

Michelle McKinley: Welcome to Kitchen Table, a CSWS podcast featuring the voices and meditations of feminists as we think about a black feminist care ethic in the time of Covid 19. My name is Michelle McKinley.

Shoniqua Roach: I'm Shoniqua Roach.

Michelle McKinley: And today's guest is Professor Christen Smith, who teaches at, University of Texas Austin in the departments of Anthropology and African and African Diaspora Studies. Professor Smith is the acclaimed author of *Afro Paradise: Blackness, Violence, and Performance in Brazil*. Her work focuses on transnational anti-Black violence and black liberation struggles, and in this tension, the dialectic between the enjoyment and celebration of black culture and the willingness and the silence on the part of Brazilian society in the killing of black people.

Michelle McKinley: And of particular relevance to the kitchen table, Kristin hosts a podcast *Cite Black Women*, which has been extremely inspirational to us as we thought about the *Kitchen Table* here. So welcome, Professor Smith.

Christen Smith: Thank you so much, Michelle and Shaniqua. Thank you so much. And in and I appreciate your invitation.

Shoniqua Roach: It's a pleasure.

Michelle McKinley: Absolutely.

Christen Smith: And as you just said, Professor McKinley and Professor Roach—

[all laughing]

Shoniqua Roach: Are we the people at the kitchen table? Is that—

Christen Smith: I hope not, but because I know you two a little bit from going out and visiting in Oregon, and I think you're wonderful people. And so I would love to just be able to remain on a first name basis.

Shoniqua Roach: Absolutely, Christen. Thank you. And with that, I'll kick us off with the first question. So given the pandemic that has devastated many black, indigenous and Latinx communities, coupled with the onslaught of state sponsored violence against black people, how do we define a black feminist ethic in this moment? What does this mean for activist and institutional based formations as we navigate the Academy? What forms of praxis can we develop as some of us settle into disembodied teaching formats?

Christen Smith: Well, I think this is an amazing question to start with, because I've been thinking a lot, about black feminist care and particularly a black feminist care ethic. Back in

September of 2019, I assumed the directorship for the Center for Women's and Gender Studies at UT Austin, and one of the things that I started just recently is Feminist Care Collectives that we meet on Friday.

Christen Smith: What is that? So yeah, Feminist Care Collective, it's it's been it's been really wonderful. So we have, a wonderful, Native professor who just joined our faculty in anthropology, and her name is, Hila Healy. Hobart. And I'm sure I'm pronouncing his name incorrectly into. I apologize, but, he is what we usually call, Healy.

But he is a wonderful professor and curated a special issue of social tax on, radical, a collective care. And when I saw that, and it came out literally in March, right when we were all beginning to shelter in place, and when I saw that, I was just really struck by how poignant and timely that is, and was inspired to start, a series on that would be relaxed and very much about lifting one another up, and about coming together.

And we started with that special issue, working with the, the two coauthors and from, from there, the two coeditors. I'm sorry. And from there, began to meet every Friday in order to just reflect and hold space and be in the presence of one another, even if virtually. Because what we're finding is that a lot of our community is just feeling very isolated.

Shoniqua Roach: Absolutely.

Christen Smith: People are are hungering for conversation and for safe spaces. And so to me, when I hear about Black feminist care ethic at this moment, it's really about creating safe spaces not only for us, but also for those in our community. I, I personally have felt overwhelmed, by everything that's going on, especially on the, on the, on the university front.

[Shoniqua and Michelle agree]

Christen Smith: And I'm sure both you. But the both of you I was about to say. I hear you say it. Absolutely. Know we. It's been a week. It's been a month. It's been four.

Shoniqua Roach: It's been centuries.

Christen Smith: It's been centuries. Right. And I think that part of what's really difficult. While we are excited that our non-black colleagues are excited about anti-racism, and we want to encourage that, that emotional and intellectual and psychological labor is falling on Black women and particularly Black feminists, mostly.

Shoniqua Roach: Absolutely.

Christen Smith: And so. Okay. Sorry.

Shoniqua Roach: No, no, no, I was going to say, just as a quick aside, Brandeis faculty. So faculty alone generated a list of demands of sorts, but all of the demands boiled down to anti-racist education, which would primarily benefit non-black and non POC faculty. Yeah. Yeah. And right—

Michelle McKinley: So who's going to provide that training?

Shoniqua Roach: Absolutely. And—

Christen Smith: I'm finding to be really honest with you, you know, my colleagues immediately wanted to form a reading group. To be able to catch themselves up on the past 20 years of scholarship, that they have not been engaging in...

Shoniqua Roach: Because it's now important,

Christen Smith: Because it is suddenly important that black lives matter, right? And I'm going to try not to be too sarcastic here, but, you know, immediately, in the spirit of democracy, colleagues requested that people suggest reading, and and trust me, this is this is definitely in the spirit of the Kitchen Table, because this whole story is going to go somewhere and it's going to answer this question, trust me.

But immediately my colleagues started to recommend the writings of scholars who are not anthropologists, and who are on the New York Times bestseller list as the new hot and great anti-racist scholarship. And we all and and of course, *White Fragility* was up in front and center. And that whole process was deeply disturbing and demoralizing to me.

Shoniqua Roach: Absolutely.

Michelle McKinley: And it was you saw this play out, right?

Christen Smith: I'm watching that play out right now. And I think part of what has been deeply disturbing and demoralizing, and this goes to the question of Black feminist care ethic at this moment, is that....to when our non-black colleagues become excited and energized about a topic that is within our expertise. What they are now calling on us to do is drop everything that we're doing to help them.

Shoniqua Roach: [agrees]

Christen Smith: And so for me, when they asked for when they were calling for suggestions for readings and suggestions, I'll be very frank with you. I am tired and I thought to myself, I am not in an emotional and and professional position to be able to stop everything that I'm doing, which is taking care of my children at home, which is keeping up my professional duties with both being an administrator, as a director of a center, but also doing the writing

and the research and everything else and and advising that I'm doing okay, taking care of family and taking care of my own personal and emotional health.

