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Dissociative States: The Metaphysics of Blackness and the Psychic Afterlife of Slavery

DISSERTATION

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for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in English

by

Selamawit D. Terrefe

Dissertation Committee:
Distinguished Professor Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Chair
Associate Professor Arlene Keizer
Chancellor‘s Professor Gabriele Schwab
Associate Professor Jared Sexton
Professor Frank B. Wilderson III

2017

DEDICATION

To

every

recalcitrant

black girl.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Selamawit D. Terrefe

2001	B.A. in English Literature, University of California, Berkeley
2006	M.A., Humanities and Social Thought, New York University
2009-2016	Teaching Assistant, School of Humanities, University of California, Irvine
2016-2020	Wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin, Department of English-Speaking Cultures University of Bremen, Germany
2010	M.A. in English, University of California, Irvine
2017	Ph.D. in English, University of California, Irvine

FIELDS OF STUDY

African American, African, and African Diasporic Literature and Visual Culture; Critical Theory; Black Feminism; Psychoanalysis; Theories of violence; Political Theory; Radical and Revolutionary Politics; Continental philosophy

PUBLICATIONS

"Afro-pessimism." *Oxford Bibliographies in African American Studies*, Ed. Gene Jarrett, Oxford University Press (forthcoming, Summer 2017).

"Speaking the Hieroglyph: Black Women and Mimetic Thaumaturgy." *Theory and Event*, special issue "Afropessimism and Black Feminism," Ed. Tiffany Willoughby-Herard (forthcoming in *Theory and Event*).

"Black Women Writers in the United States." *Oxford Bibliographies in African American Studies*, Ed. Gene Jarrett, Oxford University Press, 2016.

"What Exceeds the Hold?: An Interview with Christina Sharpe." *Rhizomes 29*, special issue "Black Holes: Afro-Pessimism, Blackness and the Discourses of Modernity," Ed. Dalton Anthony Jones, 2016.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Dissociative States: The Metaphysics of Blackness and the Psychic Afterlife of Slavery

By

Selamawit D. Terrefe

Doctor of Philosophy in English

University of California, Irvine, 2017

Professor Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Chair

This manuscript is an attempt to attend to the dead and dying, to Black people who are always already socially dead and living out their dying alone—whether on or off camera—in the US and Africa. I question the libidinal demands placed on Black cultural producers, revolutionary figures, and Black folks who simply want to 'be'— which is to say, Black bodies turned to flesh—as I ask, what fantasies must be harnessed to obscure racial violence into narratives of possibility, of redemption?

Dissociative States: The Metaphysics of Blackness and the Psychic Afterlife of Slavery elaborates what I call a metaphysics of Blackness: a psychic, ontological, and political architecture marked by what I've termed *temporal aphasia* and *onto-thanatology*. Enumerated by the Black female body as its nodal point, the metaphysics of Blackness reveals an ontology catalyzed by violence as its sole cohering agent. For to speak of the psyche—and the psychic afterlife of slavery, in particular—is to speak of metaphysics. And to speak of the metaphysics of Blackness is to broach the mining of the Black psyche and the location of Blackness within metaphysics *as* psychoanalysis.

In pursuit of such reading, I break radically from the scholarly tradition of theorists of Black life, as well as comparative scholarship on Africa and its diaspora, to argue that ontological death comprises the metaphysics of Blackness. Tracing a raced psychic plane engendered by the trans-Atlantic slave trade, I demonstrate the inadequacy of a comparative analysis to account for the continuum of psychic violence imposed by racial slavery upon African descended people. Rather than the cultural continuity experienced through social practices, performative gestures, or racial identification, I contend that a rupture in the fabric of speech, comprehension, and thus, figuration suspends Blackness in general and the Black female imago in particular within a series of dissociative states. Through an exploration of the relationship between Blackness and ontological death, my manuscript reflects the (im)possible project of elaborating agential possibility when the evidence betrays the contrary—Black (non)ontology as a site of irremediable absence.

To know, as you and I know, that we are bent on the impossible, is probably a form of love or madness. Yet, it comes from our faculty, or need, of attaching ourselves to reality.
—Yambo Ouologuem, *Bound to Violence*

Our struggle as Black women has to do with the destruction of the genre; with the displacement of the genre of the human of 'Man,' of which the Black population group—men, women and children—must function as the negation.
—Sylvia Wynter,"PROUD FLESH Inter/Views: Sylvia Wynter"

This Door is no mere physicality. It is a spiritual location. It is also perhaps a psychic destination…There is as it says no way in; no return.
—Dionne Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging*

Introduction

"She was fighting back, she was crying 'help me, help me!'"[1] On a sunny summer day in June 2016, Jessica Hampton was fatally stabbed on a busy Chicago commuter train. Witnesses recall that the 25-year-old Black woman was riding the Red Line train when a man sitting across from her asked her a question to which she responded "no." The man proceeded to stab Hampton repeatedly: the assailant had time to drop the knife, retrieve it, and continue to slit her throat, uninterrupted by other passengers. Onlookers filmed video and disseminated images across various social media platforms of Hampton laying in a pool of her own blood in the moments before her death. A witness sitting near Hampton before the attack recounts, "The woman struggled with the man and fell to her knees. He grabbed her neck and slit her throat and

[1] William Lee, Peter Nickeas and Liam Ford, "Police: Woman stabbed to death on Red Line in domestic attack," *Chicago Tribune*, June 23, 2016, http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/breaking/ct-red-line-stabbing-20160623-story.html

her torso before the woman fell to the floor."[2] The video of her sanctioned deathly imago continues to be accessible online—an imago that circulated so profusely in the hours within her death that Hampton's family learned of her passing through the fecundity of those images. Yet there was an ancillary, if not more violent, proscriptive overseeing the scene of Hampton's attack. While the audio from the footage reveals spectators declaring that Hampton was still breathing, along with a "thank you *Jesus*"[3] from one bystander, we see no rush, we hear no cries, for medical personnel to attend to her. Cellphone cameras pan the train station and we can see the presence of multiple uniformed officers walking slowly past the train cars. We hear someone command "get off of the train," even though its cars are completely empty—except for Hampton. Off camera, there is a muffled prohibition to approach her body that appears lifeless with the exclusion of the blood that continues to saturate the train's floor. Over the loudspeaker we hear announcements that the train that holds Hampton's bleeding body is out of service. There is more attention to the impact on traffic the emptied train carriage is causing than the fact that no one is attempting to save Hampton's life—or even checking to see if she is alive or dead. Minutes have passed before a lone uniformed man crouches over Hampton to check her vitals. There are no ambulance sirens, no emergency medical personnel rushing past the onlookers. Eventually we see the train leaving the station platform, with Hampton in it presumably.

Abandoned by commuters except as an object of spectatorship, of a gaze that seemingly refutes identification, one questions if Black women's lives, even within the social life of social

[2] Evans, Lauren, "Woman's Family Finds Out She Was Stabbed to Death On a Chicago Train Via Facebook," *Jezebel*, June 25, 2016, http://jezebel.com/woman-stabbed-to-death-on-chicago-train-her-family-lea-1782608501
[3] "Woman Fatally Stabbed on a Chicago Train," *LiveLeak*, June 24, 2016, http://m.liveleak.com/view?i=1af_1466774353

death,[4] precipitate any affect other than what would betray Black women's negated sentience. One questions the capacity, if not the possibility, of her "community"—whether one considers it to be the Black intramural and/or the community of civil society to which her entrance was denied—to recognize Black women's suffering as the limit for their compassion, political organizing efforts, and theoretical interventions. Hampton died utterly alone: there was no one present to hold her hand, attempt to stop her bleeding, cradle her head, or witness her last moments of wishing. No one materially or psychically present to listen to the dreams she hoped would survive for the child she was about to leave behind. What was the prohibition against protecting the young Black woman? Against attending to her lifeless body after her assailant fled? Why did fellow passengers choose to stay behind and capture her fading breaths rather than provide hospice to the dying, or to the already dead?

The Metaphysics of Blackness

If, as Saidiya Hartman asserts, "history is how the secular world attends to the dead,"[5] then this manuscript is an attempt to forge Black thought as a mode of waiting upon, and with, the dead. Reckoning with the fact that the "[d]oor" behind which the answer to questions my manuscript proposes is a "psychic destination" with "no way in" and "no return," as Dionne Brand hauntingly portrays, I propose a metaphysics, that of Blackness, specifically, as a rubric for adumbrating the "impossible." To that end, this manuscript is an attempt to attend to the dead and dying, to Black people who are always already socially dead and living out their dying alone—whether on or off camera—in the US and Africa. I question the libidinal demands placed on Black cultural producers, revolutionary figures, and Black folks who simply want to 'be'—

[4] Sexton, Jared. "The Social Life of Social Death: on Afro-pessimism and Black Optimism." *InTensions* 5.1 (2011).
[5] Hartman, Saidiya V. *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), 18.

which is to say, Black bodies turned to flesh—as I ask, what fantasies must be harnessed to obscure racial violence into narratives of possibility, of redemption? Yambo Ouloguem, in *Bound to Violence*, writes, "[t]o know, as you and I know, that we are bent on the impossible, is probably a form of love or madness. Yet, it comes from our faculty, or need, of attaching ourselves to reality." In my work to excavate both this love, which is not quite love, and madness, which is a quest for being, I elaborate what I call a metaphysics of Blackness: a psychic, ontological, and political architecture marked by what I've termed *temporal aphasia* and *onto-thanatology*. Enumerated by the Black female body as its nodal point, the metaphysics of Blackness reveals an ontology catalyzed by violence as its sole cohering agent. For to speak of the psyche—and the psychic afterlife of slavery, in particular—is to speak of metaphysics. And to speak of the metaphysics of Blackness is to broach the mining of the Black psyche and the location of Blackness within metaphysics *as* psychoanalysis. A metaphysics of Blackness reveals the ways in which both our contemporary understandings of metaphysical principles and our conceptions of death are bound to the construction of Blackness and the disavowal of the necessity of anti-Black violence in the modern versions of those theoretical constructions.

"Dissociative States: The Metaphysics of Blackness and the Psychic Afterlife of Slavery," advances a three-fold interdisciplinary intervention. First, it analyzes the nexus of mimetic, psychic, and political concerns regarding structural violence via Black intramural relations represented in both African American and African literary and political texts. Secondly, it reveals the Black woman as the conjointly ubiquitous yet absented figure par excellence within slavery's psychic afterlife. Lastly, it situates the figure of the Black woman, and by extension anti-Blackness writ large, as central to the future of psychoanalytic inquiry despite its insistence on omitting precisely this figure. In pursuit of such reading, I break radically from the scholarly

tradition of theorists of Black life, as well as comparative scholarship on Africa and its diaspora, to argue that ontological death comprises the metaphysics of Blackness. Tracing a raced psychic plane engendered by the trans-Atlantic slave trade, I demonstrate the inadequacy of a comparative analysis to account for the continuum of psychic violence imposed by racial slavery upon African descended people. Rather than the cultural continuity experienced through social practices, performative gestures, or racial identification, I contend that temporal aphasia—a rupture in the fabric of speech, comprehension, and thus, figuration—suspends Blackness in general and the Black female imago in particular within a series of dissociative states. Through an exploration of the relationship between Blackness and ontological death, my manuscript reflects the (im)possible project of elaborating agential possibility when the evidence betrays the contrary—Black (non)ontology as a site of irremediable absence.

My project therefore studies how to deploy psychoanalytic interventions centering on anti-Black violence to generate alternative paradigms of thought on Black intramural relations, theories of violence, and how we conceive of race, sex/gender, and revolutionary politics. I reveal how Blackness-as-ontological death *through the Black psyche* subtends the tension between language, the symbolic order, and violence: a constriction determining the impossibility of relationality. I read the slave's psychic disarticulation as a concomitant condition of her political and ontological deracination, or, onto-thanatology: a comportment structured by the metaphysics of Blackness—that is the impossibility of being—and revealed through a drive towards its own obliteration. This is a drive against the death drive of the human, toward a death that both catalyzes her absence and which is refused to her. This inability to die a death that functions as the ontological foundation of modernity, what Heidegger has described

as *Mitsein*[6] or the characteristic of "being-with" others as an essential facet of being human, as well as political ontology—the outcome of a particular history and set of practices—is continually forged in the work of disarticulating the slave from her conceptual coordinates. Our task, I argue, is to trace these disarticulations in visual, literary, and theoretical accounts of Black life and Black death.

In pursuit of such reading, my work investigates how slavery operates not only as a series of historical events marked by cultural objects (such as slave narratives) but offers us a deeper understanding of relations of power in the present—how there are more homologies today with the 19th century than there are differences, hence the need for the declaration and movement, #BLACKLIVESMATTER. As such, I argue that a hermeneutic lens attuned to the Black female in both African American *and African* literary and cultural production cements a critical discourse attuned to Black feminist theorizing, theorizing which has critical implications for political praxis and a radical politics that would not privilege state-sanctioned violence against Black men at the expense of overlooking Black women and children.

The Psychic Afterlife of Slavery

In the prologue to *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*, a text that limns both memoir and history, Saidiya Hartman buttresses her elaboration of the "afterlife of slavery" with the following claim: "black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago."[7] *Lose Your Mother* maps Hartman's phenomenological experience traveling the Atlantic slave route with the results, and failures, of archival research—testimonial absences, repressed and/or buried witnesses, and

[6] Heidegger, Martin, Dennis J. Schmidt, and Joan Stambaugh. *Being and Time* (Albany, N.Y: State University of New York Press, 2010).
[7] Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, 6.

underground slave prisons, among others. In so doing, she underscores her claim that "If the ghost of slavery still haunts our present, it is because we are still looking for an exit from the prison."[8] An extension of her groundbreaking work on the symbolic and material economies of racial slavery within the US in *Scenes of Subjection*, the "prison" to which Hartman refers concerns the emotional, intrapsychic, intramural and transgenerational trauma promulgated by a libidinal economy subtended in racial slavery.

While Hartman's work meditates upon the value of the traffic in Black bodies to the economic and juridico-political terrain of modernity, Hortense Spillers maps the libidinal economy of anti-Blackness by incorporating the insights of Lacanian psychoanalysis in a framework she designates as "psychoanalytics."[9] Indicating that race operates within the realm of the Real rather than the Symbolic, Spillers demonstrates that race is *a priori* and the meaning of blackness, and its machinations operating on the bodies of Blacks, is established prior to the subject's formation in language. In her discussion of Black full speech within the essay "All the Things You Could Be by Now if Sigmund Freud's Wife was Your Mother": Pyschoanalysis and Race," Spillers formulates the concept of "interior intersubjectivity"—a psychoanalytic protocol she proffers which is "predicated…on *speaking*"—which delineates the difficulty of earning the "linguistic right to use,"[10] or speech as a mode of occupying place, and space, in political economy. Moreover, as Spillers's oeuvre extends psychoanalytic inquiry to view self-reflexivity as a democratic and communal process, Abdul JanMohamed, in *The Death-Bound-Subject: Richard Wright's Archaeology of Death*, explores both Freudian and neo-Freudian theories of the death instinct in his formulation of the slave as a death-bound-subject. JanMohamed argues that

[8] Ibid.,133.
[9] Spillers, Hortense J. ""All the Things You Could Be by Now If Sigmund Freud's Wife Was Your Mother": Psychoanalysis and Race." *Boundary 2*. 23.3 (1996): 83, 109.
[10] Ibid., 107-108.

although the terror of racialized violence disarticulates the slave's psyche, overcoming repression of death as the slave's condition par excellence demonstrates a mode of agential possibility. As such, notwithstanding the slave's psychic formation through "(racialized) symbolic castration,"[11] the death-bound-subject *re*arcticulates the death contract vis-à-vis transformation of actual-death, to social death, and ultimately sublation through symbolic-death. In other words, embracing the violence, or actual-death, that subtends the slave's subject formation structures the very conditions of its possibility. While the humanities has embraced psychoanalysis as a hermeneutic lens to address critical lacunae with respect to the phenomena of trauma, mourning, terrorism, and twentieth and twenty-first century limit events, relatively few scholars wed the radical implications of psychoanalysis with the critical interventions of cultural theory to address Black (non)ontology as a site of irremediable *absence*.

I bring together various trajectories of thought to address lacunae I perceive in contemporary comparative scholarship on Africa and the US. Through an exploration of the relationship between Blackness and ontological death, my dissertation reflects the (im)possible project of elaborating a metaphysics of what Hortense Spillers has deemed "the violent formation of a modern African consciousness."[12] While this dissertation is grounded in the theoretical labor of Hartman, Spillers, Marriott, Jared Sexton, and Frank Wilderson, among others, my hope is that the dissertation will begin as a departure from, and conversation with, one of the concluding observations from Marriott's *Haunted Life: Visual Culture and Black Modernity*. Marriott reads Fanon's views on Black death alongside the recollections of a survivor of the Rwandan genocide:

[11] JanMohamed, Abdul R. *The Death-Bound-Subject: Richard Wright's Archaeology of Death* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 286.
[12] Spillers, Hortense. "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," *Diacritics* vol. 17, no. 2 Summer 1987, 68.

> [A] death that cannot ever die because it depends on the total degradation and disavowal of black life. Ipso facto: death emerges as a transcendental fact of black existence but without transcendence (similarly, black existence is one condemned to live without the possibility of being). This is no longer death but a deathliness that cannot be spiritualized or brought into meaning. This is death as nothing, less than nothing; as such, this death is never assumable as possibility or decision, but remains the interminable time of meaningless, impersonal dying.[13]

It is my contention that reading Black death as "never assumable as possibility or decision" through the primary texts of each chapter's foci, conceptualizes the psychic continuum of violence for (non)beings rendered in and through slavery, genocide, and colonialism in a manner that destabilizes current discourses that privilege multiplicity, transcendence, and immanence. I argue that the role of fantasy is critical in both the proliferation of anti-Black violence and its elision in ethical meditations on violence writ large. Moreover, I explore the affective conditions revealed in and through intramural violence as the ligature that simultaneously yokes and unbinds Blackness, slavery, death, metaphorization, and psychosis.

With the institutionalization of the disciplines of Black and Postcolonial Studies, however, scholars—from Anthony Appiah to Paul Gilroy—have consistently produced interrogations concerning the function of racial constructs within the fields of ontology, epistemology, political theory, and psychoanalysis, providing a framework within which to interrogate notions that violence fails to construct, or constitute, power. Indeed, the more prominent of the theories within these disciplines focus primarily on the problematics, or celebration, of identity, hybridity, and globalization and the nation-state. Yet, few scholars within the humanities discuss Blackness as an ethical singularity or utilize Blackness as a theoretical lens through which to examine the political, psychoanalytic, or metaphysics writ

[13] Marriott, D S. *Haunted Life: Visual Culture and Black Modernity* (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 231.

large. Similarly, many discourses concerning Black freedom struggles, including the literary wings of their movements, within the US and Africa, either focus on nationalism within their analyses, or advocate for multiethnic, or multicultural, literary and cultural approaches. The seeds of racial slavery, and the construction of race, within the Arab slave trade of Black Africans functions as one important example of the ethical danger in conceptualizing the positionality of Black people as contiguous with other racialized groups. Existentialist philosopher, Lewis Gordon, considers the ethical ramifications of the tropological utilization of Blackness within *Her Majesty's Other Children: Sketches of Racism from a Neocolonial Age*, as he states the following bold claim: "Although there are people who function as 'the blacks' of particular contexts, there is a group of people who function as the blacks everywhere. They are called, in now-archaic language—Negroes. Negroes are the blacks of everywhere, the black blacks, the blackest blacks."[14] My project asks the following: Does the ease with which the shift from ethico-political questions concerning slavery and genocide to political discourses of sovereignty and the subject betray a symptomatic discomfort with meditating on the singularity of continued, gratuitous violence against Black bodies?

The basic philosophical question about the relationship between Blackness and absence has not been theorized adequately through a comparative analysis of Africa and the US, despite the groundbreaking interventions by thinkers such as Frantz Fanon, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Sylvia Wynter, Denise Ferreira da Silva**,** Chinweizu, Lewis Gordon, Saidiya Hartman, Achille Mbembe, Hortense Spillers, and David Marriott. While Spillers has aptly suggested, "there is not a subject that you can speak about in the modern world where you will not have to talk about

[14] Gordon, Lewis R. *Her Majesty's Other Children: Sketches of Racism from a Neocolonial Age* (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), 53.

African women and new world African women,"[15] Hartman's oeuvre poignantly addresses the absence of an archive of Black women's texts about the Middle Passage. In fact, Gordon's phenomenology conceives of Blackness as Absence, mapping out its theoretical landscape through the following claim:

> The white body, being human (Presence), doesn't live as mere being-among-beings. It lives with the potential to be a being that stands out from mere beings. Its being-in-itself ironically enables it to be a being-for-itself. The worlds of the black and the white become worlds separated by Absence leading to "fate" on the one hand and Presence leading to "freedom" on the other. [16]

Similarly, Abdul JanMohamed deploys phenomenological insights in his analysis of Richard Wright's oeuvre, but towards a dialectical end—the realms of possibility, futurity, and potentiality: "If the work of mourning consists in killing the dead, then symbolic-death is closer to that state in that it too is predicated on the 'acceptance' of the dead as dead, on the affirmation of oneself as, in some sense a dead being. The shift from social-death to symbolic-death almost marks a shift in the agential control of actual-death."[17] Perhaps this (Black) drive toward theories of agency and possibility is sutured to a refusal of and resistance to the embrace of Black death, evidenced in the work of Fred Moten in his elaboration of Black cultural production as follows:

> Black Art, which is to say Black Life, which is to say Black (Life Against) Death, which is to say Black Eros, is the ongoing production of a performance: rupture and collision, augmented toward singularity, motherless child, childless mother, heart-rendering shriek, leveen camp moan, grieving lean and head turn fall….yellow dog, blue trän, black drive.[18]

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[15] Spillers, Hortense. "Whatcha Gonna Do?": Revisiting "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book": A Conversation with Hortense Spillers, Saidiya Hartman, Farah Jasmine Griffin, Shelly Eversley, & Jennifer L. Morgan. *Women's Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 35, No. 1/2, The Sexual Body (Spring - Summer, 2007), 308.
[16] Gordon, Lewis R. *Bad Faith and Antiblack Racism* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J: Humanities Press, 1995), 101.
[17] JanMohamed, *The Death-Bound*-Subject, 285.
[18] Moten, Fred. "Black Mo'nin." *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*, eds. Eng, David L, and David Kazanjian (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 72.

As such, this tension between absence and possibility, "Black (Life Against) Death" is nothing but a drive, or fantasy, to transform Blackness from the "raw desire"[19] of Presence into a proxy for its own impossible condition: mourning.

"Dissociative States" extends Saidiya Hartman's analysis of the afterlife of slavery and theorizes its psychic and political expanse for the socially dead. I adumbrate the impossibility of a traditional comparative framework between the US and Africa, noting that our contemporary moment reflects an *African American* global diaspora subtending the unconscious processes that not only structure global power relations according to what Hartman has described as a "racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago": a racial calculus, I contend, that continues to suture slaveness to Blackness. The height of this suturing, I argue, concatenates vis-à-vis Black intramural relations—rivalries among the socially dead which anatomize not only ontological death, but also libidinal investments that betray a relational impasse catalyzed by the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Examining the work of Adrienne Kennedy, Bessie Head, Hortense Spillers, David Marriott, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, and the woefully under-researched novel, *The Flagellants*, by Carlene Polite, the stakes of the manuscript include exploding single-axis and intersectional racial analytics through contending that temporal aphasia suspends Blackness in general and the Black female imago in particular within a series of dissociative states: states at the level of Being and the level of the psyche. Through an exploration of the relationship between Blackness and ontological death, my manuscript reflects the (im)possible project of elaborating agential possibility when the evidence betrays the contrary: Black (non)ontology as a site of irremediable absence.

[19] Gordon, *Bad Faith and Antiblack Racism*, 100.

In the first chapter, "Africans Waiting to Die: State of Breach, Foreclosure, and the Promise of Return in the work of Hortense Spillers and David Marriott," I engage the relationship between Marriott's reference to foreclosure and Spillers's notion of rupture to read the relationship between Blackness and psychoanalysis. Deploying Spillers's profound insights on gender, psychoanalysis, and the symbolic order, I examine the omission of the Black female imago in Frantz Fanon's discourse of negrophobia and Marriott's similar exclusion in his studies of the psychic effects of anti-Black violence. I contend that this exclusion rests upon differentially affected responses to the effects and displays of anti-Black violence against Black women and men, not upon the construction of a gender differential in the logic, structure, or practice of anti-Blackness. Delineating the function of the Black woman within the concomitant production of Black psychoanalytic discourse and the practice of chattel slavery through Spillers's concept of Black female "flesh," I locate a raced psychic plane determined by modernity's construction of the African as Black. I show how regimes of racial slavery's ascription of the reproductive function as the purview of Black women mapped sex/gender distinctions under catachrestic fantasies that designated (precarious) Black masculinity and (proscribed) Black femininity. Specifically, I conduct a radically new reading of the Oedipus Complex—the Black maternal as rival—to conceive of aggressivity and desire through the violent processes whereby the figure of the Black woman becomes a stand-in for banished Black maternity, the arbiter of Blackness itself. Resting within the aporetic space of foreclosure and return, social death and social life, the Black woman functions as the abject object against which desire is constructed and theorized.

