation, lack of belonging, and organized abandonment by the state. Due to these factors, alongside the stigma and development of negative internalizations, these geographies, for many, never truly become places Black residents call home. Instead, some retreat into the privatized spheres of their household, rejecting the public sphere as an arena for neighbourhood sociability. This retreat into isolation strengthens feelings of vulnerability in the pursuit of livability (Keene and Padilla, 2010).

When asked about her experience of belonging, Cathy responded,

> I mean I don’t have friends in the neighbourhood, I don't talk to anybody other than the people on my floor [...] I don't feel like I belong in the neighborhood. [...] I don’t belong to any of the events they run in the community. I used to actually [attend events] but then I stopped. And I also used to go to the tenant meetings, and I stopped as well.

Although Cathy attributes her absence from tenant meetings to her work schedule, she reflects positively on the gatherings, stating: “You know, you're sharing your thoughts with others. Ranging from safety to maintenance and stuff like that. Yeah, it was good. It was really good.” Her narrative suggests that the infrastructure for connection once existed but has since eroded. When prodded with the same question, Miss Neo replied, “I wouldn't say that I feel out of place, but I don't feel like I have a connection to it. I can move out of here and I wouldn’t miss anything, to be honest really.” The absence of connection for Miss Neo is rooted in the lack of social relationships in their neighbourhoods. Miss Neo elaborates on her day-to-day disengagement stating,

> I would be open to having more friends socially, but it doesn't necessarily have to be from this apartment complex. Not that if someone approached me and said ‘hey, let's be friends I would reject them and be like, no’. But I don't see anybody to approach [...] I basically just go in and out of my apartment. If I'm gonna empty the garbage, I'm going to empty the garbage and come back. I'm not really looking to socialize with anybody on my way in. I park my car. I come inside with the groceries, or I'll come inside my unit and I stay inside and that's pretty much it. I don't go out and, you know, sit in my backyard and I don't wanna sit in my backyard because people are throwing their garbage downstairs (in her yard) anyways. So, it's like, I can't even enjoy the outdoor space.

This description reflects a privatization of life where social withdrawal becomes a way to manage the discomfort of being in a space marked by stigma and neglect.

When asked, is it easy to belong as a Black person in your neighbourhood? Miss Neo replied,

> In this apartment complex? Unfortunately. Yes, because there's so many of us. We're all in the same boat because we're all financially struggling, right? It's like, you're poor just like me too. <Laugh> its that type of [understanding that] we'll just

> be poor together. So in that kind of sense of belonging. But as far as belonging in terms of status or wealth or anything like that, like, no, I don't feel any kind of emotional attachment to this neighborhood. I would wanna get outta here as soon as I could. My intention when I first moved in was just to move in for a one year, two years maximum, just so I can save as much money, but as the rent continues to increase, it's harder and harder to save money. So, I'm here longer than I would have ever anticipated. And just the way how the housing market continues to increase. I don't see a way for me to get out. So, it's like I feel stuck.

Here, class emerges as a key dimension of non-belonging. In this example, "belonging" is reduced to a shared class struggle rather than community rootedness. This form of belonging produces a contentious identity that both affirms connection and unveils the diminished capacities of residential mobility. Cathy expressed similar sentiments, noting that as a Black person, it is easy to belong in her neighbourhood, so long as poverty is the qualifier. Belonging becomes flattened to the conditions of Black worldlessness, that relegates economically marginalized Black people to *dead spaces*.

When asked if her neighbourhood could ever become home, Miss Neo replied,

> No, because I don't like it here. I don't feel like this is my place at all. I don't own it. I don't like the police presence. The only thing that's attractive to me in this neighbourhood is the proximity to the amenities that I mentioned earlier. Like the parks, the medical buildings, the grocery store, the schools, like all those kinds of things are convenient to have [...] but, no, I don't feel like this is home at all. I don't see myself ever calling this neighbourhood, this specific place home.

Similarly, Cathy noted, "if there wasn't so [many] shootings, violence, and drive-bys then there could be a possibility of it becoming home," offering a conditional version of the same sentiment.

It becomes quite clear that these reflections demonstrate that belonging is not only emotional, but also structural. The neighbourhood characteristics described by these residents imbibe carceral logics, hindering the development of social ties and reinforcing isolation. For Miss

Neo, considering her neighbourhood as home would signify resignation, a form of defeat, which is why she mobilizes disengagement as a strategy of self- preservation.

This pattern of social fragmentation is closely linked to class-based non-belonging, operating as a condition of Black worldlessness. Belonging, here, exists in diminished and constrained forms– positioned outside of the normative structures of society that denies full social, political, and existential belonging. As these narratives illustrate, residents Quietly Holding Ground can experience a fractured or partial sense of belonging shaped by race, class, and geography. This distinction is critical: while residents may share conditions of confinement, their interpretations and responses differ and should not be universalized. As such, statements about Black worldlessness must be qualified, they *can* reflect disconnection, internalization, and constraint, but these manifestations vary.

In these neighbourhoods, residents are constantly catching their breath—managing survival rather than building attachment. The result is a sense of alienation that seeps into how residents perceive their own futures. Internalization of stigma and disconnection does not just affect how residents feel in the present; it also constrains how they imagine their futures beyond the current conditions of Black worldlessness. For these residents, the aspiration to overcome the spatialized criminalization of their neighbourhoods feels increasingly out of reach. The tension between what is possible and what feels impossible defines their everyday reality. This tension, between constraint and imagined escape, structures how residents hold space between resignation and hope. It is this tension that will guide the discussion in the following sections.

3. Overcoming racializing structures as im/possible

When examining how Black residents navigate the condition of Black worldlessness, it becomes clear that they struggle on multiple fronts, both internally and externally. Often resigned to submissive strategies or Quiet endurance, the prospect of overcoming racializing structures of Black worldlessness, to many, is often described as insurmountable.

When asked, what are the biggest factors that make it hard to reach your goals? Miss Neo responded with a single word: *opportunities*. She described how anti-Black racism, and its ordering systems stifled her growth and promotion opportunities at her workplace, despite years of experience and demonstrated leadership.

> So, a lot of the talk has been happening around our office. Black people and people of color who have applied for supervisory positions and have been with the company for years, like they know their staff, they've trained staff, they've been on advisory committees, and they've applied for supervisory positions haven't gotten it. But yet someone [white] who's been with the company or has been in an acting supervisor role for maybe five years, they've gotten positions as a supervisor, as opposed to these people who have been with the company for 35 years, 20 or 17 years. [...] So it's just in terms of my success in my society in general. If I'm not able to make the income that I want to make. I don't see [my goals] improving very much. I don't see myself represented in my employment, in my place of employment. I don't see myself represented anywhere else other than on the frontlines.

For Miss Neo, systemic anti-Black racism in the workplace, not just within the geography of her neighbourhood, functions as an extension of Black worldlessness, stifling her goals and aspirations and reproducing a sense of entrapment. Throughout the interview, Miss Neo uses the word “stuck” four times, signaling the holding pattern of anti-Black racism. In this way, Black worldlessness functions not only as a spatial condition, but as a system of confinement that extends across institutions and structures of opportunity.

Cathy recounts her neighbourhood experience stating,

> There's just too much happening. The violence, the traffic, the noise, just everything. I hate it. I hate it. Like right now, this construction is going on. Nothing is supposed to start until 7am but sometimes they start at 5am. I'm sick and tired of calling the city. They just don't care. I mean, I'm sure they assume that people in the neighborhood are uneducated, they don't complain so they start at 5 am and it's so loud. I'm so tired of calling the city. Like when I call the city I'm not even sure if the agent is actually escalating my concern so I just stopped you know [...] the neighborhood is Lawrence Heights right? They don't care. It makes me feel upset. It makes me feel, you know, I'm not valued. I mean, if you call housing, they will just tell you to call the city, right? so it kinda ends there.

Shaped by race and class, Cathy's response signals the operation of organized abandonment, rightlessness and marginalization of her neighbourhood, key dimensions of Black worldlessness. As Kraus and Park (2014) argue, subjective perceptions of lower social class can diminish self-worth, especially when individuals are acutely aware of their subordinate position. This dynamic is further supported by Twenge and Campbell (2002), who found a correlation between perceived low social class and diminished self-esteem. For residents like Cathy, such structural hierarchies do not simply produce material deprivation but also erode forms of self-affirmation and curtail the imaginative capacities required to reclaim Black life and pursue Black aliveness within racialized geographies.

When asked how her life might improve internally if she moved to the suburbs or beyond the Greater Toronto Area, Cathy replied, "probably feel maybe valued more of a human being. I would feel like maybe these people are not judging me based on where I live." The desire to feel valued as a human being reflects a longing to exit the symbolic and material economies of dehumanization mapped onto her current neighbourhood. Residential mobility here emerges as a potential pathway to the genre of "Human"—a remaking of beingness that remains tenuous, if not unreachable. Cathy's experience highlights how racialized neighbourhoods impose scripts of disposability, scripting Black life outside the normative bounds of humanity. These spaces, or

"dead zones," are etched with racial exclusion and unlivability, becoming sites through which surveillance is practiced, narrated, and enacted.

Cathy further details how such experiences of confinement are reinforced through interactions with building management stating,

> Back in the day when you call them, they would literally put the key in the door and open the door without like any 24-hour notice, no consent or nothing but now they do. But I mean, stuff like that makes you feel like you're worthless. You know, like, the only reason why its like this is because I'm poor.

The absence of consent experienced here as "forced entry" into the private world of her apartment, illustrates how the private domain of the home is also subject to carceral logics. These repeated incursions, experiences of rightlessness, and territorial stigmatization, inscribe feelings of worthlessness and powerlessness. Chronic disinvestment, deferred maintenance, and limited institutional accountability, reinforce the sense that residents are unworthy of care or rights. While many residents throughout this project expressed appreciation for the affordability of their housing, such sentiments were overwhelmed by the structural limitations that define their everyday lives. These conditions that Black people live in and are produced by, makes clear the difficulty of transcending these racializing structures. For residents Quietly Holding Ground, both their internal agentive capacity and external resourcing are constrained. As Cathy states, "if I had a decent income I would not be living here, right?"

Both Cathy and Miss Neo describe the immense power racializing structures have in shaping not only the material conditions of Black life, but the capacity to envision and pursue a future otherwise. Their accounts demonstrate how anti-Black racism, poverty, and organized abandonment reconfigure the boundaries of possibility. Within the carcerality of Black worldlessness, these structures hold residents in space. Their neighbourhoods become graveyards, not only of opportunity but of dreams. The articulation of both impossibility and possibility, as

shaped by social conditions, self-perception, and material deprivation, offers a critical framework for understanding the experiences of those Quietly Holding Ground. The *im/possible* captures the tension between the Quiet possibilities of overcoming the racializing structures embedded in their neighbourhoods and the conditions of impossibility that hold Black residents in space. This tension is subtly present in the reflections of both Miss Neo and Cathy. Miss Neo, despite feeling stalled by systemic racism in her workplace, continues to leverage her experience and pursue advancement, refusing to relinquish ambition entirely. Cathy, though deeply disillusioned with her current living conditions, articulates a vision of herself as more human, more valued, in a different space, an act of imagination that gestures toward livability beyond confinement. These narratives, though marked by frustration and resignation, contain within them latent expressions of hope and desire for something otherwise. As will be elaborated throughout the analytical chapters, each category of experience differs in how the impossible and the possible are held together, how they are lived, resisted, or resigned to. It is this tension that defines the *im/possibilities* of Black worldlessness, and it is along this spectrum that Black residents move—not as fixed types, but as subjects negotiating the contradictory conditions of survival, endurance, and the fragile pursuit of hope.

The Social Self, Resources of Refusal, The Quiet & Self-Creation

The convergence of living in stigmatized neighbourhoods, internalizing degradation, and navigating eroded social and internal resourcing, severely weakens the capacity to self-creation among Black residents Quietly Holding Ground in their racialized neighbourhoods. It would be misleading to regard those Quietly Holding Ground as a uniform category of experience with a single set of shared experiences. These residents who are linked by a common set of structural conditions and affective experiences, in minute forms produce a variety of responses to the

carcerality of Black worldlessness. Different responses are shaped by individuals' life paths, ages, duration of residence, gender, and historical memories. These residents illustrate sentiments of guilt and shame that allow me to draw out the parallels and intersections creating this analytical grouping. Examining the interplay between the social self, their positioning on the internal-external continuum of Black worldlessness and capacity for self-creation provides insight into the experiential life of Black residents navigating Black worldlessness.

A negative self-concept, birthed from internalized racializing constructions of their neighbourhoods, fractures the confidence and diminishes the agency of those Quietly Holding Ground. Herbert Mead's (1934) sociological framework *Theory of Self* explores the formation and development of individual identity distinguishing between the "I" and the "Me" in the social development of the self through social interaction. In the context of these residents, the "Me", formed through social interactions, responds to others' opinions about oneself by way of internalizing external opinions as internal feelings of oneself. In this condition of possibility, the racialized social self consumes the personal self (the "I"), reinforcing racialized limitations as internal constraints. In this process, those Quietly Holding Ground curate the grounds through which they become internally confined and resign to the stigma of their neighbourhoods, which manifests in holding negative internal feelings. This was evident in Miss Neo's statement of being a "have not" because "we're all in the same boat because we're all financially struggling, right? [...] you're poor just like me too. <Laugh> [...] we'll just be poor together." Her words reflect a resignation to her neighbourhood as fate, not simply a condition. Such internalization fractures the "I", the space of self-authorship. Social isolation, shame, and protective behaviors (such as limiting guests or sending children to live elsewhere) deplete internal and external reserves. Their capacity

to dream differently becomes compromised. The external racializing structures of oppression become hyper-internalized, disrupting their agency, defined as the capacity to self-create.

Throughout the interviews, it was apparent that there were limited mitigating factors available to alleviate the effects of Black worldlessness in the lives of these residents. What I term, *resources of refusal*, *survival/protective strategies*, are truncated for these residents. I define resources of refusal as insulating barriers (social and internal) against racializing structures of oppression that equip residents with the tools and resources to reject valuations of Blackness that do not align with their self-perception. As Simpson (2016) poetically articulates,

> refusal holds on to a truth, structures this truth as stance through time, as its own structure and comingling with the force of presumed and inevitable disappearance and operates as the revenge of consent—the consent to these conditions, to the interpretation that this was fair, and the ongoing sense that this is all over with (p.330).

Simpson, although making this statement in the context of Indigenous dispossession, speaks to a cognizance of differing social and historical facts that manifests a deep awareness of self. The capacity to lean into refusals, into one's own structure of truth pushes against the consent to the conditions, the deep inequities of structures of oppression mapped out for Black life. Without these resources of refusal, Black residents become more vulnerable to internalizing Black worldlessness, gradually eroding, though not entirely, Black aliveness. For many of these residents, however, that truth is hard to hold. Yet even within these depleted conditions, Black residents still carve pathways vis-a-vi the Quiet.

Protective strategies aimed at buffering negative racializing evaluations of their neighbourhoods seem to be fleeting for these residents. In comparison to the category of experiences that will be presented in the following chapters, these residents particularly struggle

the most with drawing on both internal and external resources to navigate the condition of Black worldlessness in their communities. As explored earlier, these residents exemplify this struggle by isolating themselves from their communities, establishing a shield from the public sphere, and expressing a sense of shame regarding their geographies. This isolation negatively impacts their experience in their neighbourhoods. In hopes of taking measures to protect their children, these residents either temporarily send their children to relatives outside of their neighbourhoods or they go to great lengths to restrict visitors into their home, eroding their social connections, networks, and overall health which further marginalizes them. In the storehouse of protective resources that assist Black residents in navigating the complexities of their environments, their internal and external reserves are significantly depleted.

According to Helliwell and Putman (2005) social capital, as measured by the strength of family, neighbourhood, religious and community ties, supports physical health and subjective well-being. People who have close friends and confidants, friendly neighbours, and supportive coworkers are less likely to experience low self-esteem. More recently, a common finding from research on the correlates of life satisfaction discovered that subjective well-being is best predicted by the breadth and depth of one's social connections (p. 437). For those Quietly Holding Ground, external resources like family ties, faith, and community involvement are strained, directly affecting their subjective well-being alongside their ability to envision alternative worlds for themselves. The challenge to accumulate both internal and external resources of refusal, hinders the safeguarding of the social self. The capillaries of Black worldlessness thus infiltrates the inner life of Black residents, fosters a debilitating and palpable construction of the social self that interrupts the possibilities of Black aliveness.

Despite this, however, Black people have always drawn from a deep reservoir of interior resources that propels the will to survive, thrive, and resist (Hartman, 2019; Newton, 2009; Sharpe, 2016). This reservoir takes shape as the Quiet. The Quiet or the expressiveness of the interior as articulated by Kevin Quashie (2012), is a sensibility of being that is concerned with the interiority of Black life. Offered against the singular stereotypical framework of Black life as a caricature of racial subjectivity understood only through a vocabulary of death, publicness, defiance, and resistance, the Quiet offers us another way of reading Black life that welcomes the unexpected to be possible. Functioning as a resource of refusal, the Quiet emerges as the primary tool used by Black residents to navigate the challenges of Black worldlessness. The Quiet appears to serve as the conduit through which residents can carve out pockets of self-creation. Faced with the apparent impossibility of freedom, at first glance it may seem that those navigating this condition of futurity completely surrender to the conditions of Black worldlessness. We see this in Miss Neo's response to affirming herself in her neighborhood stating, "I really don't affirm myself in this [...] I don't interact with anybody. I don't do anything socially with anybody in this neighbourhood." Despite developing a negative internalized social self, and obstacles to self-creation in their neighbourhoods, Black residents survive by insisting on livability. They dream and thus carve out minute pathways through Black worldlessness. In the face of prohibitions that deny Black dignity, those Quietly Holding Ground refuse to succumb to the "exploitation that kills the spirit and condemns one to a living death" (Newton, 1973, p.7). The desire to live with hope and dignity in the face of death is what makes this kind of expressiveness revolutionary and self-affirmative.