I do not have the bandwidth to be able to pause my life, to be able to educate you and teach you about what you should be, should have been doing for decades now.

Shoniqua Roach: And what you should already know!

Christen Smith: And what you should already know. And then to have to actually deal with the insult on the top of that, of the insincerity of the actual response. And I don't think that they think that they're being insincere. But any time you refuse to engage with your own discipline about the topic that you're concerned about, you're not sincere. And so, for me, what does a Black feminist care ethic look like at this moment?

First and foremost, it's about us really sitting down and starting to figure out how do we do this work and lean into a Black feminist, pedagogical and political approach to surviving and preserving Black life without killing ourselves right now?

Shoniqua Roach: Yeah. Absolutely.

Michelle McKinley: I mean, that is, you know, that's the truth. That's the truth. I hear the exhaustion. I know that that is centuries old. I know that it's months old. Sometimes it's just hours old, but it comes from a really, really deep well.

Christen Smith: Absolutely. And I think that, you know, part of what part of what people really don't necessarily understand, especially people, folk who are not Black feminist, folk who are not doing this work. And in these trenches for quite a long time. What they're not realizing is that, you know, we can't take on one more thing. No, without sacrificing ourselves.

Shoniqua Roach: Absolutely.

Christen Smith: And so, part of what I have been forced to deal with during this whole time is how do I create spaces to rejuvenate and to feed Black women in particular, and to build community to lean, and how do I create alliances and and and and build, networks of care? Let's call them, right. With allies without allowing our allies and our colleagues that are not black to literally snap and suck the life out of us so that they can be helpful.

Shoniqua Roach: Absolutely.

Michelle McKinley: Well, of course, you know, you see this playing out in Portland right now. But I'll say this, though. I was just reading, and I have to bring it up because I just mentioned it to somebody else. It was something that was written and posted in a blog called like *Lily*, something. I don't remember what it was, but it was really describing the

work of professional organizations and how they rely on the people of color that they have there to do all of their mission statement work.

And then why, you know, like it's this just this boulder going up the hill and who's pushing the boulder? And of course, you're exhausted. Yeah, right.

Shoniqua Roach: I have a question about the the piece. I feel like a bona fide and deeply honest and genuine Black feminist response right now is to build communities of care, the kinds of alliances you're talking about, Christen. And I want to hear more about it in bread-and-butter terms. So how do you balance that with the exhaustion? Like, that's labor, even if it is a labor of love, that's labor too. So what kinds of strategies are you all putting into place to make sure like that you're not maxing out on bandwidth?

Christen Smith: Absolutely. I think that I will be really honest with you. Strategies for not maxing out on bandwidth have never been my strong my strong suit! I max out quite frequently. And so I am a patient in my own hospital when it comes to that. I think that first of all, one of the things that I have tried to do with Feminist Care Collective, which is a series we have at the Center for Women's and Gender Studies, is to make sure that the community that we are creating is inviting, is loving, and supportive, and that people feel fed when they walk away from it.

And so I—

Michelle McKinley: Sounds like CSWS.

Christen Smith: There you go. I mean, you know, I think that that it sounds and you all know this because this is the work that you do every day as well. But it sounds simple, but most of the spaces in universities are not that.

Michelle McKinley: Absolutely.

Christen Smith: And so for us, for example, one of the first events that we had was bringing together right after the protests erupted after the murder of George Floyd. One of the things that we did was bring Black feminist organizers from Austin together for a panel for a Feminist Care Collective.

Michelle McKinley: I think I saw that, but I thought that was related to, say, Black women. So it was it was something else.

Christen Smith: That was something else. That was the the Center for Women's Gender Studies, and it was focused on Austin because I was very much about focusing on local organizing, because I think that we have to make spaces for our local organizers and one of the things that I did was I started that event out and I said, what I can't.

I approached them and I said, I know y'all are exhausted. What I want to do is create a space that's going to be not overburdening to you, where you can just share and be in community and feel like you're getting something out of it. And I think one of the things that I was most proud of was that when we got finished with that event, which had over 100 people in attendance, which is great for a university Friday event online.

That was you know, that's just part of a regular series and not something more, elaborate. And, you know, all those organizers really felt at home and accepted and safe and they felt like they could share. And despite the fact that there were 100 strangers listening to them, it was about us and it was about our communion, and it was about us creating space.

And so I think my answer to your question, Shoniqua, is very specific. We have got to prioritize our peace.

Shoniqua Roach: Mhm, mhm.

Christen Smith: We have to prioritize our peace. We have to feed ourselves first. You know how when that mass drop down on the airplane and they say put their mask on first? So traumatic which is something that one of my colleagues Scott Perry talks about all the time. But as a, as a mother, as one of the other other Black, black feminist mothers in my in my network, she was talking about putting your mask on first.

We've got to put our masks on first, and we have to create events and create spaces that are going to be nurturing and fulfilling to us. And we also have to know when to pull back. And so with *Cite Black Women*, for example, we are a collective of Black women.

Shoniqua Roach: [agrees]

Christen Smith: We have there are moments when you'll see that we're not able to get things out as much as we usually do, and it's mostly because we are all over text. And so we have tried to create a space of peace with our five principles, one of which is let Black women breathe. Right. And so when people need a break, we give them a break.

And when somebody can step up, they step up. And so what we try to do is, is harmonize and be in chorus with one another and say, oh my gosh, I got to do this. I got to do that because somebody step up and that and somebody will step up, and then that person has to step back, somebody else steps up.

And so I think that we have to be in communion.

Shoniqua Roach: Yeah.

Christen Smith: In order to actually concretely create the structures necessary to do this work. And we cannot under any circumstances be reactionary. We cannot be driven to do the work because other people who aren't us need it right now. Yeah.

Shoniqua Roach: Absolutely. Thank you for that and for those concrete examples.

Michelle McKinley: And they were beautiful. You know, as we said, these are this is a space for meditation. And that was a beautiful meditation.