I contend that if aggressivity toward the absented figure of the Black maternal is a precondition for the split Black psyche to shield itself from the intrusions of anti-Black violence,

then a comparative framing of the performances of revolutionary politics and sadomasochism is essential to elaborating a paradox at the heart of the metaphysics of Blackness. Chapter 2, "Poiesis and the Performance of Political Desire" examines Winnie Madikizela-Mandela's testimony at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and her recently released prison notes, juxtaposing the controversy surrounding her alleged practice of "necklacing" alongside the performance of sadomasochism in Carlene Polite's Black Arts Movement novel, *The Flagellants*. Arguing that what structures intramural violence determines the (impossible) psychic and material conditions of Black relationality, I outline a dual quiescence comprised of a speechlessness regarding Africa's psychic afterlife of slavery, and a reticence to discuss revolutionary violence as a form of Black poiesis. In other words, these disparate textual and media sites unravel a critical paradox: fantasies of the presence of a self and the desire for intramural recognition, or intersubjectivity, are concomitant with the desire for their mutual destruction. Specifically, a poiesis of political desire, I maintain, structures Black psychic violence even within the most radical formations against anti-Black violence—i.e., attempts to cultivate Black love and Black power, perform iconographic displays of banished Black masculinity and femininity, or form and maintain guerilla factions within the anti-apartheid struggle.

For this reason, my final chapter, "No/Know Hope: The Semiotics of Madness in Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro* and Bessie Head's *A Question of Power*" argues that a metaphysics of Blackness structured in relation, and anterior, to absence illuminates the psychic afterlife of slavery. I show how the psychoanalytic formulation of the death drive animates Black (non)being's suspension in, and as, annihilation. Questioning the possibility of framing a comparative analysis of African American and African texts through a hermeneutics of

loss, I argue that the function of Blackness in these texts reflects more than an ontological absence. I contend that Blackness—as a construct borne of a specific set of practices, ideologies, and historical formations—constitutes an onto-thanatology wherein the perpetual state of disarticulation evidenced by the Black psyche signals its very construction. I claim that the semiotics of Black psychic (dis)integration within the symbolic order affirms a paradigmatic drive distinct from Freud's conception of the death instinct and Lacan's reading of Antigone "between two deaths."[20] Investigating the semiotics of psychosis constructed by both Head and Kennedy, my analysis intervenes in the depiction of the Black female psyche deploying her own abjection—the Black phobic object writ large—such that she stands as a substitute for a loss that cannot be temporalized, spatialized, or mourned. I maintain that the depiction of Black psychosis conceals the biracial female protagonists' attempts to adopt whiteness by proxy—whether through the literary trope of madness, the fantasy of white filiation via their white mothers, or dreams of affiliation within a community excised of Blackness. In short I argue that these two texts are sutured by language and visuality which reflects the metaphysics of Blackness as a proxy for Being's plane of immanence—presence—from which the Black is barred.

There is a dearth of scholarship on the texts under consideration here (Polite and Madikizela-Mandela, in particular), and my project critically examines how racial slavery survives—its psychic afterlife—through contemporary political practices as well as our most intimate relationships. The arguments and conclusions of "Dissociative States: The Metaphysics of Blackness and the Psychic Afterlife of Slavery" have far-reaching implications. Each chapter elaborates the structural conditions undergirding anti-Blackness, diverging from interventions in fields and disciplines spanning literary and critical theory, psychoanalysis, feminism,

[20] Lacan, Jacques, and Jacques-Alain Miller. *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII* (New York: Norton, 1992), 270-287.

and cultural studies that read race in general and the Black female body in particular through a lens that privileges experience at the expense of meditating upon the specificity, necessity, and profundity of anti-Black violence. Complicating the practice and methodologies of comparative analysis, my manuscript provides new theories of violence—from the level of the psyche to the most abstract plane of metaphysics—and its function in both our affective responses to representations of Blackness, and the meaning of "the unconscious."

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Chapter 1: Africans Waiting to Die: State of Breach, Foreclosure, and the Promise of Return in the work of Hortense Spillers and David Marriott

Intramurally, we are fixated on the broken, wounded flesh of Black males, gazing upon contemporary visages of their bullet ridden bodies as though these corpses were conduits for a mourning we refuse for Black women, cis and trans. Our affective relations and empathic visual identifications have rested with Black men, especially with the explosion of literary and visual culture from the early 20th through the first decades of the 21st century. But has the Black female imago experienced an erasure, or something more pernicious? Undoubtedly, work on the spectral parameters of anti-Black male violence from theorists such as David Marriott, among others, is crucial for understanding and arguing the extent to how normalized and normalizing white violent fantasies are to our psychic edifice. But how has the absented imago of the Black female body aided in the construction of this phantasmatic and material violence, when the pleasure derived from the Black woman's abjection travels to the space of one's negated psyche? How does one elaborate, convey, confront, mourn or bury the traveling of that impulse? An impulse that is the drive and/or desire to mete out a suffering you can only bear when it is upon the flesh of one whose annihilation you meet with ambivalence: the Black woman who bears the blame—*partus sequitur ventrum*[1]— for determining your Blackness?

Black rupture, absence and loss engenders not only the temporal aphasia structuring Black waking life throughout the globe, but also haunts interpretations of the psyche itself, including its dreams. Freud, in *Interpretation of Dreams*, renders them as follows:

[1] "The offspring follows the mother; the brood of an animal belongs to the owner of the dam; the offspring of a slave belongs to the owner of the mother, or follow the condition of the mother." *Black's Law Dictionary* (St. Paul, Minn: West Pub. Co, 1910). Web. 01 June 2017. http://thelawdictionary.org/partus/

> The dream-thoughts are immediately comprehensible, as soon as we have learnt them. The dream-content, on the other hand, is expressed as it were in a pictograph script, the characters of which have to be transposed individually into the language of the dream-thoughts. If we attempted to read these characters according to their pictorial value instead of according to their symbolic relation, we should clearly be led into error…But obviously we can only form a proper judgment of the rebus if we put aside criticisms…The words which are put together in this way are no longer nonsensical but may form a poetical phrase of the greatest beauty and significance. A dream is a picture-puzzle of this sort and our predecessors in the field of dream-interpretation have made the mistake of treating the rebus as a pictorial composition: and as such it has seemed to them nonsensical and worthless.[2]

What if we were to shift our ethico-political and theoretical orientations concerning the bodies and imagos of Black women, perhaps reading both their construction and our libidinal responses to them as a rebus for the psychic afterlife of slavery? Freud adopted a term of translation, and descriptive transference—the metaphor of the rebus— to describe the language of dreams, and similar to Freud's elaboration of the "error" in interpreting meaning from "these characters according to their pictorial value instead of according to their symbolic relation," we must do the same with respect to reading the processes and ramifications of Black people's "ungendering" via racial slavery: "the commanding terms of the dehumanizing, ungendering, and defacing project of African persons."[3] Operating as a "metaphor of social and cultural management"[4] both internal and external to the Black intramural, gender acts as both a mode of violence and a manner through which our understanding of Black suffering writ large affects the deepest levels of the psyche. Hence, our political, ethical, and libidinal investments appear to focus primarily on Black male abjection—as both spectacle and spectacular— for like dream-thoughts, they are "immediately comprehensible, as soon as we have learnt them." However, reading the psychic afterlife of slavery through both the rebus of Black female flesh as "a text for living and a text

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[2] Sigmund Freud, trans. James Strachey. *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976), 262.
[3] Spillers, Hortense J. "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." *Diacritics* 17. 2 (1987): 72. Hereafter cited as "MBPM."
[4] Spillers, "MBPM," 79.

for dying," and a primitive language without a grammar—the latent content of dreams, the dream-content itself—we could practice a mode of thinking through the untranslatable in both Black life and death, social or otherwise. For like Freud's dream-content, Black women's suffering operates as invisibly as the Black unconscious writ large, and as the underpinning of our interpretations of the (Black) psyche: a psyche which unleashes incalculable aggressivities towards the Black woman as the arbiter of Blackness itself.

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Hortense Spillers's groundbreaking essay, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," entered various fields of literary and theoretical inquiry under the shadow of a photograph (see Fig. 1). Appearing on an unnumbered page toward the beginning of the essay's publication in *Diacritics*, the violence of the photograph's placement—the trace of its absent signifiers, its reductive rendering of Spillers elaboration of New World African kinship (and its rupture)—the photograph rarely, if ever, receives critical attention or inclusion within discussion of Spillers's work. Absent a caption, the genesis of the photograph's appearance in the initial publication of "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe" proves a mystery. Inarguably an inclusion from the editorial board,[5] one questions the work of interpretation, the psychic labor involved in placing the images of eighteen Black children, predominantly barefoot, alongside two adults – all donning various types of millenary—standing in front of a dilapidated shack as a testament to the "American Grammar" outlined in Spillers's text.

[5] Spillers, Hortense. "Re: Question concerning photograph 1987 *Diacritics* publication." Received by Selamawit D. Terrefe, 24 Oct. 2013.

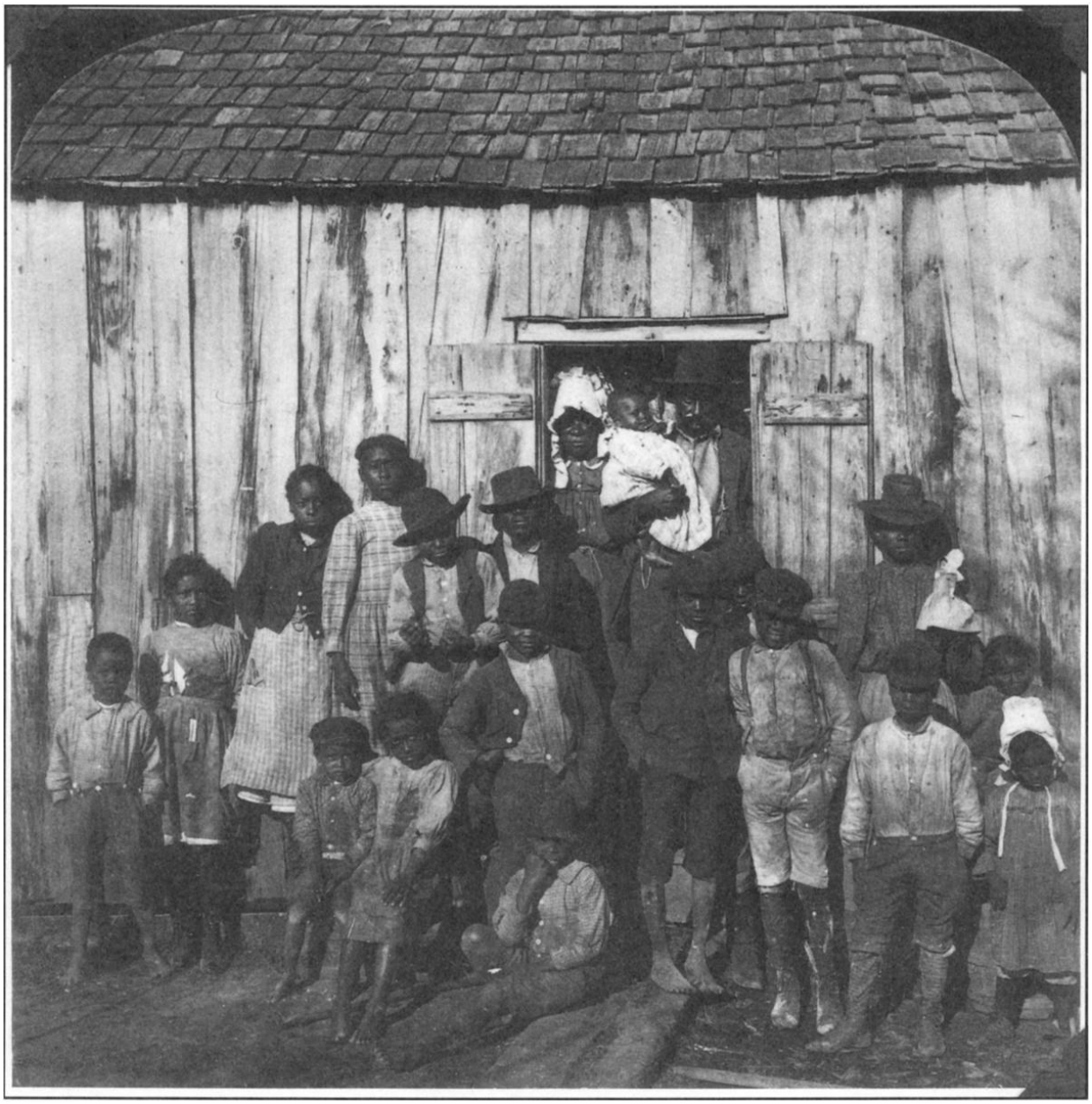

Fig. 1. Unattributed Photo, Spillers, Hortense J. "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." *Diacritics* 17.2 (1987): 65-81.

I begin my theorization of the function of the Black woman within the concomitant production of psychoanalytic discourse and the practice of chattel slavery with the same interdiction launched

within Spillers's essay, "Let's face it. I am a marked woman, but not everybody knows my name"[6]: an interdiction eclipsed by the images of the unnamed, unidentified, and unmoored Black woman, man, and children in the photo. Devoid of attribution and lacking any reference within the body of the essay, I wonder whether the photograph is intended to be demonstrative of the essay's references to Black kinship in the New World: a shadow underwritten by an id[7] sutured to Black female abjection, negated absence, and lack of critical inquiry regarding the loss and/or concealment of the Black female specter. What are the unconscious affective demands placed upon the reader as she consumes the array of expressions—from vacant, to shame, fear, save a smirk from a child in the lower right corner—the muted grey tones within the frame blending tarnished smocks, trousers, and shirts gracing skin tones whose arrangement of hues are sacrificed for the stark contrast offered by the inclusion of two white bonnets, a white infant's gown, and a white doll? What remains most striking about the photograph is its representation of vacancy, its banality, and its sophomoric treatment of the essay's profound import.

[6] Spillers, "MBPM," 1.

[7] Freud defines the id as follows: "It is the dark, inaccessible part of our personality; what little we know of it we have learnt from our study of the dream-work and of the construction of neurotic symptoms, and most of that is of a negative character and can be described only as a contrast to the ego. We approach the id with analogies: we call it a chaos, a cauldron full of seething excitations. We picture it as being open at its end to somatic influences, and as there taking up into itself instinctual needs which find their physical expression in it, but we cannot say in what substratum. It is filled with energy reaching it from the instincts, but it has no organization, produces no collective will, but only a striving to bring about the satisfaction of the instinctual needs subject to the observance of the pleasure principle. The logical laws of thought do not apply in the id, and this is true above all of the law of contradiction. Contradictory impulses exist side by side, without cancelling each other out or diminishing each other: at the most they may converge to form compromise under the dominating economic pressure towards the discharge of energy. There is nothing in the id that could be compared with negation; and we perceive with surprise an exception to the philosophical theorem that space and time are necessary forms of our mental acts. There is nothing in the id that corresponds to the idea of time; there is no recognition of the passage of time, and—a thing that is most remarkable and awaits consideration in philosophical thought—no alteration in its mental processes is produced by the passage of time. Wishful impulses which have never passed beyond the id, but impressions, too, which have been sunk into the id by repression, are virtually immortal; after the passage of decades they behave as though they had just occurred. They can only lose their importance and be deprived of their cathexis of energy, when they have been made conscious by the work of analysis, and it is on this that the therapeutic effect of analytic treatment rests to no small extent." Freud, Sigmund, and James Strachey. *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (New York: Norton, 1989), 91-92.

The at once absent and spectral materiality of the photograph—its nameless inhabitants joined together under the oppressive compositional weight of the structure's dark wooden shingles—renders it incompatible with the critical analysis of racial, familial, and maternal dispossession offered in Spillers's text. Yet, catachrestically, the photo also highlights how tantamount the shadow of Black death, which is to say Blackness, is to obscuring the attendant processes of violence situated within plantation and post-plantation American life: the graveyard that is the Americas, Africa, and elsewhere Africans were and continue to be displaced due to the machinations of a global racial order linked to racialized capital. Although the Black space of the doorway appears to engulf the lone adults and infant while the remaining unnamed specters complement the paler, wooden, vertical planks of the abode, the photo does not betray what Roland Barthes' has described as "death in the future," the punctum: "an anterior future of which death is the stake."[8] The photo affectively refutes "figuration of the motionless and made-up face beneath which we see the dead"[9] as the unidentified Black specters elide the weight of the discursive foundations that carry them into (non)being. In other words, the coarse inclusion of this photo ghosts the transgenerational marking of race and its concomitant practice of unnaming, reminiscent of the injunction included at the onset of Spillers's essay, "I am a marked woman, but not everybody knows my name." Negating Barthes' assertion that the "photograph is a certificate of presence,"[10] the photo betrays its nameless specters' absence on two critical fronts: foreclosure and return. Their negated presence, a metaphysics of absence, yields to a foreclosure of being while their spectralization, or return, is apparitioned as a proxy for white

[8] Barthes, Roland. Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 94.
[9] Ibid., 30.
[10] Ibid., 85

jouissance—fantasies conjured and recirculated by the violent breach constituted by racial slavery, elaborated within Spillers's essay as follows:

> The captive body, then, brings into focus a gathering of social realities as well as a metaphor for value so thoroughly interwoven in their literal and figurative emphases that distinctions between them are virtually useless…dominant symbolic activity, the ruling episteme that releases the dynamics of naming and valuation, remains grounded in the originating metaphors of captivity and mutilation so that it is as if neither time nor history, nor historiography and its topics, shows movement, as the human subject is "murdered" over and over again by the passions of a bloodless and anonymous archaism, showing itself in endless disguise."[11]

A productive dissonance occurs upon the Black viewer's consideration of this image and Spillers's interventions regarding the Black female captive body within "dominant symbolic activity" *if* she recognizes her absented self as part of a "family structure cast back into the id."[12] Wondering if she ever left this space of anxiety, teetering on the precipice of both the elision and overexposure of gratuitous violence—"originating metaphors of captivity and mutilation"—she may question with whom, if anyone at all, in this photograph does she, the Black woman, identify? Is it the lone adult Black woman holding the child? The Black man donning a worn hat, holding a baby swathed in white as if to say, if you are going to shoot (this picture) I must hold onto the whitest element in the frame, to save myself from my descent into/as Blackness? Or would she identify with the children who grace every inch of the photograph, peppering the pixels of the page with misery equal to the undecipherable expression of the male adult engulfed by the Blackness within the doorframe. How does her psyche process the realization that her own identifications indicate structures of a global, political id, and as such require one to think about how one travels, is carried to a place of identification?

[11] Spillers, "MBPM," 68.
[12] Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1982), 149. Hereafter cited as *BSWM*.

Staging the Scene: Oedipus without a Home

> Master… would at times seem to take great pleasure in whipping a slave. I have often been awakened at the dawn of day by the most heart-rending shrieks of an own aunt of mine, whom he used to tie up to a joist, and whip upon her naked back till she was literally covered with blood. No words, no tears, no prayers, from his gory victim, seemed to move his iron heart from its bloody purpose. The louder she screamed, the harder he whipped; and where the blood ran fastest, there he whipped longest. He would whip her to make her scream, and whip her to make her hush; and not until overcome by fatigue, would he cease to swing the blood-clotted cowskin. I remember the first time I ever witnessed this horrible exhibition. I was quite a child, but I well remember it. I never shall forget it whilst I remember any thing. It was the first of a long series of such outrages, of which I was doomed to be a witness and a participant. It struck me with awful force. It was the blood-stained gate, the entrance to the hell of slavery, through which I was about to pass. It was a most terrible spectacle. I wish I could commit to paper the feelings with which I beheld it.
>
> —Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*

> Well, you know whut dey say "uh white man and uh nigger woman is de freest thing on earth." Dey do as dey please.
>
> —333Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

These two epigraphs employ both the figure of Black female abjection and the Black female imago writ large in distinct, yet by no means mutually exclusive modes. In the case of Douglass, the image of his Aunt Hester's whipped, bloody body and the sounds of her "shrieks"[13] serve as the medium through which Douglass not only narrativizes himself within the symbolic, but also depicts how his psychic construction and subjectivity hinges upon a political and ontological structure that forecloses introjection of the Black woman. As such, he both incorporates and misrecognizes her, and the Black female imago writ large, as the arbiter of Blackness itself: his inauguration into the condition of enslavement. This linkage between enslavement, Blackness, and Black women in particular extends beyond the legal status of *partus sequitur ventrem* to determine multiple effects of modernity's raced psychic plane. This chapter outlines these effects as the following: the discourse and field of psychoanalysis; differentially

[13] Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (New York: Dover Publications, 1995), 5.

affected responses to the effects and displays of anti-Black violence against Black women and men; and, the Black maternal as intramural rival.

The second epigraph evokes these effects—the psychic afterlife of slavery— in its violent and subtle illumination of what Saidiya Hartman has deemed the "dual invocation of person and property."[14] Vis-à-vis the dual function of slave law that assigns agency to Black people solely through criminality and culpability while simultaneously assigning chattel status to Africans (effectively removing and negating political and ontological will, agency, and freedom), the equation of Black women to white men through the moniker of freedom presents another mode to analyze the precarious function of the Black female imago in the cultural imaginary. At the level of the symbolic, through language, the Black woman referred to in Hurston's text is mischaracterized as the equivalent in agential states to *a priori* free white men: "Dey do as dey please."[15] However, at the level of the libidinal, the Black woman *as sentient object* is revealed if we acknowledge the sedimentation of the dual invocation of person and property within the psychic afterlife of slavery. Put differently, "de freest thing on earth" is bifurcated for "uh white man and uh nigger woman,"[16] as white men in the legal, social and political realms are indeed granted rights as full subjects, exempt from domination from other racial groups. Yet the freedom about which the text refers regarding "uh nigger woman" concerns the unfastened and unrestrained availability for use her body and imago serve in the aftermath of racial slavery. Free is also defined as "not in contact with another object or surface,"[17] hence the Black woman as "free" in this context provides us with an opportunity to examine Blackness as what Lewis

[14] Hartman, Saidiya V. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 7, 66, 79, 80.
[15] Hurston, Zora N. *Their Eyes Were Watching God: A Novel* (New York: Perennial Library, 1990), 180.
[16] Ibid.
[17] "Free." *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2000). Web. 13 Dec. 2015.

Gordon has theorized as "self-reflective, outside itself"[18] and the ramifications of its outsider status for Black intramural relations. As "de freest thing on earth," the Black woman's body and her imago function as both (non)ontological object that determines nullification of the African as an ontological being, and represents the psychic quantifier both subject to as well as interposing the malleability and substitution of the free use of Blackness, Black bodies.[19] I perform an extended analysis of the use of the corpse of Bessie Mears in Richard Wright's *Native Son* to demonstrate precisely this substitution.

In order to trace these functions, I invoke two specters haunting the scene of my own arrival in outlining the metaphysics of Blackness and the psychic afterlife of slavery: the two foremost theorists of the Black psyche, and Black subjectivity, who have established critical interventions in the field of psychoanalysis and race, Blackness specifically: Hortense Spillers and David Marriott. As much as they have paved the scholarly and theoretical ground upon which this manuscript treads, the scene of our arrival is, and must continue to be, not only in medias res, like Sophocles' Oedipus, but also "self-reflective, outside itself." As such, we must begin at the scene of a failed, imaginary oedipal drama—the scene of the slave's arrested arrival. Returning briefly back to "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," the photograph, and Spillers's opening wherein she declares her analysis of the Black woman as a "particular figuration of the

[18] Gordon, Lewis. 11 Lewis R. Gordon, "Theory in Black: Teleological Suspensions in Philosophy of Culture," *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences.* 18.2 (2010), 198.