In Cornel West's Race Matters (1994), he asserts "the major enemy of [B]lack survival [...] is loss of hope and absence of meaning" (p. 23). Despite the weight of Black worldlessness, the interviews made one thing clear; those Quietly Holding Ground carve out pathways using the

Quiet. As I was listening to the interviews, the palpable despondency and hopelessness led me to ask, *what keeps these residents alive?* I could not quite identify it, as the language of resistance I found overdetermined the capaciousness of Black life. Similarly, these residents were sharing their pathways through Black worldlessness in spite of it not because of it. Something else was happening that was being overwhelmed by the language resistance. However, it was not until I read Quashie's *The Sovereignty of Quiet: Beyond Resistance in Black Culture* that I could name it. What kept these residents alive was a meditation on the interiority, an exploration of the desires of their inner lives beyond the language of resistance and public expression.

Hence the adoption of the concept of the Quiet, as an interpretative tool to make legible the material reality of Black life "in the midst of so much death [physically, socially and figuratively]" (Sharpe, 2016, p.17). Whilst I understand the conditions of Black beingness, the terribleness of Black worldlessness, and anti-black perpetuity, these residents illustrate the fact that Black residents do not simply or only live in subjection–these conditions are not total. The Quiet provides an alternative lens through which to interpret the life experiences of these residents that make possible a pathway to freedom. It compels us to explore capacities outside of external suppositions of identity for an interiority of aliveness, an inescapable state of being, that allows ambitions, desires, hungers, dreams, fear and all that the interior holds to be expressed, it is in the Quiet where Black dignity finds restoration.

For those Quietly Holding Ground, a route through Black worldlessness is made possible by tapping into one's inner life, specifically the ambitions and desires of the interior. Aliveness is not absent but constrained. Ambitions and desires illustrate a practice of knowing and refusal of a complete Black life in both the present and the future. The Quiet can be understood as:

(1) the source of human action where anything we do is shaped by the range of desires and capacities of our inner life (Quashie, 2012, p.8);

(2) a storehouse that can be full, it could be empty, it could be refilled. It contains resources used in the self-creation of aliveness;

(3) as a storehouse of experiential resources that have been accumulated over time;

(4) a domain of contemplation where Black people engage in contemplation; in a range of feelings and thoughts and reflect on the world.

It is important to note that "the interior is not unconnected to the world of things, nor is it an exact antonym of the exterior. It has its own inexpressible integrity, and it is a stay against the social world (p.21)." For these residents mobilizing a poor internalized self-concept and limited social resources, the Quiet, the "inner reservoir of thoughts, feelings, desires, fears, ambitions that shape a human self" become the default resource that residents of this analytical category mobilize as a mechanism through which self-creation can be produced (p. 21).

Positive self-talk, an expression of the interior, is a resource used by these residents against the dominance of the social world. Cathy explains, "I tell myself. Listen, I'm not a bad person. I've never broken the law. I mean, I'm just here because of my situation and it's going to get better. And I'm gonna be outta here."

Through affirming positive self-talk, Cathy's range of desires and capacities surface. Cathy's personal agency illustrates that her life is more than familiar characterizations of victimhood by triumph over racism. Sure, the threat and violence of racism is part of her story, but her positive self-talk invites us to understand her inner dialogue in a familiar yet unknowable manner. Cathy charts a course through the challenges of Black worldlessness, allowing room for the unexpected, to *move out,* to be possible. Here focusing on the interior, the aspiration of residential mobility operates as a mechanism aligned

with her desires and ambitions, reawakening the possibilities of Black aliveness. In dreaming of residential mobility, this idea offers her the capacity to *"feel valued [and] more of a human being,"* where she is not judged based on where she lives. Residential mobility becomes the aspirational gateway to becoming more valued as a human being–to being released from the shackles of geographical devalourization that dictates how Black residents are treated and understood. For Cathy, the aspiration of moving is still the inner desire, "the dream," but as she says, "it's hard. I mean, like it's hard. It's hard. To be positive in an environment like this. It's, it's hard."

Despite Cathy's experience in her neighbourhood, she contends that as a Black person (referring to younger people) living in her neighbourhood, it is possible to reach one's goals and aspirations in life. She states,

> For sure, if you put your mind to it. For sure. I mean, I know that discrimination is out there. I mean, systemic racism and stuff like that. But if you put your mind to it. You can do anything. So, I tell my boys. Keep in mind. You know, we live in Canada and nothing's perfect [...] try, give it 100 percent [...] Like being a Black person you have to work 20 times harder than any other colored or white person. That goes across the board even for work. You know what I mean, like anywhere. You have to always do a little bit more than, for example, white people, you know?

For Miss Neo, it's about empowering her kids. She states,

> You know, I encourage my kids. So, you know, like my daughter and I, my children, I talk to them about investments. I talk to them about, you know, giving them the education that I didn't have. So [...] we'll go to the bank, we'll make appointments and speak to a financial advisor. I'll talk to them about the difference in home ownership versus renting and the benefits of that. And it's like, 'I don't want you to rent a house because look at what I'm going through.'

For Miss Neo, dignity takes form in financial literacy lessons with her children. These intimate acts of planning, imagining, and aspiring represent alternative value systems anchored in the interior, not in external validation. The Quiet is a deep assertion of humanity in the face of social death. It is both the site and method of self-creation. The Quiet functions as the source of

human agency, as a reminder that these residents have capacities beyond the public face of stereotype and limited imagination; that they have an interiority that holds all that is. The leakage of the interior during these interviews were evident and compels us to see the ways that self-creation is remade through the Quiet. The interior asserts a humanity, an abundance in the face of Black death. The unboundness of Black worldlessness is what makes living in these neighbourhoods interrupt the possibilities of Black aliveness. However, surrendering to one's interiority, where there is no speaking to or against an audience is what foregrounds an aesthetic of Black aliveness, of self-creation. Responses from these residents assert a self-agency, an affirmation of self in spite of the climate of Black worldlessness. When still–there is a heightened awareness of their interiority, a loveliness that holds the reservoir of human complexity that is deep inside.

In the face of Black worldlessness, these residents have interstices and points of slippage that allowed for minute forms, of an aliveness that is. An aliveness that propels them into a manner of existence open to the tussle of being and becoming. Black aliveness thus is always possible even in the "impossible." Self-creation through the Quiet, allows for pockets of aliveness to exist within Black worldlessness. As hooks (1995) contends, "internalization of victimization renders Black folks powerless, unable to assert agency on our behalf. When we embrace victimization, we surrender our rage" (p. 19) and what these residents illustrate is that they have not fully internalized the script of negative evaluations of their neighbourhoods and thus have not fully surrendered their rage. The mere act of being alive compels Black residents to engage in self-creation, which refers to the process through which individuals actively shape and define their own identities, values, and destinies that support pathways of aliveness.

For these residents, the thin boundary between the social self and personal, results in a diminished capacity to resist internalizing negative racializing judgements about self. This limitation leads to limited pathways of self-creation. The Quiet, however, representing the expressiveness of the interiority encompassing the full range of one's inner life, becomes a powerful force, and source of Black self-creation and ultimately aliveness. It compels Black residents to cultivate positive activities, such as organizing drum circles on Sundays in a park, or passing on generational knowledge about investments and dreams, both mentioned in the interview by Miss Neo. These resources of refusal, housed in the Quiet, act as a buffer between neighbourhood constructions and its internalization of self, functioning as an insulating mechanism. This thus creates more place for residents Quietly Holding Ground to recreate their sense of self on their own terms, ultimately attaining Black aliveness in their racialized neighbourhoods.

This chapter seeks to make real and visible the experiences of Black residents involuntarily *held* in their neighbourhoods by the internal and external constraints of Black worldlessness. My intervention in this dissertation will demonstrate how the Black residents I engage with although conditioned by, do not simply resign to racializing and carceral structures fielding their lives nor do they simply "resist" as resistance fails to "characterize the totality of Black expressiveness", but rather offer insights into the interior narratives of Black residents who carve out as pathways through Black worldlessness. The Quiet, the reservoir of human action, provides the *energy, desire, and "the edges of all humanness one has"* to act–to envision and materialize a world and future otherwise (Quashie, 2012, p. 21). This is not to say that these residents are fixed in these geographies, as these experiences are not static and mobility is possible between the groups. Rather, I offer a snapshot of the envisioning of their futurities. These residents should be thought

of as having the ability to move in between various analytical futures. When asked, how do you affirm yourself or encourage positive feelings in your neighbourhood? Cathy states, “personally, I'm only here for the next three and a half years, four years, and I'm out. But it's hard. It's hard. It's hard. It’s hard being positive in an environment like this.” Whether Cathy occupies the analytical designation of those *Moving Ground,* who see futures beyond Black worldlessness or creates a transfigurative future, *Making Ground* in her neighbourhood, her words illustrate her will to not only survive but to thrive, indicating the fluidity of her subjectivity and active refusal of colonial meanings that have been scripted onto Black geographies, bodies, and futurities. Chapter 5 will engage with the next category of experiences, Black residents *Moving Ground*, exploring those who see clear futures beyond Black worldlessness. A closer engagement of these narratives will illustrate the various ways that Black residents envision their futurities while conceptually developing the Quiet as a means of self-creation, journeying through their lived experiences and their carving of pathways through Black worldlessness.

Chapter VI

Moving Ground: Futurities Beyond the Carcerality of Black Worldlessness

This chapter unearths a category of experience among many Black residents navigating the conditions of racialized space, who have an orientation– a yearning, a quiet maneuvering toward elsewhere. While involuntarily held in their racialized neighborhoods due to the external constraints of Black worldlessness, their experience reflects a generative tension. They do not internalize the pathologization of their neighbourhoods, but instead mobilize a quiet, protective agency rooted in self-definition and refusal that provides a sustained orientation toward futurity beyond their neighbourhoods that has not yet resulted in departure. It is an interior recalibration that marks the beginning of movement—toward self-determined lives, toward futures not yet secured, but deeply longed for. This is the essence of *Moving Ground.*

The need that surfaces here is the imperative to recognize residents who dwell in the interstices of Black worldlessness and imagined futurity. They are neither fully embedded in the permanence of racialized carcerality, nor entirely dislodged from it. Rather, their experiences are defined by what Fred Moten (2003) might call "the blur of the almost", a suspended state in which the dream of freedom is carried inward, even when material constraints remain. Their lives index the tension between rootedness and flight, safety and desire, belonging and the unknown. To interpret Moving Ground solely as precarity or indecision would be to miss the nuance. These residents are already on the move, psychically, emotionally, spiritually. Their desires exceed the logics of containment, yet they remain enmeshed in space. They strategize, imagine, and plan, not only as acts of resistance, but as forms of Black aliveness, oriented toward what might be. Their lives offer a proposition; that Black futurity often begins within, and beyond this world, in larger existential and spiritual frameworks, long before bounds of racialized space. This chapter attends to the experiential category of Moving Ground. It centers the narratives of residents who carry the

weight of both constraint and imagination, who live in neighbourhoods marked by abandonment but refuse to be fully held by them. Moving Ground signals a mode of becoming, one defined by hope, interior labor, and the slow, steady work of positioning oneself toward possibility. These are lives in motion, not yet elsewhere, but not fully placed. And it is within this flux that the pathways through Black worldlessness begin to shift, and the future quietly, insistently, begins to form.

This chapter begins by exploring the narratives of Black residents living in Brampton Flowertown, Dixie, Downtown Brampton, Elms-Old Rexdale, Malvern, Mount Olive-Silverstone Jamestown, and Springdale, who dream of futurities beyond the carcerality of Black worldlessness, mapping out how they come to develop an orientation towards Black livability. Akin to the *Quietly Holding Ground,* this category of experience referred to as *Moving Ground* emerged from my data. Moving Ground refers to Black residents who, while involuntarily positioned within racialized neighbourhoods due to the external constraints of Black worldlessness, cultivate an interior life that resists the imposed meanings of their surroundings. Drawing from accumulated resources, they buffer their social selves against the injurious scripts of racialized space. Through the storehouse of the Quiet, they transform space into place, articulating futurities grounded in dignity, care, and the refusal to be overdetermined by the structures that confine them. Their desire to move beyond these boundaries is reflected in the creation of new meanings, attachments, and a sustained orientation toward futurity, both within and beyond the contours of Black worldlessness.

Ghettoization and pathologized constructions of their neighbourhoods impact the ways they feel about living in their neighbourhoods, however, unlike those who Quietly Hold Ground, these residents do not absorb the negative representations of their neighbourhoods into their social self. Instead, they withhold the social self from the racializing structures of oppression; and in doing so, have developed mechanisms and accumulated resources of refusal that enable them to

find livability in their neighbourhoods. The operating logic that attempts to deny Black livability is met with a subjectivity that "has its own ineffable integrity" and "stay against the social world" (Quashie, 2012, p. 21), interrupting the calculus and prescriptions of containment insisting on the possibility of otherwise.

While this chapter draws primarily on participants living in neighborhoods below the municipal index threshold, three participants (Alys, Zainab, and Tyler) live in areas ranked as having significantly higher structural advantage. Rather than treating their narratives as statistical anomalies, this chapter incorporates their insights to challenge the assumption that geographic advantage translates into racial safety or livability for Black residents. Their experiences, particularly in areas like Springdale and Dixie, highlight the limitations of spatialized metrics in capturing the nuances of anti-Blackness and the lived realities of Black worldlessness.

Distinctive properties

In narrating the lived experiences of those I categorize as *Moving Ground*; residents living in Brampton Flowertown, Dixie, Downtown Brampton, Elms-Old Rexdale, Malvern, Mount Olive-Silverstone Jamestown, and Springdale. These interviews reveal four salient themes that characterize this mode of inhabiting and interpreting their neighbourhoods.

1) Normalizing discourse/positive self-concept

2) Strong community network

3) Cosmology beyond Black worldlessness

4) Overcoming racializing structures as possible

1. Normalizing Discourse/ Positive self-concept

As defined by Alvarez and Ruiz-Tagle (2024), a normalizing discourse refers to a way of framing that seeks to lessen the perceived exceptionalism or stigma as it pertains to

neighbourhoods or geographical spaces by emphasizing its ordinariness or similarity to other neighbourhoods. This discourse works to soften harsh stigmatized representations without entirely denying the existence of the challenges, aiming instead to restore a more balanced depiction of the neighborhood within a broader normalized framework of social understanding. For those Moving Ground, they possess a positive, balanced self-concept that is not governed by the negative racializing evaluations of their neighbourhoods. Instead, they have cultivated a complex understanding of self that does not merely succumb to internalization, whilst adopting a normalizing discourse that contests representations of their neighbourhoods. Without denying the foci of insecurity, these residents assert that the daily life in their neighbourhoods is no different from that in other areas, contending that the media "paints" exaggerated versions of Black life in racialized geographies (Alvarez and Ruiz-Tagle, 2022).

Zuly, an Elms-Old Rexdale resident, illustrates this discordance,

> Yes, they [community members] are good people. They are friendly, they will talk to you. It's like a community. If you are walking around, we'll talk to you. We know each other. In my neighbourhood, [people] know who you are and when they see you they will talk to you even if they haven't seen you for a long time. Even if they see your kids they will talk to your kids [...] The negative [aspect of this neighbourhood] is just the way it's painted. To me, I don't see it as a low-income area, but it's painted that way because we have government housing around us. So, it's just like, 'Oh there's a lot of gang issues there'. 'The kinds of houses near your apartment are crazy' and those kinds of stuff. The police are always patrolling, and I believe it's because of the way it's painted.

A normalizing discourse, perhaps unconsciously, is a strategy adopted by these residents as a means of self-preservation enabling these residents to maintain a more positive self-concept (Alvarez and Ruiz-Tagle, 2022). This normalizing discourse serves as a medium through which extreme negative narratives are rejected in favour of a more equitable and accurate portrayal of their neighbourhood (Alvarez and Ruiz-Tagle 2022; August, 2014). This discourse functions as a

protective mechanism, whether intentional or not, against the complete internalization of stigma in their racialized neighbourhoods. The protection or "insulation" that is produced from the normalizing discourse simultaneously obstructs the internalization of negative neighbourhood evaluations whilst creating interstices that allow the desires and interior expressions of Black life to materialize, opening up avenues for envisioned futures beyond Black worldlessness. When asked, do these perceptions impact the way you see yourself? Mary, a Rockcliffe-Smythe resident, contends,

> A little, yeah, not in the way I see myself, but in the way I feel. I feel like sometimes because I'm a Black woman or live in these types of neighbourhoods, I'm always perceived as a certain type. Even with going for a higher position and job I'm perceived as not the "right fit." So, like the thing is, I know myself, I try to say you know what? I can't let what people think of me, because I live here or whatever, bother me because I know what type of person I am. I know how I grew up. I know what my morals are, you know, so that's how I try to look at it.

For Mary, her value system and engagement with a normalizing discourse serves as protective factors that help mitigate the internalization of negative tropes associated with her neighbourhood. Even with the presence of factors that would make her susceptible to the internalization of Black worldlessness, such as organized abandonment and systemic racism, there is a deliberate posture of self-awareness and personal dignity. This expressiveness of her interiority enables her to resist the internalization of Black worldlessness and sets her experience apart from those quietly holding ground.

Similarly, Kasey, a Downtown Brampton resident, states,

> I'm not conforming to cops or what others perceive of the area. I'm not changing that for no one. I think it's just with all my experiences put together, right? […] I have to push into myself because I have the opportunity in front of me to be the best person I can be. So that's why now I feel so confident to do everything, but now it's working on myself with my past and everything that I went through.

Alongside mobilizing a normalizing discourse, expressing sensibilities of the interiority e.g., self-acceptance, resilience, confidence, serves as a grounding force in the conceptualization of self that is not easily uprooted. Retention of the social self is not reduced to worldlessness by the negative views of how others see them, nor do the structures of worldlessness determine their dreams. For these residents, they retain their inner hopes of residential mobility that is grounded in a desire for betterment–or "a state of being that that moves beyond the logics of an anti-Black world" (Quashie, 2021, p. 142). Retention of a positive social self helps them to make ground. Here, "mobility" is not just moving out of neighbourhoods; it is fastened to the procurement of a different future; mobility between the present and the future. Taken together, physical mobility and dreaming of a better place are combined as the constituting elements of their aliveness. Even in the environmental condition of infertile grounds, these residents remain steadfast to an aliveness of their own making.