Shoniqua Roach: Absolutely was.

Christen Smith: Thank you.

Michelle McKinley: You know, that that idea of the chorus and the choir and who can step up and this is communion. I mean, this is, it's sacred work.

Christen Smith: I definitely think it's sacred work. And I think that, you know, what's been we've focused a lot just generally we meaning our society. We focused a lot on what has been difficult about this time. But so many beautiful things have come out of this time and so many beautiful conversations that wouldn't have happened. So education has become so much more democratic because we're all doing it online and anybody can show up. And so I have been really dedicated and making all of the events that I organize, the webinars, the interviews, whatever, making sure that they are not fee-based and making sure that they can be accessed by everyone.

Shoniqua Roach: I, I guess I have a question about like who the audiences are because at the same time, we're having really real conversations about how the digital divide persists, especially, you know, and low income, low SES Black communities. So who's getting the access? I know a strong and robust contingent of people for Black folk in the South, you know, who are not even getting access to any of these conversations.

Christen Smith: So absolutely. And you're right. And I think that when I say more democratic, I definitely recognize that we are talking about shifting slightly more towards democracy as opposed to getting all the way there is for. Folk who are working class, who don't have internet, who are essential workers and can't be listening to webinars during the middle of the day, have not been able to do this to to to get fed in the same ways.

And I think that we are going to have to really deal with the digital divide in that regard. And I think that, you know, we're going to have to think seriously about how can we democratize some of this knowledge beyond just the internet. I know that, one of the things that I've tried to do, one of the things I've been working with folks to do in Austin, is really making sure that working class folk have access to the technology that they need to be able to do stuff that they want to do.

And that's spotty and has been very much community based and kind of like, you know, mutual aid in a lot of ways.

Shoniqua Roach: I knowm, duct tape.

Christen Smith: Great. Absolutely. And just what.

Michelle McKinley: About what about these initiatives like, you know, showing people how to actually record good video on their phone if they need to send in, you know, police interactions or things like that? You know, like, those are concrete things. I mean, I think Shoniqua is absolutely right. When we talk about the lack of access to technology, right. They're not going to sit down and listen to webinars, but their social media feeds, all of this, you know, that the knowledge is, is, is, is definitely part that, you know, that's being generated across the across the spectrum. So at some point, you know, I'm going to like show my age here. But I'm like, I don't know what TikTok is. They know how to use it. Right.

Christen Smith: But that's one of the things I think we can do. Oh, and it doesn't solve it. But I do think that really democratizing the kinds of technology we use to disseminate information or to to circulate, I hate the word disseminate. So not feminist. It's circulate information, right? Yes. I'm acknowledging that word disseminate that I just use is totally patriarchal. I'm not using it to circulate knowledge. Right. We have to be careful. So, for example, if we really want to be inclusive, Instagram Live is way more inclusive than Zoom and webinars, right? And so that's something that we can acknowledge. Short videos or short things. Facebook Live is more inclusive, short, you know, and more intergenerational.

So if you want to just get folk who are, you know, millennials and younger. Then TikTok and Instagram can work well if it's teenagers TikTok can work really, really well. Now that it's a shorter platform. But if you want to get and if you want to get millennials Twitter, if you want to get folks who are like Gen X and up, you got to do Facebook because folks are not on these other platforms.

And so thinking know generationally thinking, in terms of different bandwidths, literally and figuratively, like what can somebody's phone use and what can and so how can you do short bits of information? How can you, you know, how can you really make knowledge something that circulates widely. And I think you're right. I mean, I think that I think that there's other things that we could do, like teaching people how to be able to shoot videos and things like that. I think that that's a great idea. I also think that just kind of like really thinking about ways to empower people to promote their own voices is also a great idea. But we need we need to do more work about what kinds of technology can get to that population.

Shoniqua Roach: Absolutely. I mean, it makes me think about Sophia Noble's algorithms of oppression, right? So absolutely, all rushing online somewhere. But something came up. So I did a lecture for Queer academics and activism program this week. My piece was on Combahee River Collective Statement and their contributions to intersectionality. So this was a group of high school students. So they were slated to give presentations on what they learned via zoom today. So I listened in on a few presentations, a few hours ago, but someone had cited Combahee River Collective on a slide, which was appropriate because they used all of the collective's ideas to motor the entire presentation. But the slide got lost in, I don't know, some connection stuff, and the person never verbally cited the Combahee River Collective.

So, yeah, like a boy who's attempting to do good, like in the face. I mean, got away with erasing, like Black queer feminist ideas, even as these were the very ideas that buttressed the presentation. So I got in the chat thread and said, like citational erasure, hashtags like #blackwoman, shout out Christen. Citation erasure is the thing and one of the first things students learn when entering college in particular. So we'll never forget to name drop Foucault, but Black women are the first to go, right? So someone said I think I did see the slide, but citation has to be thought more robustly, particularly on these platforms where there's potential for so much to get lost in translation.

Christen Smith: I think that's absolutely the case. And I think that, you know, one of the things that you mentioned that I thought, I really hope that people kind of lean into and reflect on is the the fact that citation or acknowledgment for Black women has to look different than citation or acknowledgment for white men or Black men or white women or anybody else, for that matter.

Shoniqua Roach: Absolutely.

Christen Smith: Because we are inclined socially to forget Black women immediately. And so even if there's that one slide that says Combahee River Collective, the way that we have been trained cognitively is to drop that slide from our memory.

Shoniqua Roach: Absolutely.

Christen Smith: And to move on and then attribute those words to something else or the ether. And so I think that we have got to create new strategies of citation that really pay attention to the systematic erasure and silencing of Black women for at least the past 400 years. And this has been where, you know, at least. Right? I try to just talk about the Americas because at least it gives me some, some historical parameters to work with.

Christen Smith: Absolutely.

Michelle McKinley: Well, I'll tell you this though, Kristen. I mean, you, you know, when you, you launch *Cite Black Women* and talked about why you did it when you saw your ideas there on a slide. Right? And there was no attribution like this happens on a daily basis. And it's either, you know, part of your own self-care where you're just like, okay, well, at least the ideas are out there.