[19] I am indebted to Hartman's elaboration and extension of Marx's notion of the commodity, as she discusses slavery in the US in the following passages from *Scenes of Subjection*: "I contend that the value of Blackness resided in its metaphorical aptitude, whether literally understood as the fungibility of the commodity or understood as the imaginative surface upon which the master and the nation came to understand themselves" (7) and "the fungibility of the slave—that is, the joy made possible by virtue of the replaceability and interchangeability endemic to the commodity—and by the extensive capacities of property—that is, the augmentation of the master subject through his embodiment in external objects and persons. Put differently, the fungibility of the commodity makes the captive body an abstract and empty vessel vulnerable to the projections of others' feelings, ideas, desires, and values; and, as property, the dispossessed body of the enslaved is the surrogate for the master's body since it guarantees his disembodies universality and acts as the sign of his power and dominion. Thus, while the beaten and mutilated body presumable establishes the brute materiality of existence, the materiality of suffering regularly eludes (re)cognition by virtue of the body's being replaced by other signs of value, as well as other bodies." (21)

split subject that psychoanalytic theory posits," I argue Spillers's investigation provides us a radical hermeneutic lens, the "scene of unprotected female flesh—of female flesh "ungendered" – [which] offers a praxis and a theory, a text for living and for dying, and a method for reading both through their diverse mediations."[20] Spillers questions whether the "hieroglyphics of the flesh," "undecipherable markings on the captive body," a "phenomenon of marking and branding" actually "transfers" from one generation to another. In my work, I argue in the affirmative, insisting that indeed this phenomenon of marking and branding not only transfers materially vis-à-vis both state sanctioned and intramural violence; but also, psychically. This psychic afterlife of slavery bears both the suspension of flesh, ungendered and unmoored, in the ship's hold as Spillers's work poignantly theorizes, as well as evinces how the Black woman's imago functions both ideologically and discursively within the parameters of contemporary theoretical frameworks.

Although we have just gazed upon the material scene of violence threatening to encumber the readings of Spillers's engagement with New World formations, disformations, and de-formations of African bodies, one aporia upon which this chapter intervenes concerns two other shadows to encounter Spillers essay. First, David Marriott, theorist of Blackness, psychoanalysis, and cultural studies, and his interpretation, if not misrecognition, of the Black maternal as the trace of a "promise." The second shadow concerns Fanon's influence on the canon of scholarship and discourses attendant to a grammar of Black dispossession: one that Spillers's hermeneutics of "flesh" explodes. The psychic processes involved in the production, deployment, and neglect of the symbolic weight of the photograph's inclusion signal the construction of Blackness as foundational to the conception of the psyche itself: one founded

[20] Spillers, "MBPM." 68.

upon the suspension of African bodies turned into "flesh" vis-à-vis the "oceanic,"[21] a reference to Freud's theory of a state of consciousness prior to the formation of the ego. Predicated upon an "undifferentiated identity,"[22] the African body, on the continent as well as the diaspora, rests catatonically within states of fissure and dissociation. The psycho-social dynamics and political purchase instrumentalizing the malleability of the Black subject's visage predates this particular photographic inclusion within *Diacritics*. Moreover, since any ethical investigation into the intersection of race, gender, politics, and violence as manifested within 20th and 21st century culture in Africa and its diaspora must include a vision of the psychic life of Black subjects as *theorized by Blacks*, Spillers's oeuvre, I contend, provides a critical foundation. Beyond her contribution to the canonical formation of African American literary and critical theory with essays such as "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," Spillers's engagement with and formation of psychoanalytic theory in works such as "As the Things You Could be By Now if Sigmund Freud's Wife Was Your Mother': Psychoanalysis and Race" profoundly catalyze and situate the socio-political and ethical import of meditating upon the psychic afterlife of slavery. Spillers extends her radical hermeneutic of "flesh," what she defines as "that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse, or the reflexes of iconography,"[23] to her subsequent work in "All the Things you Could be by Now, If Sigmund Freud's Wife was Your Mother" with the introduction of two key concepts: first, "psychoanalytics," which she poses differentially to traditional psychoanalytic discourse, and tasking it with "effecting a translation from the muteness of desire/wish—that which shames and

[21] Spillers "MBPM" references Freud's use of the term oceanic, a reference to a state of consciousness prior to the formation of the ego, in the following passage: "Those African persons in 'Middle Passage' were literally suspended in the 'oceanic,' if we think of the latter in its Freudian orientation as an analogy for undifferentiated identity: removed from the indigenous land and culture, and not-yet 'American' either, these captive persons, without names that their captors would recognize, were in movement across the Atlantic, but they were also *nowhere* at all." 72.
[22] Ibid., fn 14.
[23] Ibid., 67.

baffles the subject…into an articulated *syntactic* particularity."[24] The second critical concept Spillers introduces in her essay is a strategy she terms "interior intersubjectivity," defining it as both a goal and process of "self-reflection" "predicated…on speaking," "a discipline of a self-critical inquiry," which occurs "in the transgressive unpredictable play of language."[25]

I place the work of Spillers, in particular her essays "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe" and "All the Things You Could be by Now, if Sigmund Freud's Wife Was Your Mother," in conversation with the oeuvre of Marriott, beginning with Spillers's profound, albeit unacknowledged, influence on the direction of his work. Both Spillers and Marriott write under the weight of and engagement with Fanon's interventions within the discourses of psychoanalysis, phenomenology and ontology. Examining their respective interpretations of Fanon's rendering of the split Black psyche in chapter six of *Black Skin, White Masks*, "The Negro and Psychopathology," I argue that a bifurcation between Spillers and Marriott reflects both a political and ontological impasse: a political disagreement about the promise of Black life and the aporetics of Black psychoanalytic discourse on the psychic purchase of Black absence and loss. For Marriott interprets Spillers claim that "the African-American male has been touched…by the mother, handed by her in ways that he cannot escape,"[26] as "the maternal as an historically constituted horizon of touch, as the trace of a promise."[27] Notwithstanding, whether in her refutation of Fanon's assertion that "the Oedipus complex is far from coming into being among Negroes,"[28] the relevance of Freud's theory of neurosis regarding the Black psyche, or

[24] Spillers, Hortense J. ""All the Things You Could Be by Now, If Sigmund Freud's Wife Was Your Mother": Psychoanalysis and Race." *Boundary 2*. 23.3 (1996), 107-108. Hereafter cited as "All the Things."
[25] Ibid., 115.
[26] Spillers, "MBPM." 80.
[27] Marriott, David. "In Memory of Absent Fathers: Black Paternity and Social Spectatorship." Campbell, Jan, and Janet Harbord. *Psycho-politics and Cultural Desires* (London: Routledge, 2004), 137. Hereafter cited as "In Memory."
[28] Fanon, *BSWM,* 151.

her concept of "interior intersubjectivity," Spillers's work gestures in the same direction as Marriott's— meditating upon psychic dimensions of Blackness. My reading of the aporia between these two theorists' work emerges through two vantage points. First, through the omission of the Black female imago in Marriott's studies of the psychic effects of anti-Black violence and Frantz Fanon's similar absenting in his discourse of negrophobia, I contend that this exclusion rests upon differentially affected responses to the effects and displays of anti-Black violence against Black women and men, not upon the construction of a gender differential in the logic, structure, or practice of anti-Blackness. Delineating the function of the Black woman within the concomitant production of psychoanalytic discourse and the practice of chattel slavery through Spillers's concept of Black female "flesh," I locate a raced psychic plane determined by modernity's construction of the African as Black. Second, I argue that until the 2017 publication of Marriott's article, "On Decadence: *Bling Bling*,"[29] the nearly two decades long excluding of Spillers within Marriott's work is subtended in a (political) disagreement about the promise of living. While Spillers's essay concludes with positing potential, if not hope, for Sapphire's "*claiming* the monstrosity (of a female with the potential to "name"),"[30]Marriott maintains "there are certain lives already dead to the future; lives, in other words, whose promise is inextricable from the most deadly psychic and social fantasies; lives for whom paternal abandonment is only one part of the necessary violence of the life as lived."[31] While a cursory distinction between these two scholars' theoretical dispositions may reveal, perhaps, their respective foci on gender and/or the role of the maternal or paternal in the psycho-social and political development of Blacks in the US, as well as the mediums from which to theorize the ideology and spectrality of Blackness, the centrality of Spillers's texts to Marriott's subsequent critical interventions in his

[29] Marriott, *e-flux.* Vol. #79 (2/2017). http://www.e-flux.com/journal/79/94430/on-decadence-bling-bling/
[30] Spillers, "MBPM." 80.
[31] Marriott, "In Memory," 126.

text *Haunted Life: Visual Culture and Black Modernity* have yet to be examined. For Marriott's later inquiries into "the interstices of cultural fantasy and racial anxiety, abjection and desire"[32] echo and extend Spillers's elaboration African bodies turned into "flesh," of "the violent formation of a modern African consciousness" and the "hunger of recorded memory."[33] Yet these echoes and extensions rest at a primary site of irreconciliation: whether or not the violence of Black relationality—the Black psyche—reflects its impossibility. For Spillers's, the praxis of self-critical inquiry relies on the assumption of a coherent, agential self whereby Black people could, perhaps, act as agents amongst one another. Conversely, Marriott contends with the possibility that the Black psyche is one that must "live with hatred as our most intimate possession" as "the truly difficult task of our dreams."[34] Marriott, here, displays a recourse only through the possibility of death, even if only through dreams. This is reminiscent of what Freud defines as "the royal road to a knowledge of the unconscious activities of the mind; it is the securest foundation of psychoanalysis and the field in which every worker must acquire his convictions and seek his training. If I am asked how one can become a psychoanalyst, I reply: 'By studying one's own dreams."[35] A key site, I maintain, for excavating the machinations of the Black unconscious in general and "the securest foundation of psychoanalysis," as practiced *and* theorized by Blacks, is the Black woman. How we proceed after recognizing the ontological dead space that is indicative of rupture— a psyche split from a non-self, inaugurated and governed by absence and loss—becomes the task of contemporary theorists of both Black life and death.

[32] Marriott, David. *Haunted Life: Visual Culture and Black Modernity* (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 208.
[33] Spillers, "MBPM," 68.
[34] Ibid., xv.
[35] Freud, Sigmund. *Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (New York: Norton, 1977), 33.

Marriott's initial theoretical contributions—the essays "Bonding over Phobia," published in the edited volume *Psychoanalysis and Race*[36] and "Bordering on: The Black Penis"[37]—entered the field of critical inquiry after the publications of Spillers's "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe" and her most significant work on psychoanalysis and race, "All the Things You Could Be by Now if Sigmund Freud's Wife was Your Mother." A formidable cultural critic attuned to the need for extended psychoanalytic investigation of the violence governing the lives of Black folk in the African diaspora, Marriott's commitment to psychoanalytic inquiry and his sustained engagement with Frantz Fanon's contributions in *Black Skin, White Masks* mark him as a crucial interlocutor into the field. Marriott has situated his work at the interstices of visual media, literature, poetics, and psychoanalysis, hence, when coming across his essay, "In Memory of Absent Fathers: Black Paternity and Social Spectatorship," the author's rare mention of Spillers in addition to his text's attendant critique of her engagement with psychoanalysis prove puzzling.

Notwithstanding the acknowledgement that Spillers's essays reveals "psychoanalytic complexity" by "restoring a certain *historicity* to these racial and sexual relations" undergirding "racial and familial relations in American culture,"[38] Marriott's limited reference within the body of his work to Spillers's oeuvre reveals a curious absence modeling a failed Oedipal cultural drama considering his profound insights regarding psychoanalysis and African American cultural production. Given Spillers's call for psychoanalytic discourse as a "supplementary protocol" for a "revised and corrected social-political practice,"[39] a concept to which I will return later, it is difficult to imagine the trajectory of Marriott's work independent of Spillers's opus. Placing

[36] Also included in his first full text, *On Black Men*, which explores the work of violence, fantasy, and desire in both the historical construction of the Black male subject and/within U.S. visual culture: Marriott, D S. *On Black Men*. (Edinburgh, 2000).
[37] Marriott, David. "Bordering On: the Black Penis." *Textual Practice*. 10.1 (1996): 9-28.
[38] Marriott, "In Memory," 133.
[39] Spillers, "All the Things," 77.

Fanon, Spillers, and Marriott's engagements with the Oedipal complex in context demonstrates critical bifurcations that engender new insights into analyses of not only intrapsychic machinations and intramural relations relating to desire, identification, and aggressivity, but also illuminate divergent interpretations of a metaphysics of Blackness respective to how one views the mimetic function of the Black female imago.

Marriott's sole text to critically engage Spillers's insights, "In Memory of Absent Fathers: Black Paternity and Spectatorship," appeared two years after Spillers's "All the Things You Can Be By Now if Sigmund Freud's Wife Was Your Mother," and presented a critique of Spillers's most lauded work: "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe." Hinging upon her deployment of the concept of mimesis in the conclusion of her essay, "legal enslavement removed the African-American male not so much from sight as from *mimetic* view as a partner in the prevailing fiction of the Father's name, the Father's law,"[40] Marriott's criticism of Spillers rests on a misreading, at best, and bad faith, at worst, with the following bold claims:

> [W]hat her arguments perhaps leave uninterrogated is precisely this question of the legacy of the violated Black father for those sons and daughters who could not help but identify with him as the necessary condition of their own social identities...Spillers fails to clarify the precise link between the Black father's symbolic death and his loss from "mimesis"… is Spillers, in her account of Black filial identification, assuming that identification with the father only takes place if it is with a positive image of paternity? In which case is she not overlooking a more psychoanalytic notion of mimesis defined as a "primordial tendency" to identification, a drive towards identity which brings, in turn, the desiring subject into being, and not the other way around in the form of a psychic voluntarism (Borch-Jacobsen 1989:47)? If so, and despite her complication of a naive account of looking as identification, of visibility as recognition, Spillers use of the word "mimesis" appears to restrict it to an equally problematic voluntaristic account of social identification. [41]

[40] Spillers, "MBPM," 80.
[41] Marriott, "In Memory,"135.

The precondition for Marriott's interpretation of Spillers's definition of mimesis rests upon a reading of "her account of Black filial identification" as a "voluntaristic account of social identification." Yet, the body of Spillers's text elaborates the "social ambiguity and chaos" of paternity for the Black child, contingent upon the historical conditions of slavery ─beyond "an enforced state of breach," it's the "bizarre axiological ground" from which contemporary modes of signification, mimesis, and identification articulate.[42] In other words, I do not read Spillers's essay as an endorsement of social identification as a matter of choice—the choice of which subject to *be.* What we see in terms of Oedipality in the case of the Black family (now we enter the realm of both being and having—object choice) is a condition not born of a matriarchal complex, but rather a structure within the anti-Black and white supremacist hierarchies established during racial slavery (I suspect that this goes as far back as the Arab slave trade vs the Atlantic, but that is for another chapter). When looking at the very formation of the family, or the entrance into the social order, we must take into account how we gauge the process of identifications and aggressivity as Freud has elaborated. Freud's theories of identification are by no means consistent, but he came to a formulation wherein identification inaugurates the formation of the ego and, most importantly, he found that identification commences prior to modeling an ideal.

For the Black/African, I argue, the processes of identification outlined within traditional psychoanalytic discourse fail to determine healthy sexual/object- choice and attachments (critiques of the heterosexism of Freud's account notwithstanding) outside of the paradigmatic racial structures that govern all prevailing social and power relations post racial slavery. We must examine the processes of identification and desire incipient to the Oedipal complex and

[42]Spillers, "MBPM," 74, 65, 76.

abjected for Black people globally due to the historically specific relations of power undergirding Black maternity as banished: *partus sequitur ventrem*. Using Borch-Jacobsen's conception of mimesis as a "desire of," rather than *for*, others as its necessary precondition, one is forced to ask if Marriott's critique of Spillers's psychoanalytic prowess is based on a misreading in bad faith and/or the result of a failed Oedipal cultural drama wherein Marriott's analysis stands in mimetic rivalry to its theoretical progenitor. Rather than producing mimetic identification, Marriott's curious absencing of Spillers's work, with the exception of her articulation of the Black father's "loss from 'mimesis,'" mirrors Black intramural relations among cis-identified men and women, reflecting what Rene' Girard has outlined, in *Violence and the Sacred*, as a "sacrificial crisis" "at the height" of which "man's desires are focused on one thing only: violence. And in one way or another violence is always mingled with desire."[43] Rather than cathedralizing mimetic identification as sutured to desire to be or to have a particular object, Girard discusses:

> [A] third presence as well: the rival. It is the rival who should be accorded the dominant role. We must take care, however, to identify him correctly; not to say, with Freud, that he is the father; or, in the case of the tragedies, that he is the brother. Our first task is to define the rival's position within the system to which he belongs, in relation to both the subject and object. The rival desires the same object as the subject, and to assert the primacy of the rival can lead to only one conclusion. Rivalry does not arise because of the fortuitous convergence of two desires on a single object; rather, the *subject desires the object because the rival desires it*. In desiring an object the rival alerts the subject to the desirability of the object. The rival, then, serves as a model for the subject, not only in regard to such secondary matters as style and opinions but also, and more essentially, in regard to desires.[44]

Perhaps, here, begins an illumination of how the Black mother—and by extension all Black women—is always-already a rival for more than just the Black child, regardless of the gender. This object of desire is what Frank B. Wilderson III has elaborated as "gratuitous freedom": "an

[43] Girard, René, and Patrick Gregory. *Violence and the Sacred* (London: Continuum, 2005), 154.
[44] Ibid., 154-155

ontological, rather than experiential, question," its status "an ethical purity," "freedom from the world, freedom from Humanity, freedom from everyone (including one's Black self)."[45] Spillers's interventions, if read carefully, force us extend the parameters of psychoanalytic inquiry to account for the "syntactic particularity" of socio-cultural impact of New World slavery on the Symbolic registers. These include the symbolic father—this patronymic to which the Black man is banished—as well as Black fathers *and* Black children. As such, is not Black female flesh born of slavery's violence established through a state of "breach," in Spillers's lexicon: a breach animating a violence that precedes Freud's conception of the id, characterized by both an instinctual drive *and* that which is repressed—"There is nothing in the id that corresponds to the idea of time; there is no recognition of the passage of time…Wishful impulses which have never passed beyond the id, but impressions, too, which have been sunk into the id by repression, are virtually immortal"[46] and "the dark, inaccessible part of our personality"[47]? Hence, the id is sutured to the Black woman as both "subjected to repression" in constructions of modern notions of gender and femininity, and the "dark continent" of Freud's female sexuality. The process of identification for the Black is inseparable from the *a priori* status of absence which situates Blackness, which is already to say an absence of Black femininity. In so doing, banished Black maternity restructures the pre-Oedipal in Freud's configuration, a passion/desire for the mother, the child's entry into desire—a foreclosure of desire for the mother. Concurrently, this entry into desire which is also a foreclosure functions as an opening and suturing of aggressivity and violence directed at the Black maternal as rival for being the very negation of the phallus: a phallus delinked from the male sex. For instance, contrary to Freud and

[45] Wilderson, Frank B. III. *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 23.
[46] Freud. *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, 92.
[47] Ibid., 91.

Lacan's theorization which fails to account for Blackness in relation to the phallus, the white female also functions in multiple registers as a form of the phallus since she is a conduit of power with the social relations established within the afterlife of slavery. In other words, although for Freud love, or object-libido, prefigures identification, Marriott fails to see how Spillers's reading of the Black father's loss of "mimesis" demonstrates how Black fathers (as well as Black sons and daughters) can adopt white scopic pleasures. These pleasures are constituted by an id that has repressed the banishment of Black female flesh, and the Black maternal by extension, from the category of Other: a category of negation as well as representation. Hence, if the Black mother and woman as subject or sexual object-choice is neither foreclosed to a white Other nor available in the Symbolic and socio-cultural registers to Black children or object-choices, this double bind constitutes her abjected body and imago. Her vulnerability to violence via this double bind precipitates the abjection meted upon Blackness writ large and illuminates the psychic, phenomenological and ontological condition par excellence affecting Black intramural relations: outside of thought and consciousness, Blackness is a void unto a Black (non) self.

If our conceptions of identification for the Black were to veer away from possession—to be or to have an object-choice bound by white fantasies embedded in our own Black psyches—we cannot begin to answer the question about the woman of color to which Fanon abdicated: "We know nothing about her." Although much has been theorized about Fanon's relationship to the woman of color in the context of his statements on not only rape fantasies regarding Black men and white women, but also women of color's rape fantasies involving the 'darker,' Senegalese, it is worth noting that Fanon, unlike his exploration of the Black man in relation to non-Black women or even lighter hued Black women (or women of "color"), Fanon is relatively

silent on exploring the condition and psychosexual development of Black women specifically.[48] This relative silence, I argue, is another unconscious repudiation of the Black female imago as she relates to the ghost of slavery haunting Fanon's oeuvre, a repudiation that Kara Keeling has insightfully elaborated as "the woman of color is not the Black man's other, she is subsumed into the Black," "she is without representation," and "eludes representation by colonialism's structures."[49] Fanon indeed states that "The real Other for the white man is and will continue to be the Black man. And conversely. Only for the white man, the other is perceived at the level of the body image…unidentifiable."[50] Hence, I argue that not only is the Black woman the real Other for the white man, but also that Black women and men cannot be real Others for one another. We must return to Fanon, this time via Marriott, to investigate the ways in which we can read the missing Oedipal crisis for the Black, specifically how the psychic ramifications of ontological negation concatenate via misrecognition and failed incorporation between Black men and women to view what Marriott has elaborated as follows:

> What does it mean for Oedipus to go missing? This is a question with profound ontological consequences, of course, and one that returns us to the earlier point about real fantasy: if the Black has no Oedipus, is this because identification follows on from an earlier catastrophe and on that, to put it simply, precedes what it means to be a subject?...Yet to say that Oedipus is absent is to gesture toward a subject immobilized, forever in abeyance, caught up in an uncanny, disturbing moment of traumatic belatedness. By giving a different version of Oedipus, which is all to do with a fetishized relation to whiteness, Fanon is, then, saying that 97 percent of Antillean families are without legitimacy or differentiation in culture—but only if Oedipus continues to name

[48] Fanon, *BSWM*: "Accomplishing the phenomenon of turning around upon the subject's own self, it is the woman who rapes herself. We can find clear proof of this in the fact that it is not unusual for women to cry to their partner during coitus: 'Hurt me!' They are merely expressing the idea: 'Hurt me as I would do if I were in your place.' The fantasy of rape by the Black man is a variant of this: "I want the Black man to rip me open as I would do to a woman.' Those who grant us our findings on the psychosexuality of the white woman may well ask us what we have to say about the Black woman. We know nothing about her. What we can suggest, nevertheless, is that for many Antillean women, whom we shall call the almost white, the aggressor is represented by the typical Senegalese or in any case by a so called inferior," 156-157.
[49] Kara Keeling. ""In the Interval": Frantz Fanon and the "Problems" of Visual Representation." Qui Parle. 13.2 (2003): 95-97.
[50] Fanon, *BSWM*. 161.

> the laws of symbolic difference, inheritance, the legitimate assumption of a culture. The net result is an image of the Black as insufficiently alienated (as a being who has not had to face the threat of castration and so confront the price we pay for entry into sexuality and culture). It would seem that the encounter with racist stereotypes is when the Black child's "real apprenticeship begins," and it is doubtless from the same encounter that "reality proves to be extremely resistant."[51]

Indeed, Marriott's affirmation of the ontological consequences of a missing Oedipal complex for the Black proves critical. I identify the psychic machinations attendant to the Black who is both "insufficiently alienated" in the context of the "laws of symbolic difference, inheritance, the legitimate assumption of a culture," yet also "forever in abeyance, caught up in an uncanny, disturbing moment of traumatic belatedness" as compelled by a foundational trauma prior to "the encounter with racist stereotypes." This crisis is an encounter without a relation that is the material and mimetic encounter between a non-self and a barred encounter with the Black female imago that represents one's ontological negation.