Similarly, Duwane repeatedly states that while stereotypes about his neighbourhood exist (especially from media, police, and insurance companies), he does not internalize them. He says, "if you believe who you are and you're strong, it doesn't damage you." Duwane demonstrates confidence, an internal foundation that is not easily shaken by external judgements even when faced with external hardships (i.e., racial profiling by police). Although he recognizes systemic unfairness, he does not view himself as powerless. He believes in working hard, respecting others, and maintaining integrity as keys to success, reflecting internal stability rather than dependence on external validation. Duwane measures his personal success by the success of his children (i.e., attaining a university education, maintaining a good direction in life) illustrating a clear sense of his values and life goals.

Residents Moving Ground feel themselves to be capable of betterment but stifled by external structures that hinder them from moving out. They locate the cause of their plight in external factors (i.e., systemic racism), however, they have the fortitude to mobilize foreseeable change in their lives. Unlike those *Quietly Holding Ground*, personal limitations are not conceived as personal deficits or unactionable, nor is Black worldlessness internally directed. Rather, they see their predicament of being positioned in their neighborhoods as a structural deficit that impacts the daily happenings of their lives, and which they have the willpower to overcome.

2. Sense of Community Network

A significant theme that arises with these residents, despite the top-down discourse of "danger" is the presence of meaningful social connections in their neighbourhoods, which promote a sense of connectivity and belonging. The interviews with these residents reveal that, "in spite of its physical deterioration and nefarious reputation, residents value their dwelling place for anchoring webs of friendship and reciprocal support [...]. The housing complex remains a communal place bathed in shared emotions and joint meanings, supported by practices and institutions of mutuality instead of an indifference space of mere survival and relentless contest" (Wacquant et al., 2014, p. 1277). Social bonds, as described by Hirschi (2017), consist of four interconnected elements: attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief. Attachment refers to the strength of bonds and relationships within an individual's social environment, which can include others and institutions. Commitment reflects the level of dedication invested in conventional goals. Involvement describes active involvement in conventional activities, and belief pertains to adherence to conventional norms. While Hirschi's (2017) work primarily focuses on explaining how variations in social bonding influence delinquency at the individual and group levels, reworking his theorization of social bonds helps to illuminate the process and maintenance

of social bonds in racialized communities. Throughout my interviews, Hirschi's (2017) components of social bonds emerged as critical elements that support Black residents in navigating the challenges of Black worldlessness.

Attachment & Commitment

When asked, how do you affirm yourself or navigate through the negative experiences in your neighbourhood?

Samuel, a Malvern resident, asserts, "I was just born into that. So it's the cards I was dealt. I [am] just using them. And "I got good people around me." Samuel frames his negative neighbourhood experiences as inevitable, but mitigated by the support of "good people around [him]." Samuel emphasizes that the longstanding bonds with friends, some whom he has known since kindergarten or high school, have been crucial in grounding and affirming him within his neighbourhood. And in doing so, these relationships have fostered a sense of commitment and dedication to his community. Samuel continues,

> I feel responsible. I feel a lot of responsibility, lot, a lot, a lot. Cause I still know a lot of the people, a lot of the younger kids, their siblings are older now from [Empringham[11]]. Their siblings are my peers, and I know them from there so it's like I'm from there. When I see them, I could either try to act hard or I could put them on a game. Like, yo, I could be that person that steers them away from it. That's what I really try to do. As I've gotten older, even from high school, I've always been a volunteer, community worker; and then even as an artist, I could make a different type of music. I could make hood music, which I don't. I chose intently. Like I chose, like extremely, extremely intensely to make something that's just completely left. So, when they see that it's like, oh, I know him. like, he's, my OG. But like, he's not doing what these guys are doing, but he's from here [Empringham]. Especially when they go home and they're by themselves, they're going to say if he's making it by doing this, then I don't have to go and do that.

[11] Empringham is a neighbourhood located in Malvern East in the northeastern part of Scarborough, Ontario, Canada.

Through his words and actions, Samuel demonstrates a profound commitment to steering younger generations away from criminogenic paths, using his agency to inspire and create pathways of differing futurities for the youth.

Like Samuel, Zuly also finds affirmation through relational ties in her neighbourhood, though her emphasis is less on mentorship and more on the emotional bonds and mutual care. When asked about the ways her neighbourhood benefits her, Zuly explains,

> I will say emotionally. I believe they're [neighbours] really helpful. Like if you look at the times of emergency, if you need anything, knock on the door, [and my neighbours] would help out 100%. And we know each other [...] The way that we talk to each other, we have this understanding that we are neighbours. We are together in times of need, or in case of anything. Apart from two families, the rest are sweethearts [...] on my floor, everybody has lived here it's more than 10 years, except for maybe two or three families who just came in maybe three-four years ago, but the rest, we've seen our kids growing up together.

Zuly describes a strong sense of attachment and commitment within her community, where long-term relationships and mutual support are the norms. The shared history, collective care, and social worth among neighbors provide emotional support and a sense of security, reinforcing the bonds that tie them together. Here, the essence of attachment and commitment as expressed by Samuel and Zuly highlight the importance of strong community ties in navigating and overcoming the conditions of Black worldlessness.

Involvement & Belief

Similarly, for these residents, involvement and belief emerges as salient features in maintaining their social bonds and fostering a sense of community. Rashid explains,

> My friend and I started a committee for Islamic help. And we have about 200 members in this neighbourhood. Some live on Jane, some the next building over others in Mississauga, all over. We started a community, but we don't take anything from the government. It's all from our pockets. We host barbecues in the summertime. If somebody dies in our community, we bury them with our own

> money. If it doesn't work, what they do is they go through the system, but right now we have paid off 13 burials.

When asked what prompted the formation of this initiative, Rashid responded,

> We want the people that we know together to protect the kids. And a future and give them the right environment, right? [...] Because in our religion, if somebody dies. You have to bury him. It's our responsibility. So, we decided to start with 10 people, now we are almost 250.

For Rashid, the sensibility to surrender to his dream of intergenerational prosperity, community betterment, and religious responsibility is animated through collective action and belief in shared values. These bonds, that are future-oriented, are not merely symbolic, they are materially enacted through mutual aid, belief in the legitimacy of community goals, and faith-based obligation.

Zainab, a Dixie resident, similarly emphasizes everyday form of community care,

> If I'm driving in my neighborhood and I see something is on the road, I will get up and pick it up. Here's another thing we do for each other. My next-door neighbour is Filipino. Every time it's garbage day, I used to roll over his bin. So now he's, he's taken it over. He'll bring my garbage bin back to my door when they've emptied it. Because he saw, I was doing it with my daughter and he said, you're teaching her very well. So yeah. It makes you feel like a good person. You wanna continue doing good, right? [...] it makes you have a good sense of community.

For Zainab, community emerges through reciprocal gestures and everyday acts of kindness that reinforce belonging and mutual recognition. These actions build a culture where care is expected and reciprocated, not because it is demanded, but because it is valued. Kasey, a Downtown Brampton resident, shares a similar perspective grounded in mentorship and giving back,

> I'm a community guy, so I like giving back to kids. I work for the Raptors. I work for a lot of different I guess organizations, you know, teaching kids how to play basketball, empowering kids. That's something I would love to do in the community because I look at, you know, going back to Jane and Finch and actually going back to the younger me that needed the person I am right now. To show some kids that

> are, whether it's in grade four or grade five or grade eight that, hey, listen, you can be in my position. You know what I mean? There's hope.

Together, these narratives illustrate how social bonds are sustained not only through shared space but through a shared belief and involvement in the generative potential of community. These residents do not need to be convinced of the value of community, it is lived, affirmed, and reproduced through acts of care, responsibility, and hope.

3. Cosmology (world) beyond Black worldlessness

Another pervasive theme that emerged from the interviews was the role of religious and spiritual identity in negotiating and addressing the racialized carceral structure of Black worldlessness. Spirituality holds deep significance in the daily lives of many African-descended peoples (Graham, 2016), and it often becomes a core framework for responding to stressful life events, adversity, and constraint. For those Moving Ground, religiosity and spirituality serve not only as coping mechanisms, but as expansive worldviews; frameworks through which they interpret their social conditions and assert their futures.

Residents frequently drew on faith as divine support, a pillar of strength and clarity, using it to anchor their sense of purpose and orientation toward the future. In describing how Black worldlessness makes her feel, Zainab asserts:

> I view myself in the eyes of my creator, so not really through their eyes (referencing white folks) [...] it's not my workplace that is in control of my sustenance. Building that relationship with God has shown me that he's in charge of my sustenance. So, building that relationship is more important to me now.

Similarly, Bobby, a resident of Brampton's Flowertown community, reflects,

> I truly believe that the perceptions don't really impact me because my mind is not focused on the perceptions or on their behaviours. I'm aware of them but I wanna focus on the more positive aspects of what I can do as an individual. If I could come

> in contact with somebody, how would I treat them? If they were to base the neighborhood on my behavior, what would I show them? I believe in God. My faith is in God. And I truly believe that regardless of where I am. I have to be an example because of my faith. Because of my belief in Christ. He saved my life. He rescued me.

Sara, also from Flowertown, echoes this tension between the felt effects of stigma and her internal grounding,

> It's weird because I kind of wanna say it doesn't impact me (the stereotypes of her neighbourhood), but for me to say that 'I would rather be somewhere else'. Yeah. It clearly does. This is where I feel like I'm stuck because to me at my core doesn't impact me—[...] My faith, my culture, the people that I allow to surround me, like in a close manner, like my friends and family [...] they impact me.

In these accounts, we see how residents cultivate a cosmology of self that exists beyond the racialized geographies that attempt to define them. Their connection to something larger, God, spirituality, energy, or purpose, provides not only comfort, but clarity and direction. This spiritual thread is further evoked in Samuel's journey revealing how spirituality also became a guiding tool to support navigating and overcoming the violence in his community, during his formative years.

> I've had to overcome a lot. You don't do that without being spiritual in a sense. [...] I read a lot in high school. Certain books. I feel like I stumbled across a lot of books in high school that a lot of people stumble across a lot later [in life]. Like I was reading 48 Laws of Power. And like, I actually, I hate that book. And in grade 11 or 12, I read The Celestine Prophecy. It just made me aware of things, certain things like the law of attraction, spiritual energy, and energy fields in high school, which was really good for me. It helped a lot, a lot. Because it made me realize that people didn't know how to manage their energy and that's why things were going on. That's why they were super reactive to things. I'm not extremely reactive to things. I'm extremely observant. I take my time before I make decisions.

Tyler, a Springdale resident, recounts how music, particularly, gospel, became a way to cope with the harms he experienced in the Peel educational system.

> So there's been times where I've felt worthless. And at the later stages of high school, that's where I realized I had to work hard for what I wanted. And that's when I got more focused on university and all these different courses and just bettering myself. And then that's when I got into singing and again with The Toronto Children's Concert and Performing Arts Company (TC3) and Hope Works, all these different moments that kind of shifted me away from all these negative sentiments that I was experiencing [...] I used to be spiritual and I used to be heavily into Bible scriptures and stuff like that but I had to kind of detach now. But I still listen to a lot of gospel music. I was even a part of the York University Gospel Choir at one point. I still do sing a lot but I feel like maybe that's my way of dealing with things, sometimes I even make up things on the spot. So, I think singing helps me get through things that are happening.

These narratives reveal two key dynamics: first, a cosmology of self, how residents understand themselves in relation to larger existential and spiritual frameworks, is described as existing beyond the cartographies of this world, and second, spirituality and religiosity serves as extended world-less resources that residents lean on to navigate Black worldlessness. Many of these residents embrace the idea of worldlessness not as lack, but as alignment with a higher existence. Rashid succinctly states, "I just say I belong to God; I don't belong to you. You're human beings. And one day everybody's gonna die anyway (laughs)."

Spirituality, tethered by a connection to the divine, is utilized to counteract Black worldlessness. It cultivates a sense of wakefulness or as Sharpe (2016) contends is, "a vigilant attendance to the needs of the living" (p.10). This wakefulness materializes for those *Moving Ground* as communal commitments, that transforms individuals and awakens communities, exemplified by Rashid's founding of the Toronto Islamic Community Fund, or Samuel's decision to create positive, affirming music for youths in his neighbourhood. This prompts us to consider the value of religious or spiritual belief as a psychological resource, one that anchors residents in a broader sense of purpose and moral agency. The frank embrace of their identities beyond Black worldlessness emerges from a deep attunement to a higher power. Here, the inner Black life of

those Moving Ground is *externalized to supersede the structures of Black worldlessness subjectively.*

While their religious practices are internally directed, they also create a protective buffer between the publicly stigmatized social selves and the inner life–carving out spaces for the full spectrum of Black expressions. This perspective enables residents to celebrate their full humanity, resist internalizing oppressive structures, viewing them as surmountable. Their cosmology then becomes a social reality, informing how they perceive and navigate their social environments, making these spaces livable while imagining Black worldlessness as conquerable –a testament to the efficacy of spirituality.

4. Conquering racializing structures as possible

When examining how Black residents navigate Black worldlessness, it becomes quite apparent that akin to those *Quietly Holding Ground*, they struggle, citing external constraints such as finances, anti-black racism, and employment for holding them *in space*. However, as limiting as they are, these residents do not experience racializing structures of oppression as insurmountable. Instead, these residents have been able to develop mechanisms and resources of refusal to find livability in their neighbourhoods and dream of a life otherwise developing unwavering determination to "get out" where the impossible becomes possible. Here, their challenges become a conquerable task.

When asked, what makes it possible to reach your goal? Bobby cites the confidence within him as the source.

> It's the confidence within me. I want to strive for that mastery. I don't believe that this neighbourhood is stopping me from doing that. I'll play my bass outside and people could stop and watch and say hi to me and listen [...] some will dance while I'm playing gospel.

For Bobby, Black worldlessness is a backdrop, it does not define the terrain of his aspiration. Instead, he cites his confidence and God; both expressions of the internal, as the vehicle that makes overcoming racializing structures as possible. Bobby's response recreates the landscape of what drives him –it is a poetic presentation of his intimate thoughts.

Similarly, Kasey echoes this sentiment, grounding his vision in past experiences and present responsibility, contending,

> I have to push [discipline, time management, communication] into myself because I have the opportunity in front of me to be the best person I can be. So that's why now I feel so confident to do everything, but now it's working on myself with my past and everything that I went through. It's not like I'm a kid that I grew up in Brampton and that's all I knew. I grew up from the fucking hood, the ghetto in Driftwood [...] there's no downtown there. You don't see the CN tower. You don't get to see Lake Shore. Golden Griddle was our favourite thing that we used to go and get, so that's who I grew up in and now see where I'm at now. I'm in control. But like, I need to make sure that kids can see that, but it's a lot of effort that you have to put in there. You know what I mean? So I have something called the McKasey way. The McKasey way isn't only finance. It's about budgeting. It's about a way of living life and enjoying life. Traveling, getting to know yourself [...] that's why I have so much confidence.

Kasey's past experiences and memories provide a gateway to social and eventually financial mobility. Resilience, cultivated in constrained spaces, has become a trait that prepares him to confront and transform the structures of Black worldlessness. Alongside the accumulated social resources, Kasey turns inward to draw strength and resilience.

When asked how he encourages himself to remain focused despite the limitations of his neighbourhood, Kasey reflects:

> I just look at the education I've gotten over the years, whether it's through school or work experiences. And I see that I have my own niche. I have my own way of getting around. I'm a financial advisor. I was previously an accountant. [...] That's another way for me to be successful and offer a service [...]. So, for me, I'm my own driver, but I also have to make sure that I'm okay.

Across these narratives, we see that spiritual and self-affirming resources, whether grounded in faith, music, education, or self-concept, act as *catalysts for refusal*. They allow residents to reimagine Black worldlessness as something that can be challenged, stretched, and even overcome. These are not naïve dreams of escape, but intentional practices of self-creation that carve out emotional and ontological spaces for Black livability. The impossible, for these residents, becomes a terrain of possibility.

While these narratives illuminate how residents navigate and resist the structural limitations of their environments, they also highlight a dominant assumption embedded in spatial analysis—that disadvantage is most acute where material conditions are visibly poor. Yet, what happens when anti-Blackness operates through less visible, more insidious channels in areas deemed "advantaged"? The following section engages this question through the experience of Alys, a Springdale resident whose life in a high-indexed neighborhood challenges the adequacy of structural metrics to capture the full dimensions of Black worldlessness.

Beyond the Index: Rethinking Structural Metrics and Anti-Blackness

This subsection includes the experience of Alys, a resident who lives in Springdale, a neighbourhood with a significantly higher index score, who complicates the assumption that spatial advantage, neighbourhoods with higher index scores equates to social and racial safety or even an escape from Black worldlessness. Alys' experience, detailed below, illuminates the limitations of such indexes and expands our understanding of the conditions of anti-Blackness beyond spatial cartographies. When asked how the perception of her neighbourhood impacts the way she sees and feels about herself, Alys who has cultivated certain resources of refusal contends,

> It can be tough because you can't escape the world. I use public transportation. I use public taxis. You go on the bus, you get the dirty looks. You get people talking about you staring at you, talking about you in their language. You know, even trying to talk to other people sometimes and being polite and friendly at the bus stop and like the body language. There

> is a level of defacto cultural segregation, even if the person is fluent in English. And you know, being in a cultural environment where you feel silenced by the pressure not to make a fuss, you don't want to be a Karen, and you don't want to blow things out of proportion.