Michelle McKinley: It's in circulation, and then you stop and you say, no. If this were a graduate student or an undergrad and you know there was no attribution whatsoever, the kid would get kicked out for plagiarism or not.

Christen Smith: Oh, yeah. I think that that's the other part of it. I, you know, or and I think that and I joke around with that and say or not, just because one of the things that I'm finding because *Cite Black Women* as a project, you know, as you as you mention, Michelle, it started out as, as a frustration on my part, right, as a deep hurt.

And when I say frustration, I don't even think that's an adequate word. There's a deep sense of hurt and, and, and helplessness when that happens to you.

Michelle McKinley: Because when people feel like they can get away with it, because a, you're either too powerless to say it to, to push back, or they just feel entitled to appropriate your idea.

Christen Smith: Absolutely. And there's no punishment for it.

Shoniqua Roach: There's no recourse for you.

Christen Smith: There's no recourse. Yeah. Because the fact of the matter is, you know, I'm at a conference. What do I do? I get up and say, this is outrage. You're plagiarizing my work. You all know how that story ends for Black women, right? Like that means. Okay, now I'm the crazy. The crazy one that—

Michelle McKinley: Who never gets asked back.

Christen Smith: Who never gets asked back, who doesn't know how to act, who is sloppy in her presentation? Do you see what I'm saying? And so there is there is a way that we are very much powerless when these things happen to us. And I think that, you know, one of the things that I grapple with is just how do we begin to unravel this entangled mess of erasure and disrespect that has led to the constant repetition of Black women being devalued and dismissed not only academically, but but just intellectually writ large?

Shoniqua Roach: Absolutely.

Christen Smith: And so I, you know, I, I, I wonder about that. I also I also talk a lot about the fact that this is a deep wound that doesn't heal very well. And so we have a lot of our elders who are traumatized.

Shoniqua Roach: Absolutely.

Christen Smith: And have been and really have not been cared for because of this. And so there's also that aspect of it, right? There's also the aspect of the fact that, you know, a lot of our elders have been gaslighted, about being erased for so long.

Shoniqua Roach: Absolutely.

Christen Smith: That they have a lot of social difficulty engaging with mentorship. Engaging in a, an ethics of care when it comes to relationships with colleagues because that trust has been eroded.

Shoniqua Roach: [agrees]

Christen Smith: Because they have they feel like they have been completely undermined. And so I have had it. I mean and so one of the things that a lot of my Black feminist anthropologist colleagues in my generation and I have been talking about is how do we begin to care for our elders, because a lot of them are so used to being erased that they have become callous and defensive?

Shoniqua Roach: Absolutely.

Christen Smith: And we're rightfully so. Yeah.

Michelle McKinley: In our one of our, podcasts that we did with [unclear], you know, she talked about this and, and what we discussed at that point was, what is it about the institution that has produced this subject?

Shoniqua Roach: Absolutely.

Michelle McKinley: Who is you know, backbiting and cruel and, almost atonal, like, you know, not knowing how to tune into anything anymore because they're so tuned out. And so rather than say, oh, you know, this person is just evil, like the inquiry should be, what is it about this institution that made her that way?

Christen Smith: Absolutely. And not only what is it about this institution that made her that way, which I think is or the Academy with the academy? No, no, no.

Shoniqua Roach: That is fundamental. The academy.

Christen Smith: What does reparation look like? What does that look like? Because part of what I'm grappling with is that I firmly believe, and I mean this in the most respectful, loving way possible. Part of the problem is that people have been traumatized and abused and have not gotten cared for absolutely and are literally living with the psychological effects of this abuse. Because citation or erasure is a kind of abuse I need. I need to be there with it.

Shoniqua Roach: I mean, not to some people. So we're talking about like sickness and health and morbidity and mortality with an.

Christen Smith: Absolutely.

Shoniqua Roach: Right with us and beyond. Absolutely.

Michelle McKinley: Okay, we're also in an industry. I mean, I don't think that the academy is not is sheltered from being called an industry. We're in an industry that rewards words.

Christen Smith: [agrees]

Michelle McKinley: This is our currency. And if you don't attribute those words absolutely those ideas then you, you're not just devaluing them. You completely write people out of history.

Christen Smith: Absolutely. And I think that I think that there is a way that. How do I say this? There is a way that that particular fact is part of the problem and part of the solution. And so on the one hand we must absolutely attribute and acknowledge the genealogy of thought. That is fundamental. But on the other hand we also need to deconstruct the individualistic and neoliberal and capitalist approach to knowledge that the Academy has produced.

Shoniqua Roach: And foster, and reward.

Christen Smith: Makes it property based.

Christen Smith: As if there are as if the only people who can have bread and water are the people who own intellectual property. And that the more expansive your intellectual property grounds are, the more successful in taking care of you are in the Academy. And so, lest we forget this whole settler colonial approach to the world that white supremacy has propagated.

It's also alive and well in the notion of ideas as property in the Academy. And so part of what I deal with beside *Cite Black Women* is trying to, to go back and forth on this and figure out we need to really lean in and figure out a way to both acknowledge and deconstruct. And those two have to be twin projects.

Shoniqua Roach: Oh, I want to I need to hear more about this. So a lot of these ideas around, like Black feminist knowledge production as property came up around, citing here Jen Nash's book *Black Feminist Reimagined*, and curated a forum for syndicate lit around this. But this is one of the contributors asked, I think it was James Bliss, "Can Black women own property, even intellectual property, because I'm thinking about, I don't know, even folks figures I'm working on like Anne Petry, who's written robustly. But we don't we don't imagine her as a knowledge producer or as someone who has property. If we're like going with housing, then of course, property worth tending to, property worth maintaining. Keeping, etc.." So simple question like "Can Black women own property, intellectual property within the academy?"

Michelle McKinley: So can I ask, a clarifying question there, Shoniqua? You mean Ann Petry, the novelist?