Staging the Scene: Black Women and Mimetic Thaumaturgy

> Even though the European hegemonies stole bodies- some of them female - out of West African communities in concert with the African "middleman," we regard this human and social irreparability as high crimes against the flesh, as the person of African females and African males registered the wounding. If we think of the "flesh" as a primary narrative, then we mean its seared, divided, ripped-apartness, riveted to the ship's hole, fallen, or "escaped" overboard.[52]
>
> —Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book"

Until the publication of Spillers's work, we've had limited access to theoretical apparatuses that begin to discuss the Black female as a figuration both outside of and in excess of not only language, but also the specular.[53] The role of the Black woman, I contend, proves critical within both the symbolic and Real, illuminating the psychic processes of modernity's

[51] Marriott, David. "On Racial Fetishism." *Qui Parle.* 18.2 (2010), 224.
[52] Spillers, "MBPM," 67.
[53] I do not wish to suggest, however, that Black women's theorizing did not occur within various forms of cultural production prior to Black women gaining access to the academy.

negotiation of life and death, desire and fantasy. In other words, Black women's "flesh"─ as an outcome and practice of conceptions of psychic life/death within the modern (on both sides of the Atlantic)─undergirds and drives the language and discourse of not only psychoanalysis but the unconscious itself. The erasure and silencing of affective responses to Black women's suffering mirrors her ontological absence, the obliteration of her suffering in our collective imagining of anti-Black violence and the theoretical apparatuses Black critical theorists of Black life and Black death deploy. Extending the critical work of Spillers, I argue that a hermeneutic lens attuned to the hieroglyphics of Black female "flesh" translates the muteness and ideological purchase of the Black female imago, and by extension the Black female psyche, from what I call temporal aphasia—a rupture in the fabric of speech, comprehension, and thus figuration, predicated upon the suspension of Blackness (in, and as, flesh) absented from the self —towards Spillers's goal of "an articulated *syntactic* particularly."[54]

Spillers describes the scene of the "ship's hole" as a "primary narrative" of the "wounding," searing, and annihilation of African "persons" as they discursively, ideologically and materially transform to "flesh." Concomitant with her discussion of an American grammar rooted in the violence constitutive of racial slavery and the construction of the New World, Spillers presents a radical reformulation of what in common parlance within the Humanities would be referred to as (white) abjection. Blackness, "Black sound" specifically, opens the similarly titled section of Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*: "Throughout a night without image but buffeted by Black sounds…I have spelled out abjection."[55] For Kristeva, the abject possesses properties of both subject and object, retaining "only one quality of the object that of being

[54] Spillers, "All the Things," 108.
[55] Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror*. Vol. 98 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 207.

opposed to *I*."[56] More pressing for our discussion of Spillers's work is the relationship between Kristeva's theory of abjection, the corpse in particular, and Spillers's notion of the flesh. The corpse is abject—"what disturbs identity, system, order,"[57] according to Kristeva. Yet it is worth repeating that Spillers theorizes the "primary narrative" of "flesh" as "that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse, or the reflexes of iconography."[58] For Kristeva, however, the primary aspect of the abject upon which its existence hinges is jouissance:

> It follows that jouissance alone causes the abject to exist as such. One does not know it, one does not desire it, one joys in it *[on enjouit]*. Violently and painfully. A passion. And, as in jouissance where the object of desire, known as object *a* [in Lacan's terminology], bursts with the shattered mirror where the ego gives up its image in order to contemplate itself in the Other, there is nothing either objective or objectal to the abject. It is simply a frontier, a repulsive gift that the Other, having become *alter ego,* drops so that "I" does not disappear in it but finds, in that sublime alienation, a forfeited existence. Hence a jouissance in which the subject is swallowed up but in which the Other, in return, keeps the subject from foundering by making it repugnant. One thus understands why so many victims of the abject are its fascinated victims—if not its submissive and willing ones.[59]

Kristeva, here, implies that victims of the abject may be "willing ones," finding in "sublime alienation, a forfeited existence." Yet if we follow Spillers's hermeneutics of flesh, what subtends the transubstantiation of Black bodies into flesh concerns: "a *theft of the body*—a willful and violent (and unimaginable from this distance) severing of the captive body from its motive will, its active desire. Under these conditions, we lose at least *gender* difference *in the outcome*, and the female body and the male body become a territory of cultural and political maneuver, not at all gender-related, gender-specific."[60] For Spillers, Black female flesh remains

[56] Ibid., 1.
[57] Ibid., 4.
[58] Spillers, "MBPM," 67.
[59] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 9.
[60] Spillers, "MBPM," 67.

"ungendered," and marks the quintessential slave – an object void of jouissance in itself. Serving as a conduit for the jouissance of white, or non-Black, people whose subjectivity, or status as Human, hinges upon the construction of slaves, or the Black, as antihuman, the Black body constitutes and exceeds Kristeva's abject— "what disturbs identity, system, order"—for it is the very object against which (and thus constituting how) identity, system and order within modernity are formulated.

In Kristeva's thought, entry into the social order is predicated on abjection, or separation from the mother, which precedes and precipitates the child's entrance into the Symbolic, or law of the Father. The Black, however, lacks this corporeal tie with the maternal, instead revealing the ontological, psychic, and material ruptures reflective of a political ontology borne of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade.[61] For Black motherhood is sutured to a history of *property* relations, rather than kinship ties, and is illuminated by the state's and civil society's reach which extends from and beyond the ship's hole: the severing of kinship ties of ascent and the erasure of maternal claims to descendants, whether on the plantation or via the foster 'care' and carceral systems. Blackness as deathly marker within the Symbolic, Imaginary, and Real is so intimately tied to the metaphoric and material reality of the corpse (and we have thousands of bones laying in the bottom of the Atlantic ocean to support this claim) that Spillers's elaboration of the reduction of African bodies into flesh illuminates a critical facet: the material and psychic violence attendant to the construction of racial Blackness —in and through chattel slavery and its aftermath — precedes one's subjective experience and phenomenology of it. For anti-Blackness

[61] Jared Sexton defines political ontology as: "not a metaphysical notion, because it is the explicit outcome of a politics and thereby available to historic challenge through collective struggle. But it is not simply a description of a political status either, even an oppressed or subjugated political status, because it functions *as if* it were a metaphysical property across the *longue durée* of the pre-modern, modern and now postmodern eras." ""The Curtain of the Sky": An Introduction," *Critical Sociology*. 36.1 (2010), 18.

as a political and ontological outcome of a series of historical events—Sub Saharan racialized slavery, the TransAtlantic slave trade and the birth of modern racial capital—is prior to one's entrance, but perhaps not one's formation, in language or the Symbolic Order. Temporal aphasia operates by way of retraction where what remains unsymbolizeable in language—the Real, or the violence that precedes the Id for the Black—gives way to speculative theories such as from Spillers who reveals the distinction between searching for communicability vs the rules of order, for understanding and expression vs systems of power: language versus her aim to "posit a grammar of a different 'subject of feminism'."[62] And if violence is the *a priori* psychic and ontological construction undergirding the Black, our methods for interpreting and articulating not only the machinations of the Black psyche, but also Black intramural relations, must be attuned to the effects of these "high crimes against the flesh" of "African females and African males" who still register this foundational "wounding"— what Spillers defines relationally as "social irreparability." In so doing, we may glean a better understanding of how not only Fanon, but also Marriott and Spillers alongside and through Fanon, agree that Freud's Oedipal Complex eludes the Black.

If the fetish undergirding the phobia and anxiety cathected towards Black men, in both the work of Marriott and Fanon, for instance, has no equivalent in terms of obsession with the Black woman's (void of) jouissance (which these two theorists unsurprisingly fail to investigate), what can we say about the level of anxiety, threat, and aggressivity both deployed against Black women and mediated through the construction of her image? This question requires a response beyond what discourses concerning the Symbolic alone can bear as the Black woman remains

[62] Hortense Spillers, "Peter's Pan," in reference to both "MBPM" and "The Permanent Obliquity of an In(Ph)alliably Straight" in *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 20.

more of a threatening idea/anti-ideal than a sexual presence. The Black woman's body has never remained under the purview of prohibition for both white and Black men as the system of chattel slavery encouraged both a political and libidinal economy subtended on the forced breeding and rape of Black female slaves—the vessel and proxy through which white capital functions in a plantation system. But if we are to investigate the realm of the Real and the height of aggressivity, desires, fantasies, and violence buttressing contemporary manifestations of anxiety deployed against Black women, are we to look no further than Fanon's own sentiments on Black women, or lack thereof? For when Fanon writes, "whoever says rape says the Negro," we understand the imago of the Black man as the *object* of fear, but we are still fighting to register the captive female as the quintessentially obscured—nameless and faceless—victim, a sentient object who suffers, along the lines of this syntax, *if* it were inverted. Marked and branded by the sexual-sadistic machinations attendant to racial slavery (also evident in the Arab slave trade's concubinage of African bodies), the Black captive female carries a chiasmic resonance, a crossing and intersection of dissociative states—a gesture towards self-reflective interiority—even in the work of the most prominent theories of the Black male psyche who absent her in their work. For if we place Spiller's dictum that "the monstrosity (of a female with the potential to 'name')" against and alongside Fanon's assertion that "it is implicit that to speak is to exist absolutely for the other,"[63] we begin to broach the temporal aphasia, the speechlessness that surrounds the psychic afterlife of slavery.

Blackness in general and Black women specifically have been so intimately and violently tied to the reproductive function, Black women now function as the emissaries of the transmission of Blackness, at least in the New World. The resentment and aggressivity displayed

[63] Fanon, *BSWM*, 96.

unconsciously toward the Black woman (cis and trans) conveys no bounds as Fanon has so poignantly stated: "the negro is a phobogenic object, a stimulus to anxiety"[64] Recalling how the Black female slave, as Hortense Spillers notes in "Interstices : A Small Drama of Words," is made to occupy the place of the "vestibular" — the "principal point of passage between the human and the non-human world,"[65] I argue that examining the role of the Black female imago within both Primary and Secondary processes of the psyche proves crucial to understanding contemporary Black intramural relations.

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Claudia Tate, in "Rage, Race and Desire: *Savage Holiday*, by Richard Wright,"[66] crafts a fascinating study of Richard Wright's relationship to psychoanalysis, conducting original psychoanalytic interpretations of a number of his works. Tate claims that "unconscious matricidal desire" fuels much of Wright's oeuvre, and that *Savage Holiday* is the very work that "exposes the origins of and resolves his compulsive murderous plots," presenting "a story so horrible that it literally awakens Wright the dreamer from a long, recurring, traumatic nightmare, inscribed in Wright's earlier works, about the paradoxical wish to express and suppress his matricidal impulses."[67] Committed to the application of the Oedipal and pre-Oedipal complexes as elaborated by Freud, notwithstanding her critique of their cultural bias, Tate also engages Melanie Klein's theory of object relations in her study to offer an insightful, although incomplete, view of the split Black psyche. This limitation is buttressed by delinking sexual violence from racial violence as Tate argues that Wright's work displaces "sexual trauma onto

[64] Ibid., 151-152
[65] Spillers, Hortense. "Interstices: A Small Drama of Words." *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 76.
[66] Tate, Claudia. *Psychoanalysis and Black novels: Desire and the Protocols of Race* (Oxford University Press, 1998).
[67] Ibid., 118.

racial violence."[68] Literary interpretations abound regarding misogyny in Wright's work, including Tate's argument that Wright's "narrative—the urtext—of the son's perception of maternal betrayal" reflects "his reactions of initial ambivalence and subsequent hostility,"[69] yet I question the refusal to push one's framework for delineating "ambivalence" and "hostility" within Black intramural relations without probing the historically specific ways that Black women as scopic objects of fear, derision, scapegoating, and desire have circulated. I suggest that examining the temporal and spatial positioning of Black female subjects within literary and visual representation is critical in understanding precisely how their bodies – theorized generally as presence, absence, or misrecognized as "betwixt and between"[70]— operate as symbolic and/or metaphorical figures for Black male representations within the public sphere.

Investigating the metaphorization of the Black female corpse in Richard Wright's *Native Son* via tracing the troping and/or symbolic positioning of Black bodies buttressed by historical violence demonstrates how the ghost of slavery subtends the function of Blackness in general and Black women in particular as mimetic thaumaturgy: both a technique and configuration of wonder-work mobilized through mimetic structures deployed, as Wright contends, "toward the task of creating with words a scheme of images and symbols whose direction could enlist the sympathies, loyalties, and yearnings of the millions of Bigger Thomases in every land and race…"[71] Black women's bodies are not just made invisible, they are made to disappear within the staging of Black suffering, Black men's suffering in particular. This work of disappearance, of capturing what can appear in traces, through tropes and metaphors, is part of the mimetic

[68] Ibid., 97.
[69] Ibid., 96.
[70] Victor Turner, in his anthropological treatise on symbol and ritual, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, asserts, "The intervening liminal phase is thus betwixt and between the categories of ordinary social life" (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974), 273. Cited hereafter as *DFM*.
[71] Wright, Richard. "How Bigger Was Born," in *Native Son and How "Bigger" Was Born* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 520. Hereafter cited as *Native Son*

thaumaturgy that erases the hieroglyphics of Black female flesh from our purview. Thus what I argue is that the Black female body is the figure par excellence for the "illegibility of [slavery's] grammar."[72]

The literary "scheme of images and symbols" that Wright arranges concerns the discursive function of the corpse of Bessie Mears: "(t)he sight, bloody and Black."[73] Bigger Thomas' ambivalent and highly complex responses to his desire for, relationship with, and memory of Bessie Mears reflects Wright's preoccupation with the history of "the Negro in America" as "the history of men who tried to adjust themselves to a world whose laws, customs, and instruments of force were leveled against them."[74] While a reductive reading of Wright's assertion would suggest that the "history of *men*" [75] determines the history of "the Negro in America," or an effacement of Black women from the paradigm Wright signifies, the deployment of Bessie's corpse as a figural and literal site of substitution reveals a critical intervention into contemporary symbolic and legal articulations of Hartman's account of the "dual invocation" of the enslaved. Wright's representation of Bessie's corpse demonstrates that Black female subjects, while equally subject to regimes of violence meted against Black men, find differing and muted articulations even within these schemas; articulations that betray an undecipherability that transfers to both the material and psychic realms in and through mimetic representations of Black intramural relations.

In a seminal text that provides cogent analysis of the history and ramifications of slavery and "social death," Orlando Patterson claims:

> The slave's natal alienation and genealogical isolation made him or her the ideal human tool, an *instrumentum vocal* -- perfectly flexible, unattached, and deracinated...The slave,

[72] Sexton, Jared. "The Curtain of the Sky," 13-14.
[73] Wright, *Native Son*, 384.
[74] Wright, Richard. *White Man, Listen!* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1957), 108. Cited hereafter as *WML*.
[75] Emphasis mine.

> losing in the process all claim to autonomous power, was degraded and reduced to a state of liminality.[76]

The exposition of Bigger's desire for Bessie to be bound to him by "ties deeper than marriage"[77] and Max, the defense lawyer's, closing remarks, "Love grows from stable relationships, shared experience, loyalty, devotion, trust. Neither Bigger, nor Bessie had any of these"[78], reflects both the "precarious status of the slave in the public sphere," and the subsequent liminal positioning of Black women. Bessie's corpse, like the slave, performs a symbolic function: "perfectly flexible, unattached, and deracinated" in the interests of maintaining white authority and Black subordination within the public sphere. However, the rights or "claim to autonomous power" denied to Bessie in life—"[S]he would be his; her fear of capture and death would bind her to him with all the strength of her life"[79]—are deployed symbolically via her corpse, its "bloody and Black" state, and status as "degraded and reduced to a state of liminality." I am not making the claim that Bessie's corpse functions as a literary substitution for the subject position of the slave, or Black female subjects writ large. Rather, I argue Wright's staging of Bessie's corpse as evidence of Bigger's crime against Mary Dalton reveals the attendant implications of violence disguised in (and as) metaphor—a violence that reveals the Black female imago's weight as mimetic thaumaturgy.

Certainly Wright's language employs the same "sympathies" that he wishes to "enlist" from his Black male audience, describing Bigger's reaction to the entrance of Bessie's draped corpse in the courtroom as:

> His eyes rested wistfully on the still oblong white draped form under the sheet on the table and he felt a deeper sympathy for Bessie than at any time when she was alive. He

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[76] Patterson, Orlando. *Slavery and Social Death* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1982), 337. Cited hereafter as *SSD*.
[77] Wright, *Native Son*, 171.
[78] Ibid., 468.
[79] Ibid., 171.

> knew that Bessie, too, though dead, though killed by him, would resent her dead body being used in this way. Anger quickened in him: an old feeling that Bessie had often described to him when she had come from long hours of hot toil in the white folks' kitchens, a feeling of being forever commanded by others so much that thinking and feeling for one's self was impossible….not only had he done these things until he had killed to be quit of them; but even after obeying, after killing, they still ruled him. He was their property, heart and soul, body and blood; what they did claimed every atom of him, sleeping and waking; it colored life and dictated the terms of death.[80]

Wright, here, describes Bigger's gaze as one of mourning, resting "wistfully" upon the "white draped form under the sheet of the table." His sympathy for her serves, rather, as rhetoric for empathy: "Anger" since he "knew that Bessie…would resent her dead body being used in this way." The words of resistance Bessie uttered prior to her death that Bigger neglected are remembered and memorialized in the "old feeling that Bessie had often described to him when she had come from long hours of toil in the white folks' kitchen." White supremacist socio-economic structures sediment his memories of Bessie, but more poignantly evince an empathy for her in and through the "Anger" he experiences not solely for the mistreatment which he suffered along with Bessie, but that he continues to suffer in her absence. This is not only an absenting of her presence at the level of plot narrative but also an absenting, we shall see, that existed prior to her transformation from person to corpse. His refusal to deem her body as a corpse, referring to her as "Bessie" for the duration of the cadaver's presence at the inquest, reveals Bigger's conflicting emotions in being confronted with the ramifications of his actions. Acknowledging Bessie's loss, for Bigger, would not only precipitate his own mutability in and through his impending execution, but also the immutability of his bereavement.

Although the passage depicts Bessie's volition as inscribed through the perspective of Bigger, "[H]e knew that Bessie…would resent," Wright's narration of Bigger's response enacts a ventriloquizing of Bessie's muted voice. Describing Bigger's conflicting impulse to both confirm

[80] Ibid., 383.

and disavow his agential role in her subjugation, anger functions as the emotion par excellence suturing his ambivalence. His longing for her, "eyes rested wistfully," reveals an affirmation of his "deeper sympathy" for Bessie *after* her murder. The second impulse, memory of "an old feeling that Bessie had often described to him," reifies Bessie's past feelings and deploys them in the service of allowing Bigger to repudiate his role as agent, rapist and murderer, to reoccupy his status as victim. The narrative illuminates Bigger's "[A]nger" toward the state's use—substitution—of Bessie's body in terms of metaphor, "He was their property." As such, the staging of Bessie's corpse executes the manner in which Bigger's empathy for her underscores his own brutality in addition to that of juridico-political forces. In other words, his anger functions affectively through Bessie's muted voice, her ongoing absented presence, and is subsequently enacted through his memory of her. Hence, Bigger finally views Bessie as his equal—an equal within the very lexicon in which his own deathly life rests: subjection under legal and philosophical premises which deem him, and Bessie, both ontologically negated and a "subcategory" of human, as Patterson notes: "We must show not simply that slaves are a category of persons treated as property objects, but…that they are a *subcategory* of human proprietary objects. The fact that we tend not to regard "free" human beings as objects of property--legal things--is merely a social convention."[81] As subject, to the law, and historically an object, under the law (the institution of chattel slavery), Bigger's reaction to the presence of Bessie's corpse cannot be divorced from the juridico-political history which determines his subsequent death, when found guilty: "what they did claimed every atom of him, sleeping and waking; it colored life and dictated the terms of death."

[81] Patterson, *SSD*, 22.

Yet Bigger's response to Bessie's corpse divulges much more than revulsion, shame, guilt and loss as she functions, in the novel and Bigger's psyche, as *both* body and flesh. While Spillers clarifies the distinction between body and flesh as between "captive and liberated subject-positions," she describes "hieroglyphics of the flesh" as "severe disjunctures [that] come to be hidden" by the cultural marker of Blackness, elaborated via "various *symbolic substitution*s in an efficacy of meaning that repeat the initiating moments" of "marking and branding." [82] Perhaps one could only claim that Bessie's body has been reduced to a corpse *if* she had occupied a liberated subject position while alive. However, her body-reduced-to-flesh is what engenders her imago as legible, allowing her representation to travel as a "symbolic substitution" for not only the purposes of Wright's plot narrative, but also for the state's inquest. More importantly, Bigger's use of Bessie's body/flesh suggests a psychic defense against what Marriott describes as "[A] death that cannot ever die because it depends on the total degradation and disavowal of Black life. Ipso facto: death emerges as a transcendental fact of Black existence but without transcendence."[83] Bigger's response to Bessie in life and after death indicates his own moment of recognition that the hieroglyphs of her flesh that 'mark' and 'brand' her absence are also what constitute his vulnerability at best, or death as a "transcendental fact of [his] Black existence" at worst. As such, the thaumaturgy of her image as body/flesh—corpse—reveals how intramurally fantasies of loss function as psychic defenses against one's own inability to tarry with Blackness as irremediable absence from the symbolic order.

Bigger's reaction to the spectacle of Bessie's dead body mirrors the revulsion toward the corpse theorized by Kristeva and metaphorized under slave laws enacted and based upon Western Enlightenment views. For instance, Wright illustrates, "The sight, bloody and Black,

[82] Spillers, "MBPM," 67.
[83] Marriott, David. *Haunted Life: Visual Culture and Black Modernity* (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 231.

made Bigger flinch involuntarily and lift his hands to his eyes and at the same instant he saw blinding flashes of the silver bulbs flickering through the air"[84]. As the author portrays Bigger's "involuntary" "flinch" at Bessie's "bloody and Black" corpse, the "flashes of the silver bulbs flickering through the air" blind Bigger. Yet, the flash of the bulbs provide audio as well as visual signification reminiscent of the whip used against the captive. Moreover, the "bloody and Black" "sight" evinces, for Bigger, the image of "Blood and lips and hair and face turned to one side and blood running slowly" after he batters Bessie's head with a brick, juxtaposed with Bessie's assertion, "All you ever cause me was trouble, just plain Black trouble"[85]. "The sight, bloody and Black" transforms beyond the purview of "plain Black trouble" as Bigger reflects on his complicity in the system of domination and subjugation which he resisted, and continues within the scene as Bigger flinches "involuntarily and lifts his hands to his eyes." Bigger's initial reaction to the "still, oblong table" cradling Bessie's corpse evokes physical paralysis, "frozen, numb," and an acceptance of his murder of Bessie as generating from his aggressivity against white people who claim every "atom" of his existence: "Not only had he lived where they told him to live, not only had he done what they told him to do, not only had he done these things until he had killed to be quit of them; but even after obeying, after killing, they still ruled him." The alliterative abutment of the vision before Bigger, "bloody and Black," and his refusal to gaze upon the image as he "lift(s) his hands to his eyes" disclose Bigger's involuntary resistance to the symbolic and material regimes of violence perpetuated in and through the state's mimetic use of Bessie's corpse as "evidence," and "in the interests of justice."

Preparing the reader for the image of Bessie Mears's corpse, Wright illustrates: "As Deputy Coroner, I have decided, in the interests of justice, to offer in evidence the raped and

[84] Wright, *Native Son*, 384.
[85] Ibid., 265.

mutilated body of Bessie Mears, and the testimony of police officers and doctors related to the cause and manner of her death…"[86] For the purposes of medical and legal autopsy, the corpse is considered "evidence," but rather for the *decedent* as a form of testimony for his or her death:

> …the corpse is a wealth of evidence -- the literal and figurative "body of the crime" referred to in the Latin phrase *corpus delecti.* Through them, corpses can convict their own killers, testify to their own self-destruction, or serve as evidence of a blameless death by natural or accidental causes.[87]

The deputy coroner introduces Bessie's corpse as "evidence," a means "in the interest of justice," but what occurs in this scene is the novel's depiction of a inscription of violence on two different levels. First, in and through the deployment of Black women's bodies as "resource for metaphor," and second, the symbolic and metaphysical signification of the use of Black female bodies as legal articulations of the liminal positioning of Black subjects.

Spillers's articulation of the "captive body" as "absence from a subject position" and "a category of 'otherness'" conveys the mimetic, psychic and ontological stakes for my argument. If one reads the hierarchical inscriptions of race, specifically Blackness, through what Spillers has elaborated as "hieroglyphics of the flesh" deployed during and after the Atlantic Slave Trade, then not only is Spillers's assertion regarding "ethnicity" "perceived as mythical time" which "enables a writer to perform a variety of conceptual moves all at once" crucial for reading Wright's novel, but "hieroglyphics of the flesh" provides a heuristic device to disarticulate the thaumaturgical uses of the Black female imago deployed through mimesis in and as metaphor. Spillers prefaces her assertion with the following statement: "Under its hegemony, the human body becomes a defenseless target for rape and veneration, and the body, in its material and

[86] Ibid., 381-382.
[87] Quigley, Christine. *The Corpse: A History* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1996), 20. Cited hereafter as *HC.*

abstract phase, a resource for metaphor."[88] The novel's depiction of Bessie's rape, in the 'Flight' section of the novel, and the display of her corpse within the 'Fate' section of the novel confirms Spillers's characterization of the "hegemony" of the fixity of race, or "ethnicity," in performing "a variety of conceptual moves": Bessie's flesh a "defenseless target for rape" and her corpse as "the body, in its material and abstract phase, a resource for metaphor."[89] The fixity, or perception of "mythical time" that "enables" the writer to inscribe Black women's body as thaumaturgy through its appearance as liminal—"betwixt and between," "material and abstract," a "resource for metaphor"—is revealed as wonderwork vis-à-vis its juridical function within the novel's courtroom scene. Whereas Spillers's argument concerns a culture of white supremacy meted onto Black bodies via paradigmatic spheres of conceptualization, metaphorization, and/or transformation, Wright's novel confirms and disavows these paradigms in and through its representation of Bessie Mears's cadaver.