Here, Alys is describing the climate of anti-blackness that interrupts her everyday happenings. In exploring the geographical contexts of residents Moving Ground, I found that Black residents living in the Greater Toronto Area, specifically in Brampton, Ontario, had a unique experience. For these residents, inter-group racial conflict produced by anti-black colonial logics was further preserved and sustained by South Asian diasporic communities (Bannerji, 2000). As of 2021, 80.6% of Brampton's population reported as being a visible minority, an increase of 20.9% from 2016 (City of Brampton, n.d.). The top three visible minority groups reported were South Asian, Black and Filipino (City of Brampton, n.d.). South Asian communities first arrived in Canada in the early 1900s from former British colonies including the Indian subcontinent, Africa and the Caribbean. According to Statistics Canada, since 2001 the immigrant population of South Asians has been one of the largest and fastest-growing populations. Between 2016 and 2021, a total of 50,095 immigrants arrived in Brampton with India as the most common place of birth. The increase of South Asian residents has ushered in a new sociopolitical and cultural landscape of race relations that calls for critical scholars of race to understand their historical and current relationship to a racial capitalist agenda that deepens racial divides and reinforces systemic anti-Black racism. Mudambi (2023) contends that anti-blackness has been a central facet of South Asian American subjectivity, influenced by intersecting structures of Whiteness and racialized notions of caste and colourism. In a non-white country such as India, colonist epistemologies

privileging whiteness translated into internalized preferences for lighter skin, which became associated with beauty, intelligence, and success.

Meanwhile, "caste-based attitudes towards darker-skinned overlap[ped] with perceptions of Blackness as both a symbol of inferiority and indicator of a particular racialized subjectivity" (Jayawardene, 2016, p. 338). These same factors effectively correspond with the model minority discourse that encourages anti-black racism. The model minority discourse contrasted with other minorities, particularly Black communities in Canada, is a strategy used to deepen divides, fostering a superior status reinforced through meritorious claims (Prashad, 2000). For people who identify with South Asian ancestry, Prashad (2000) contends that they find themselves perpetually recruited into anti-black racism through the promise of securing ethnic inclusion for themselves if they only demonstrate their fidelity to the anti-black practices or racial exclusion that characterize so much of the social structure in the U.S. and Canada. For many Black residents, these patterns of racialized differentiation are felt intimately and what remains is a scant area of research that underprivileges the complex relations of anti-black racism between non-white communities in favour of a singular conceptualized form of racism, reproducing oftentimes, a binary race schema of Black and white relationships. Alys' experience highlights the paradox this presents for Black residents, contending,

> Theoretically, it's very difficult to find the language to explain this [anti-Black racism from the South Asian community] because the only framework we have is like white privilege and white supremacy, even in the BIPOC community group, the notion is that we're all united against the common enemy of white supremacy. But if that's not your real life experience, you cannot force yourself to fit your lived experience in this political ideological framework. If most of the racism I'm experiencing is not being perpetuated by white people. How do I put that in a framework of white supremacy?

Engaged in this critique, and couched in her lived experience, Alys brings to the forefront the inadequacies of the development of racial discourse in North America, here she challenges the dominant racial framework that conceptualizes anti-blackness solely through white supremacy (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Prashad, 2000). Alys' analysis grapples with power relations and adds an additional layer of complexity in understanding how Black residents navigate living in Brampton with the changing sociopolitical and cultural landscape. Consequently, this shift has influenced race relations and contributed to the preservation of anti-black colonial logics within South Asian diasporic communities, as well as Canadian racist epistemologies privileging whiteness perpetuating anti-black racism. Anti-black violence is thus compounded where Black residents face anti-black racism both from white society and, on a micro level within South Asians. Similarly, in James' (2012) We Rise Together Report exploring the experiences of Black students in the Peel District School Board, students echoed analogous sentiments, contending that their South Asian peers, whom they seemingly expected, as students of colour, to be allies were "always against the Black people." An elementary schooler asserted, "If there's a [South Asian] person in the class, and we have a [South Asian] teacher, the Black people are never going to get any say in anything. You don't get any notice." While these quotes are provided in the context of education, they point to the larger condition of anti-blackness experienced from South Asian people that is experienced beyond neighbourhood parameters. Steeped in educational domains, young children reveal the ways that race emerges very early in their school life as a new terrain of Black worldlessness that Black students need to navigate and develop resources to resist and combat. Here, the nuanced experience of racism in Brampton provides a critical lens for theorizing anti-

blackness as a site for expanding our understanding of racialization and anti-blackness within the conditions of Black worldlessness. Yet, while these conditions of Black worldlessness shape daily experiences, they do not render Black residents entirely without agency. Rather than passively accepting these structures, Alys and others who share her experiences turn inward, drawing on personal knowledge and mental fortitude as a means of survival. In many ways, these residents mobilize agency from their internal knowledge(s) and resources rather than resign to the racialized structures of Black worldlessness. There is a steadfast refusal to surrender, to comply, and to conform to Black worldlessness. In the determination to centre their desires of Moving Ground, these residents bring into focus the aliveness of Black life in a Black(end) world. Responses to Black worldlessness reveal the fallacy of negative racializing logics that attempts to write Black un-livability.

Alys's account expands the conceptual frame of Moving Ground by revealing that Black worldlessness is not confined to geographies marked by deprivation. Even where there are material or infrastructural resources, anti-blackness persists as a structuring logic shaping interpersonal interactions, community belonging, and interior life. Her analysis reminds us that the refusal of Black life is not always spatially legible, and that livability must be theorized in ways that account for both the visible and invisible operations of racialized harm.

The Social Self, Resources of Refusal, the Quiet and Self-Creation

The amalgamation of a normalizing discourse, a positive self-concept, social belonging, a cosmology beyond Black worldlessness, and the capacity to perceive racializing structures as conquerable, opens pathways for reclaiming Black life. For residents categorized as Moving

Ground, these interwoven resources cultivate a capacity for self-definition that is not bound by externally imposed limitations. What emerges is not only a rejection of dominant explanations, but the creation of new meanings and attachments that reflect a sustained orientation toward futurity. Their effort to move out of their neighbourhoods is reflected in the formation of a social self that refuses to be overdetermined by Black worldlessness. Examining the interplay between the social self, internal and external continuum of Black worldlessness, and capacity for self-creation provides insight into the experiential life of Black residents navigating Black worldlessness.

These residents, often located on the right side of the internal-external continuum of Black worldlessness, live with fewer internal constraints, possess greater resources of refusal, and have a strengthened sense of self. This occurs because the storehouse of the Quiet, the domain of vitality is consistently being replenished, insulating the social self from the devaluation of space. While they are keenly aware of the carceral and pathologized constructions projected onto their neighbourhoods, they do not internalize these views. Instead, they hold space for futurities that exceed the limitations of racialized containment, they do not see their neighbourhoods as having the capacity to materialize their dreams. In this manner, the inclusion of participants living in neighbourhoods with higher neighbourhood index scores, such as Alys, Zainab, and Tyler are not outliers, but an expansion of the conceptual terrain of Black worldlessness. Alys and Tyler, whose experiences are situated in Springdale, and Zainab in Dixie offers a critical counterpoint: their accounts complicate the assumption that structurally "advantaged" spaces offer racial refuge for Black residents. Instead, Tyler and Alys' experiences of inter-minority anti-Blackness and social exclusion underscore that Black worldlessness transcends index metrics nullifying the indicators placed around Black "well-being." Black worldlessness is not merely a condition of spatial

poverty, but a relational and affective condition lived through the repeated negation of Black livability across geographic gradients.

What sets Moving Ground residents apart is not the absence of hardship, but the refusal to internalize oppression and dream of a future *beyond* their neighbourhoods. Their sense of futurity is based on developed mechanisms and accumulated resources of refusal, i.e., faith, community networks, normalizing discourses that enable them to find pockets of livability in their neighbourhoods and dream of a life otherwise. These resources, a form of protective buffer between the social self and the conditions of containment, make it possible to dream of futurities beyond the limitations of Black worldlessness. It allows them to realize their agency, envision their futures, curate capacities for self-creation and reclaim Black life in their neighbourhoods.

For these residents, *self-creation* is not deferred, it is lived daily in micro-movements of assertion, withdrawal, imagination, and care. Even when their environments cannot materialize their aspirations, they do not relinquish their capacity to dream. This is where the concept of Moving Ground takes shape, while these residents remain physically *held in* by external constraints, they carry the belief in the possibility of leaving. Their desire for mobility is not only spatial but symbolic and ontological, rooted in a refusal to be held by the weight of negation. Through the Quiet, they cultivate a livable present while holding fast to the conviction that a different future can be claimed beyond the boundaries of Black worldlessness.

Contrary to those *Quietly Holding Ground,* whose racialized social self (the "Me") colonizes the personal self (the "I") reinforcing racialized limitations as internal constraints, those *Moving Ground* mobilize a construction of self where the "I" is at the forefront. This is not to deny the social impositions of the "Me", however, the "I", that corresponds with a sense of freedom, of initiative, the source of spontaneity and creativity, inserts itself to challenge societal impositions

of self. While the "Me" governs the socialized aspect of the individual, the "I" allows, when possible, for the bending and stretching of the rules that govern social interactions. This reciprocal dynamic lends itself to futurity; and futurity lends itself to a more robust "I-Me" enabling these residents to dream of futurity that opens the possibility of transcending Black worldlessness.

As elaborated in Chapter 1, resources of refusal; including religion, spirituality, kinship ties, community support, and coping strategies, act as insulating barriers against structures of oppression. They help people deal more effectively with stressful events and mitigate risks and potential harm. The implications of accumulating resources of refusal are that they provide residents with the capacity to reject valuations of Blackness that do not align with their self-perception. For this group, protective strategies seem to insulate Black residents through the most difficult times. Four primary protective strategies shore up for these residents. Firstly, a normalizing discourse as noted earlier, recognizes the depictions constructed are not reflective of the lived experiences of residents, thereby offering more breadth and depth to Black residents humanizing their existence and the conditions. This creates a buffer space between the construction of self and the racialization of their neighbourhoods. The second protective strategy, community networks, functions to promote a sense of connection and belonging for residents. These residents find solace in creating social bonds, which humanize them through reciprocal validation and recognition, suggesting a richness of life beyond the cartography of Black worldlessness. Community attachments, commitments, involvement, and beliefs function to restore the balance between the social or public meaning of Black life and human life. Whether it's through a re-scripting of the cosmology of self or a drawing from higher sources, spirituality and faith, as a third protective strategy, offers a shield against the challenges of Black worldlessness, guiding residents to reject impositions on their sense of self. In allegiance to their faith or spirituality, these

residents reject any imposition that attempts to re-make them or impact their sense of self. This attuness and divine empowerment, guides their steps and allows them to overcome challenges of the world. As a result of these protective strategies, they do not see the structures as over-defining them, rather the buffer retained between the structural impositions of Black worldlessness and their inner Black life provides the vehicle to cultivate a pathway through Black worldlessness, conquering racializing structures of oppression becomes easier to attempt. Nima, an Elms-Old Rexdale resident and a father of three boys exemplifies this orientation when he tells his children,

> You can be anything. I was just telling them Obama slept on a street and he became the president of America. I was reading his book; he was sleeping with the homeless in New York and he ended up becoming president of the United States. Read the book, *The Dream of My Father.*

The Quiet functions here as an inevitable and beautiful part of being alive. It is a route through Black worldlessness for these residents. Black aliveness which emphasizes creativity and expressive potential of Black life beyond the lens of trauma and oppression is articulated through the quiet. Rather than serving only as resistance to violence, it becomes a wellspring of expressive life, allowing ambitions, desires, creativity, joy, and freedoms to persist. In this way, Black aliveness is not deferred to a mythical future; it is made real through the act of dreaming and imagining. These residents call their world into being. Here, their imaginings become acts of self-making.

Samuel explains,

> I don't even feel like I belong here sometimes. I feel like Canada–Ontario took a lot [from me]. I don't know what it feels to feel Canadian and on top of it, as I get older especially right now in the pandemic, just this experience, how the government is treating us right now. It's disrespectful.

So instead, Samuel opts for futurity in St. Lucia stating,

> Sunshine is powerful. Sunshine is powerful. When I'm buying land in St. Lucia, [I'll ask] does it come with a mango tree? Banana tree? I want to pick what I will be eating, what fruit it has. And look around where there's people that look like me and where their accent is similar the Jamaican accent. I want familiarity.

Samuel's vision of life reflects his response to the external realities, yet it does not simply capitulate to the external world. Samuel's dream of mango trees, land ownership, and intergenerational rootedness is not just about relocation, it is about *recalibration.* He asserts a right to live and live well, untethered from the structural scripts of containment. His world-making, all inner desires render him alive, living beyond a monolithic or reductive representation of Black life.

Similarly, Kasey's dream of financial freedom and stability speaks to a redefinition of freedom not as absence from labor, but as time reclaimed, presence with loved ones, and sovereignty over one's life. He states,

> Before I used to want my own home, but now it's just like, I want my own home, but what I want for us (Black people) now is freedom. I feel that [freedom] is not worrying about paying your bills or worrying to make sure that you're making enough to pay your bills [...] Freedom for us is [...] not working nine to five, but the nine to five is teaching you discipline and structure. I think it's just making sure that I'm financially stable and financially free where I don't have to worry about my bills [...] freedom is having time when I do have kids to invest in them.

For Kasey, the Quiet, the focus on his inner desires, carves out a pathway for him to envision his future beyond the present conditions of Black worldlessness. His desire for freedom operates against the externalizations of Black worldlessness. And it is through surrendering to his inner life that he finds the agency to achieve his envisioned future of residential mobility. His articulation, like that of other residents in this category, affirms that Moving Ground is an active orientation toward leaving, a belief that departure is possible, even amid structural constraint.

These residents envision life beyond their current geographies and live toward those possibilities by accumulating the internal and external resources that make such futures conceivable.

These residents assert a sense of self agency and affirmation despite the backdrop of Black worldlessness. Residential mobility represents a tangible goal for them, serving as a means of reuniting families together and revitalizing individuals. However, achieving Black aliveness through mobility is challenging. As noted by Alys, who emphasizes the need for long term strategies like saving and investing, it requires "a long term goal." Alys continues, "You're trying to advocate for yourself from a position of being from a disadvantageous position. So just keep on saving so you can finally leave, keep on investing so you can finally leave." As someone living in a high-indexed neighbourhood, her experience reveals that Black worldlessness is not bound to state-classified zones of deprivation. It manifests in quieter, less visible forms; microaggressions, inter-minority racial exclusions, and the dissonance of being promised equity but living in negation.

Residents in this group are acutely aware of their inner desires and the need to fulfill them amidst the external pressures of the world. With their accumulated resources of refusal, many of these residents transcend bitterness and cynicism for an all-encompassing dream of freedom within and beyond the confines of Black worldlessness. These residents are determined to overcome existing structures and believe in their ability to do so. In the face of Black worldlessness, these residents insist on Black livability, on Black aliveness that fosters self-creation.

Self-creation is captured in Samuel's experience of being on top of Rouge Peak Hill. Where he narrates,

> [From the peak] you can see AJAX, Pickering, Oshawa, downtown [Toronto], Scarborough, Steeles, North York and East York all at the same time. It's very amazing to see that. So, when I'm there and I'm still in Scarborough, I'm like thinking I'm still in Malvern. And like, you know, I'm still thinking about my past.

> And I say, well, this is beautiful. So, yeah, even though what's happening is happening, it's like, this is still here.

When asked what the image of the hill represented to him, Samuel stated,

> [...] looking at the bright side of things [...] creating your own reality [...] Like seeing [the realities that are forced upon you] and breaking through that. Cause if I were to show somebody this hill in the view, then their first impression would never be like the violence of it. But if I were to show them somewhere, that's kinda the bottom of the hill technically it'll be a different perception. So, it kind of represents us looking at something from a different angle, from a different perspective, glass half full kind of thing.

Rouge Peak, situated in the Rouge National Urban Park, a conservation park, serves as a conduit through which Samuel not only challenges Black worldlessness but reclaims Black life by surrendering to his aliveness. Samuel's experience on this peak interrupts the public face of Malvern in exchange for a *Quiet that has been and is always there, whether people are looking to see it or not.*

Throughout the interviews, it was evident that these residents were determined to find "a place where paradise can be created" (hooks, 1994, p. 207). They cultivate community, resilience, radical envisionings of their futures and hope– hope that they will one day leave their communities for "a better life." This chapter explores the experiences of Black residents involuntarily *confined to* their neighbourhoods by Black worldlessness. However, it is through adopting self-preserving frameworks, whether consciously or unconsciously, and accumulating resources of refusal, housed in the Quiet, that allows them to live towards a different future. This allows them to carve out inlets of possibilities reinscribing vitality and Black expressiveness while cultivating deeper and broader future imaginings.

As noted in the previous chapter, these residents are not permanently fixed in these geographies. This analytical grouping captures the fluidity of their envisionings, where residents

can move between different future possibilities. Their experiences are not static, and mobility between groups is possible. This analysis provides a snapshot of their envisioned futurities. Possessing more resources of refusal within the context of Black worldlessness enables these residents to resist its conditions, demystify its perceived inescapability, and open pathways to self-creation and vitality. This equips Black residents to envision a vibrant future and make residential mobility more attainable.

In the next chapter, I will delve into the final category of experience: residents who *Make Ground*. These are residents who voluntarily stay in their racialized neighbourhoods, whom I identify as creating transfigurative futures. Through in-depth exploration of their experiences, the chapter will conceptually develop how they come to construct their sense of self, use the Quiet as a tool for self-creation, and trace the journeys of Black residents who channel their expressiveness through demanding vindication of place.

Chapter VII

Making Ground: Transfigurative Futurities Within the Carcerality of Black Worldlessness

This chapter unsettles the presumed binary of either remaining in space or escaping it. Among many Black residents navigating the conditions of racialized space, there exists a third orientation: a making of *place.* The data revealed a necessity to articulate Black aliveness not only as resistance, but as a practice of *transfiguration*, in which the psychic, social, and spatial constraints of Black worldlessness are inverted through intentional, self-authored acts of care, vision, and political clarity. These residents illuminate a Black livability forged not in opposition alone, but in devotion to community, to interiority, and to an otherwise yet-to-be. I argue that we must resist interpretive frames that solely position Black residents as either trapped within or escaping their racialized, economically marginalized neighbourhoods.

To *Make Ground* is to inhabit a third space, a spatial orientation grounded in possibility and revolutionary care, where Black residents choose to remain in their *hoods*, not out of resignation, but a profound investment in worldmaking. Their orientation is not one of stasis, but of rooted futurity—a poetics that rejects the narrative of decay and decline, against the logic that only departure signals success. These residents assert that Black futures are not only elsewhere, but they are here, seeded in the struggle and sanctity of where they live now. The voices of residents who Make Ground tell us that staying is not always a lack but can be an act of self love and worldmaking. Their narratives offer possibilities of being, one that is tender, fierce, political, and Quiet all at once. Through their everyday refusals, mutual care, and visionary commitments, they rework the boundaries of livability itself, challenging us to see Black aliveness as ordinary.