Shoniqua Roach: The novelist. But she over the street who wrote *The Street*. But she was also writing a lot of cultural criticism in that period, on par with the criticism of Richard Wright. Yet she's been taken up, and not that robustly, within the academy for *The Street*. So she's popular for that. But we don't recognize her other forms of knowledge production.

So I don't understand why she's not canonized within Black feminist literary studies, for example. So I guess the question is about that acknowledgment that Brittney Cooper makes in another piece, *Love No Limit*, that some Black feminist, some Black women within the academy, do get recognition, for their intellectual property. And a lot of us don't like historically and contemporarily.

Michelle McKinley: Well, on that note, before you answer, Kristen, I, I think that a lot of us are asking questions. Not necessarily about intellectual property, although I think that that's a fascinating way to think through it. But what about the right to privacy? You know, I'm just thinking about Kira's work on just this fundamental, shift that needs to happen just around something as liberal as privacy.

Shoniqua Roach: Absolutely.

Michelle McKinley: Or domesticity or all, you know, just space. A private space. You know, and I was thinking about your meditation recently, Shoniqua, that you sent about just the right to create your own.

Christen Smith: Can you say that last part because, I missed just a part, towards the end there.

Michelle McKinley: Well, Shoniqua had, you know, just in this whole idea about, the right to intellectual property, which I'm fascinated, and I know a lot of us has been talking about

just the right to privacy. That's right. And I was at that point in invoking not just Chiara Bridget's work, but also in my own field, in slavery studies, this idea that there's never been a right to privacy for Black women.

It's just not even in the canon. And so Shoniqua just wrote a really interesting reflection and meditation of her own on her creation of a domestic space, as, you know, as a right, as an entitlement, as.

Shoniqua Roach: An entitlement, but not one that's granted privacy or even a semblance of property. Like, I own a piece of property, but it could be invaded at any time. I know that I know, and my white neighbors are not necessarily going to always respect this as a piece of property that belongs to me. And I'm not sure that I need them to.

Like Audre Lorde says, "For the embattled, there is no place that cannot be home, nor is," right. Like, Tianna Jefferson was killed in her living room.

Michelle McKinley: Breonna Taylor.

Shoniqua Roach: Breonna Taylor. Like, I have no illusions you know, about. Right?

Christen Smith: I think that this is.

Shoniqua Roach: Oh, sorry.

Christen Smith: Go ahead. Yeah. I was going to say, I think that this is such an important line of thinking and, you know, one of the it's interesting because it she. Shoniqua, it was your provocation to, to to invite me to be part of the the special issue for the Black scholar. Yeah.

Well, hopefully. Hopefully. But, you know, I really started to think about this issue of privacy. When, when we started to talk about that, Shoniqua, and I think that this particular topic is so relevant and so important and so caught up in this question of property and so caught up in Michelle's work around slavery.

Shoniqua Roach: Absolutely.

Christen Smith: It's all very much intertwined. And I think that I'm glad that you all really kind of laid out the question in this way, because I am inclined to believe that no, Black women cannot own ideas, but it but it's not. I believe that the aspiration to own ideas is part and parcel, or in lockstep with the aspiration to white ascendancy, with the aspiration to the neoliberal ideal, with the aspiration towards, nationalism and imperialism and all the things that I seek to critique in my work.

We, you know, again, going back, you just quoted Audre Lorde. So I have to go back to Audre Lorde, “The master's school tools will never dismantle the master's house.” And the notion of property and ownership absolutely is a tool of the master. And so we have got to be very careful about that. And, and as, as you were asking the question, I was thinking, well, part of what needs to happen is for those of us that feel violated, to sit down and think about what it is that really makes us feel violated.

Is it this idea that we must own the idea, or is it something else? And at least for me, it is not the idea that I own this idea. It is simply the acknowledgment that what I have said helps us to, has helped create how we understand the idea, and that is very different from ownership.

Shoniqua Roach: I think that's right.

Michelle McKinley: I think you're right. I think because if we go back to what we were talking about with, you know, how did the institution create this subject, it's like that is also the approach. How did the institution recognize that the only value in intellectual production was ownership of that idea? Rather than how we move the field? But I think it is it, you know, it's not just the acknowledgment, it is the recognition, the respect and the space that is made for the knowledge that we produce, that say, you know, you would ascribe to, you know, why Ann Petry is not the same as Richard Wright.

Michelle McKinley: You know.

Christen Smith: And I have to do that.

Michelle McKinley: Kind of work. We have to do that kind of recovery.

Shoniqua Roach: I hear all of that. And I hear your point question about ascendancy, but I mean, it feels tethered to bread-and-butter issues too for Black women who labor in the academy. So, if intellectual ideas are currency, and this currency is buttressing my livelihood and that of my child, you know, and may this from someone as someone from a working class background, the question of ownership becomes really complicated.

Shoniqua Roach: Like, I literally can't have you appropriating and not acknowledging my ideas. If I'm going to work in the neoliberal academy where my bread and butter is contingent on, like, intellectual production that can be marked out as mine.

Christen Smith: Absolutely. And I think I completely and utterly agree. And so and that is why I think that particularly around *Cite Black Women*, I've thought about this a lot. Because I think that it has been, it's been a struggle for me as a black feminist to reconcile. We have a lot of people who are very invested in this movement.

Who don't share my ideas about property. Absolutely right. I mean because you know, the hashtag culture in and of itself really does not render itself to a lot of deep dialog among the people who are following the particular topic. And so a lot of folk kind of think about it as marking territory.

Shoniqua Roach: Mhm-mhm-mhm!

Christen Smith: And you know I can't help but think back again to this question of slavery and property ownership. And I think you're absolutely right. It is our bread and butter. But if we think about proto Black feminism. And those that we, we seek to emulate. Right. And for me Harriet Tubman is always one of my sheroes. When it would have been the beginning of, you know, just there.

Shoniqua Roach: Yeah. Ida B. Wells is one of my sheroes.