Spillers's formulation of metaphor and Patterson's delineation of liminality are important to my project because first, they convey the extent to which the performance of the legal system has historically generated symbolic and material regimes of violence against Blacks in the U.S. Secondly, state sanctioned and juridical violence against Black people in the US rarely focuses on Black women as equivalent bearers of this violence, within intramural conversations in particular. Within the 'Fate' section of the novel, Wright introduces Bessie's corpse during Bigger's inquest. Appearing before the Grand Jury and prior to the theatrical display of Bessie's

[88] Spillers, "MMPB," 66.

[89] Spillers makes a useful distinction between "flesh" and "body" in her analysis of Maud Martha's consciousness in Gwendolyn Brook's *Maud Martha*: "The "extra-text" to which I refer, examined at greater length in an ongoing work, traces the historical implications of African-American women's community as a special instance of the "ungendered" female, as a vestibular subject of culture, and as an instance of the "flesh" as a primary or first level "body." Because African American women in their historic status represent the *only* community of women *legally* denied the mother's access to her child, their relationship to the prerogatives of "gender" must be reexamined as the select stratagem of an ethnic solidarity; of the dominant community's strict exploitation of gender rule as an instrument of a supremacist program" (Spillers, "Notes on Brooks and the Feminine," *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature*. Chicago, IL: U Chicago Press, 2003), 149.

corpse, though, the district attorney displays physical evidence of Bigger's crime against Mary Dalton:

> Bigger looked about and saw the pile of white bones lying atop a table; beside them lay the kidnap note, held in place by a bottle of ink. In the center of the table were white sheets of paper fastened together by a metal clasp; it was his signed confession…[T]hen he saw the trunk unto which he had stuffed Mary's body.[90]

Mary's incinerated body provides no physical remains other than the "white bones lying atop a table." While the "kidnap note," "signed confession," and "bottle of ink" reflect the stagecraft involved in presenting circumstantial evidence against Bigger, the most incriminating evidence against Bigger for the rape and murder of Mary, besides Bessie's body, consists of a lone earring which Mrs. Dalton identifies as: "a family heirloom. There are no two others like them. My grandmother had them designed and made to order." While the earring and Mrs. Dalton's [91]identification of it as "a family heirloom" function to identify the body of her dead child, the physical remains of Mary's corpse are splayed on a table in conjunction with circumstantial evidence. The inquest provides not only a forum for the Daltons to request justice for the murder of their child, hence appealing to the pathos of white observers, but also an apparatus to display and claim kinship in and through the identification of the "heirloom." In so doing, the novel illustrates the social and juridical value of whiteness vis-à-vis property ownership and claims of kinship.[92]

The crime of rape is crucial in reading both the history Wright's novel traces as well as its deployment of Bessie's body as repository and evidence of Bigger's violence against both

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[90] Ibid., 361.
[91] Ibid., 364.
[92] Cheryl Harris, in "Whiteness as Property," makes the following claim about the property interest in whiteness: "Slavery as a system of property facilitated the merger of white identity and property. Because the system of slavery was contingent on and conflated with racial identity, it became crucial to be "white," to be identified as white, to have the property of being white. Whiteness was the characteristic, the attribute, the property of free human beings" ("Whiteness as Property." *Harvard Law Review* 106.8, 1993), 1721.

Bessie and Mary. The nature of feelings aroused in white audiences with the description of Bigger's sexual proximity to Mary and his subsequent murder and dismemberment of Mary's body were sure to stir white angst concerning Black male sexuality. Robyn Wiegman discusses how both race and gender operate within the U.S. construction of the rape metaphor, as she states:

> Through the rape metaphor, the emasculation of the Black male undertaken in lynching and castration emerges as the imposition of the binary figuration of gender, with the white masculine retaining hegemony over the entire field of masculine entitlements, while the Black male is confined to the corporeal excess of a racial feminization.[93]

Bigger, indeed, feels emasculated by the hegemonic "white masculine" legal structure, as he maintains, "Rape was not what one did to women. Rape was what one felt when one's back was against a wall and one had to strike out…to keep the pack from killing…it was rape when he cried out in hate deep in his heart as he felt the strain of living day by day."[94] Bigger inverts the rape metaphor employing emasculation and feminization to depict, accurately, the history of violence against Black men in America. However, Bigger's assessment of rape as "not what one did to women" proves problematic as the narrator conveys the attitude of spectators and participants in the courtroom: "…they were determined to make his death mean more than a mere punishment…The atmosphere of the crowd told him that they were going to use his death as a bloody symbol of fear to wave before the eyes of that Black world"[95]. Accurately reading rape as "mean(ing) more" than sexual violence, the brutal exercise of power, Bigger's assessment that, "[R]ape was what one felt when one's back was against a wall and one had to strike out" mirrors the subject position of Bessie, regardless of Bigger foreclosing her ability to "strike out" physically against her aggressor. Bigger's reticence to view himself as perpetrator,

[93] Wiegman, Robyn. *American Anatomies: Theorizing Race and Gender* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 98-99.
[94] Ibid., 263.
[95] Ibid., 318-319.

agent of "fear," concerns his immediate experience of these emotions during the courtroom proceedings, as "a bloody symbol of fear to wave before the eyes of that Black world." As Wright confirms his intent to create, "a scheme of images and symbols whose direction could enlist the sympathies, loyalties, and yearnings of the millions of Bigger Thomases in every land and race," he also, subsequently, asserts the "vivid and bloody terms" in which that history is constructed. Indeed, Wright's courtroom scene serves as an indictment against the legal system in the subjugation of not only Bigger, but also Bessie as Bigger admits: "Though he had killed a Black girl and a white girl, he knew that it would be for the death of the white girl that he would be punished. The Black girl was merely "evidence." And under it all he knew that the white people did not really care about Bessie's being killed."[96] Nevertheless, Bigger's admission of his knowledge of how the legal system manipulates gender and race in relation to violence and the subjugation of Black women, in particular, demonstrates Wright's awareness of the metaphorical currency deployed in his use of Bessie's dead body as "evidence."

In addition, "while medical autopsy is at the discretion of the family, medical-legal autopsy needs no consent of next-of-kin."[97] As evidence, Bessie's body falls into the realm of medical-legal autopsy. Moreover, since Bessie, to the reader's knowledge, has no "next-of-kin" to whom custody can be established for the purposes of burial, then Bessie's corpse remains, indefinitely, within the liminal sphere of "quasi-property." Observing that "the quasi-property right in a corpse is not pecuniary in nature…" in conjunction with Hartman's explication of the relationship of the slave economy to the slave's body and the slave community proves noteworthy, as Hartman writes:

[96] Ibid., 383.
[97] Quigley, *HC*, 120.

> Within this economy, legitimate and proper relations were foreclosed. The particular investment in and exploitation of the captive body dissolved all networks of alliance and affiliation not defined by property ownership. This was evidenced by the courts' description of slave children neither as illegitimate nor bastards but as simply "not legitimate."[98]

Both Bigger's contention that "You have to have a girl," and his fear that "He was their property, heart and soul, body and blood" after viewing the "still oblong white draped form," gestures to the "networks of alliance and affiliation" defined by "property ownership" and the subjugation entailed, particularly, for women. Additionally, the distinction between the corpse as a possible object of property versus object of custody—"there is no personal property interest in a properly buried dead body" opposed to the "duty to bury the dead"—dispenses the notion of Bessie's dead body as pure metaphorization, troping, and/or substitution for Mary Dalton or Bigger. Wright's utilization of Bessie's corpse serves to portray what Wright defined as "the history of America written in vivid and bloody terms" via the inclusion of the death of African American female bodies, raped and subjugated, as within the "legitimate and proper relations…foreclosed" to African Americans. In so doing, Wright's approach to metaphorization contributes to the historical lexicon of myriad muted voices of the violated Black female in and through her body. Moreover, if one considers the liminal status of the corpse through the "quasi-property right (that) exists for the limited purpose of determining custody of the body for burial," then one must take into account that the courtroom scene lacks any surviving members of Bessie Mears's family. Both Bigger Thomas and Mary Dalton have "nearest relatives" who can provide mourning, witness, testimony, and can claim custody; Bessie does not. I do not wish to imply that Wright's gesture is intentional; rather, I suggest we read it in the context of the language of the law and the semiotics of death, and dead bodies. Black women's bodies and representations

[98] Hartman, *SS*, 100.

of Black female subjectivity metaphorized through the hieroglyphs of the flesh animate Black suffering as a metaphor par excellence. As such, I argue that Blackness is revealed as a non-ontology precisely for the "illegibility" of Black suffering's "grammar." The *History of the Corpse* proclaims, "[I]n ways both revered and reviled, the corpse, or parts of it, is kept in remembrance,"[99] in regards to the relics of saints in the West. In addition, the text discusses the uses of the corpse as a symbol for the "transitoriness of life"[100] within Western visual representations. If one considers the history of depictions of the Black female body as "deracinated" and with "restrictions on its sentience," then one can understand the political motivations for Wright's deployment of her corpse as both metaphor and symbol in the courtroom scene where Bigger's life is on trial. Similar to the import of the relic of the saint, Bessie's body increases in metaphysical currency through her death and Bessie's corpse remains unburied and unclaimed as the liminal agent within the novel. Reading through her liminality, rather than for her mimetic thaumaturgy, Bessie would represent what Turner describes as:

> There is nothing wrong with metaphors or, *mutatis mutandis*, provided that one is aware of the perils lurking behind their misuse. If one regards them, however, as a species of liminal monster…whose combination of familiar and unfamiliar features or unfamiliar combination of familiar features provokes us into thought, provides us with new perspectives, one can be excited by them; the implications, suggestions, and supporting values entwined with their literal use enables us to see a new subject matter in a new way.[101]

Turner refers to the "perils lurking behind" the "misuse" of metaphor, which one does note, upon cursory readings of Bessie's corpse as merely a substitution for Mary's body.[102] However, one

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[99] Quigley, *HC*, 11.
[100] Ibid., 22.
[101] Turner, *DFM*, 30-31.
[102] In addition, the following passage regarding the notion of two Bessie's also proves problematic when read in relation to Wright's use of metaphor and Bigger's rage against Bessie, but since this paper's primary focus is the scene containing Bessie's corpse, I will not examine it in detail here: "He yearned suddenly to be back in bed with her, feeling her body warm and pliant to his. But the look on her face was a hard and distant one; it separated him from her body by a great suggestion of space…As he walked beside her he felt that there were two Bessies: one a body that he had just had and wanted badly again; the other was in Bessie's face; it asked questions; it bargained and

may also read the peril within the legal theories to which both Hartman and Patterson refer concerning subject-object distinctions, juridico-political rights, and liminality as a state of "natal alienation": the loss of "all claim to autonomous power." And if we read Wright's representation of the corpse as a "species of liminal monster" in conjunction with jurisprudence concerning the corpse, we may view Bessie's dead body as an image that "provides us with new perspectives" concerning her representation in the novel: perspectives that betray the dangers of reading mimetic substitutions as liminality alone sans the psychic and ontological precursors embedded in the hieroglyphics of Black flesh.

Bigger admits that his murder of Bessie was an act of sacrificing her to save his life, as he confesses, "…I had to kill Bessie to save myself. You have to have a girl, so I had Bessie. And I killed her."[103] His claims of dependency upon Bessie in terms of both ownership or possession, "You have to have a girl," and as a form of substitution for his own life or body, "I had to kill Bessie to save myself," demonstrate how Wright's "scheme of images and symbols" appears more complex when examined through the "bloody terms" of the "history of the Negro in America" in regards to the relationship between race and gender in the subjugation of enslaved Black women. For instance, Hartman explicates:

> The captive female does not possess gender as much as she is possessed by gender--that is, by way of a particular investment in and use of the body. What "woman" designates in the context of captivity is not to be explicated in terms of domesticity or protection but in terms of the disavowed violence of slave law, the sanctity of property and the necessity of absolute submission, the pathologizing of the Black body, the restriction of Black sentience, the multifarious use of property, and the precarious status of the slave within the public sphere.[104]

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sold the other Bessie to advantage He wished he could clench his fist and swing his arm and blot out, kill, sweep away the Bessie on Bessie's face and leave the other helpless and yielding before him. He would then gather her up and put her in his chest, his stomach, some place deep inside him, always keeping her there even when he slept, ate talked; keeping her there just to feel and know that she was his to have and hold whenever he wanted to" (159).

[103] Wright, *Native Son*, 408.

[104] Hartman, *SS*, 100.

Hartman's delineation of the "disavowed violence of slave law" as subtended within the "particular investment in and use of the body" for the "captive female" directly addresses a noteworthy issue for analysis within the novel: "the pathologizing of the Black body" in relation to "the sanctity of property" and the "precarious status of the slave within the public sphere."

Thus I believe Wright's courtroom drama signifies the "precarious status of the slave within the public sphere" in and through the symbol of Bessie's body for the relations of the auction block, where "captive women" represent "multifarious use(s) of property." Bigger's body is described as "free and easy now that he had lain with Bessie…She would be bound to him by ties deeper than marriage. She would be his; her fear of capture and death would bind her to him with all the strength of her life."[105] Bigger's attitude toward Bessie, prior to her murder, mirrors Hartman's description of "the necessity of absolute submission" of the "captive female." In addition, Katherine Fishburn, in her examination of the role of bodies in *Native Son* argues, "…I believe that this great, disturbing novel serves…as a twentieth-century re(in)statement of the kind of bodily knowledge that marks the nineteenth-century American slave narratives,"[106] and "Wright…is able to retrieve the insight of the slave narratives that embodiment is not a curse to be overcome, but is rather the very state that makes possible the human being itself."[107] I agree with Fishburn's assertion that the novel "serves…as a twentieth-century re(in)statement" of the concerns that mark much of "nineteenth-century American slave narratives,"[108] but possibly via representations of Black women, in Wright and Hartman's terms, that force white audiences and "enlist the sympathies" of male readers to view the representation of Black female subjects through a history of "the restriction of Black sentience" and representations of their bodies as a

[105] Wright, *Native Son*, 171
[106] Fishburn, Katherine. "The Delinquent's Sabbath; or, The Return of the Repressed: The Matter of Bodies in Native Son." *Studies in the Novel.* 31. 2 (1999): 202.
[107] Ibid., 203.
[108] Ibid., 202.

"resource for metaphor." Although the scene wherein Bigger murders Bessie after she protests running from the law and resists his advances contains gruesome details—"Blood and lips and hair and face turned to one side and blood running slowly"[109]— Bessie's resistance to systems of oppression in life are transformed and cemented by narrative and juridical structures of representation. Yet, after an analysis of the limitations of the liminal and in pursuit of rigorous application of a body of psychoanalytic work on Blackness and Black subjectivity, the question of violence as it relates to the Black intramural remains; that is, was there a self in Bigger mirrored or reflected in Bessie's corpse prior to her death, and what mimetic wonderwork do visual representations of the Black imago serve for a Black psyche that may remain illegible to that self?

"The Ship's Hole"; or, Do Dreams belong to the Law of the Living, or the Dead?

> How can we explain, for example, that the unconscious representing base and inferior characteristics, is colored Black?
> —Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*

Returning to the scene of the "ship's hole" and the two specters haunting this chapter, Spillers and Marriott, I argue that Marriott's, and by extension, Fanon's, absencing of the Black female imago, and ultimately psyche, does not rest upon a disavowal, but rather illuminates the very chiasmic resonance I have outlined: a crossing and intersection of dissociative states—a gesture towards a self-reflective interiority for a subject without a self. Indeed, Marriott's earlier work references and briefly engages "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," and in his subsequent writings Spillers is absent in name only. Marriott closes the foreword to *On Black Men* with the

[109] Wright, *Native Son*, 275.

following, "And what psychoanalytically speaking, would it mean to risk ourselves knowing that the contempts of culture are already inside us…? To live with hatred as our most intimate possession becomes, then, the truly difficult task of our dreams."[110] May we read, here, a return to Spillers's interior intersubjective, "a discipline of a self-critical inquiry," effectively traversing primary and secondary processes? Marriott ends *Haunted Life* with a return to a notion of risk, via Fanon, stating:

> We too must descend into the icy depths like Orpheus if we are to experience that endless death that pierces us and that we preserve inside ourselves like a lump of ice. Only by returning toward absence or loss can we grasp the gaze that petrifies and arrests at the very point of experiencing it, the essential deathliness of Black experience: the irony and perversity of a haunted life."[111]

In a return to Fanon's investigation, and ultimately suspension, of the disalienation of the Black (man), Marriott's recourse is to the possibility of death, a possibility that would signal the Black's escape from his nothingness of being, yet in and through another return: "returning toward absence or loss." Marriott meditates on this possibility through mining and challenging the revolutionary thought of Fanon, but only through the *dis*arrangement of misrecognition: the Black woman is effectively buried in the mise-en-scène of racial intrusion, misrecognized as Other. Put another way, the very condition of possibility, which is the possibility of death, may be a rendering through "female flesh 'ungendered,'" *as* myth. This is forged through Spillers's summons to "[claim] the monstrosity (of a female with the potential to 'name')," and for Black men to regain the "heritage of the mother… as an aspect of his own personhood - the power of 'yes' to the 'female' within."[112]

[110] Marriott, *On Black Men*, xv.
[111] Ibid., 241.
[112] Spillers. "MBPM," 80.

Both Spillers and Marriot attempt to address how to deploy, negotiate, and "live with" the negative ontological space constituting the Black psyche Spillers constructs a psychoanalytics that could serve as a practice beyond technê, as epistêmê or an accounting for one's self through the power of the mother as a way to advance life and possibility. To this, Marriott's work provides a sharp rejoinder, refusing an emancipatory logic either through a return to the law of the mother in a *symbolic* sense—a rejection of the "monstrosity," the "Sapphire" within —or the possibility of speech. Spillers's later work is decidedly oriented toward the intramural, aiming for a collective and social practice at the phenomenological level, at times refuting and placing her ontological positing of Black absence, loss and negation in her earlier work in stark relief against the possibility advanced in the corrective practice of "interior intersubjectivity." Marriott's work orients us neither to a praxis in particular nor theory writ large, but to an orientation that excavates the "task of our dreams." It is both in the anticipation of Spillers's psychoanalytics—a theory and praxis borne from Black suffering, "of unprotected female flesh—of female flesh 'ungendered'"—and Marriott's refusal to bifurcate death from the lived experience and (non)ontology of Blacks, that we may contemplate the Black woman as both an object of the gaze in the scopic register and as a "text for living and dying."[113] However, the unavoidable misrecognition that both Fanon and Marriott display, and theorize, illuminates the propagation of a rivalry against the Black woman: one which masks the relationship of aggressivity towards Blackness writ large, towards *all* Black "flesh" "ungendered." One must command an ethical, political and scopic orientation toward the Black woman's absented imago, her suffering under erasure.

[113] And not as the "promise" that he maps onto Spillers's "MBPM."

Thus, I must return to the following question: if the racial fetish undergirding the phobias and anxieties violently cathected towards Black men has no equivalent in terms of the Black woman's jouissance, whether one posits or rejects she is void of such, what can we say about the level of anxiety, threat, and aggressivity leveled against her? This question requires a response beyond what discourses concerning the Symbolic alone can bear, and due to dissociative states of desire, affect, and political will, the Black woman remains more of a threatening idea—the horror of one's anti-ideal, the excess of the Real—than an object of desire, an object of valuation, affection and/or sensuality. Henceforth, from the "ship's hole," she becomes the content against which affects, desires, and defenses are split within not only the Black intramural, but also the larger global imaginary post racial capital. Spillers maps for us an imaginary that serves as a psychic, ontological and political landscape engendering a dual patronymic wherein not only Black women are banished "out of the traditional symbolics of female gender," but also inaugurating Black people's banishment—an "enforced state of breach"[114]— from the fields of Being, gender, *and* the domestic, or relationality within the intramural. Moreover, when we discuss scopophilia in the context of the Black female imago, we are as much discussing the absence of Black men's psychic investments in addressing her obliteration as we are discussing Black women as bearers of looking (at) themselves. For Marriott, spectrality, and spectatorship, are parallel to dreamwork—the dreamwork enunciated on a film screen, or photo— for he illuminates dreamwork as "a wish to remember and inability to forget."[115] But is not his absenting of Spillers work also indicative of a dreamwork that excises Black women's phenomenology, attempting to carve out theories of the Black psychic terrain

[114] Spillers, "MBPM," 74.
[115] Marriott, "In Memory,"125.

primarily in and through the homo social? Spillers's Black female, the "quintessential 'slave,'"[116] as the only one to "stand in the flesh" "in a play of paradox," enunciates the raw material of the Real, that which cannot be accessed through the Symbolic or internalized in the Imaginary: what she deems "monstrosity."[117]

Yet, Marriott's absenting of Spillers work operates through dismissal, and her interventions, in my estimation, operate via suspension throughout his work. Marriott's claim that Spillers locates the Black maternal as "an historically constituted horizon of a touch, as the trace of a promise he cannot escape" and the "promise of an authentic future," [118] foregrounds the aporia between the two theorists, determined by their respective orientations towards a "horizon." I do not interpret Marriott's curious judgement of Spillers's discussion of African American males ungendering—Black men are the "only community of males" in the US that have "the specific occasion to learn who the female is within himself"[119]— as wholly motivated by a critique of her "use of the word 'mimesis' appear[ing] to restrict it to [a]…problematic voluntaristic account of social identification."[120] Marriott posits an unusual slippage in transcription: he renders Spillers elaboration of "enslaved offspring" by positing a hyphenate—"kinless, semi-orphan state"— where none appear in her essay. In fact, Spillers refutes orphanage as an enumerating term, as follows:

> In the context of the United States, we could not say that the enslaved offspring was "orphaned," but the child does become, under the press of a patronymic, patrifocal, patrilineal, and patriarchal order, the man/woman on the boundary, whose human and

[116] See Spillers, "MBPM," 72-73. "Because it was the rule, however—not the exception—that the African female, in both indigenous African cultures and in what becomes her "home," performed tasks of hard physical labor—so much so that the quintessential "slave" is *not* a male, but a female—we wonder at the seeming docility of the subject, granting her a "feminization" that enslavement kept at bay.
[117] Ibid., 80.
[118] Marriott, "In Memory," 137.
[119] Spillers, "MBPM," 80.
[120] Marriott, "In Memory," 135.

> familial status, by the very nature of the case, had yet to be defined. I would call this enforced state of breach another instance of vestibular cultural formation where "kinship" loses meaning, *since it can be invaded at any given and arbitrary moment by the property relations*.[121]

I find no reservation in Spillers's text concerning the unequivocal rupture constructing African and African descended people's "enforced state of breach." Hence, Marriott's reading of a partial breach, "semi-orphan," in lieu of Spillers's description of the ramifications of deracination is beyond curious. This slippage-as-critique is subtended, I argue, in a refusal to account for the ways in which Spillers's essay implicates how the fantasy of gender coherence, and coordinates, operate for all Black people, "the man/woman on the boundary." And it is precisely *against* this figure "on the boundary"— a boundary as porous as Hurston's Janie, or "de freest thing on earth"— that "can be invaded at any given and arbitrary moment by the property relations" that Marriott dismisses, whether in his avoidance of the figure of the Black woman, refusal of Spillers's psychoanalytic insights, or his return, which is also a reply, to Fanon.