In this chapter, I draw attention to the experience of what I refer to as Making Ground. This experiential category insists that Black life within racialized neighbourhoods is not reducible to

harm or survival. Rather, Black life is capacious, capable of generating dreams, dignity, and collective vision amid systemic neglect. Making Ground does not merely describe a community response; it describes a mode of being, a presence in which residents reclaim the right to remain, to imagine, and to shape the conditions of their living. Their work does not simply repair a fractured world; it begins again, from within.

> I hope Jane and Finch is Wakanda in 20 years. That's what I hope. I hope it's like some high tech super Black, super cultural Mecca. I hope I can speak that into reality.
>
> –Sha'la, Jane and Finch resident

> Transmogrification: "strange or grotesque transformation characterized by distortion, exaggeration, extravagance" and "unnatural combinations" (Sullivan, 2006, p. 552).

Transmogrification as expanded by George Yancy (2017) in *Black Bodies, White Gazes*, describes the racial dynamics and experiences of "Black bodies under a white racist culture" (p. ix). Transmogrification is the idea that Black bodies undergo a form of transformation when viewed through the racial gaze of others, particularly within a white supremacist framework resulting in their distortion and dehumanization. This process, as Yancy (2017) reveals, requires violence that strips the Black body of its subjectivity and humanity, transmogrifying its presence into an unrecognizable object of fear, hatred and control. This transformation is not merely a material or superficial excavation of humanity, but also implicates the psychological and ontological, resulting in forms of self-alienation and internalized oppression. Building from this, I introduce the concept of transfigurative futurity; a self-authored, dignity-driven process in which Black residents invert carceral mappings of Blackness to reclaim distorted geographies, identities, and futures. This concept retools transmogrification not as grotesque distortion or "disavowed and objected monstrous others," but as a poetics of Black being; a radical act of self-making, where

Black interiority, political vision, and community vitality converge to produce livable Black futures within the unlivable conditions of Black worldlessness. Transfigurative futurity as mobilized by these residents, foregrounds the ways that Black residents forge a livable world by distorting the prototypical conceptualization of Black life welcoming dignity, strangeness, and interiorities that are wildly their own. While some distortions are in response to the white imaginary, the poetics of Black beingness extends far beyond the gaze of whiteness. These residents centre their internal knowledge(s), vulnerabilities, pleasures, radical dreams and inner lives to invoke a Black world guided from within. In other words, these residents are creating a Black world, "an aliveness that is of [themselves] and of the textual worlds [they] make" (Quashie 2021, p. 29). Here, transfigurative futurity transforms (1) the corporal integrity of the Black body as constructed through the white racist gaze and (2) the futurities of Black life which is restored by honouring the dynamic subjectivity and interiority of Black life.

This chapter explores the narratives of Black residents living in Black Creek and Malvern who, despite the atmospheric weight of Black worldlessness, actively dream of futurities within the carcerality of Black worldlessness mapping out how they come to develop an orientation towards Black livability and futurity. This category of experience that emerges from my data refers to those who *Make Ground*. These residents whom I identify as *Making Ground* refers to the intentional and future-oriented practices of Black residents who, despite the enduring condition of Black worldlessness, choose to remain in their racialized neighbourhoods and actively reimagine them as sites of Black livability, dignity, and futurity. Those *Making Ground* confront and reshape the external and internal constraints of racialized space through activism, collective care, political struggle, and interior self-realization. Through the lens of transfigurative futurity, they invert dehumanizing structures to cultivate new ways of being, asserting that Black life not only resists

but also dreams, builds, and thrives, even within carceral geographies. These residents affirm that Black aliveness is not merely survival or refusal, but an ongoing project of worldmaking grounded in the Quiet and a radical commitment to community transformation. More associated with political activism and protest struggles, these residents are people who have shared histories of stripped subjectivities and collective joy in their neighborhoods, and as such, they actively challenge the forces of territorial stigmatization and carcerality to reclaim Black life and futurities in their racialized neighbourhoods. Despite the condition of Black worldlessness, these residents push back against the "American Dream" of upward residential mobility that normalizes "success" as assimilation into white spaces of affluence, carving out spaces of livability and place-making within their racialized geographies (Silver et. al, 2023). Oftentimes, these residents do not experience racializing structures of oppression as insurmountable, rather, they see them as challenges to be met, cultivating a political identity in the process. Through activism and collective organization, these residents reclaim their neighbourhoods and attempt to recover the stigma, fostering a deep sense of self shaped by the community. Contrary to research that frames stigmatized neighbourhood pride as a defensive response to external defamation (Slater, 2017), the pride of those Making Ground is not simply a reaction to stigma. Rather, their pride is rooted in a proactive commitment and belief in restoring justice and the humanity of their community. In the next section, I will explore some of the distinctive traits that shore up for residents with this category of experience.

Distinctive properties

In narrating the lived experiences of those I categorize as Making Ground; residents living in Black Creek and Malvern, these interviews reveal four salient themes that characterize this mode of inhabiting and interpreting their neighbourhoods.

1) Renewed sense of self/challenging discourse

2) Strong community network

3) Community activism

4) Overcoming racializing structures as a possible challenge

1. *Renewed sense of self and challenging discourse*

For residents engaged in Making Ground, the initial experience of living in their neighbourhoods was shaped by the internalization of the negative racializing structures of Black worldlessness. Over time, however, and through the accumulation of lived experiences and social interactions, these residents underwent a process of self-renewal. These experiences became vital resources, enabling residents to develop self-reflective skills and self-determinant attitudes. This internal shift allowed them to reframe how they understood themselves in relation to the community and to re-imagine Black futurities on their own terms. Ultimately, this process created accessible pathways through Black worldlessness. Bismarck, a Malvern resident recounts,

> I recognized that I never mentioned where I was from unless I was asked. Actually, it's funny because like, I would always be told, “ew” that would be the simplest reaction, “ew”. It would be elongated like, “well, Malvern’s ghetto”. Constantly, Scarborough's so ghetto. Constantly, constantly. But it was funny. I was buying a piece of jewelry from somebody, and they were coming in from downtown [Toronto]. And they were like, “oh yeah, I grew up around here. And I was like, wow, it's surprising to hear people claim this area”. And he's like, “really?” And he looked at me shocked. And like, something about that kind of felt good, like that he lived here. He had his experiences here. And then the idea that someone would be ashamed of it, like shocked him. Like I was like, oh, really? You liked it? OK. Yeah. Yeah, you should be shocked. It's amazing here. It's like I'm so used to defending it. I'm so used to constantly defending it to people.

Bismark’s reflection illustrates the internal conflict he experienced as a result of persistent negative messaging and the stigma ascribed to his neighbourhood. The encounter of someone openly “claiming” the neighbourhood, unsettled the narrative he had

internalized. For Bismark, his renewed appreciation for Malvern was sharpened during his time away in London, Ontario.

> They're [neighbourhood residents] all so segregated [...] And it was so unwelcoming towards anybody from any other background. And then at the same time, there was this disgusting fetishization of certain ethnic differences like "ohhhh, you're mixed so you must be this". And it was very disturbing and very messed up and very upsetting […] So coming back here and seeing how diverse it was, how open it was, how welcoming everybody was, how willing to accept differences, learn about other people [...] I never appreciated that until it was gone. I don't want to be without that ever again.

Similarly, Sha'la, a resident of Black Creek, recalls,

> I have to be honest […] the first year I was here, I tried really hard to get transferred out and that feels really uncomfortable to say now because I see it for what it is and was, which is internalized anti-Black racism, you know? I had come from downtown [Toronto], and I had this idea that I was taking a step back somehow or something [starts to tear up]. So wrong. Now, I actually still tell people not to move here, but because I don't want the price to go up. But I feel like that's a sailing ship. So, I just really want the people that are here to be able to stay here, able to live the lives that they deserve to be living anyways because they are citizens of Toronto.

For residents like Bismark and Sha'la, the stigma mapped onto their neighbourhoods initially discouraged them from embracing or "claiming" their neighbourhoods. Research shows that neighbourhoods increasingly serve as significant markers of social status, shaped by meanings and messages generated by where and how we live (Kearns & Parkinson, 2001). Dis-identification can serve as a strategy for residents to manage the "spoilt identity," distancing oneself from the perceived immorality or devaluation of a space (Blokland, 2013; Goffman, 1968). However, as Williams (1991) articulates, "the Blackness of Black people in this society has always represented the blemish, the uncleanliness, the barrier separating individual and society. Castration from blackness becomes the initiatory tunnel, the portal through which black people must pass if they are not to fall on their faces in the presence of society, paternity and hierarchy" (p. 198). In this vein,

disidentification is a necessary buffer to social death. Yet over time, through deeper immersion in community life and a reorientation of self beyond the gaze of whiteness and anti-black frameworks, these residents not only develop a more positive sense of self, but mobilize what Alvarez and Ruiz-Tagle (2022) describe as a challenging discourse; a counter-narrative that not only critiques the dominant perception of racialized neighbourhoods but also reclaims them as sites of pride, complexity, and futurity.

Sha'la elaborates,

> I literally realized that when I wasn't around Black people, I didn't care about what I was doing. And on one hand that was good and on the other hand, it wasn't right. I didn't care as much. I could take more risks because I didn't care as much, but I also didn't care as much about the outcome. So, I didn't work as hard. I didn't put as much effort into it because the outcome didn't matter as much, who's gonna care? Who's gonna be proud of me? My grandparents aren't around to be proud of me. My aunties aren't around to see [….]. However, Jane Finch is the only community I've ever lived in, in Canada that I felt like I could be my full self…nothing is jarring my spirit. Nobody's taking me out of my sense of self, you know, I can be in my own head and do my own thing and, and, and be relaxed. And whatever's coming at me. I know how to deal with it.

Sha'la's reflection underscores the role of community and neighbourhood in restoring Black subjectivity, emphasizing that "spatialities are critical to identity and belonging" (Woods, 2017). Living in Jane and Finch has allowed Sha'la to be introspective and engage in a worldmaking that honours her aspirations for Black futurities beyond mere survival.

A challenging discourse is often associated with political activism and protest struggles, where social groups channel their resistance demanding a vindication of place and attempt to revert the stigma through a higher level of collective organization (Alvarez and Ruiz-Tagle, 2022). They establish counter-narratives of resistance against racializing discourses and structures of oppression and in some cases, they mobilize forces from discourse to action. Adopting a

challenging discourse, then, is affective, embodied, and political. While such discourse often manifests through collective activism, it also emerges in everyday acts of living and imagining otherwise. As Sha'la explains:

> One of the things I find in this community is that Black people are very proud and very well taken care of. People here are happy, […] hair did, nails did, people are trying to live their best lives. And I feel like it's in resistance to how they're being told that they are. Like we know we're not nothing. Like when you see what comes out of this community, you see the Jully Black's you understand that people know that they're not nothing and they're trying so hard, but with no help, no real concrete help. If this is what we're doing like this?! I know this is the Black condition because what we make out of the nothing we're given —boy, it's exhausting. […] Since I've been here, I feel like all I've been doing is advocating and, I don't mind. My life has always been involved in some way. I've been doing that as work for a long time. But time now it's very personal though, because it's my community, my home and that, and seeing the different responses, like the straight up ignoring of complaints. Calling the city, writing letters like so much work being done. And seeing it go basically nowhere because the system is broken—I say the system is broken, but it's not even that the system is broken it's that the system is not being applied to Black people and people of color.

Ultimately, the renewal of self and emergence of a challenging discourse does more than reject stigma, they reclaim space, whilst redefining identity and belonging within these communities. This process aligns with what Fred Moten and Stefano Harney (2013) describe as "the refusal to be refused." For residents like Sha'la, refusal paves the way for life within Black worldlessness. Through practices of refusal, they create and envision the possibility to live unbounded lives irreconcilable with the spatial logics of white supremacy.

2. *Sense of Community / Strong community network*

A significant theme across interviews with those Making Ground was the power of community. As August (2014) observed in Regent Park, "a strong sense of community was a major theme in interviews with residents" who challenged dominant narratives of stigma (p. 1324). Despite being routinely framed as dangerous, undesirable, or entrapping, many residents expressed

deep fondness for their neighborhoods. August (2014) notes, “Regent Park is often portrayed as a place with little work saving, where danger, crime and physical neglect entrap residents in a place they wish to escape […] [however, this portrayal] does not capture the very positive feelings that most of [the] respondents had towards their area and neighborhood” (p. 1324). Instead, residents went as far as to express that they “love[d] the neighbourhood.” Similarly, my respondents echoed this sentiment, though their connections developed overtime. They expressed a sense of trust, belonging, acceptance, and aliveness within their communities despite Black worldlessness. Bismark reflects,

> When I think of a home, it's funny, I don't think of a place, I think of a feeling. [...] the feeling this gives me, the feeling of safety, of reassurance, of acceptance. Acceptance is a big thing. Because like I said before about my brother [who lives in London, Ontario] and where he is—I recognize the other side of that and how that's non-acceptance. That is a box that you have to fit in, or you are just not right in other people's eyes. And that's just such a destructive feeling. It really is. Like it eats away at people [...] people are just like, OK, what's wrong with me? What's wrong with me? What's wrong? Nothing's wrong with you. You're in the wrong place. Like being back here it's just that feeling of acceptance and belonging. Belonging in your individualism, I guess, is a big thing too. Because I know, like I said, it's a fairly conservative area, but everybody who I've seen has always been different. There’s always going to be, you know, the Jamaican woman or the old lady who sucks her teeth [mimics the sound] ‘why you doing that?’ But you know that that just kind of reminds me of, I don't know, us. Like family.

For residents like Bismark and Sha’la, the infrastructure of community serves as a buffer against racialized degradation. Their neighborhoods provide what the outside world often cannot—recognition, safety, and a grounded sense of belonging. Bismark’s recounting of his experience highlights the value of community that serve as a resource in navigating Black worldlessness. Highlighting this, Sha’la explains,

> I think being in Canada, I had forgotten, like I came here as a teenager from Jamaica, and I had forgotten growing up here what a community, a Black

> community felt like [...] But being in a community where the only thing that you have in common is that you're Black. I don't think we appreciate how much that does for us, for our psyche. Like just, you know, all the things we give, like lip service to representation, just seeing you...the same face every day. Having products that cater to your palette, your skin, your hair, just readily accessible. I feel privileged honestly, to live in Jane and Finch as a Black person in Toronto. A lot of the narrative is very false. I don't actually feel like this is a community of scarcity. We're a scarcity or a community of scarcity in terms of city supports or proper infrastructure. When I hear Jane and Finch is a food desert, I'm like, mm, I don't know about that. [...] . And I don't know if I would trade what we have for the price, I feel like that's what's coming. I feel like there's a gentrification coming that is gonna ruin the spirit of Jane and Finch much like what's happening in Eglinton West.

Sha'la's framing resists the familiar scarcity logic often attached to places like Jane and Finch. Even in her comments about violence, she recasts it as an act of defense against structural abandonment, not as a breakdown of intra-community relations stating, "we're not killing each other. We still think we're killing an enemy [...] it's not intra-community, it's inter-community".

> We're being misinformed about who the enemy is, but all of this is us trying to protect ourselves from outside forces and to see that being spun and manipulated is sad. We treat each other very well in this community. […] And that's one of the things too, that is so frustrating about this narrative, about Jane and Finch that everybody is killing each other. No, we're not. I have never felt more love in a community than I found in this. I lost my cell phone three times in the six years that I've lived in Jane. People returned it to me. Strangers found me based on my screen saver because they knew my children. And he was like, oh, 'do you know who kids?' That's how he found me. Found somebody who knew somebody who knew me and gave me that three times.

These residents cite examples that directly counter prevailing narratives. Sha'la describes multiple occasions in which she lost her phone, and it was returned by strangers who recognized her children. These everyday acts of care reflect a shared obligation that undergirds the community's internal life. There is a level of trust, and with this sense of community and trust,

there is a deep sense of obligation to community members. This sense of obligation generates a profound need to protect. Sha'la is unequivocal states,

> And that's the thing that is most infuriating. Like I've worked in law, I've worked now in a legal profession. We have every law and policy we ever need to ensure the proper treatment of Black male people, call anybody in Canada. Canada is one of the few countries that actually has the laws in place. That actually has the policies and systems in place to ensure equality. They're not applied to Black people. They're not applied to Black people.

Driven by despair over their social conditions, these residents refuse to submit to the existing state that has created these conditions. Instead, they make it an obligation to ensure community needs are met. Consequently, the theme of these communities as being *"something that needs to be protected"* emerges. It is no surprise, then, that these residents adopt a posture of protecting what they have in their communities against system forces such as gentrification, anti-blackness, and black expulsion. These geographies function as the "oasis" for Black residents who, when stepping out of their neighbourhoods, are often berated by the pervasive climate of anti-blackness. That is not to say that anti-blackness and its insidious nature does not operate within these neighbourhoods, but rather, the condition of anti-blackness is mitigated by the revalorization of these neighbourhoods by its residents.

Sha'la states,

> I've gone a long way in my knowledge and friendship with white people. And I still have one or two white friends. I literally have less than a handful. And I feel very happy about that, but I feel I could still kick it or whatever. I would still never invite them to Jane. I would never invite them, I don't even care how they would feel. I don't want them here in my oasis. I don't want them in the space because of all the things it means and, and how I don't have to deal with any whiteness here. I used to take transit. When the bus would pass, like a certain point, I would feel like a weight drop off, like the mask fall, you know? It would be the Jane bus and it'd be all of us [...] So when you hit Woolner on the Jane bus, everybody is just like 'yeah' (sigh of relief) because all the white people are gone. They're in Annette Street, you

> know, they're all south of Dundas. Once you hit that first Woolner stop, a) a lot of people get off the bus so you can breathe easier but b) it's just, more Black people now, you know, I'm with my Black people now.