Christen Smith: Ida B. Wells, absolutely. Although from this, with this thing that I'm about to talk about right now, I think I have to go back to Harriet Tubman.

Shoniqua Roach: Okay.

Christen Smith: Because of this. Because at a certain point, we have to recognize that there is no liberation within the territory of slavery. We must recognize that the only way we're going to get free is when we get up and leave completely. And so I agree with you, we have got like just like Harriet Tubman. We have got to do what we need to do to survive pending revolution to quote you.

Shoniqua Roach: Right. Yeah.

Christen Smith: But the fact of the matter is, we cannot confuse what we do in order to survive with liberation.

Shoniqua Roach: Oh, absolutely.

Christen Smith: So for me. Yes. Do I want people to cite and acknowledge Black women's work? Absolutely. Do I really want Black women to get to the point where we are so possessive, invested in protecting the territory of our ideas that we forget that this is about collective liberation? Absolutely not.

Shoniqua Roach: Oh, absolutely.

Christen Smith: And so for me, that is really the issue when I start to see people getting territorial and callous and mean spirited, and going at each other's throats I know we have lost the vision of.

Shoniqua Roach: Yeah. Oh, absolutely.

Christen Smith: And so that's where you know it's like but that's a delicate game.

Shoniqua Roach: It's a delicate game

Christen Smith: You can't.

Shoniqua Roach: Because if.

Christen Smith: It means you can't ever get comfortable where you are. No. You can't ever go like I again. Like I said, I'm into Harriet Tubman these days because I've been traveling in Maryland, and they always remind me of Harriet Tubman. But, you know, we can't ever go back to get our brothers and sisters and get so comfortable that we don't want to leave and return and get them know where, where they're supposed to go.

Christen Smith: I mean, but so sometimes that's why.

Shoniqua Roach: We need that bread and butter, though, to have somewhere for our brothers and sisters to return home to or to return to, not even home. That might be a lofty goal. So, I.

Christen Smith: Mean, I'm there, I'm there, and I'm 100% there, but I think I am still stuck on the issue of comfort and vision.

Shoniqua Roach: Mhm.

Christen Smith: And I don't know if I'm being I'm romanticizing this, but I can feel the difference between when we have gotten to the point where we actually truly believe that what we're doing to survive is the goal and when we don't. And, and I think that I can whenever I talk and engage with scholars, particularly Black women for whom careerism. Is the horizon, I am unsettled.

And I'm often finding myself in debate with folk where there were folk will say me tell me, you know what, I gotta earn my money. It's time for me to get my cash. It's time for me to get paid. And I'm like, I am there with you, sister. All day, every day. But my issue is not with you getting paid.

My issue with your is with your horizon. And I can feel and I can tell because, there's certain things. How do I say this. There's certain when your horizon is something else there's certain things that you will not do because it sacrifices your ethical core.

Shoniqua Roach: Oh absolutely. Absolutely. And to be clear, I'm not disagree. I don't think like to make company out of idea. If I'm just speaking of horizon and to the point about careerism. Like what are the conditions of possibility for Black women in the academy? I just feel like the terrain is so fraught from job. So I don't know, it's by design.

Shoniqua Roach: It's by just so it becomes hard when we say Black women play nice. You know, it's like.

Michelle McKinley: And, you know, Christen, and you're you and I are at the probably much more senior stages, but, it's so important that even when you see new people coming in that they're socialized into realizing that there's a difference, right? You don't just have to be careerist, that there are ways, that there are communities, that there are associations, that there are, you know, places and spaces that you can be that you know, I think the difference with *Cite Black Women* and like when I have to do my annual, faculty activity report, there's even like a line on there that you have to go and count your Google citations.

And that is like evidence of impact. And, you know, the dean uses it probably to think about salaries and things like that. I mean, that is the that is the the most debased algorithm for our, you know, merit and our ideas. Right? I don't even do it like I put on there. I will not check this. I'm not going to play into this.

Christen Smith: But I think you're right Michelle. You know you and I have a privilege as tenured professors.

Michelle McKinley: Yeah. That we have to make the place better. We have to make it different.

Christen Smith: And we can do things and say things that other folks may not be able to do or say and, and I and I want to acknowledge that and and and be be fair about that because I think that, you know, it is it is it is world turning to have to live in the precarity of not knowing whether or not you're going to be able to take care of yourself and your family.

Michelle McKinley: Especially now.

Christen Smith: Especially now, especially

Michelle McKinley: At this point, we are seeing contingent faculty and on tenured faculty get laid off.

Christen Smith: Absolutely. And I think that we have to be very vigilant about protecting the most vulnerable of us. I mean I you know I have to just kind of be be real about that. But I also I also am aware however, that. How do I say this? There are ways to survive this process without falling back on careerism. And I don't, and I want to acknowledge because I think this is the part that people often struggle with. Right. Is like you know, listening to folks who are listening to this might say, "but you know, you're a tenured professor. You're a director of a center. Like of course you're going to be on your how I was talking about, you could do this and you could do that and liberation". Listen to the rest of that, because the fact of the matter is you're secure. That's what people are going to say. But I will tell you

this. I support my family on my salary. It is always at the forefront of my mind that this is the academia. Every job for any Black woman anywhere is precarious.

Shoniqua Roach: Absolutely.

Christen Smith: And it's survival. But part of what I want people to really understand is that really fighting against the demons of white supremacy, that are the careerism of the Academy is a constant struggle.

I try my best to check myself at every turn. And I surround myself with friends and colleagues who I value, who can check me when I am not living up to the ethical standards that I try to put forth as who I am as a person, as a scholar. And so that fight against careerism, it is not an easy fight.

And so I don't want to put that off like, "oh yeah, you should just not be careerist". You know, that is hard. It is hard work when you need money and you got to pay your bills, and folk are dangling things in front of you that you know good and well would help you sleep better at night for at least a couple of weeks.