Spillers, too, returns to Fanon in "All the Things You Could Be Right Now if Sigmund Freud's Wife was Your Mother," referring to "markings on the social body of New World Africanity" as "stripes of an oedipal crisis." Claiming that "Fanon…might well have been right" as she articulates the need for a "apposite psychoanalytic protocol for the subjects of 'race,' broken away from the point of origin, which rupture has left a hole that speech can only point to and circle around,"[122] I am left to wonder if this is the same raced subject of her earlier essay, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe." Conjuring Fanon, Spillers locates the mythic implications of the "abandoned son"—African Oedipus—as demarcating a "discontinuity" demanding "a new article of faith...in the discovery of the Law of the living, not the dead, and in the circulation of a

[121] Spillers, "MBPM," 74.
[122] Spillers, "All the Things," 140.

new social energy that confronts the future, not the past."[123] The specificity of Black female flesh, constituted by an ontological breach so vividly imagined in her seminal work, has all but vanished here, despite the paralysis of temporal aphasia evincing and transferring the "rupture" of the Middle Passage delineated in her previous essay. As such, Spillers's recourse to the "law of the living" proves as puzzling as Marriott's interpretation of the Black maternal as a "horizon," only *if* we were to forget that Marriott defines this horizon as a "trace of a promise [African American men] cannot escape": "the touch and hands of the mother as the place where the kinless can re-imagine the promise of an authentic future."[124] Alongside aporias such as recourses to laws of the living and the laws of the dead, paradoxes between what is, or what can be, promised to Black life, or death, as products of a breach, not only conjure the dreamwork involved in illuminating the "ship's hold" —"a wish to remember and inability to forget"— but also express different visions of possibility within states of breach and foreclosure. These alternatives include Spillers's contemplation of a "psychoanalytic hermeneutic" which would "recover it in a free-floating realm of self-didactic possibility that might decentralize and disperse the knowing one,"[125]and Marriott's disclosure of the "inheritance passed on from Black fathers to brothers and sons: an inherited assurance that there are certain lives already dead to the future." Additionally, Spillers identifies a potential agency through "claiming the monstrosity (of a female with the potential to 'name')," which Marriott misrecognizes as a promise of return, in addition to her theorization of "[T]he interior intersubjectivity [that] would substitute an *agent* for a spoken-for, a 'see-er,' as well as a 'seen'."[126] Marriott, too, traces a possibility, yet rendered through "a right to death" which I maintain is equally "riveted to the ship's hole" as Spillers's

[123] Ibid.
[124] Marriott, "In Memory," 137.
[125] Spillers, "All the Things," 141.
[126] Ibid., 104.

work, regardless of its failure to account for the specific ways in which Black women and femmes' suffering both constitutes and is elaborated by a metaphysics of Blackness enumerated by (her) erasure: "Blackness, I repeat, is a right to death in which dying has no value and is no longer sovereign. It is a death in which sovereignty is marked by unreal cruelty and night makes visible a room full of wounds one can no longer look on."[127] But what processes of the unconscious mind are altered to conceal this disjunction between Blackness as a death that cannot die, as Marriott maintains, and Spillers's assertions that we cannot afford to live without an "ethical self-knowing?

Considering Black female flesh, which is not exclusive to the Black "female [who] stands *in the flesh*, both mother and mother-dispossessed,"[128] as the latent source of the unconscious—our conceptions, displacements, desires, and revulsions surrounding Blackness—would provide a path to address the determinative, the inaugural of the hieroglyph of the flesh. As "a text for living and for dying," practicing the untranslatable grammar of the latency of ontological negation invokes reading the determinative of Black suffering through the logogram of Blackness writ large. Put differently, the hieroglyphics of Black flesh, as described by Spillers, provides us with an ethical impetus and mode of thinking Black suffering in and through erasure, through a state of breach read as both foreclosure and return: more specifically, the erasure and absented suffering of Black women in particular, both in proximity to Black men, yet recognizing it as a proximity without recognition of a relation. For a crisis of "Oedipus go[ne] missing" is an encounter with a relation that is the material and mimetic encounter between a non-self and its primary other in dream-thoughts alone: the Black woman as the chiasma of the

[127] Marriott, *Haunted Life*. 227.
[128] Ibid., 80.

Black man. Hence, what mimetic wonderwork do visual representations of the Black imago serve for a Black psyche that may remain illegible to that self?

It is within the language of dream-thoughts that we interpret the intramural as primarily a space of violence, subtended in these categories of distinction easily transposed from the slave master's purview. We speak and theorize too hastily if we fail to excavate the dream-content through what can be exhumed for the purposes of emancipation, our desires for political revolution and for Black love (non-mutually exclusive categories): emancipation as much from our non-selves as from the world of rivalries and misidentifications. Moreover, Black women's status as ungendered, flesh(ed), unprotected, whipped, tortured—her figurations and representations not only register as an absence from prohibition, or lack of desire, but also the at once boundlessly temporal and indeterminately eclipsed spatial determinative that Blackness is yet to be free. Rather, it has yet, as Marriott states, been allowed to die. And in our responses to theories of Black life and Black death—filled with our anxieties, revulsions and aggressivities towards those concepts, towards a metaphysics of Blackness that feels like the unrequited love that is thwarted freedom— we must ask ourselves if we are willing to have the courage to dream *in and through the imago of the Black woman* its untimely demise.

Germinating in the phonetic scripts of dreams, these glimpses of Black (female) flesh and their temporal aphasic displacement indicate a raw grammar of the psyche. This hyperstatic grammar never signals, but rather dreams of a possible extramural to a prohibition comprised of the constraints of our desires. Perhaps living with hatred "as our most intimate possession" is to do as Spillers has proscribed, to claim "the monstrosity," but in excess of a "a female with the potential to 'name'." Embracing the monstrous may entail *interrupting* desire as much as it pertains to its construction. As such, one question remains: if the metaphysics of Blackness

illumines the foreclosure of catalyzing desire— desires outside of identifications coterminous with revulsions, if not drives for its own obliteration—from what mimetic, psychic, and political positions can Black people read and articulate the psychic afterlife of slavery? Differently put, reading the composition and terrain of this afterlife through the violent revelation that a chasm exists where we once perceived a self may necessitate the imposition of additional breaches in place of what appears most coherent. Without so doing, we opt for a *distortive* dreamwork like Black Orpheus: one that mistakes a reflection for a horizon, subjectivity for a promise of return.

Marriott posits a recuperative reading of Fanon's Black Orpheus, shifting the traditional interpretation of Orpheus' descent into the depths of Hades to return his wife, Eurydice, from the underworld, forbidden from gazing upon her until their return to the living. In the classical narrative, fearful of her absence Orpheus returns to gaze upon her only to lose her once again to the darkness of the underworld. Marriott's interpretation, if not corrective, to Fanon's rejoinder to Sartre[129] is that we, too, must descend like his, and Fanon's, Orpheus, turning toward that "absence or loss" which "petrifies and arrests." Yet for Marriott:

> in Fanon's retelling, it is not Eurydice who disappears after having been set free by the gaze, but Orpheus…It is through his powerful unveiling of the power of the negative, both within and outside himself, that Fanon is able to resist the entrapments and lures of Eurydice in defiance of *Orphée noir* and, ultimately, in defiance of that within his innermost self.[130]

The true "Other," "both within and outside himself," for Marriott and Fanon is not only the white man articulated in *Black Skin, White Masks*, but also the white woman—Eurydice. And only by absenting that which is the mirror "both within and outside himself," the Black woman, does the Black man in this scenario escape, "resist[ing]..entrapments and lures….in defiance of that

[129] Jean-Paul Sartre's reflection on Negritude: Sartre, Jean-Paul, and Samuel W. Allen. *Black Orpheus*, 1963.
[130] Marriott, *Haunted Life*, 68

within his innermost self." This resistance and defiance is achieved at the expense of concealing the "power of the negative" within the Black intramural, refusing to grapple with the intrapsychic relations of violence that still undergird Fanon's unfinished project in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Thus, I must ask why is our urge to look away, Black Orpheus' resistance in walking away, stronger when confronted with the Black woman's suffering, her imago and her dreams, than it is with the Black man?

However, the task at hand, now, for both Spillers and Marriott, for those of us who read, theorize and practice in their wake, is a mode of return to foreclosure: returning to the originating moment of woundedness, a state of breach, the "ship's hole." This return may signal both a liberatory politic and an intramural psychoanalytic practice—a "psychoanalytics"—to excavate the buried and transferred content of our dreams. For to speak of a Black unconscious is to see the world unfold at a destructive rate and against telos; with the barrel of a gun, the targeting light of a Taser, and the discomfort of civil society. But how can what happened on that ship be the same thing that happens in the welfare line? Is it the same unconscious that carried Harriet Tubman's identifications, deciding whom to shoot or whom to save as she traversed the passageways to a freedom that wanted nothing to do with her kind? Or is it akin to the unconscious that drove Miriam Carey to a security checkpoint at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue one autumn day in 2013? Indeed, promises are unfulfilled, and are impossible to sustain, but they are indicative of desires without expectations, of endings where we begin, "riveted to the ship's hole, fallen, or 'escaped' overboard"[131] as we travel the impossible fissure—the breach of Black relationality—"betwixt and between" the New World and Africa.

[131] Spillers, "MBPM," 67.

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"The day that the enslaved decides to act out the threat of death that always hangs over her by risking her life is the first day of wisdom. And whether one survives it or not is perhaps less important than the recognition that ***unless one is free, love cannot and perhaps will not matter***."
—Hortense Spillers, "African-American Women and the Republics"

Chapter 2: Poiesis and the Performance of Political Desire

This chapter reads the figure of Winnie Madikizela-Mandela alongside the Black Arts Movement novel, *The Flagellants*, by Carlene Polite, to analyze violence through the pathologization of the Black intramural. I conduct a comparative analysis of the rhetoric of guerilla warfare as it accrued on the body of Winnie Madikizela-Mandela during South Africa's anti-apartheid struggle to the narrative representation of sadomasochistic phenomena within Black intimate partner relations in the US to argue that what structures intramural violence in fact determines the (impossible) psychic and material conditions of Black relationality. The disparate textual and media sites, that of Winnie Madikizela-Mandela's revolutionary political poiesis and the novel, *The Flagellants*, unravel a reticence to discuss violence, revolutionary or otherwise, as a form of Black poiesis. These conditions that determine the impossibility of relationality are obfuscated, however, rendering all Black affect as violent, adjectivally, and violence in both its most abstract and material nominal signification. Black love, in all its forms within "the social life of social death,"[1] as a cultural object of study reflects the inability to extricate the inaugural violence of its conceit from the fantasies of possibility within which it is conjoined. Put differently, the appearance of Black love and/or Black rage—their seemingly synchronous presentation—is an ideological fabrication that maps violence onto Blackness, tainting theorizations of what constitutes the Black intramural and violence writ large.

[1] Sexton, Jared. "The Social Life of Social Death: on Afro-pessimism and Black Optimism," *InTensions* 5.1 (2011).

I maintain that Black relationality—both its impossibility and its necessity for the project of Black liberation—is a paradox at the heart of the metaphysics of Blackness. Specifically, a poiesis of political desire, I maintain, structures Black psychic and revolutionary violence. This structures even the most radical formations against anti-Blackness– i.e. attempts to cultivate Black love and Black power, perform iconographic displays of banished Black femininity and masculinity, or form and maintain guerilla factions within antiracist struggle. I contend that violence, both symbolic and material, can never be delinked from Blackness. Whether manifest as political, filial, communal, or romantic desire, Black relationality registers and circulates within the symbolic and imaginary as a pathology out of which there is no escape. Secondly, I argue that there is no distinction between the nebulous monikers of 'Black love' and 'intramural violence', and by extension of the two, 'Black revolution'. The psychoanalytic implications of this symbolic indeterminacy include wrest(l)ing with the death drive in two primary modes: to destroy not only this drive towards death [a drive towards death as a return to the fantasy of what Freud described as the oceanic, or what Spillers would refer to as Body before flesh, before zero degree of social conceptualization], but also to destroy the notion of the subject itself, and therefore our conceptions of the political. For to *be* Black, I demonstrate, is to lack access to a self through recognition from a Black Other; Black people can neither be their own others or others to one another. However, the very condition of impossibility for a coherent Black self, for Black relationality, and for Black love delinked from violence, does not preclude Black love as the fulcrum of the political: "unless one is free, love cannot and perhaps will not matter."[2]

Delineating the impossibility of (Black) relationality within the traditional schemas of psychoanalysis, I reveal how Blackness-as-ontological death *through the machinations of the*

[2] Spillers, Hortense "African-American Women and the Republics," *Reconsidering Social Identification: Race, Gender, Class and Caste,* ed. JanMohamed, Abdul R. (Routledge: 2011), 35.

Black psyche subtends the tension between language, the symbolic order, and violence: the very constriction determining and inaugurating this negation. I argue that only through analyzing a psyche evacuated in and through violence can one understand an oft ignored, overlooked and/or disavowed truth of violence and its relationship to anti-Blackness. Outlining Blackness as an effect of violence is to by no means dismiss the importance of Black social life, which is to say Black love and Black revolution, as equally important, yet fraught constructions within the violence of the psychic order: an order within which Black resistance manifests as the violence of and against the subject itself. Lastly, by understanding the impossibility of delinking violence from the construction of Blackness, violence from the condition of Blackness, and violence from Black desire—ranging from how and *by whom* Black affect is read to how Black love is registered—we can shift our focus from behavior modification, which further sutures Black suffering as pathological rather than politically induced, to a structural analysis. An analysis of the psycho-political edifice undergirding Black intramural violence provides myriad insights. The primary intervention concerns why the fantasy of a coherent self and the desire for intramural recognition, or intersubjectivity, are concomitant with an unconscious interpretation of the two as desire for their mutual destruction: a destruction that coheres as both the violence of Black love, and Black love as violent. Because Black love is the impulse for freedom of which violence appears as its prerequisite.

Articulating the nexus of violence, poiesis, and Black revolutionary desire challenges hegemonic theorizations of both what constitutes the political and whose desire dictates the order of violence. What I establish in this chapter is that the expression of the political—what I call Black political poiesis—reveals a desire that is misread as demand. Whereas within Lacanian psychoanalytic theory demand in its very articulation produces unfulfilled desire as its residue,

Black political desire animates Black life as a paradox of both infinite death and its deferral. Unlike the Lacanian schema wherein desire is produced "in the margin in which demand rips away from need,"[3] the violence of the void of relationality provides the foundation for the very "margin" constituting which psyches are read as human, as political beings—those who suffer at the hands of an Other. Lacan elaborates on this margin, describing it as a "dialectic of transference" establishing "the notion of the Other with a capital O as being the locus of speech's deployment."[4] Lacan describes the analyst as playing "a recording role by serving a function which is fundamental in any symbolic exchange—that of gathering what *do kamo,* man in his authenticity, calls 'the lasting word.'"[5] He continues to describes the role of language in the following:

> [T]hen it must be posited that, as a characteristic of an animal at the mercy of language, man's desire is the Other's desire. This concerns a totally different function that that of primary identification…for it does not involve the assumption by the subject of the other's insignia, but rather the condition that the subject find the constitutive structure of his desire in the same gap opened up by the effect of signifiers in those who come to represent the Other for him, insofar as his demand is subjected to them…Desire is produced in the beyond of demand…In this aporia incarnate…desire asserts itself as an absolute condition.

I read what Lacan describes as underlying the foundation of analysis *and* the unconscious, "the dialectic" of the unconscious, as dictated by a process and condition dependent upon one structurally positioned as an "Other": "the effect of signifiers in those who come to represent the Other for him, insofar as his demand is subjected to them." Blackness, I find, is denied this position as Other in and through both an Other's lack of subjection to Black demand and lack of recognition of Black desire as such. This lack, or denial, borne of a political ontology established

[3] Lacan, Jacques, and Bruce Fink. *Ecrits: The First Complete Edition in English* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2006), 689
[4] Ibid., 525.
[5] Ibid., 258.

through the emergence of our modern racial paradigm—anti-Blackness—is a structuring condition of what constitutes the political, ontological, and psychic registers governing the modern episteme. The "lasting word" in analysis wherein "desire asserts itself as an absolute condition" in the Lacanian schema erases the problematic of race, Blackness specifically, that is constituted *by violence* as its "absolute condition" within the racial imaginary. The psycho-political interposition of violence distorts the symbolic order through which we read, respond to, and theorize Blackness in general and the Black intramural in particular. However, it is not impossible to map this distortion, which is also a disavowal, through exploring the metaphysics of Blackness. I define this as a negative ontology where difference becomes its effect, and whereby the violence of the metaphysics of this current order is elaborated through Black extramural *and* intramural subjective experience. In fact, it determines the permeation of Black extramural 'relations' within the intramural, effecting the constitution and interpretation of both desire and demand. In other words, a metaphysics of Blackness, I argue, is revealed through Black political desire that is constitutively disavowed *as* desire. The metaphysics of Blackness reveals a paradigmatic structure determined by the yoking of the psychic and political orders. In so doing, when Black political desire is read as demand, this demand is used as a vehicle for white jouissance (always and already) at the expense of Black life, furthering the endless deferral of white disavowal of their desire *for* Black violence—for Blackness *as* violence. The impossibility of Black relationality as a metaphysical precondition for the white psyche, which is to say for analysis (or what "man in his authenticity, calls 'the lasting word'"), arbitrates misreadings of the Black intramural—Black relationality, Black love, and the violence mapped therein when discussing Black political desire.

For instance, misrecognition in Lacanian thought constitutes the emergence of desire as the condition par excellence of relationality—again, articulating a demand on an Other produces desire, desire for recognition from the Other. Relationality within this schema is dependent neither upon the fulfillment of demand nor a response to it, hence the production of desire within the liminal space between demand based on need and the demand for love. Lacan discusses misrecognition in the following excerpt from *Ecrits*:

> It should be noted that a clue may be found in the clear alienation that leaves it up to the subject to butt up against the question of his essence, in that he may not misrecognise that what he desires presents itself to him as what he does not want – a form assumed by negation in which misrecognition is inserted in a very odd way, the misrecognition, of which he himself is unaware, by which he transfers the permanence of his desire to an ego that is nevertheless obviously intermittent, and, inversely, protects himself from his desire by attributing to it these very intermittences.[6]

Unlike the subject within Lacan's formulation, Blackness has no defenses for its desire, nothing to "protect himself from his desire by attributing to it these very intermittences." The threat of violent anti-Black intrusions upon the psyche render Blackness as inalienable in regards to questions of essence: there is no butting "up against the question of his essence, in that he may not misrecognize that what he desires presents itself to him as what he does not want." Rather, if there is alienation, it is not governed by a psychic register regulating the formation of a subject, but due to the ongoing psychic and material violence of anti-Blackness, not misrecognition. Black political desire is mutually exclusive with Black psychic demands, a demand for love and recognition *within the intramural* that is misread as violence via extramural intrusions—a demand *for* Black violence in order to disavow the primacy of white violence, white desire. Black relationality, or *Black love in the space of violence*, faces the impossibility of recognition outside of an anti-Black structure that misreads and displaces violence, essentialized violence,

[6] Ibid., 690-691.

onto Blackness. Put differently, since all Black intramural relationships are *born of and in resistance* to violence, Black political life, Black political desire signal how Black love is a weight to bear as much as it is a baring of the weight of wanting, of demand *and* desire. A poiesis of Black desire, of Black revolutionary politics, and the demands of and for Black love are articulated through "Black life…not lived in the world that the world lives in, but…lived underground, in outer space,"[7] the space of misrecognition as a metaphysics of violence permeating Black social life and social death.

I call this chapter "Poiesis and the Performance of Political Desire" to argue that the denial of Black political demands as constitutive of the political—whether through Enlightenment philosophy, political theory, or contemporary critical theory defining what and which beings constitute the political—mirrors the same negation in the psychic sphere. To disavow the demand for freedom from racial animus and/or freedom in the socio-political realm *as* (psycho)political desire reproduces the same misattributed desire for community, for Black relationality, as a demand for violence. For Black political desire is a praxis misrecognized as poiesis, and vice versa, as much as Black psycho-political demand is misread as desire. These obfuscations reveal Blackness and by extension all Black collectivity as a mode of political being simultaneously negated as being. In other words, Blackness' evacuation from, and of, being presupposes the condition of possibility for politics. Black political desire is incapable of being read as meaningful and purposive in action. Similarly, Black political action can never be read as political within a symbolic that maps violence onto all Black demand: demand, here, is always read a desire for violence. The ideal formulation that Aristotle articulates in *Poetics*, his theory of three forms of action—praxis, poiesis, and theoria—are corrupted within our modern episteme in

[7] Sexton, "The Social Life of Social Death," 29.

and through the violence of racialization, (anti)Blackness specifically. For instance, twentieth century theorizations of the distinctions between praxis and poiesis, such as from Heidegger or Arendt, hinge upon similar assumptions regarding the effects upon the world and the agency involved in both poiesis and praxis. Whether it concerns one's ability to transform, continue within the world, reconcile thought with time or matter, enact one's will, engage in participatory democracy, or effect the disclosure of truth (aletheia), the forms of action and will that both praxis and poiesis entail are effectively barred for Black folk, both in the political and social spheres. In other words, Black people cannot be seen as agents of change—agents under political or symbolic law, agents within any metaphysical schema outside of a pathologization that abases them at the level of the subject. Within this framework, all Black affect, Black love in particular, is criminalized and read as essentially violent. Moreover, if one reads the ability to act, to make meaning, and to transform the world through one's making, one's action or presence within the world, Blackness is the constitutive element that constructs that possibility for all except for Black people. Hence, in articulating Black political desire as both performance and a poiesis, this chapter analyzes the nexus of poiesis and Black revolutionary desire in our theorizations of violence. This mode of theorizing requires us to think of Black collectivity and the Black intramural in its most radical, radicalized, and radicalizing form—Black love and Black revolution as violence. In so doing, I hope to illuminate how the impossibility of Black relationality, whether read through Black political organizing denied access to the political or the void of the Black psyche within the intramural, constitute a fissure within Blackness deployed extramurally to prevent Black social life lived "underground" from accessing a self that is read as such within the world. I argue that whether it be through analyzing the figure of Winnie Madikizela-Mandela in the context of antiapartheid violence, or *The Flagellants'* characters'

demands for love within the domestic sphere, Black poiesis can only be read as performance rather than agency or desire. Differently put, Black poiesis and Black political desire are manifest in the performance of its primary aim rather than in the world of its making. And this primary aim, a "gratuitous freedom," is one that would include freedom from "one's Black self."[8]

***

I think I must maybe just explain that Mrs Winnie Madikizela Mandela and after the President's release were obviously the most heavily targeted people in the Security Branch in the Stratcom sense in the country. Mrs Mandela all the years…was under 24 hour surveillance. The telephone was tapped, the house was bugged, her [sic] movements were monitored on a 24 hour basis and I cannot think of any other circumstance or situation in the South African Police Security Branch where more attention was given to anything than Mrs Winnie Madikizela Mandela's situation.[9]
—Paul Erasmus, *TRC Special Hearings: Mandela United Football Club Hearings*, 24 November 1997, Johannesburg, Day 5

I am not prepared to apologise for anything we did whilst we were fighting. I will continue being the white man's enemy for as long as I am alive[10]
—Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, Interview with Malou von Sivers excerpted for "A Life of Refusal. Winnie Madikizela-Mandela and Violence in South Africa"

South Africa's Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act 34 of 1995 established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (*TRC*) comprised of seventeen commissioners tasked with investigating human rights violations committed between 1960-1994. "Based on the principle that reconciliation depends on forgiveness and that forgiveness can only take place if gross violations of human rights are fully disclosed," the commission's purpose

[8] Wilderson, Frank B. III. *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 24.
[9] "Mandela United Football Club Hearings." *Truth Commission - Special Report - Special Hearings*. 24 Nov. 1997, Day 5. South African Broadcasting Corporation, http://sabctrc.saha.org.za/documents/special/mandela/56336.htm
[10] Madikizela-Mandela, Interview with Malou von Sivers in "A Life of Refusal. Winnie Madikizela-Mandela and Violence in South Africa," by Shireen Hassim. *Storia Delle Donne*. 10 (2014), 71.

included bringing "unity and reconciliation" after such "full disclosure."[11] Although branded as a restorative justice project, the *TRC* hearings demonstrated precisely the antithesis. Political insurgents against South Africa's apartheid regime were placed on moral and ethical par with their perpetrators. Both former officers, administrative and paramilitary, of the defunct regime and their political opponents applied to receive amnesty for their crimes, effectively placing the violence of the state—systemic, anti-Black genocide and torture—commensurate with the resistance efforts of the oppressed. Proponents of the *TRC* process used the discourse of reconciliation to buttress representations of a peaceful transition of power as the language of the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act 3 stated its purpose was to "find a balance between the process of national healing and forgiveness, as well as the granting of amnesty as required by the interim Constitution."[12] The rhetoric of just war, just means, and precarious distinctions between political violence and mob violence were uncritically presented within countless hours of *TRC* testimony. Members of South Africa's paramilitary forces (and their informants) stated they were following explicit political orders, and the apartheid administration's claims that they utilized appropriate means to address counterinsurgency, following the protocols of war, fueled their requests for amnesty. Black revolutionary violence against the state was addressed via pathologizing Black intramural violence, representing it as savage, brutal and apolitical: a reification of framing Black rage, insurgency, and political organizing as deviant and inherently violent. Winnie Madikizela-Mandela eloquently theorizes