These neighborhoods become spiritual sanctuaries, portals of reprieve. As Bismark adds,

> [...] my neighbourhood for me at this point in my life has been an anchor point. Because I know it. And I feel safe here and I know it's safe. It's a home base. It's a place of safety. It's a safe port.

As narrated by these residents, the boundedness of Malvern and Jane and Finch (neighbourhood within Black Creek) function as a shield from the racialized forces of whiteness and in doing so, allows for the inner worlds of Black life to sprout where Black residents can create interior resources of peace, trust, and safety to those who live in these neighbourhoods.

3. Community Activists

The activism embraced by residents who Make Ground emerges from direct encounters with systemic neglect and injustice, which fuel their commitment to defend, dignify, and transfigure their communities. As Sha'la contends, "everything is a battle just to get them to see us as human and to respect us. If we don't make them apply the law, they're not going to." In this excerpt, Sha'la's strong sense of neighbourhood pride is grounded in her belief that residents in her community deserve respect and rights worthy of protection (Fein, 1993). Sha'la continues,

> they straight up are ignoring complaints, you know, calling the city, writing letters, like so much work is being done. And seeing it go basically nowhere because the system is broken, right? But it's not even that the system is broken, it's that the system is not being applied to Black people and people of color.

Bismarck echoes this, recounting an incident of intimate partner violence where the police showed up 40 minutes late, sat in their car, and drove away. In contrast, he describes his brother's white-majority neighborhood in London, Ontario, where the police drove drunk residents' home.

His disbelief underscores the stark disparity and neglect from the police towards his community. Bismarck states,

> I think it shows a certain amount of indifference to this community because I know how other communities are policed. And like I said, my brother lives out in London. Going out and hanging out with people out there. People aren't really allowed to walk down the street. So say, for example, you go out on a Friday night, and you're drunk, and you're walking home. Like I've seen the police literally stop people on the street and be like, you're too drunk and belligerent. We're going to take you home for you. And I'm like, how is this the police? Like, is this how policing is supposed to be done? You know? Especially in a city where we're spending as much money as we are on policing […] It baffles me. It baffles me.

For these residents, the conditions of their neighbourhoods, for example, organized abandonment, rightlessness, anti-black racism, carceral logics of containment, and the "performance of a future that hasn't yet happened but must" is what propels their community activism (Campt, 2017, p. 34). Unlike sensational popular accounts that fixate on neighbourhood issues, careful analyses of public housing find that dissatisfaction can coexist alongside meaningful place attachment and residential satisfaction (August, 2014; Clampet-Lundquist, 2004). These residents do not simply ignore the salient problems that exist in these communities, but they actively toil to hold bureaucratic systems accountable while building futures from within (August, 2014; Clampet-Lundquist, 2004). They organize, advocate, and protect, not to gain external recognition, but to maintain dignity within their communities. These residents, who do not explicitly name themselves activists, create spaces for alterities and the fullness of Black life to exist. They take up roles of leadership to ensure that the needs of the community are met.

Bismark dedicates much of his time to advocating for his community. Whether he is calling 311 and city councilors to request the clearing of iced-covered sidewalks for those with mobility challenges, lodging complaints with the Toronto Transit Commission about arbitrary bus schedules, or reporting gunshots to the police, he consistently prioritizes the greater good of his

community. Bismark recalls an incident after COVID-19 restrictions were lifted, when mask enforcement in his local gym was lax, partly due to the fear of reprimand from gym-goers. In an effort to support the staff and curb the spread of the virus, Bismarck decided to take action, but was met with indifference. He called 311 three times, with no response. Bismark continues,

> It's a problem, and it kind of makes you feel, I don't want to say helpless, because like I said, I feel like I have a lot of agency. It makes me feel like we are very underappreciated here in this area. Underappreciated. There's no value to the people in this area until, you know, voting time comes around.

Despite this, when those Making Ground were asked if they would move to another neighbourhood, residents firmly replied no, describing their communities as "anchor points," "home bases," and "safe ports," places of peace that are unimaginable in Canada. For these residents, a profound love for their community fosters a deep sense of belonging, motivating them to actively defend their neighbourhoods. Whether through community organizing, advocacy, or reframing Black livability, they tirelessly work to protect their spaces. As Bismark puts it, "I'm so used to defending it. I'm so used to defending it to people." This defense of Black humanity reinforces their commitment to remaining in their neighbourhoods.

Sha'la defends her stance stating,

> But I think a lot of people blame the people instead of the system. And that always makes me really sad to see. Cause I'm like, no, we're not worse off. We don't deserve worse. We don't. There's a lot of self-blame and a lot of people who've lived in Jane and Finch and left. When I tell them I love Jane and Finch and would never leave and I don't wanna leave, and that I just want it to be better, they're very shocked and kind of think I'm dumb. Well, they laugh and say, 'you can do better this' and I'm like, why? This is prime real estate. This is a great location. It's close to a lot of stuff. What is wrong with Jane and Finch?

Although there is an understanding of the richness in these neighbourhoods, there is also the reality that due to organized abandonment which produces slow deaths, that the geographies

in which they inhabit cannot fully embrace the inner desires of these residents. Residents who Make Ground wrestle with the consequences that staying often produces, noting that those who have left their neighborhoods find success outside of the neighborhood. Bismark recalls,

> I think it's a good starting point. A lot of the people I've known who have been successful who have grown up here, they could not be as successful as they have been if they had stayed here. They wouldn't have had the same opportunities, they wouldn't have had the same, I don't want to say ability to perform, but they wouldn't have made the same connections that they did. A lot of them move out of here, they go to different places in the city, or they go to other cities, and the connections they form there help strengthen them. Whereas a lot of people who I find stay in the area don't. They don't have the same connections; they don't have the same opportunities. They don't have the same ideals of what they want to be honest with you.

In frustration, Sha'la laments in this contradiction stating, "everybody who's been in Jane finch and is better off, has left Jane and Finch. Jane and Finch isn't better. Jane and Finch isn't fixed; Jane and Finch isn't any better off." This acknowledgment of both the love for one's neighbourhood and the sacrifices it demands reveals the inner struggle of those who stay. Here, Sha'la is sharing parts of her interiority. She is cognizant of the positive experiences of those who have left Jane and Finch. The choice to remain is not naïve; it is revolutionary. This act recalls Huey Newton's concept of *revolutionary suicide*. This concept refers to the decision to fight and resist against systemic oppression and injustice, even at the risk of one's own life. Newton (1973) writes,

> I do not think that things will change for the better without an assault on the Establishment, which goes on exploiting the wretched of the earth. This belief lies at the heart of the concept of revolutionary suicide [...] revolutionary suicide does not mean that I and my comadares have a death wish; it means just the opposite. We have such a strong desire to live with hope and human dignity that existence without them is impossible. When reactionary forces crush us, we must move against these forces, even at the risk of death (p. 3).

While these residents are not courting death, as a statement of resistance and call to action, in some ways, there is a death, a sacrifice of a "better life" in exchange for the struggle towards a liveable Black future. Their efforts are acts of belief, of holding space open to "win a new world" (Newton, 1973, p. 4).

Sha'la's desire to "make sure that people get what they deserve " is animated by this very ethos. This is why she cannot "stop writing letters," despite her tiredness. As Newton (1973) contends, "any people who struggle against a brutal and powerful force–are suicidal" (p. 5). This is not meant in a defeatist or fatalistic manner, but rather,

> an awareness of reality in combination with the possibility of hope –reality because the revolutionary must always be prepared to face death, and hope because it symbolizes a resolute determination to bring about change (p. 6).

It is through these acts, large and small, that residents defend their right to live, thrive, and dream, right where they are.

4. *Overcoming racializing structures as possible*

When exploring how Black residents navigate the condition of Black worldlessness, it becomes evident that overcoming the racializing structures embedded within their neighbourhoods is not only possible but actively underway. For Sha'la, this possibility is realized through harnessing the energy generated through community. She reflects, "it feeds me in such a way that I have energy to do more." This energy emboldens her to take risks, invest in outcomes, and assert herself with purpose. It opens space to see possibility amid structural impossibility. Sha'la attributes this energy not only to the people, but also to the land itself. She locates Jane and Finch within a longer ancestral history, naming the presence of Indigenous life as a source of power. She states,

> I understand why people become superstars in Jane and Finch. There's energy here and it might have something to do with the native people's lands. This has always

> been an ancestral, very powerful place [...] So, you know, I won't discount that cuz that's something I feel very strongly here [...] I'm so happy to see it because I've felt the history of native people very strongly in this community. And I don't know if the people here know it, but I know there's a lot of landmarks here. [...] It's been a place of community for a long time.

For Sha'la the historical and spiritual legacy of her community produces "superstars," individuals who, despite genocidal mappings, transcend the conditions designed to constrain them. This empowerment is what makes resistance not only possible, but necessary. For these residents, the question is not whether they can conquer racializing structures, but rather *how* they can ensure Black livability in its breadth and depth, embracing both Black mediocrity and exceptionalism. The intrinsic valuing of Black life is what anchors Sha'la in Jane and Finch. She explains,

> I can't stop making phone calls because nobody else might do it. [...] I hope Jane and Finch is Wakanda in 20 years. That's what I hope. I hope its [Jane and Finch] like some high tech super Black, super cultural Mecca. I hope I can speak that into reality. The people, how they care about me, how they care about each other, how we have so many similarities, how I'm just seen here and understood and, and validated. I'm validated here in a way I have never been in Canada, definitely not in Toronto. Somebody said it to me, and I've been trying to kind of brush it off, but I think I'm gonna just embrace it and accept it. I feel like people see my abilities and look to me for leadership here.

Sha'la's words remind us that resistance to racialized structures of oppression requires a collective sourcing. What emerges is a transfigurative arrival of futurity, one that insists on Black dignity, humanity, and life, as Campt (2017) describes, through the lens of "unbounded Black subjects" (p. 45). Through these narratives, it becomes clear that those Making Ground are quite literally forging the terrain through which livable moments carve small pathways through Black worldlessness. Black residents bring beauty into their home in every way they can; they make livable moments in the neighborhoods that they live in; in the schools that their children attend; and in the streets that render them nonhuman. These residents remind us that everyday utopias are "a form of refusal, of choosing not to accept the status quo and instead carving out space for

something better" (Woods, 2017, p. 74). As Woods (2017) reminds us, the politics of refusal are not always in response to the dominant but may exist in their own right. So too do these residents in Jane and Finch and Malvern who craft livable worlds from within Black worldlessness, not because they have been given the tools, but because they have always carried the will.

Living the Interior Otherwise

For those Making Ground, the interplay between the "I" and the "Me" reveals the complex negotiation of identity within the racialized neighbourhoods they inhabit. Growing up and living in stigmatized neighbourhoods marked by negative perceptions and organized abandonment, initially led these residents to internalize anti-black racism and its misconceptions. The "Me", the socialized self shaped by societal expectations, internalized negative attitudes and absorbed deficit-based tropes about Black communities. Bismark captures this internalization, stating, "I recognized that I never mentioned where I was from unless I was asked." Likewise, Sha'la recalls, "I have to be honest […] the first year I was here, I tried really hard to get transferred out."

However, the arc of their narratives did not end with internalization. Bismark's time in London, Ontario, which he described as "a different environment" rife with "racism [and] every kind of discrimination you can think of," provoked an appreciation for the diversity, acceptance, and welcoming spirit of his neighbourhood. The transition back to his community marked the emergence of the "I", the expressive, interior self. His "I", which had taken a back seat to the "Me", emerged, allowing for a more coherent sense of identity and self-expression within his neighborhood. Similarly, experiencing a turning point, Sha'la's time spent within her neighbourhood propelled her "I" forward. She recalls, "I had come from downtown [Toronto], and I had this idea that I was taking a step back somehow or something (starts to tear up) [and it was] so wrong." Her transformed perspective on the people around her, stating, "99.9% of the people

that live in this community are the hardest workers. They are the workers that run this country, this city for sure", represents a salient shift in self-perception grounded in the recognition of her community's intrinsic value.

Living and witnessing state abandonment and underappreciation of her community brought forth her creative and impulsive "I." Despite the lack of external value and pride attached to the neighbourhoods, these residents highlight their value and the value in one another. Consequently, the "I," expressing the interior self, allows for these residents to dream of a futurity that opens up the possibility of transcending Black worldlessness. Despite structural abandonment and the external devaluation of their neighbourhoods, these residents locate meaning and vitality in one another. The "I" becomes a site of possibility, a wellspring of futurity through which they imagine lives beyond Black worldlessness. With this renewal of self, they develop a discourse that challenges territorial stigmatization and affirms Black humanity on their own terms. Through deliberate acts of recognition, care, and creativity, they transfigure the grotesqueness of their neighborhoods curating and presenting alternative narratives of Black livability. This development of self is strengthened through the collective energy of the neighbourhood, making it easier to refuse negative valuations of Blackness that do not align with their self-perceptions.

The counternarratives those Moving Ground develop are not meant to romanticize life in racialized neighbourhoods or deny their problems. Instead, these narratives hold in tension the persistent material struggles of life in racialized neighbourhoods with the internal fortitude that allows residents to push back. As Cooper (2013) reminds us, "a community's reinventions and transformations are rooted in more than direct opposition […]. They are products of independent desire: utopian concepts do not derive simply and only from the world they reject; they are also forged through their anchorage in the utopian world that is grown" (p. 33). The agency and

resistance of these residents are not only called into action by the external world, but also by their desires, ambitions, dreams, and by the hope that, "everybody gets what they deserve." Community thus becomes both a buffer and a generative force. In this manner, these residents are not reinforcing or resigning to the stigma of their neighbourhoods, but rather are politicizing their issues, demanding a vindication of place, and attempting to revert the stigma through collective organization and in radical notions of care.

The Quiet becomes central here, not as a retreat from the world but as a refusal to let the world overdetermine one's worth. Sha'la's words acknowledge, but are not overdetermined by the exterior world, there is a potency and meaningfulness of her interiority that is prioritized. The Quiet, the source of human action, storehouse containing experiential resources, domain of contemplation, and a stay against the world has its own inexpressible integrity. For Sha'la, this storehouse is constantly being filled, taken from and refilled, but never emptied. And it's the resources in this storehouse that activates her agency.

She echoes this idea saying,

> Being around Black people gives me both energy and purpose. It feeds me in such a way that I have energy to do more. I can't explain it [...] I'm not a religious person, but I'm a spiritual person. [...] I literally realized that when I wasn't around Black people, I didn't care what I was doing. And one hand was good, but on the other hand, it wasn't right. I didn't care as much. I could take more risks cuz I didn't care as much, but I also didn't care as much about the outcome. So I didn't work as hard. I didn't put as much effort into it because the outcome didn't matter as much. Who's gonna care? Who's gonna be proud of me? My grandparents aren't around to be proud of me. My aunties aren't around to see my mom's not. So, I didn't try as hard. [...] But being older and then also being around Black people, I want to prove something to people around me. I want to show them a lot. I wanna show my kids a lot. I wanna show my family all the Black love and energy that I'm feeding off of every day. And when I'm stressed, I don't have to say anything, like I literally can just be like, "yo, these people, this job", [pause] and the whole store is like "Jesusss these people" [throws hands up] and we're done. And right there I have everything

> I need, you know? Then I can go get some porridge and some fried dumplings. Everything I need is here.

Sha'la's reflection illustrates how interiority, the Quiet, functions as a reservoir of refusal, enabling her to transform stress into care, and exhaustion into purpose. Peeling back Sha'la's reflection a bit more, we see how the gaps and pauses, attempts to describe the interior but reveals the limits of its expressiveness. As Quashie (2021) contends, the interiority cannot be fully accessed or expressed as it is largely indescribable, as such, her inner desires are made known through her behaviour and exterior manifestations, highlighting her attunement to her interiority. Sha'la's desire to "prove something" is not merely a reaction to the state and Black worldlessness, but a deeply personal meditation, a scene in the play of her inner life. The Quiet operates as a gateway through which agency is nurtured and fostered; a reminder that those Making Ground have an interiority that holds all that is.

Pathways through Black worldlessness are made possible through fighting.

A salient pathway through which those *Making Ground* navigate their neighbourhoods and lay the foundation to living in a world otherwise, is through the everyday act of fighting. For these residents, resistance is a daily necessity, an insistence on dignity in the face of ordinary violations. Sha'la shares her frustration with grocery store shopkeepers that dishonor scanning codes of practice meant to ensure fairness and grocery stores that ignore consumer protections, routinely selling expired goods. She states,

> It's the constant fighting just to get basic stuff. Not even special [treatment]. I would understand if we're asking for special stuff. [...] We don't need special interest groups cause we're not asking for something special. We just want regular everyday stuff that any citizen of Toronto gets just by buying stuff from the corner store and paying taxes [...], buying goods and services, we're already paying into the system.

When asked how do you respond to everyday injustices, Sha'la answers,

> I argue a lot. I fight a lot, but you know what? We all do. We all do [...] I'm a Karen before there was Karen, but we're not Karen's, we're righteous. So I'm a Valkyrie. [...] But white women taught me this. It's my time amongst white women that taught me how to write a good letter to customer service. And I've never forgotten that skill.

For Sha'la, fighting becomes a channel through which she discovers her capacity and expands her sense of self. She continues,

> I can't stop trying because it is helping me to learn my capacity and how much I can handle where I want to go, where I wanna live. And at the end of the day, we cannot let them steal our agency. Our freedom of choice and ability to live the lives we want to live. And so my choice is to fight and to fight for respect [...] I'm not, I'm never gonna stop doing what I need to do to live the best life that I wanna live.

Similarly, Bismark explains,

> I realized that I'm a person who can articulate what he wants, to a certain degree. And like I said, it's a very diverse area. So, there's a lot of people who don't have the ways to talk. There's a lot of older people who don't know who they're supposed to be talking to, who they're supposed to be asking for help from. It's a problem.

This insistence on agency is not forged in isolation. It is made more possible through the accumulation of resources of refusal, resources anchored in community relationships built through an exchange of trust. Community relationships play a vital role in the development of their self-esteem and the energy that propels these community activists forward. For this group, protective strategies (i.e., adopting a challenging discourse and maintaining a sense of community) supports and shields Black residents through the most difficult times. Those Moving Ground find solace in creating social bonds that humanize them, providing reciprocal exchanges of validation and recognition that enriches their lives outside the cartography of Black worldlessness. Community advocacy then becomes a site of energy, creating grounds for self- creation and self-realization that fosters a radical imagination where Black residents can inhabit "aliveness as a fuller habitat for being" (Quashie, 2021, p.26).