And so the fact of the matter is, that's a hard thing to do. But again, that's why we have got to steep ourselves in Black feminist ethic and Black feminist genealogies. And I swear, it's like I have my spiritual, my spiritual routine. I got my meditative routine, and I got my Black feminism routine because I go back to my foremothers.

Every time I'm getting out alive and I say, okay, wait, what am I doing wrong here?

Shoniqua Roach: I mean, I.

Christen Smith: Had a conversation.

Shoniqua Roach: This morning and I was like.

Christen Smith: Oh, we got to have conversations with Audre Lordre, we have to have conversations with Harriet Tubman. We got to have conversations. Ida B. Wells, and we have to recognize who they were. Okay. So when I'm talking about things where I'm fighting against respectability politics, I don't have a conversation about Ida B. Wells. Right. Because that wasn't her forte.

She had other strengths. Absolutely. That wasn't one of them. Right. It's like we have to figure out okay, who are the people that really gave us insight or give us insight into some way that we want to approach the world? And we have to ground ourselves and we have to constantly check ourselves because this, this, this system is really designed to eat us, eat us alive.

Shoniqua Roach: Absolutely.

Michelle McKinley: You know, Shoniqua and I, we were talking the other day about, you know, how to just avoid that soul murder that happens. And, and I sent her a fragment from my journal about why I don't go to meetings, and I, Or like what meetings I do.

Christen Smith: You send me that fragment.

Shoniqua Roach: It was beautiful.

Michelle McKinley: I will send it to you, but—

Shoniqua Roach: It's really a checklist.

Michelle McKinley: It's a checklist. I made up a game. And it's like how I advance. But I already give myself 20 points when I start the day. If I've done something for my mind and my body, you know. So I can't like. It's the. It's the mask in the airplane. Right. If I'm coming into my workday depleted, I can't fight for my junior colleagues.

I can't rage against the machine if I'm depleted inside, you know? So and so I sent her. I sent her this. And it's true. Like, one of my check points for meetings is. “Okay, how much of myself do I have to leave at the door?”, When I walk into that table, you know, and it's a really, really it's, it's a clarifying measure for me.

Michelle McKinley: So you know.

Christen Smith: I think that it's important. We will definitely.

Michelle McKinley: Send you the, the, the checklist.

Shoniqua Roach: I think you've covered quite a bit of quite a bit of terrain, I'd like us to get to the fourth question.

Michelle McKinley: I was just going to say, I think the fourth question. So in the immediate brunt of our every day, every minutes, every hour, it has often been outside the realm of possibility or felt outside the realm of possibility to construct a Black future. So, Christen, what are your creative projects? Do they feel urgent? Do they feel time sensitive? What are your responses to time right now? And if I can throw in, what kind of cultural production is fueling you? What are you reading for? Are you listening to? What are you watching? Take that wherever you want to go.

Christen Smith: Now, that's a beautiful question. I love this question. I'm glad you all didn't skip it. And it's a tough one. I think that creatively, I still have work to do to get back to who I am as a creative person. And I say that recognizing that I, I for many years I was a poet and I do kind of like visual arts and particularly sculpting. I really like music and I love mixed

media art. And I haven't done that in many years. And so I would first say that I see the question as a call to action because my creative, my creative energy has been, has been, detoured into my professional work in ways that are not satisfying to me long term.

And so whereas I love to write and I've always loved to write and I ever since I was a little girl I wanted to be a writer. And so in some ways I'm doing the creative work that I want to do because I love writing. I really do love writing. That's like my favorite thing that I do is to write, but I don't necessarily write on my own terms all of the time because academic writing is so restrictive.

And so I need to get back to that creativity in that way. That being said, part of the reason why I have felt fed in my professional writing lately is because I really have married a lot of the passions that I have about learning and thinking about Black futures with my career, and that creative energy with my research.

And so the project that I'm really excited about now is the work that I'm doing around Beatriz Nascimento. Who was, black organizer and activist from Brazil's Black movement in the 1970s, 80s and was tragically killed in the 1990s. And I've been working with, her daughter and a, translator, who's not just a translator, who's a scholar, who's another scholar who we've been working to translate her work and also, to bring it into a popular audience.

And that has been really fulfilling to me creatively, primarily because what she wrote about prolifically was Quilombo or the kinds of quilombo which is black, maroon, maroon societies, but not maroon societies, simply in the historical sense, but imagining what Black space, what Black spaces of freedom look like in the Americas from a transcendental trans temporal and trans spatial sense.

And so that work really is very exciting to me. And it's something that gets my creative juices flowing and it's something that is a space of peace in a lot of ways. And so when I'm working on that project I feel fit and I feel generative primarily because it's about thinking about Black futures, and it's about thinking about what is a Black feminist vision for black liberation look like in the Americas from a global South perspective?

Right? And so that, to me, is is just a lot of what I work through. And then on the other side that actually goes hand in hand with what I'm reading. You know, I love science fiction. I love science fiction, like, a lot. I've always loved it. And so I am one of those people where I am so excited that Black science fiction is finally getting its due.

And so, I love N.K. Jemison. I read a lot of N.K. Jemison. I really, really like Nettie Okafor. And have been without me and Jimmy Sagan.

Shoniqua Roach: What about Tomi Adeyemi?

Christen Smith: Say again?

Shoniqua Roach: Tomi Adeyemi.

Christen Smith: I haven't read Tomi Adeyemi.

Shoniqua Roach: Oh okay. *The Blood of Children of Blood and Bone Collection*.

Christen Smith: I have started that book. I have not finished it.

Shoniqua Roach: Okay, okay. It's stunning.

Christen Smith: It. I we can talk about it. I love it. I really do like it. I think that, I need to kind of lean in to that to be able to finish it. Yeah. And.

Shoniqua Roach: It's young adult.

Christen Smith: So it's young adult. And so part of what it's not fast enough for me. Yeah. And so I and I think it'll probably get faster as I go on, but I'm one of those people where it's like, when it's not fast in the beginning, I'm like, okay.