[11]"Explanatory Memorandum to the Parliamentary Bill" regarding Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Amendment Act 87 of 1995. *Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, Republic of South Africa*, http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/legal/bill.htm.
[12] Ibid.

her structural position within this war of representation, stating "I am not Mandela's product. I am the product of the masses of my country and the product of my enemy."[13]

During a speech for the township of Munsieville on April 13, 1986, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela uttered the following statement which would be circulated in the interest of the South African government's media propaganda war machine: "[T]ogether, hand in hand, with our boxes of matches and our necklaces we shall liberate this country."[14] Necklacing in the context of South Africa in the 1980s referenced the practice of publicly identifying and punishing those suspected as being double agents, collaborators, informants, assassins, or agents provocateurs for the apartheid regime. The practice of public execution consisted of trapping an individual's shoulders and upper body into a rubber tire filled with petrol or diesel fuel, and lighting it on fire. The discourse of necklacing as it circulated in the media could be no further divorced from the discourse and practice of necklacing within townships. *Askaris* (informants) posed significant threats to the lives of militant and moderate Black South Africans alike. The practice of planting *askaris* within any ranks of revolutionary organizing was one of the most pernicious of the government's practices. It created material and psychic violence with the specific purpose of exacerbating fissures within various communities of Black South Africans and/or political disagreements between organizations, such as between the African National Congress (ANC) and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP). Through its secret police force, the regime would target moderate Blacks to be killed in hopes to fuel media propaganda and public sentiment against radical groups such as the ANC. Additionally, collaborators who infiltrated guerilla organizations would target radicals for execution either by paramilitary forces or by planting bombs specifically aimed at insurgents. By planting Black informants within Black organizations

[13] Bezdrob, Anné M. P. *Winnie Mandela: A Life* (Cape Town: Zebra, 2004). 273.
[14] Ball, Joanna. *The Ritual of the Necklace*. Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, 1994.

to kill Black South Africans, the government was able to circulate propaganda about Black-on-Black violence within the townships as justification for heightened state intervention through militarized violence, curfews, and detentions. Government implementation of STRATCOM (the strategic communication plan) included infiltration of and psychological warfare against revolutionary guerilla movements and the necklace method was employed by both the state, via the secret police and infiltrators, *against Black South Africans*, and by Black South Africans as an instrument of *self-defense against the state*. Due to the tactics of psychological warfare such as the fomenting of suspicion by infiltrating radical organizations, wiretapping phones, murder of insurgents, and torture of detainees, the South African government fueled distrust in already tenuous communities of antiapartheid struggle throughout South Africa. Through STRATCOM, the South African government deployed the press to publicly denounce the ANC as a violent mob who posed more danger to politically moderate Black South Africans than the state. Madikizela-Mandela's statement regarding "boxes of matches and our necklaces" was circulated internationally and since she had been banned (her right to assemble, freedom of movement, ability to be in the presence of other people, determine where she could live and work, etc. had been restricted), she was prohibited from responding publicly to how her speech was taken out of context. Her words were weaponized immediately by the apartheid regime as part of their counterrevolutionary warfare efforts to undermine the ANC and other revolutionary organizations, convert increasing global sentiment against apartheid to the side of the South African state, and depoliticize the violence of Black insurgency. P.W. Botha and his administration proliferated the rhetoric of "Black-on-Black" violence, attributing it to revolutionary organizations such as the ANC and its "communist allies" with Botha declaring the following:

> It is common knowledge that innocent and moderate people are the victims of the so-called "necklace" executions in public, people who do not support the violent aims of the ANC and the instigators of violence. In the name of freedom and democracy, moderate Blacks are being robbed of their freedom of choice – peace…and now the "necklace" alone is no more regarded as effective enough.[15]

Moreover, the South African government disseminated a booklet titled "Black-on-Black Violence" which juxtaposed "short extracts of ANC statements with the minimal of context provided, together with the detailed statements of P.W Botha," which was "telling of a discourse on violent resistance encapsulated within a discursive war of propaganda strategies."[16]

TRC testimony of former security branch member of the South African police, such as Paul Erasmus, verified the extent of high level government officials and apartheid security forces' targeting of Black revolutionaries. Erasmus first testified to the Goldstone Commission in 1991 and subsequently to the *TRC* about the South African government's infiltration of and use of media to conduct "smear" campaigns against revolutionaries, especially those capable of mobilizing masses of Black Africans:

> The National Party believed that it could negotiate successfully with the moderates and radicals like Mr Chris Hani, Mrs Winnie Madikizela Mandela, Mr Steve Tshwete, Mr Peter Mokaba, Mr Tony Yengeni, Mr Joe Slovo and others had to be neutralised at all costs and obviously by any means possible….
>
> On another occasion I spread the fabrication that the President [Mandela] had personally authorised the necklace method and which I believed was widely reported on international media. Apart from spreading the information locally and nationally and especially via contacts in the intelligence community in the written and electronic media, I was able to recruit an agent in Glasgow, the United Kingdom, Britain who immediately gave Stratcom Johannesburg an international capability. Within days I was forwarding masses of Stratcom value material to him by fax, postal service and courier and telephone and not only by myself but via other agents and co-workers. This agent had a massive conservative contact internationally including politicians, senior journalists, media representatives, intelligence contacts and so on. Almost immediately dirt on the ANC and

[15] Moosage, Riedwaan. *The Impasse of Violence: Writing Necklacing into a History of Liberation Struggle in South Africa* (Diss. University of the Western Cape, 2010), 43.
[16] Ibid., 45.

> including matters relating to Mrs Mandela's activities and other relevant matters began to appear in the international press and of greater importance, in a Stratcom sense were forwarded ultimately to inter-alia the Conservative Party members and the British Prime Minister Mr John Major himself, whom so I heard was horrified with what he saw…
>
> Stratcom activities throughout were conducted on behalf of clients, that is the State President, the Cabinet, sister intelligence departments and the Department of Foreign Affairs and other State departments, for example the Department of Education. All projects and activities were carried out with the full knowledge of and approval of the relevant ministers who received details thereon from the Stratcom component of the State Security Council. There was a regular flow of intelligence and on occasion Stratcom value material between different Security branches. I received information for example on the Mandelas from Security Branch Soweto especially as I developed the international capability and was the best placed person to utilise this information.[17]

Madikizela-Mandela was already a prime target of the apartheid regime and was considered much more of a threat during her husband's imprisonment than Nelson Mandela himself. Madikizela-Mandela's prison diaries outline her awareness of the threat she posed to the state: "Tata could not comprehend how I had become so violent in the eyes of the police. They knew that I was involved with the military wing of the ANC and they knew I was a leader of the struggle underground."[18] The state's efforts to neutralize her "by any means possible" include incarcerating her for 491 days in solitary confinement, targeting her two children, stabbing her in a public marketplace, raiding her home in the middle of the night, poisoning her dog, attempting to murder her while she slept by strangling her with a wire noose, throwing a bomb at her home, repeated banning orders to various parts of the country where she did not speak the local language, and more. Madikizela-Mandela's statement about necklacing appeared less than a year after South African media saturated the global press with video of the necklacing of Maki Skosana, a young woman accused of being an *askari* tied to the deaths of three young ANC

[17] "Mandela United Football Club Hearings." *Truth Commission - Special Report - Special Hearings*. 24 Nov. 1997, Day 5. South African Broadcasting Corporation, http://sabctrc.saha.org.za/documents/special/mandela/56336.htm
[18] Mandela, Winnie, and A M. Kathrada. *491 Days: Prisoner Number 1323/69* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2013). 235

activists. The gruesome images of a Black woman necklaced by other Black people effectively erased the political context in which this particular mode of torture developed.

The *TRC* painted itself as an objective body whose interest in reconciliation required the elaboration of truths concerning unaccounted for murdered and missing citizens during the fight against apartheid. It is critical to stress that "acts associated with a political objective"[19] committed during 1960-1994 were the main criteria the *TRC* utilized in considering amnesty applications. Prior to the hearings, in the interest of portraying insurgents as *a*political actors enacting senseless 'tribal' or 'communal violence,' the South African government painted members of the armed wing of the ANC, Umkhonto weSizwe (MK), as barbarians who encouraged and carried out 'jungle justice' via public lynchings, or necklacing. The libidinal economy of (anti)Blackness required this projected image of Africans as savage, incapable of governing themselves through political means. The white South African government indeed used every political and paramilitary means to depict themselves as benevolent masters who had to reign in the terrors to come if Black Africans were to govern. A *TRC* Special Hearing on Political Party Recalls called upon members of the executive committee of the ANC to testify about both their reticence to publicly condemn the necklace method and the use of violence by armed militants during the war against apartheid. Mac Maharaj, a member of the National Executive Committee, testified accordingly:

> So the ANC in its efforts to reach home needed to interact with the masses in motion and it needed to appreciate anything that they did even if it looked to us from a distance to be a form that we did not like. It needed to locate its appreciation in that context. The result is both the necklacing and various other activities that took place could not be reacted to by immediately having the benefit of the knowledge that the enemy was perpetrating those acts and seeking to discredit us. It had to be reacted to as something that the masses

[19] "Explanatory Memorandum to the Parliamentary Bill." *Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, Republic of South Africa*.

> had taken up under conditions of extreme brutalisation and repression. And then you sought to channel that energy into proper forms of political action and unity with the armed actions that we were undertaking. So that explains the approach that we had to take.[20]

While Maharaj's testimony provided a political context for the ANC's, as an organization, failure to condemn the practice by stating they did not have the knowledge at the time "that the enemy was perpetrating those acts and seeking to discredit us," Jacob Zuma, then national Chairperson of the ANC, testified to the *TRC* about the origins of the necklace method:

> [W]hat I would just want us not to lose sight of that the whole question of the necklace originated from the regime. They were responsible for it, they used their agents to portray it as if it actually emerged from the people in general. At the beginning I think people did not know, nor did we know, but I think it is now an established fact. I am just hoping that with all the questions that are being posed we don't lose sight of that fact, that in fact it was a deliberate tactic used to show that people were doing inhuman things in South Africa, by the regime. I just wanted to underline that fact. [21]

Skosana's graphic murder at one of the ANC youth's funerals proved a critical turning point in the government's campaign to immobilize and neutralize insurgents. *TRC* special reports linked Skosana's death, and the deaths of the young ANC activists associated with her, "to a chain of command that reached the highest levels of government: former brigadier Jack Cronje, Police Commissioner Johan van der Merwe, General Johan Coetzee, and even President P.W. Botha."[22] By infiltrating the liberation movement, murdering activists, and sowing suspicion within the organizations such as the South African Communist Party (SACP), Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), and the ANC in particular, the apartheid government perpetuated a form of psychological warfare to immobilize insurgency within various ranks of different organizations, and portray Black south Africans in the media as complicit, if not responsible, for the violence they suffered.

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[20] "Political Party Recalls." *Truth Commission - Special Report - Special Hearings*. Starting date 16, May 1997, Day One ,12 May 1997. South African Broadcasting Corporation, http://sabctrc.saha.org.za/documents/special/party2/56352.htm

[21] Ibid.

[22] Cole, Catherine M. *Performing South Africa's Truth Commission: Stages of* Transition (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 98.

Erasmus elaborates on the state's efforts to perpetuate this form of psychic warfare in the following testimony:

> Chairperson at the time I saw it, the actions that we carried out and the things that I did as part of a psychological war. I saw it as justified… Yes, I introduced a more psychological aspect, as opposed to simply physical acts. I could explain that, instead of just throwing bricks through somebody's window, it was people like me, or it was myself who introduced this thing of phoning the people…. We found, I found, and my superiors were very happy with this, was that the psychological aspect must have been very oppressive to our enemies at that time. They were not just dealing with random acts of violence or thuggery perpetrated against them, here were people phoning the press, phoning them and phoning the whole world and saying: "We are a group of South Africans that are not going to tolerate communist liberals, radicals and everything else which fell outside the national objectives in our midst.[23]

The South African government and security forces' "psychological war" worked conjointly with media campaigns to manipulate ownership of legitimate, or political, violence in South Africa: the violence of the state was effectively erased through the images of necklacing as an explicitly Black form of pathological filiation, political judgment, and justice. In fact, the state manipulated Black South Africans' fear of engaging in self-defense *and* the guerilla tactics of armed wings of various organizations, such as Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) of the ANC, as justifications for psychic and material violence: "[F]or the white public, these stagings testified to the threat of terrorism, justifying the need for increased repression; to the general Black public, they aimed to demoralise; while for those in MK structures, for whom the number of incidents would have suggested foul play, they aimed to warn and boasted of superior power."[24] The government's interest in circulating the footage of Skosane's necklacing including implementing and maintaining official states of emergencies that eventually prohibited gathering for political funerals and banned many indoor gatherings.

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[23] Ibid.

[24] Fullard, Madeleine, and Nicky Rousseau. *The Farm, the River and the Picnic Spot: Topographies of Terror* (Bellville: University of the Western Cape, Dept. of History, 2005), 359.

After Madikizela-Mandela's April 1986 statement, the concerted effort to link her in the media with apolitical mob violence allowed State President P.W. Botha in June of 1986 to declare emergency rule. The discourse over necklacing obscured the state's fear of rising insurgency in the townships, inverted power relations and representations of violence in the media, and justified military occupation of at least 97 townships. Use and dissemination of the portrait of Blackness, and the Black intramural by extension, as always already violent, violence in waiting, and/or essentialized violence was made possible vis-a-vis the political and epistemic exploitation of the conceptual link between Blackness and violence. This ontological war of negation is based on a centuries' old "historico-racial schema" Frantz Fanon theorizes in the following statement: "The Black has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man."[25]

Isolating Black intramural violence outside of the political environment in which it was constructed, and under which it is *continuously* performed, is a facile enterprise considering the epistemic and symbolic history of linking violence and debasement to Blackness in general and Black resistance in particular. Saidiya Hartman, in *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, brilliantly theorizes how the discourse of seduction is employed to obfuscate power relations, the master-slave relation specifically, through language that erased the conditions of enslavement and inverted the relations of power subtending chattel slavery: "White culpability was displaced as Black criminality, and violence was legitimated as the ruling principles of the social relations of racial slavery."[26] While Hartman is specifically talking about the pretext of rape as incitement to white violence in order to maintain white sexual innocence at the turn of the century, her analysis of US law's

[25] Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1982), 90.
[26] Hartman, Saidiya V. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 83.

recognition of the slave as person only in the context of abasement, servility and criminality is applicable to analyses of global, transnational and transhistorical (post racial slavery in the modern era) responses to Black self-defense and liberation movements:

> [T]he law's selective recognition of slave humanity nullified the captive's ability to give consent or act as agent and, at the same time, acknowledged the intentionality and agency of the slave but only as it assumed the form of criminality. The recognition and/or stipulation of agency as criminality served to identify personhood with punishment. Within the terms of the law, the enslaved was either a will-less object or a chastened agent.

For instance, just as with efforts to invert and deny power relations on either the slave estate, during Jim Crow, or through the rebellions during the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, Black resistance is delegitimized in order to justify and disavow the primacy of white violence. The apartheid regime similarly manipulated the discourse on violence to disavow the extremity of white violence and justify the various states of emergencies the South African government increasingly implemented. By deploying images of necklacing, situating it as a form of 'Black-on-Black crime,' the stated deployed these images of Black intramural violence in mythological proportion to quell white conscious and unconscious anxiety about their own racial animus: white jouissance in their disavowal of the extremity of white violence. And it is against this libidinal economy of white jouissance that Black resistance—Black love in the face of unrelenting violence—gets mobilized as pathological, intramural violence. The necklace method as one form of justice occurred in the space and time of the "Black ordinary in extreme circumstances,"[27] the quotidian violence of torture, murder, and captivity during apartheid South Africa. Chris Hani, who rose to General Secretary of the SACP and Chief of Staff of MK, poignantly theorized the necklace method several years before his assassination. Refusing to

[27] Hartman, Saidiya. "The Dead Book Revisited." *History of the Present* 6.2 (2016), 211.

condemn necklacing as a form of justice, or the anger members of the democratic movement experienced due to infiltrators, Hani emphasized that "democratic participation" should be crucial in devising "revolutionary forms of justice" to handle the issue of "agents and collaborators":

> [South Africa] is not a normal society; the situation is very very abnormal…whatever method we use, that method should conform to the norms of the revolutionary movement. As I say we understand why the necklace has been used. We know even the negative and positive aspects of the necklace. There is a lot of discussion now going on the question of the necklace. But it is not this silly conclusion that it is Black on Black violence. The necklace has been used against those who have been actively collaborating with the enemy. We say the movement should be vigilant to ensure that whatever sentence is passed on anybody, it is a result of participation by the revolutionary elements of our struggle…We are going to come increasingly across a situation where comrades in anger are going to react and deal even with White civilians. That is not the policy of the ANC. One must remember that we are in a state of war. The ANC is clear. I must repeat its position: we want to deal with the enemy personnel, the police, the army, with the administration of the enemy, with the economic installations, with farms and farmers. But in the process our people are going to get angry. And I think the world in general, and especially the Whites in SA, must reckon with the fact that the Botha regime solely is responsible for this sort of situation. We are not authors of the situation. And increasingly as we confront the enemy, as we deal with enemy personnel, more and more White civilians are going to be caught in the cross fire. And I want to repeat that we are not responsible for this situation. We shall try as much as possible to avoid civilian casualties. We are not a terrorist movement. We abhor terrorism. We are a revolutionary movement.

Hani brilliantly explicates how the violent intrusions of the South African state and white civil society, the threat of violence against white life, were irremediably linked to Black revolutionary desire. Moreover, his characterization of the political desire of the revolutionary movement is also intimately connected to the demands Black people place on each other collectively in the struggle for liberation: the "norms of the revolutionary movement," "discussion…on the question of the necklace," "participation by the revolutionary elements of our struggle," and how to address "comrades in anger." The figure of Madikizela-Mandela catalyzed the trope of Black

anger in the interests of the South African state prior to, during, and after the *TRC* hearings. Indeed, Madikizela-Mandela's Black womanhood made her particularly vulnerable to a specific form of intramural violence and demonization within and outside of the establishment of the ANC as the governing party of post-apartheid South Africa.

The Barometer of a Movement

> Rumours begun while she was in Brandfort, that she had lost perspective on her role in the struggle, and specifically as Mandela's representative, followed Winnie to Soweto, where they were fueled by some of her own actions. She seemed more defiant than ever, often wearing a khaki military-style outfit, and making statements that evoked strong criticism
> —Anne Marie du Preez Bezrob, *Winnie Mandela: A Life*

> They were using me as a barometer, a political barometer.[28]
> —Winnie Mandela, *491 Days: Prisoner Number 1323/69*

> …the world is not here to admire a defiant, unrepentant Black woman; the world has come to watch us burn a witch.
> —Antjie Krog, *Country of My Skull: Guilt, Sorrow, and the Limits of Forgiveness in the New South Africa*

Winnie Madikizela-Mandela's leadership within the larger antiapartheid movement followed a long line of pivotal roles Black women played in shaping the liberation struggle in South Africa. Florence Matomela's leadership in the anti-pass campaign of the early 1950s coincided with Lilian Ngoyi's leadership of the Defiance Campaign, and Ngoyi, along with Annie Salinga, Francis Baard, and Bertha Gxowa were co-defendants with Nelson Mandela in the Treason Trial of 1956. These women, and many others behind the front lines of the movement, provided inspiration for Madikizela-Mandela in the years that would follow. Trained as a social worker, Madikizela-Mandela's path followed Albertina Sisulu's most comparably.

[28] Mandela, Winnie, and A M. Kathrada. *491 Days: Prisoner Number 1323/69*.

Both were married to prominent members of MK, Sisulu to its chairman and Madikizela-Mandela to its commissar. Albertina Sisulu was elected co-president of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in 1983 and had been detained, imprisoned, banned for 18 years, psychologically tortured, and endured relentless harassment by the security police. Additionally, Sisulu suffered these abuses of the state while her husband was incarcerated, along with Nelson Mandela, after the Rivonia Trial of 1963-1964. While Sisulu had risen to prominence within the UDF, Madikizela-Mandela suffered a different form of press scrutiny, beginning in the 1970s when the media linked Madikizela-Mandela's presence to the 1976 Soweto uprisings, scapegoating her for inciting youth activists to riot. Madikizela-Mandela has been less critically examined as a political actor within our conceptualizations of revolutionary violence during the war against apartheid. Indeed, her position as both former wife of jailed insurgent-turned-president and "mother of the nation" placed her in a more precarious position politically and socially within the movement for Black liberation in South Africa. Madikizela-Mandela remains a popular recipient of misogynoiristic[29] ire, often portrayed as "an unrepentant Black woman,"[30] "witch,"[31] and even compared to Lady Macbeth: "vaulting ambition, a capacity for ruthless conspiracy, abuse of devotion, the smell of blood that will not leave her hands, the persistent ghosts."[32] As her popularity increased in terms of mobilizing Black people across the globe for the cause of Black liberation within South Africa, state and press attacks on the image of Madikizela-Mandela increased. The continual banning orders she received were to erase her presence from both the world stage and youth activists within South Africa, but as the government's counterinsurgency

[29] "Misogynoir" is a term devised by queer Black feminist scholar, Moya Bailey, who defines it as a "term that address[es] the specific violence of representational imagery depicting Black women." "New Terms of Resistance: A Response to Zenzele Isoke." *Souls* 15.4 (2013): 341-343.
[30] Krog, Antjie. *Country of My Skull: Guilt, Sorrow, and the Limits of Forgiveness in the New South Africa* (New York: Times Books, 1999), 321.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Krog, 321.

plans were met with increasing militancy from Black South Africans, Mandikizela-Mandela's image underwent a transformation in the press, and eventually within the ANC as well. Newspaper headlines such as "More corpses in Winnie's Cupboard," "Whatever Went Wrong with Winnie," and "Mandela's Biggest Challenge: His Estranged Wife" appeared in publications such as the *Mail & Guardian*, *The Independent*, and the *LA Times*. Even the U.S. magazine, *Vanity Fair*, published an article titled "How Bad is Winnie Mandela" penned by STRATCOM operative Paul Erasmus. Antje Krog, in writing about Madikizela-Mandela's presence at the *TRC* hearings, described the media frenzy surrounding her as follows: "Why is it that a woman, a Black woman from a long-isolated country, creates such an unprecedented media frenzy? Is it because Winnie Madikizela-Mandela answers to the archetype Black and Beautiful? Or because she answers to the stereotype Black and Evil?"[33] Characterized as "Evil" and legally sanctioned for being a bad mother (mother figure to MK fighters living in her home, the youth of the Mandela United Football League, and to youth killed by informants placed in her cohort), the tropes of pathological violence, irredeemable lasciviousness, maternal neglect and corruption of Black youth that erupted in the US antebellum and Jim Crow south converged with the pathologization of Black womanhood in apartheid South Africa. The state's fears of Black insurgency were played out on characterizations of Madikizela-Mandela's body—with whom she was associating, how she was dressed, and how she handled the bodies of the youth in her charge. Critiques of her militancy, and proximity to guerilla fighters, were couched in questions concerning her "erratic behavior" and "defiance," and were delivered in gendered language regarding the relationship between her clothing choices and mental state: "Winnie's behavior was becoming ever more reckless and erratic. She wore her khaki outfit at every opportunity, and

[33] Krog, 319.

it was common knowledge that she had begun to harbor MK fighters in her home."[34] Prior to Madikizela-Mandela's statement about the necklace method, she was acutely aware of how the government utilized her body as an instrument to ascertain and judge the political climate of Black radicals within the nation. Indeed, the media and government created a monstrous mystique about Madizikela-Mandela, portraying her at times as invincible, if not impervious, to pain. But what remains most striking is Winnie's insights documented in her prison diaries during the earlier years of her involvement in liberation, where she refers to herself and her comrades as follows:

> I did not know what my fate would be because we were part of an experiment – the first ever to be detained under Section 6 of the then Terrorism Act. They were using me as a barometer, a political barometer…We were the foot soldiers. We were their cannon fodder and it was us who were used as their political barometer each time they wanted to find out how the country was going to react. They tortured us knowing that it was going to leak to the country and they wanted to test the reaction.[35]

Here, we see the machinations of a psyche under the most brutal conditions of psychological warfare, the government utilizing the suffering of comrades as weapons to neutralize and break opposition groups. It is beyond media propaganda, the issue of representation, or political tactics that determine the ease with which Madikizela-Mandela continues to be demonized. Precisely due to her position as a Black woman in the movement, the tropes deployed against her were saturated with a violent history, and meaning, that continue to distort our movements for Black liberation.