These residents, situated on the right side of the internal–external continuum of Black worldlessness, embody a distinctive experience. Unlike those *Quietly Holding Ground*, who remain in their neighbourhoods due to limited resources or internalized constraint, and unlike those *Moving Ground,* who dream of futurities beyond their neighborhoods, but are held in due to external constraints, these residents choose to stay. They are neither externally held in place by oppressive structures nor internally bound by shame or stigma. Instead, they have developed the interior and social resources to actively resist the meanings imposed on their neighbourhoods, crafting livable lives in spite of, and against, the carceral logics that attempt to define them. Here, the expressive force of the interior meets the structural denials of Black livability. Their presence is not passive, nor born out of scarcity, it is chosen in care. By leaning into the storehouse of their Quiet, they chart pathways through Black worldlessness.

Resistance is a key tool used in the quest for liberation for these residents. However, as Quashie (2012) cautions, resistance as a dominant framework should be used as a tool in the toolbox of analysis rather than a dominant framework "to characterize the totality of Black culture or expression" (p.14). Quashie critiques resistance frameworks when exploring Black expressiveness as he argues they limit the capacities through which Black life can be read and understood. When resistance frameworks are the dominant script for reading Black life; Black life becomes tethered to fighting the social world instead of being imagined outside the logic of victimization with an unimaginable interiority. Thus, the Quiet functions to ask, *what else? What is beyond the aesthetic of loudness?* The meditation of the interior recognizes and reveres the interior above all else. This is not to say that loudness is not important or has not been vital to resistance movements, but this dominant expectation that scripts Black life as knowable, suppresses the textualities of Black identity as if Black subjectivity possesses no interiority worth

speaking of. Black livability insists on Black beingness and expressiveness beyond a singular framework of negation. These residents show us that Black life is also resistant, and should be when need be, but is not all that Black life is! The Quiet helps us to understand that certainly, these residents are gesturing towards resistant in context, but not in essence.

For these residents, their neighbourhoods represent more than just a physical location; they are geographies of belonging, solidarity, and empowerment. They are the grounds for the formation and validation of identities that are essential for the well-being and development of self. Tenants engaged in mutual assistance and material exchange watch over each other's children and homes; developing a felt sense of unity from "being in the same boat", which helps them cope with the external stigma and prejudice. Convergingly, these findings point to an important contrast between the "lived experience of place and an external view of public housing perpetuated by the media as islands of despair" (p. 1873). There is an exuberance, an energy that lives in these spaces that allows for coming to self. What is unique about those Making Ground is that they produce a climate that allows Black residents to feel wholly accepted. It's not just of the "extraordinary Negro" or the unexpected Negro who are accepted, but Black residents who live ordinary, mundane or wayward lives, who refuse an existence scripted for them. These narratives are stories of Black aliveness, Black capaciousness, and Black possibilities.

As Bismark illustrates they are geographies of love.

> To be honest with you, every day I look outside it reminds me of those picturesque commercials. Kids are playing on the lawn, everybody's tending to their garden and doing little projects, or just walking around [...]. There are a lot of older people, they're constantly about walking around and interacting. I really think this is a loved neighbourhood by the people who live here.

Similarly, Sha'la states,

> Other than the angst that we feel towards stuff that is bothering us, there's love. I feel loved. I feel care. Like they care about me and my children.They care about what happens to us. My neighbors care about each other. We care. And knowing that somebody cares about me matters. It makes me care about what I'm doing. It makes me wanna prove [myself].

These responses indicate a sense of joy that illuminates and sees Blackness in totality, where every human question and possibility is of people who are Black. Despite the struggles of living in these geographies, peace is found in embracing the indisputable aliveness of Blackness. And as such, it restores Black humanity and dignity.

Sha'la resident states,

> I love it. I love walking in my neighbourhood, I love it. I see people, I see the kids, I see everybody's doing their thing and dressing in their stuff and listening to their music. I love it. [...] I've never felt so at home and at peace in a place. I never thought that I'd find it in Canada. And if I stay in Canada, it's because of Jane and Finch, [...] Jane Finch is the only community I've ever lived in, in Canada that I've felt like I could be my full self.

In the face of Black worldlessness, these residents assert an aliveness *that is*. An aliveness that propels them into a dynamic existence, embracing the constant tussle of being and becoming. Black aliveness, ever-present and enduring, finds expression through self-creation within the Quiet. The choice to remain in their neighborhoods reflects not merely the absence of alternatives but a profound commitment to community and a willingness to sacrifice personal comfort for the betterment of their neighbourhoods. These residents tirelessly advocate for social change, enduring the hardships of Black worldlessness and make personal sacrifices in their dedication to defend their neighbourhoods. Despite the pervasive backdrop of Black worldlessness, these residents refuse to tether Black life solely to the notions of death and despair. Instead, they engage in a process of mutual recognition, validating each other's humanity and affirming Black aliveness, where "mattering matters indisputably" (Quashie, 2021, p.13). Choosing to remain in their

neighbourhoods becomes an expression of their inner lives, a testament to their engagement in self-creation and active participation in shaping their identities, realities, and experiences. Through the Quiet, they carve pathways through Black worldlessness within their racialized neighbourhoods.

This chapter, building on Quietly Holding Ground and Moving Ground, pushes back against the oversimplification of Black experiences by illustrating the diversity within racialized neighbourhoods. It insists that Blackness is no longer reduced to the external imposition of racialization, criminalization, and carceral logics, but has a rich interiority that exceeds them. Through the Quiet, the interiority of Black residents becomes a site of an already present aliveness, innately and complicatedly present.

As such this chapter illuminates the experiences of Black residents who voluntarily choose to remain in their neighbourhoods, transfiguring Black futures, existence, and livability in these geographies. Although, resistance is a framework used by these residents and rightfully so, my critique, building on Quashie advocates for moving beyond resistance as the primary lens. This work calls for a broader understanding of Black life that encompasses fugitivity, experimentation, play, and love as this is required to understand the motivations, sublimity, and humanity of those Making Ground that often gets disregarded through the discourse of resistance or public assertiveness. As previously mentioned, these categories, Quietly Holding, Moving Ground, and Making Ground are not fixed. They are temporal, fluid, and context dependent. This fluidity is further illustrated in Sha'la's comment above where she states, "if I stay in Canada, it's because of Jane and Finch." Her words leave open the possibility of mobility, illustrating the shifting nature of Black subjectivity. This is the aim of this work, to hold space for the fluidity, to mark the present, and to affirm that Black life is always more than what it is forced to survive.

Chapter VIII

Concluding Remarks

The human heart does not only resist; its beat is insistent, lurching pulsing, but its agency is not only resistance

–Kevin Quashie, The Sovereignty of Quiet (2012)

This dissertation set out to explore the following questions: How do Black residents respond to the racialization of their neighbourhoods? How does the racialization of their neighbourhood's impact Black residents' sense of self? What are the strategies for reclaiming Black life in and or/from their racialized neighborhoods? Upon investigation, I found that the narratives of residents make evident that experiences of racialization of their neighbourhoods, its impact on their sense of self, and their strategies of reclaiming Black life are neither passive nor monolithic, there is no fixed response. Rather, their experiences operate across a continuum of responses represented in diverse, complex ways interwoven with strategies of Black aliveness, that exceed the vocabulary of resistance alone (Hartman, 2007; Quashie, 2012). These narratives disrupt the homogenizing force of racialized carcerality, revealing the experiential nuance and interior richness of Black social life.

What emerges from the data is three categories of experiences: *Quietly Holding Ground, Moving Ground,* and *Making Ground*. These represent dynamic and overlapping orientations to space, selfhood, and futurity within conditions shaped by Black worldlessness. More significantly, these categories are not fixed as unchangeable objects but relational snapshots that reflect how Black residents respond to, navigate, and carve out livable lives within their racialized neighbourhoods. By mapping these variations, my research highlights both the synchronicity and

heterogeneity of Black social life. I highlight these designations as indicators that reflect the lived experiences of Black residents living in racialized neighbourhoods *today.*

1. Quietly Holding Ground: Futurities Within or Beyond the Carcerality of Black Worldlessness.

This category of experience refers to residents who, while situated within the constraints of Black worldlessness, embody a fractured self through internalized stigma. Yet within this wounded interiority lies a quiet persistence, a subtle orientation towards aliveness. Here, Black futurity is not defined by overt defiance or resistance, but by constrained, quiet acts of holding on, a quiet insistence on life. For these residents, the condition of Black worldlessness seeps into their interiority, fostering a debilitating and palpable construction of the social self that interrupts the possibilities of Black aliveness. Here, the capacity to realize their agency, envision their futures, and self-creation is constrained by the limited protective resources, both internally and externally, which makes the work of self-affirmation difficult, but not impossible. However, despite this condition, Black life persists. The interiority that is equipped with a reservoir of internal resources, quietly grounds these residents in space. The will to survive, and at times, resist provides Black residents with a sensibility, a conduit to find interstices to hold onto Black life. This is made evident through moments of positive self-talk and intergenerational transmission of knowledge that signal presence and quiet insistence on life that sustain the possibilities of aliveness.

2. Moving Ground: Futurities Beyond the Carcerality of Black Worldlessness

This category of experience refers to residents who have an orientation, a Quiet maneuvering towards elsewhere. While involuntarily held in their racialized neighborhoods by Black worldlessness, they do not internalize the pathologies projected onto their neighbourhoods. Instead, they mobilize a Quiet, protective agency rooted in self-definition and refusal that provides

a sustained orientation toward futurity beyond their neighbourhoods that has not yet resulted in departure. These residents possess greater internal and external resources that safeguard their self-concept equipping them with the capacity to reject imposed valuations of Blackness that do not align with their self-perception. Protective strategies, whether assembled intentionally or not, in the form of normalizing discourses, a positive self concept, a strong community network, and adopting cosmologies beyond Black worldlessness operate as buffers against Black worldlessness. This empowers and eases residents into a reoriented framework of their social self that allows them to see and create futures beyond Black worldlessness. These residents do not easily succumb to the racializing logics of their neighbourhoods, instead they draw on their resources as sources to navigate the constraints and cultivate future imaginaries that extend beyond their immediate social conditions. In this vein, these resources of refusal create and enable these residents to realize their agency, carve out inlets of possibilities, and reinscribe livability. This is signalled through the ways they envision their futures, how they dream, and reflect on goals toward futures not yet secured, but deeply longed for. Not only is there is an acute awareness of their inner desires and thoughts, but there is a firm insistence on Black livability and attaining those futures against any constraints (Campt, 2017).

3. Making Ground: Transfigurative Futurities Within the Carcerality of Black Worldlessness

This third category of experience refuses the presumed binary of either remaining in place or escaping it, offering a third orientation; a making of *place*. These residents assert that Black futures are not only elsewhere but seeded in the soil of the very spaces pathologized by the state. The voices of these residents tell us that staying is not always a deficit but can be an act of worldmaking. These residents who neither feel fully internally nor externally confined by Black worldlessness, but voluntarily choose to remain in their neighbourhoods, transform their

relationship to the conditions of Black worldlessness through radical self love, moving from self-alienation and internalized anti-blackness to a renewed sense of self grounded in dignity. In this process, they adopt a challenging discourse, cultivate strong community networks, and foster community activism. Equipped with both internal and external resources, these residents not only reject valuations of Blackness that do not align with their self-perception, but actively challenge the forces of territorial stigmatization, developing an orientation toward Black livability and futurity within their racialized geographies. Rather than succumb to the epidermalization of inferiority imposed through white supremacist frameworks, whether through media outlets, state constructions of racialized neighbourhoods, or policymakers, these residents disrupt the prototypical conceptualization of Black life by embracing Black beingness in its fullness without alteration, in its strangeness, extraordinariness, mundanity, and failures (Fanon, 1986; Song, 2017). For these residents, through their everyday refusals, mutual care, and visionary commitments, they transfigure the boundaries of livability itself. They challenge us to see Black aliveness by retooling the grotesque distortions of blackness scripted in the white psyche, self-authorizing a selfhood that exists far beyond the white gaze, where Black interiority and community vitality converge to produce livable Black futures within the *unlivable* conditions of Black worldlessness. Black futures within Black worldlessness becomes possible through embracing the energy of their communities, paying deep reverence to the desires of their Quiet, fighting, and through radical acts of love and resistance.

This study reveals the fluidity of how Black residents respond to, navigate, and reimagine pathways out of or within their racialized neighbourhoods. By mapping these variations, my research highlights both the synchronicity and heterogeneity of Black social life, demonstrating the multiple ways in which Black residents carve out spaces of aliveness, envision selfhood, and

articulate futurities in the face of persistent anti-blackness. I highlight these designations as indicators that reflect the lived experiences of Black residents living in racialized neighbourhoods *today.*

My research forges a theory of Black emplacement and futurity, where Black residents navigate the tensions between ontological negation and world-making desires. The analytical chapters, a grounded epistemology of Black social life, calls scholars, stakeholders, and policy makers to reorient how they think about space, race, and aliveness through the lens of Black residents not as derivative of suffering alone, but as a site of radical and quiet transformation. My work reconciles two salient, but seemingly oppositional abstract ideas; Afro-pessimism's ontology of social death and Black Optimism's insistence on social life in the lived realities of Black residents. All the categories of experiences, those Quietly Holding Ground, those Moving Ground, and those Making Ground, map how Black life in spite of the weight of negation and condition of Black death, find, curate, and transfigure moments of aliveness, futurity-in-process grounded in both material constraint and the interiority. Here my work builds a conceptual bridge holding space for both perspectives and the paradoxes of Black life from a Canadian perspective. This is evidenced by examining the tactics of self-making, strategies of reclaiming Black life, and the envisioning and materialization of Black futures by residents navigating conditions of Black worldlessness in neighbourhoods within the City of Toronto and the Region of Peel. My research captures both the conditions of Black social life as the artifacts of imposition and negation and as active performances against a perduring antiblackness; a dialectic that sustains hope and the capacity to imagine things otherwise (Hart, 2018). By privileging the interiority and mundaneness of Black life, my work opens "a whole range of possible avenues of analysis" allowing for deeper explorations of Black resilience, quiet, and creativity (Kline, 2017, p. 57).

Methodological contributions

My work activates Black Radical Tradition by centering lived narratives as critical sites as theory-making. I offer a bottom-up radicalism, demonstrating how liberation dreams are created not only in protest but in everyday persistence, care, and interiority. I centre the humanity of Black people as their first identity, the default for understanding what joy, vulnerability, and agency means in the context of Black life. While further study is required, this research already extends several critical traditions. Within Critical Race Theory (CRT), it illustrates the relationship between racial stigma and its impact on one's relation to place and futurity. My analysis compels CRT to further engage in the embodied and psychosocial impacts of systemic racism, offering an ontological and emotional extension that links structural racism to lived, embodied experiences, and futurities.

In Critical Urban Studies, I move beyond judicial and institutional critiques to an engagement with Black urban subjectivity that interrogates urban policy, infrastructure, and surveillance. I centre Black expressiveness culture, memory, desires, and futurities to reveal how space is co-constituted through Black presence. The intervention challenges the field's historical neglect of inner life, feelings, and creativity as salient spatial forces. In Black Cultural Studies, I build on the work of scholars who have moved from textual and cultural analysis to the narratives and interior worlds of Black subjects as cultural texts in themselves. In this manner, the Quiet operates as a form of embodied cultural production that resists blackness as public discourse in exchange for other ways of thinking about life privileging the inner lived components of life; the silences, expressiveness, spiritual awakeningness, the strategies Black people deploy in everyday life as valid, critical sites of knowledge production.

Deepening the work in Black Geographies, this thesis demonstrates how the "ungeographic," those presumed out-of-place, create and re-claim Black presence in spaces designed to erase it. Here, the Quiet, expands McKittrick's (2006) notion of ungeographic and becomes the vehicle through which Black residents mark and hold space and create place in their racialized neighbourhoods. Here, Black geographies are not only about being held in or escaping, but also about staying, holding, and refiguring the terms of beingness.

Lastly, when thinking about carceral geography, I add to the scope of carcerality beyond material confinement to include interior, psychic, and imaginative constraints. Across all three experiential categories, I demonstrate how carcerality immobilizes not just bodies, but also aspirations, desires, and agency. This framework insists that carceral geographies must account for the foreclosure of possibility, how systemic architectures of containment impede the ability to envision and realize Black futures. This, too, is a form of incarceration.

Final reflections

Actively listening to the narratives of Black residents in my study reveals five key insights:

First, Black life cannot simply be reduced to the modalities of racialization or framed solely through oppositionality and resistance. Black life is composed of energetic capacities, histories, vitalities, nuanceness, complexities that shape Black expressiveness. Black residents are not always engaged in the politics of resistance in response to racial oppression, nor do they always operate from a political framework of blackness; speaking back to the dominant ideology. Rather Black people just are–they are driven by desires and logics that are often misread as externally propelled. My dissertation seeks to reposition this framing by utilizing the concept of the Quiet to expand how we read Black life, highlighting interiority, the "stuff" that sustains Black life. While

some may argue that such an inquiry is unnecessary, pointing to the self-evident nature of Black humanity, the material reality of black life illustrates otherwise. The very need to assert, "Black Lives Matter," underscores a broader discourse that denies Black interiority, imagination, and desires. However, Black livability proves otherwise. Quiet is not absence, it is fundamental to humanity; it is already there, if one is looking to understand it (Quashie, 2012, p. 9). Yet, contemporary readings of Black life often position the Quiet as antithetical to it. Understanding Black life requires a different lens, one that explores capacities beyond flat, external suppositions of Blackness-as-resistance, spectacle, or disruption in exchange of a lens that foregrounds Black interiority rooted in the mundane and ordinary. While the notion of aliveness is not new, evident in Black feminist literary texts by Audre Lorde, Toni Morrison, Dionne Brand, I extend the use of this concept outside an aesthetic of poetry into the material reality of Black Canadians living in neighbourhoods within Toronto and the Greater Toronto Area. This work restores the humanity of Black residents living in racialized neighbourhoods demarcated as "dead spaces." Black residents navigate their neighbourhoods in ways that tell a more complex story beyond the spectacle of Blackness. In their mundane sentiments, I observe pain, fear, and abandonment, but also transgenerational knowledge-passing, deeply rooted religious cosmologies, love, ambiguity, and world-making in its fullness. Though conditioned by racializing and carceral structures, Black residents do not simply resign to them, nor do they exclusively resist. Rather, they navigate these structures in ways informed by the Quiet—modes of being as they see fit not always legible as resistance.