Shoniqua Roach: The I find N.K. Jemison really fast. I know that's not the Black feminist thing to say out loud these days, but.

Christen Smith: No, N.K. Jemison is super fast. And that's why I really like N.K. Jemison, because it's like she starts in the middle of the story. I'm like, that's what I'm talking about.

Shoniqua Roach: You know.

Christen Smith: And saying, tell me, don't, don't give me. Don't sugarcoat it. Where are we? Where are we going? What we gotta do. So that's me, you know. And I love that. And with Eddie Okafor is I think I think that *Who Fears Death* is one of my favorite novels. And it's just beautifully written and I just love it.

Christen Smith: And I love Black feminist futurity. I really love black feminist science fiction. I love Octavia Butler. Although she hurts my feelings every day. But I love her. You know, one of the things that I did during the pandemic was reread *The Parable of the Sower*. And I watched the opera when it was re rebroadcast. And that was beautiful because I and I and I and that was part of the the friendship circle.

Christen Smith: Right. Because in watching the opera, I did it with some of my friends from college, and they reminded me that they were part of Toni Morrison's class that actually started to workshop the opera before it became the opera.

Shoniqua Roach: Oh, wow. That's amazing.

Christen Smith: Yeah, they were part of the class with, Oh, gosh. With, Bernice Johnson Regan. That actually formulated *The Parable of the Sower* as that opera that, that, that basically Regan. And then, and then her daughter created. And so they know all the songs and they were singing along and they were like, yeah. You remember when we were tuned in this and they were doing this and they were changing this and that.

And so that was a beautiful moment, right. Cause I had forgotten about that. And so, you know, these are the things that make me excited. And I love, love, love, love, love James Baldwin. Right now I'm reading, rereading *The Fire Next Time*. And it's been it's been devastating and beautiful. Just to paraphrase him.

Shoniqua Roach: That's sounds nourishing Christen, like I have to pick my books back up. I was on a reading kick for a while, so Akwaeke Emezi I don't know if you've read them. Amazing.

Christen Smith: No, I haven't read them.

Shoniqua Roach: They did a novel. I think it's called *Freshwater*, but. Oh yes, I heard about this. Oh my god.

Christen Smith: So on the list to get it from the library. That's why I. Haven't read it. Where's it.

Christen Smith: I. Oh, right. Okay. I'm ready for it. I'm ready, but I've been.

Michelle McKinley: Well, you have to text me the citation.

Shoniqua Roach: For that I will myself.

Christen Smith: Yeah. We need to get a list going.

Shoniqua Roach: We do, we do.

Christen Smith: Yeah. It will be our own reading group. That would be awesome. I would love that. I mean, you know for me those are the things that I'll do it I don't know.

Shoniqua Roach: That's amazing.

Michelle McKinley: That's great.

Christen Smith: Not to mention doing stuff with my kids and cooking, I do a lot of cooking. So that's part of where my creative energy goes, cooking. And I really, really like this is, what I'm looking for. I like to kind of creatively engage with nature. And so I do a lot of nature exploration. Oh, and yeah, that's right.

Christen Smith: I remember

Michelle McKinley: Met you, I met you in, Tepos.

Christen Smith: That's right. I didn't know that. Yeah.

Michelle McKinley: Yeah, that's where I met Chris.

Christen Smith: I love Tepos, partly because.

Michelle McKinley: Because you can go. I mean, there's so much there's so much outdoors stuff that you can do.

Christen Smith: Absolutely. And I love climbing the mountain, even though it's the most excruciating mountain climb I've ever done. Maybe because I didn't know it was a mountain the first time I went up. It, and I was like, oh my gosh, this is a mountain. Y'all told me it was a trail. It was not a trail. It the about.

Christen Smith: But I mean, that kind of stuff is just, it's really enriching to me. And I also love doing *Outside Black Women* podcast. I love podcasting, so I'm glad you all invited me to do this. I love talking to people and creating, you know, these kind of spaces and conversations.

Michelle McKinley: Yeah. And I don't know when the pandemic first started. And, you know, I don't watch TV, so I can't really, take too much sensory stuff. But I remember starting to listen to a lot of podcasts myself. And that's why I reached out to Shoniqua, because I was like, well, we can't endanger people and bring them, you know, in, in this into our space. We can't, you know, host them and make them feel appreciated and be part of our community. What can we do? And this felt really intimate. It felt really important. And then, of course, the question is, well, who do we want to be in conversation with? So this this was a great but I mean, I did think that I did think about, *Cite Black Women* when we were thinking through it.

You know, for sure.

Christen Smith: I think it's great that you all are doing this and I, I, you know, I just I love really seeing black women engage with one another intellectually and personally on their own and ethically on our own terms, and just really talk about what we want to talk about, thinking about what we want to think about, and being relaxed and at ease.

It's so rare. It is.

Michelle McKinley: Absolutely true.

Shoniqua Roach: Thank you so much for joining us, Kristen, and.

Christen Smith: Thank you both.

Shoniqua Roach: Gracing us with your comments and clear headedness. I just find you so frickin brilliant.

Christen Smith: Aww thank you! That's sweet.

Shoniqua Roach: I think it's very clear headed. You know, clear headed.

Michelle McKinley: Yes, yes. Just doing the Christan thing.

Christen Smith: Absolutely. Right. Thank you. That's kind of you. Sometimes I sometimes I sit there and I think to myself, gosh, you know, at some point I have to stop talking because I feel like people are maybe like she talks way too much. And so it's funny because this, that we're doing right now, I decided I was like, this is the last one I'm gonna do for a while, y'all, because I need to take a break.

I feel like I've been talking for the past four months.

You know? But this is really fun and very fulfilling. And I just appreciate you.

Shoniqua Roach: Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Christen Smith: Both of you are brilliant. Like, otherwise, you know, that goes without saying. I learned so much from the both of you. And I can't wait until we can actually physically be in the same space because I'm bringing both of y'all to Austin. Just say you just love that.

Shoniqua Roach: We love it.

Michelle McKinley: We love it.