Second, my dissertation challenges the oversimplification of the pathways of low-income Black urban residents, shifting away from cultural determinist perspectives that assign cultural deprivation and pathologize Black life (Carter, 2005; Harding, 2007; Lareau, 2003). Mobility, or

lack thereof, as a measure of progress fails to consider the ways in which residents experience their surrounding environments regardless of their structural conditions. Instead, it offers a holistic perspective that illustrates the diversity of experiences within racialized neighbourhoods, the varying ways residents cope with organized abandonment, and the multiplicity of motivations behind their decisions. This complexity transcends binary frameworks, capturing the dynamism and richness of Black existence in racialized spaces. As Small et al., (2010) contends, fully understanding how Black residents living in racialized neighbourhoods navigate their experience and options is essential for developing complete, stronger explanations of how they navigate poverty. Black life in urban racialized neighbourhoods is heterogeneous, encompassing an array of behaviours, aspirations, and outcomes. I reject the notion that there is a single, cohesive experience shared by Black residents living in racialized neighbourhoods, or that all residents living marginalized communities are involuntarily "stuck in place". Instead, by listening to my participants, I have developed the Internal-External Continuum of Black worldlessness, which accounts for the variation in how Black residents envision pathways of aliveness and future possibilities. This continuum challenges deterministic notions of constraints and possibilities, allowing for complexity in how constraints are conceived, broadening the understanding of constraints to contain both internal and external dimensions while also taking into consideration the saliency of resources, whether internally or externally contrived to factor into how Black residents experience their neighbourhoods and navigate Black worldlessness. My findings demonstrate that the greater the resources available, the less residents internalize negative racializing narratives, allowing them to realize their agency, for some, to envision futures beyond Black worldlessness, and others to reclaim Black life in their communities. Navigating Black

worldlessness and the pathways through it is not a linear or homogeneous process, but a dynamic and multifaceted negotiation of space, identity, and possibility.

Third, my dissertation advances an expansive understanding of containment that directs scholarly attention to the continuities of carcerality. Specifically, it examines how carcerality constrains: (1) the envisioning of Black futures beyond the present conditions of Black worldlessness, and (2) the capacity of individuals to realize those envisioned futures. Carcerality is often employed as a form of social control that extends beyond incarceration; however, my research moves beyond conventional understandings of carceral systems, policing, surveillance, and spatial containment, to examine their effects on Black futurities. In this manner, I am adding to the way we think about the impact of carcerality (Story, 2019). The omnipresence of surveillance and policing (i.e., over-policing, surveillance technologies, community-police relationships), spatial containment (i.e., architectural isolation, underdeveloped infrastructure, legacies of containment), and criminalization of daily life (i.e., regulation of public space, male criminalization) produces environments where daily struggle for survival eclipses the possibility of imagining a different future. The constant threat of carcerality fosters a climate of fear and insecurity, stifling creativity, ambitions, and the ability to dream beyond immediate circumstances. This extension of carcerality is useful in the field of carceral studies as it provides a necessary framework for understanding how carcerality operates emotively, materially, psychologically, and futuristically. It also helps us to move beyond cultural determinist narratives that attribute Black deprivation to internal deficiencies rather than structural conditions.

Fourth, my dissertation foregrounds the importance of understanding Black futurities by examining how Black residents envision and cultivate future possibilities despite structural constraints. Through the lens of the Quiet, my work provides a new lens for exploring how Black

life insists and thrives in the face of systemic oppression. The Quiet which critiques how we have been conditioned to read black life, offers a methodology to read the subtext of Black life. It is a call to read beyond excess and the spectacle of public death. This research is also a deliberate rejection of cheap attention, it calls us to reconsider, patiently and quietly, how we support Black life in racialized urban neighbourhoods, urging us to question how dominant narratives of unlivability shape the lived experiences of Black residents.

Finally, my research responds to and is in conversation with social policy research analysts, who develop strategic interventions for historically under-invested racialized neighborhoods under the aim of providing "vulnerable populations" with stronger supports to strengthen and monitor their well-being. My dissertation compels policymakers and research analysts to take seriously the impact of interventionist strategies that claim to be invested in the well-being of Black life. Through social policies and historical patterns of territorial stigmatization, city planners have participated in producing the very conditions that they aim to address failing to account for the lasting harms of territorial pathologization (Hulchanski, 2006; McKittrick and Woods, 2017). While I acknowledge the material realities of racialized neighbourhoods, my work critiques the neoliberal assumption that upward residential mobility and wealth acquisition are the primary pathways to success. When we buy into this logic (1) it implicitly suggests that those who are held in or decide to stay in their neighbourhoods are failures, and (2) overlooks the ways that Black folks cultivate aliveness within their racialized neighbourhoods. While mobility studies are useful for designing urban policy, as Silver et al. (2019) reminds us, "solely relying on such economic measures may obscure how opportunities within these places are made" (p. 2025). Not all residents seek to leave—many find success and meaning in their own spaces and we miss this important

distinction when we do not pay attention to the lived realities of Black residents which is uncovered through my work.

My research also challenges the City of Toronto and Peel Region's index tools. My work complicates these indicators asking, what would it look like for Black lives to exist in totality? If we want to take seriously the well-being of Black residents, we need to reframe Black life and Black geographies. Index indicators, rather than measuring the well-being of life, should measure the quality of life. Identifying anti-black racism as a social determinant of quality of life would illustrate the gaps in Black livability much more saliently than, for example, participation in decision making. What I am hearing from residents is that these indicators do not effectively measure the well-being of Black residents. Instead, such strategies reinforce spatial boundaries and racialization processes contributing to harm where black residents are made to shoulder the burden of the city's organized abandonment. By pathologizing racialized neighborhoods, these tools perpetuate the very conditions they purport to address, driving away investment and exacerbating economic and social disparities. These rankings not only drive away investment, but it lays the ground for interventionist tactics like revitalization projects in the form of gentrification. Powerful and compelling narratives of isolation and decline that accompany redevelopment overshadow the positive aspects of public housing and the benefits of living in "concentrated" low-income communities (August, 2014). These theories provide ready-made language to describe public housing in a way that justifies its removal, and ready-made policy solutions, which include the demolition of projects, the dispersal of residents, and the construction of mixed-income communities (August, 2014). My work urges urban policymakers and planning and community development caucuses interested in understanding local perceptions as it relates to well being to move beyond frameworks that merely quantify deprivation and instead engage with the ways

Black residents construct meaning and livability within their communities. My dissertation points towards the importance of quietly listening to residents, supporting their critical engagement with the "labyrinth of government that controls planning," understanding their lifestyles and values, and seeking how to better support and expand those assets (Jane-finch TSNS Task Force, 2015, p. 42). This work is critical for developing more equitable and just policies that recognize the humanity and agency of Black residents rather than merely pathologizing their neighbourhoods. Ultimately, my dissertation is a call to action, it is a testament to the promise of Black futurity, a commitment to one another in a world that seeks to perpetually index them to death.

The final note that I want to leave Black residents, my participants, and Black/African people globally; is to continue to craft your own worlds; to create meaningfulness, whether it is a world-making filled with desire and anxiety cocooned from the conditions of Black worldlessness, or a world-making ragingly wild and faithful requiring a dream-making that honours future worlds that are not yet materialized, or perhaps a world-making within the cartographies of your neighbourhood that expands the vision of freedom– do not stop world-making. Continue to discern, think, feel, create, survive, and dream beyond the conditions of Black worldlessness. Dare to look at yourselves on your own terms, not consumed by publicness or prescriptions of social identities, hold steadfast in the Quiet. This dissertation does not prioritize the Quiet to the exclusion of loud anti-black violence and racism but rather illustrates how the hues of the Quiet persist, as a low hum alongside the conditions of Black life, home to wondrous possibilities.

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Appendix A: Demographic Questionnaire

Demographic Questionnaire: **Bodies in space: Negotiating Black personhood in racialized geographies.** *Please complete the following demographic questionnaire so I know who you are. If there are questions you choose not to answer, leave them blank. Your information will not be shared with anyone. Feel free to add any additional information you feel to be relevant or to create your own categories when needed.*

DATE: _____

NAME: _____

PSEUDONYM (for use in publications):_____

AGE: _____

What city and neighborhood do you currently live in and how long have you lived there? Please include major intersection._____

Where were you born: _____

Have you lived anywhere else and how long did you live there? Please include city, neighborhood, and major intersection.

_____

_____

Describe your racial-ethnic identity:_____

Describe your gender identity:_____

E-MAIL:_____

Would you like to receive updates about the project by email? Y N

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Non-Movers and Movers

Key questions

1) Would you recommend your neighbourhood as a place to live? Why/not?
List 5 good things and 5 bad things about your neighbourhood (explore responses)

2) If you could move to another neighbourhood would you? Why/not? (explore responses)

i. **If no,** what makes this neighbourhood attractive to you?

3) **If yes**, which neighbourhood would you move to? Why? (explore responses)

i. What makes that neighbourhood attractive to you?
ii. How do you think your life would be better? (internally?)
iii. Are there any barriers that have prevented you from moving?

4) If you could live in a different city or country, would you? Why/not?

5) A*) Do you have any children*?

***For those who have young children**: would you be happy if your children stayed in this neighbourhood for the rest of their lives? Why/not?

B) ***For those who don't have kids**. If you ever decided to have kids would you want to raise them in this neighbourhood? Why/not?

6) Looking ahead, 20 yrs. from now, if you still lived in this neighbourhood, would you be happy with that? Why/not? Explore

Topics for Consideration:

i. Socialising: neighbourhood resources/spaces
ii. Safety: Policing
iii. Belonging/inclusion (connecting to heritage)
iv. Employment opportunities
v. Access to health care
vi. Education
vii. Participation in decision making

Potential follow-up questions to be included as appropriate with key questions:

B) What are some of the challenges of living in your neighbourhood?
   a. Prompts
      i. Dance
      ii. Music
      iii. Accessing cultural foods
      iv. Hair products
      v. Can you provide me with an example of this experience?
   b. How do you respond to these challenges?
   c. How does this make you feel?

C) How do you generally feel when you are walking through your neighbourhood?
   a. Prompts
      i. Going to the nearby convenient store, grocery store etc.
   b. Do you feel like you belong?

c. What makes you feel that you belong/or don't belong? Can you provide me with an example of this experience?

D) ---------- (end here for movers and move below)

E) How do you feel that your neighbourhood is perceived (stereotypes)?

i. By Neighbours
ii. Media
iii. By Local government
iv. By Police
v. By teachers working in the local schools

a. Do you agree with these perceptions?
b. In which ways have/do you respond to these perceptions?
c. How do these perceptions impact how you see/feel about yourself?

F) Can you recall particular instances where you were made to feel like you did not belong in your neighbourhood? How did you respond to that experience?

G) Do you feel Black people in your neighbourhood are perceived fairly?

i. By neighbours
ii. By media
iii. By Local government
iv. Other

H) Given these experiences, would you recommend living in this neighbourhood (livability)?

a. Who would be successful in this neighbourhood? Why?

Possibilities of Self

I) Overall, how do you feel that your neighbourhood benefits you? (i.e. socially, culturally, economically, emotionally, spiritually)

Topics for Consideration:

a. Socialising: neighbourhood resources/spaces
b. Safety: Policing
c. Belonging/inclusion (connecting to heritage)
d. Employment opportunities
e. Access to health care
f. Education
g. Participation in decision making

h. Do you feel as if it is easy to belong as a Black person in your neighbourhood? If so, how? If not,why not?

J) Based on your experiences in this neighbourhood, do you think that it is more possible to reach your goals/aspirations in life as a Black person? Why? Or Why not?

a. **If yes**, what factors make it possible to reach your goals? Can you provide me with an example?
b. **If no,** what factors make it harder for you to reach your goals/aspiration in life as a Black person? What are you doing to encourage yourself to think more positively about this?

K) Does your neighbourhood feel like 'home'?

a. If so, how? Can you provide me with an example?
b. If not, do you feel like there is a possibility of making your neighbourhood 'home'? How do you do to affirm yourself (encourage positive feelings) in your neighbourhood? Can you provide me with an example?

Additional Possible Follow-Up Questions for Movers

7) Why did you move to your current neighbourhood?
   a. In comparison to your previous neighbourhood, what do you like/or not like about your current neighbourhood?
   b. In comparison to your previous neighbourhood, would you say that your current neighbourhood is missing anything that your previous one had?

8) How do you feel that Black people are perceived (stereotypes) in your current neighbourhood in comparison to your previous one?
   i. By Neighbours
   ii. By Media
   iii. By Local government
   iv. By Police
   v. By teachers working in the local schools
   a. Do you agree with these perceptions?
   b. In which ways have/do you respond to these perceptions?
   c. How do these perceptions impact how you see/feel about yourself?

9) Can you recall particular instances where you were made to feel like you did not belong in your neighbourhood? How did you respond to that experience?

10) Given these experiences, would you recommend living in your current neighbourhood (livability)?
   i. Who would be successful in this neighbourhood? Why?
   ii. What does success look like to you?

Possibilities of Self

A) Overall, how does moving to your new neighbourhood benefit you? (i.e. socially, culturally, economically, emotionally, spiritually)

Topics for Consideration:
   a. Socialising: neighbourhood resources/spaces
   b. Safety: Policing
   c. Belonging/inclusion (connecting to heritage)
   d. Employment opportunities
   e. Access to health care
   f. Education
   g. Participation in decision making

B. Do you feel as if it is easier to belong as a Black person in your new neighbourhood? Is so, how? If not, why? Can you provide me an example of this?

C) Now that you live in this neighbourhood, do you think that it is more possible to reach your goals/aspirations in life as a Black person? Why? Or Why not?

a. **If yes**, what factors make it possible to reach your goals? Can you provide me with an example?

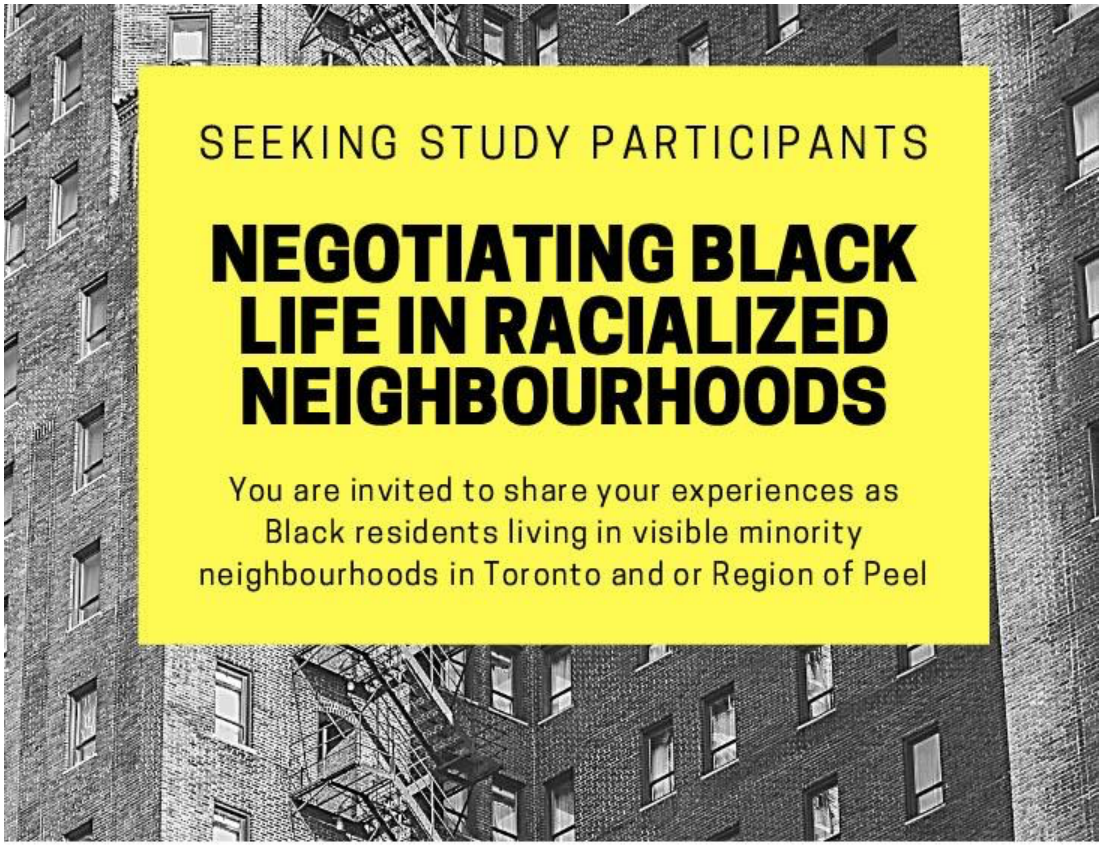
b. **If no,** what factors make it harder for you to reach your goals/aspiration in life as a Black person? What are you doing to encourage yourself to think more positively about this?

11) Does your neighbourhood feel like 'home'?

c. If so, how? Can you provide me with an example?

d. If not, do you feel like there is a possibility of making your neighbourhood 'home'? How do you do to affirm yourself (encourage positive feelings) in your neighbourhood? Can you provide me with an example?

Appendix C: Recruitment Flyer



Participants must meet the following requirements:

-Be 18 years and older during the time of the interview

-Identify as Black (African/Caribbean descent)

-Reside in Toronto and or Region of Peel for a minimum of 10 years

-Be willing to be interviewed (via zoom) for approximately an hour

If you are interested in participating in the study, please contact Beatrice Anane-Bediakoh at bediako1@yorku.ca.

Participants will be compensated