While Blackness writ large has been ideologically rendered as inherently violent, the gendered manifestations of this violence play a crucial role in determining how the trope of Black womanhood remains the freest signifier deployed, to the detriment of the Black intramural

[34] Anné M. P. *Winnie Mandela: A Life* (Cape Town: Zebra, 2004), 224.
[35] Mandela, Winnie, and A M. Kathrada. *491 Days: Prisoner Number 1323/*69 (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2013*)*, 233.

in general and Black revolutionary politics specifically. Although there are cogent critiques of the gendered performance of the *TRC* hearings,[36] I posit that what Jared Sexton and Frank B. Wilderson III have defined as "borrowed institutionality" brings us closer to illuminating both the unique ways Black women suffer anti-Blackness and how anti-Blackness operates intramurally. Wilderson writes of "borrowed institutionality" as "the feigned capacity to be essentially exploited and alienated (rather than accumulated and fungible) … in other words, a fantasy to be just like everyone else, which is a fantasy to be." Additionally, Wilderson defines it as a "myriad of compensatory gestures" whereby a Black person "assumes subjective capacity to be universal and thus 'finds' it everywhere."[37] I interpret Wilderson's formulation to elucidate the various ways in which certain Black people engage the state, or anti-Blackness, *in the interests* of *anti-Black*ness while subjectively experiencing a "fantasy" of being "just like everybody else." Put differently, since anti-Blackness is intimately tethered to, if not constitutive of, patriarchy, white supremacy, homophobia, and heteronormativity (among other violent conscriptions of humanity within the modern era), Black men's attachment to patriarchy as one "compensatory" gesture toward a heteronormative masculinity denied to Black men may be subjectively fantasized as mastery or power. However, the reality of their structural position as Black unveils them as actors bereft of power. "Borrowed institutionality" bestows no agency to Blackness to transform the structure of anti-Blackness, or the world. The ability to mete out

[36] For instance, Shireen Hassim, in "A Life of Refusal. Winnie Madikizela-Mandela and Violence in South Africa," writes about the "highly gendered performance" of the TRC in the following excerpt: "Madikizela-Mandela was therefore among a small minority of women who testified about their own actions. The presentation of the case against Madikizela-Mandela was itself a gendered narrative. She was testifying about activities within the sphere of her own household, the quintessential private sphere of home, where her authority as head was well-established. Residents in her household, both in the main house and a warren of back rooms, referred to her as "Mummy" and deferred to her judgment. The assaults that she was accused of were not attacks on representatives of the apartheid state of or white power, but young Black men who saw themselves as part of the struggle and who sought out Madikizela- Mandela's home as a place of refuge. It was a home where members of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the armed wing of the African National Congress, frequently hid from the police and where arms were stored (astonishingly flagrant, considering that the house was continually watched by security police)," 68.
[37] Wilderson, Frank B. III. *Red, White & Black,* 43.

violence against Black women, Black children, Black queer and gender non-conforming folk, etc. is *violence sanctioned by institutionally granted access* to the tools of humanity and hegemony, what serves anti-Black interests and not any individual Black person. For Black men's access to these tools is in the first instance contingently granted only if it serves anti-Black interests, and in the second instance never bolsters any mode of Blackness into power. Rather, these tools are wielded to mete out punishment to Blackness that can never, and must never, be incorporated into hegemonic conceptions of what it means to be human or free, and what serves the interests of white patriarchal heteronormativity. Blackness yields no power within the state *or* within the intramural. Black social life "lived underground," however, includes modes of psychic resistance we have yet to fully understand. This very resistance is inextricably linked to Black women's (and other groups of Black people with less access to the instruments of "borrowed institutionality") suffering made (il)legible within revolutionary movements. In fact, I argue that without devising proper analyses, discourse, and political strategies that understand the unique ways Black women's, particularly poor Black women's, suffering remains illegible within the intramural yet legible and *malleable* in the interests of anti-Blackness, we will fail in our attempts to unveil how the psychic afterlife of slavery persists within our most radical and revolutionary attempts to foment revolution and cultivate Black love: Black love for all positioned within the varied spectrum of subjectivities within Blackness. It was not only the South African government that was able to deploy and manipulate the trope of pathological, violent, Black motherhood, but also the ANC. When Madikizela-Mandela's militancy and leadership threatened the conciliatory politics the ANC adopted after Mandela's negotiations with F.W. de Klerk, the ANC's leadership was "thrown into disarray." du Preez Bezdrob discusses the power struggle within the ANC in the following passage:

> By 1997, Mandela started looking at who would succeed him… it became clear that Winnie was positioning herself for election to the crucial No. 2 post on the ANC's national executive. Had it not been for recurring allegations during TRC hearings of her involvement in the murders of Stompei Seipe…others, she might well have mustered enough popular support to fulfil her ambition[38].

The ANC was aided by the conclusions of the *TRC* as many Black South Africans were disenfranchised by Nelson Mandela's willingness to drop the demand for economic nationalization. The ANC needed to demonize any public figure tied to their sanctioning of revolutionary violence in an effort to sanitize their image for white and other non-Black South Africans. Madikizela-Mandela's unflinching commitment to the liberation movement's initial demands maintained her popularity in the townships even in the midst of the *TRC* hearings and Nelson Mandela's opposition to her. In 1992, after Madikizela-Mandela was convicted, along with members of the Mandela United Football Club, of kidnapping, Mandela officially separated from his wife. After becoming president of South Africa in 1994, Mandela divorced Madikizela-Mandela in 1996, and the testimony he gave in his divorce trial cited her infidelity and her extravagant spending habits. Mandela, along with other high profile members of the ANC, was aware of the secret police's tactics in tarnishing Madikizela-Mandela's reputation for political effect. Yet, Mandela manipulated the same strategies to elicit public, i.e. global white, support for the new administration under his charge, taking steps to ensure that future administrations' politics would reflect the same neoliberal, counterrevolutionary stance.

Madikizela-Mandela refused to eschew the militant strategy that propelled the liberation movement. F.W. de Klerk demanded opposition groups cease revolutionary violence in return for Mandela's release from prison and subsequent talks to decide on a general election that would include the ANC, yet de Klerk's administration continued the torture and execution of

[38] Bezdrob, *Winnie Mandela: A Life*, 248.

insurgents, some in leadership positions of the very organizations he promised a seat at the table[39]. The ANC benefitted from Madikizela-Mandela's role in the guerilla faction, but distanced themselves from her as her revolutionary image was no longer required to fuel insurgency within the townships; the antithesis was needed since the ANC was soon to demand an end to militant violence. The ANC had arrived at the opportunity to carve out the new constitution of South Africa and place themselves on the ballot for elections. At first, Mandela refused to publicly condemn Madikizela-Mandela for the allegations against her. The ANC, like the South African government, preferred to allow rumors to spread that the reason why many militants who associated with Madikizela-Mandela were getting killed was because *she* was a government agent. In addition to allegations that she incited public lynching via her comments about necklacing, she was accused of assault and kidnapping of 14-year-old Stompei Seipei. Jerry Richardson, one of the members of the Mandela United Football Club living in her home, was convicted of the child's murder. The case catapulted Madikizela-Mandela in the spotlight once again, and solidified her imago as the "evil" "witch" who corrupted Black youth. Madikizela-Mandela denied involvement in the assault and murder of the young boy and *TRC* testimony revealed that Jerry Richardson was a paid *askari* responsible for the deaths of two MK members and Stompei Seipei. The hearings exposed that "two MK cadres were killed after [Richardson] had informed police that they were at his house," and subsequently the *TRC* "found

[39] On April 10, 1993, Chris Hani was murdered. Although a Polish immigrant named Janusz Walus, a neo-nazi, confessed to the murder, citing he wanted to start a race war, there is still speculation regarding whether or not the apartheid regime was responsible for his assassination. Moreover, Wikileaks released a series of cables from 1991 documenting US diplomats' speculations on Hani's rise in power, popularity, and potential to win a general election: "The ANC's Thabo Mbeki and Chris Hani," *Cable: 91PRETORIA4652_a*, Confidential 1991 March 20, 13:45. Wikileaks.https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/91PRETORIA4652_a.html

that Winnie had been negligent and that her misplaced trust in Jerry Richardson was the direct cause of their deaths."[40] The *TRC* final report stated the following:

> The commission finds that Ms Madikizela-Mandela placed MK members…in the house of Mr Jerry Richardson for safekeeping. The commission finds further that both cadres were killed as a result of a police operation launched on the basis of a 'tip-off' from Jerry Richardson, who admitted to providing the police with information in this regard…The commission finds that Madikizela-Mandela was negligent in that she failed to institute enquiries into the deaths of the two cadres at the time, and that her misplaced trust in Jerry Richardson was the direct cause of their deaths.[41]

Although the *TRC* concluded that the two MK members were "killed as a result of a police operation launch" aided by the informant, Jerry Richardson, Madikizela-Mandela was found "negligent" due to "misplaced trust" in Richardson, the informant *the police* planted in her home. In condemning Madikizela-Mandela for precisely what the state desired, to place agents who revolutionary leaders would trust within the inner circles of the guerilla movement, the *TRC* made a farce of its proceedings whose objectives were to bring "unity and reconciliation" after "full disclosure" of the truth of human rights abuses. The *TRC*s condemnations of Madikizela-Mandela equalized the monopoly on violence that the state possessed to the use of violence—violence in self-defense and self-determination— insurgents deployed against the state. In so doing, "the state strategically manipulated the term 'violence' so that it only applied to actions by the liberation movement; the violence of the state disappeared, only to reappear in official discourse as legitimate force."[42] The qualitatively and quantitatively uneven power relations between the South African government and the revolutionary movement were erased within a discourse that implicitly relied on criminalizing Black dissent. Moreover, this criminalization was a facile enterprise when aided by the utilization of the rhetoric of Black maternal pathology.

[4040] Bezdrob, *Winnie Mandela: A Life*, 251.
[41] "TRC Final Report." *Truth Commission - Special Report - TRC Final Report* -Volume 2, Chapter 6, Part 6, Subsection 5, page 563, paragraph numbers 36-39.
http://sabctrc.saha.org.za/reports/volume2/chapter6/part6/subsection5.htm
[42] Moosage, *The Impasse of Violence*, 46.

In the media, Madikizela-Mandela's presence at the *TRC* hearings were juxtaposed with the imposing legacy of Nelson Mandela. Antjie Krog, a white South African poet and academic, described her experience at the hearings thusly:

> I extricate myself from the web of cables and go outside for air. On the pavement, a man is selling little white plates with faces on them: Nelson Mandela, Thabo Mbeki, Joe Slovo, and Winnie Mandela — all in the same row. I flinch from the ardent sun and turn back. Where to? I cannot live in a space where the face of Nelson Mandela or Joe Slovo is interchangeable with that of Winnie Madikezela-Mandela.[43]

Villainized and depicted as an object of disgust, Madikizela-Mandela's image was placed in stark contrast to the affable Mandela. Even after Richardson's confession to the murder of Seipei, Desmond Tutu, one of the commissioners of the *TRC*, pleaded to Madikizela-Mandela to apologize to Seipei's mother for his death, "to say sorry, things went wrong, forgive me. I beg you." Winnie conceded to Tutu's request and replied,

> To Stompie's mother, how deeply sorry I am. I have said so to her before a few years back... I am saying it is true, things went horribly wrong. I fully agree with that and for that part of those painful years when things went horribly wrong and we were aware of the fact that there were factors that led to that, for that I am deeply sorry.[44]

Madikizela-Mandela had no issues acquiescing to Tutu's demand; her relationship to violence having always been rooted firmly in its aims against the state. However, Madikizela-Mandela was doubly penalized by the *TRC*: first, for endangering children such as Seipei (the guilty verdict of kidnapping and assault), and secondly, for her affect: trusting the wrong people. By equating the illegal, criminal, and murderous violence of the South African government with violence of figures such as Madikizela-Mandela or Richardson, the *TRC* became complicit with the new regime's attempts to gloss over the genocide and torture of Black South Africans during

[43] Krog, 337.
[44]"Mandela United Football Club Hearings." *Truth Commission - Special Report - Special Hearings*. Day 5, Johannesburg, South African Broadcasting Corporation http://sabctrc.saha.org.za/hearing.php?id=56342&t=winnie+mandela&tab=hearings

the latter half of the twentieth century. The seamless transition between the hearings' performative empathy for Seipei's mother, criminalization of Madikizela-Mandela, and punishment of Richardson illuminates the extent to which conceptions of Black women's abjection and Black men's debasedness serve to feed white jouissance. The *TRC* hearings continued the status quo of making violence against Black people both palatable and justifiable. The hearings were neither about meting justice, nor about truth and reconciliation. Rather, they proved that the new administration, and the world, would be content with reconciliation in spite of truth and in lieu of justice for Black Africans. Madikizela-Mandela continued to be made culpable for the violence deployed against her, for the violence of informants planted by the apartheid regime, and for the regime's violence against innocent youth. With her reputation continually tarnished by the press, Mandela utilized this as an opportunity to fire her in 1995 from her post as a deputy Cabinet minister, solidifying his attempts to steer Thabo Mbeki into position as his successor.

What appeared to some as evidence of unrepentance and defiance, to others demonstrated an unwavering commitment to the principles of freedom that buttressed the movement from its inception in the townships. Understanding the ways in which the ideology of Black filial dysfunction were tropes the state deployed to dismiss Black people's political agency, Madikizela-Mandela's testimony displayed political brilliance and aptitude for the theatrics of the *TRC* process which her responses disclosed:

> **MR KUNY:** …Would it be correct to say that you at that stage were the head of the household?
> **MRS MADIKIZELA-MANDELA:** I have always been the head of that household. And I still am.
> **MR KUNY:** Well, normally speaking, is it not correct that the male in the family, the man is the head of the family, but at that stage you were the head of that household?

MRS MADIKIZELA-MANDELA: You seriously wouldn't make that sort of statement to me.
MR KUNY: I am merely asking you a question.
MRS MADIKIZELA-MANDELA: I have lived all my life without that head of a family.
MR KUNY: Well, now as the head of the family, you were responsible for keeping order in the household?
MRS MADIKIZELA-MANDELA: Yes, I have always been head of my family.
MR KUNY: Did you delegate that function of keeping order in the household to anyone or did you undertake that responsibility personally?
MRS MADIKIZELA-MANDELA: How does a head of a family delegate?[45]

Her testimony, here, at the Mandela United Football Hearings, referenced implicitly the state's interference in the Black family structure under white rule. Stating "I have lived all my life without that head of the family" echoed the experiences of Black Africans whose kinship ties had been severed, such as those who worked for the mining industry where male workers could only visit their families twice a year. Pass laws, detentions, razing of townships to build white farms, industry, and housing created conditions whose more detrimental that mere geographic dislocation. The conditions created by white rule severed filial bonds and depicted Black family dysfunction as the fault of the oppressed. Again, Madikizela-Mandela was a barometer for a political condition which is as psychic as it is a reflection of the political ontology of Blackness. Madikizela-Mandela's answers consistently displayed the defiance of the most vulnerable populations that suffered during and after the apartheid regime's reign, demonstrating a mode of Black intramural collectivity for which she continues to receive their unwavering support. Madikizela-Mandela's epilogue to her prison diaries outlined her reflections on violence and the ease with which uncritical condemnations are disseminated vis-à-vis demonizing figures, such as herself, who had no other recourse to survive. In the following excerpt, she describes the protection of certain leaders who were locked away on Robben Island, dissociated from the material struggle of the fight against the Boers:

[45] Ibid.

> The leadership on Robben Island was never touched; the leadership on Robben Island had no idea what it was like to engage the enemy physically. The leadership was removed and cushioned behind prison walls; they had their three meals a day. In fact, ironically, we must thank the authorities for keeping our leadership alive; they were not tortured. They did not know what we were talking about and when we were reported to be so violent, engaged in the physical struggle, fighting the Boers underground, they did not understand because none of them had been subjected to that, not even Madiba himself – they never touched him, they would not have dared.[46]

She names Mandela, here, as a direct beneficiary of the benevolence of the state—dispossessed of the "torture" and "physical struggle" those "fighting the Boers underground" endured. Depicting him as having the material and psychic privilege of bodily integrity, "never touched," she describes him as "cushioned behind prison walls" with "no idea what it was like to engage the enemy physically." Characterizing the first Black president of South Africa as removed, physically, from the struggle underground and protected by the apartheid regime, "we must thank the authorities for keeping our leadership alive; they were not tortured," Madikizela-Mandela offers a candid analysis of violence and the multicultural darling of South Africa that the *TRC* hearings elided. Maharaj's *TRC* testimony also confirms the theory-praxis divide in conceptions of leadership, and although not directed at Mandela, one can see the applicability of his speech to the divide between Madikizela-Mandela and Madiba's political practices, as he states, "Political leadership cannot be acquired simply from the textbooks, it needs to be located within the context of people as they are living and working and labouring and struggling."[47] Madikizela-Mandela, not Madiba, was on the front lines of the movement, and even when she was banned, she continued to be located, materially and ideologically, "within the context of people as they [were] living and working and laboring and struggling."

[46] Mandela, *491 Days*, 234-235.
[47] "Political Party Recalls." *Truth Commission - Special Report - Special Hearings*. Day 1, 12 MAY 1997. South African Broadcasting Corporation, http://sabctrc.saha.org.za/documents/special/party2/56352.htm

My formulation of a theory of violence that uses the Black woman as a barometer for the violence of the psycho-political condition of modernity is distinct from theories of the violence of racialization writ large. The Black psyche's constitution in violence leaves a material trace in twentieth and twenty-first century politics that we can read, map and follow through both Black revolutionary movements and the sphere of Black intimacy, although not mutually exclusive categories. I analyze how conceptions of violence are incumbent on an implicit acceptance of the mythology of Black brutality and how this tacit consent effects the Black intramural. I am referring to the production of the meaning of violence, Black violence and anti-Black violence, as more than the production and circulation of signifiers. One of the material effects of these productions of meaning is that the violence of (non)being, rather than the violence of experience and identity, undergirds the Black intramural. This does not dismiss the importance of Black people's subjective experience of violence, but rather emphasizes the former's constitutive framing so that we may begin understand how and why it effects all aspect of Black psychic and political life. The violence of discourse continues to police the insurgent dreams and rage of Black people suffering across the globe. I have yet to find any other group's filiation, love, and political desire as policed, punished, criminalized, or put on trial to the extent that Black people in Africa and its diaspora have experienced over the course of the last several centuries. Each act of political praxis, all filial affect, and every attempt at community registers as performative, abstracted from the ontological and psychic conditions of absence and negation interpreted as exemplars of pathology. Madikizela-Mandela's statements regarding violence in general and necklacing in particular affirm a poiesis and performance of revolutionary desire by rearticulating the violence of the state *to* the state. I do not use the term poiesis as a confirmation of its inherent value established in the western philosophical tradition. In fact, I argue that due to

its grounding in ontological assumptions of possibility it is inverted in the context of Black relationality. Although all Black politics in so far as they are liberatory are a poiesis, one that can never be divorced from phronesis, the transformation or meaning of Blackness cannot be delinked ethically from the violence concomitant with Black psycho-political resistance to the conditions of their impossibility. Indeed, a polarized, yet rarely polarizing figure due to her position as a Black woman, the support Madikizela-Mandela continues to receive is dismissed as either fear she induces in her sycophants, collaborations with powerful white male lovers, or witchcraft. However, what many in the townships display is a reverence toward a figure who demonstrated a form of Black love that was tethered to responsibility: the responsibility to a movement defined by Blackness in its fullest range, Blackness tethered to the violence of its conceit as much as to violence as a mode of resistance. While I have argued that Black love is violence in so far as violence can never be delinked from Blackness, in or as Black affect, the modern political sphere is as much yoked to perpetrating anti-Black violence as an essential libidinal drive as it is to capitalizing on Black radical politics to fuel social justice campaigns for anyone other than Black people. Freedom from political, psychic, and economic violence qualifies the political discourses of human rights, yet continues to elude realization for Black populations within Africa and its diaspora.

The years subsequent to Madikizela-Mandela's divorce and demonization in the press also include the continued economic, social, and political disenfranchisement of South Africa's most vulnerable Black populations. Her indictment of Mandela's leadership as detached from the realities of those who waged war "underground" reflect internecine wars about the use of Black violence as a liberatory strategy rather than tactic. Moreover, these intramural debates and psychic contestations are repeatedly mapped onto the bodies of Black women and girls, reifying

discourse of Black intramural abnormality writ large. Discourse about Black dysfunction as mimicking the violence of oppressors remains an incomplete if not intractable theorization of internecine violence. Fanon's theory of the dispensation of the native's "muscular tension" is one apt example, as he writes:

> The native's muscular tension finds outlet regularly in bloodthirsty explosions--in tribal warfare, in feuds between septs, and in quarrels between individuals. Where individuals are concerned, a positive negation of common sense is evident. While the settler or the policeman has the right the livelong day to strike the native, to insult him and to make him crawl to them, you will see the native reaching for his knife at the slightest hostile or aggressive glance cast on him by another native; for the last resort of the native is to defend his personality vis-à-vis his brother... [48]

Fanon, here, makes several unfortunate errors in collapsing all colonial violence within the political economy of settler exploitation without accounting for the specific ways anti-Blackness operates within the psycho-political sphere. First, I must clarify that not all internecine warfare, such as what Fanon describes here, is Black intramural violence. Additionally, Fanon's text is too universalizing, and universalized in its construction, and avoids the particularity of anti-Black racial animus to the colonial project. His analysis fails to link the enslavement of Africans to the violence of the decolonizing project, hence his supposition of the "last resort of the native...to defend his personality vis-à-vis his brother" reads like disavowal of the political necessity of violence for decolonizing projects. In fact, this theorization mirrors the critiques of Black intraracial violence from the proponents of Black respectability politics. Is the Fanon that contends violence during the process of decolonization among the natives is a displaced aggressivity for the oppressor in contrast to the Fanon that writes about violence against the settler in the same chapter, "On Violence," in *The Wretched of the Earth*? There is no elaboration on whether the intra-native violence he discusses is one desired and/or intended for the

[48] Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1968), 54.

oppressor; in other words, no analysis of whether or not the native's "last resort" is fueled as a dispensation of misdirected energies because they are catalyzed by the oppressor, or they are misdirected because the native's "common sense" has been dulled by primitive, tribal culture and exposure to colonial violence. Fanon's text can countenance violence if the aim is the "settler or policeman," yet pathologizes it as revenge for "the slightest hostile or other aggressive glance cast" by another native. However, Fanon does add a psychic dimension to his theorization, outlined in what follows:

> It is as if plunging into a fraternal bloodbath allowed them to ignore the obstacle, and to put off till later the choice, nevertheless inevitable, which opens up the question of armed resistance to colonialism. Thus collective auto-destruction in a very concrete form is one of the ways in which the native's muscular tension is set free. All these patterns of conduct are those of the death reflex when faced with danger, a suicidal behavior which proves to the settler (whose existence and domination is by them all the more justified) that these men are not reasonable human beings. In the same way the native manages to by-pass the settler. A belief in fatality removes all blame from the oppressor; the cause of misfortunes and of poverty is attributed to God: He is Fate. Meanwhile…the native will strengthen the inhibitions which contain his aggressiveness by drawing on the terrifying myths which are so frequently found in underdeveloped communities.[49]

To account for internecine warfare as a displacement of "the death reflex" without understanding how the "death reflex" as a psychic formation may be constructed from and projected onto Blackness is a curious oversight from such a careful psychoanalytic and philosophical thinker. The liberation movement in South Africa, in a rich tradition of Black armed revolt most infamously realized with the Haitian Revolution, did not "ignore the obstacle" but rather engaged in "armed resistance." Fanon curiously bifurcates intramural violence with colonial violence, pathologizing the former in his theory of "auto-destruction." The issue that Fanon's elucidation of "auto-destruction" elides is the necessity of the "muscular tension" of Black people, in other words Black violence, for the very "existence" of the settler. I do not suggest that the "myths" found in "underdeveloped communities" are not cause for concern for some people; rather, I

[49] Ibid.

suggest that they are misplaced, like in Fanon's estimation, and do not explain how the violence of the settler, or the master, has appeared as a formation within the Black psyche. In other words, there can be no Black "collective auto-destruction" because this formulation depends on the existence of a Black self –auto, as *in or by itself,* to destruct. The singularity of Blackness includes its paradoxical inability to be singularized to the extent that there is no Black self independent of the exigencies of violence: violent anti-Black psychic and political intrusions governing every waking and dreaming moment of Black social life and social death. Furthermore, the Black native cannot engage in "suicidal behavior which proves to the settler" that Black people are "are not reasonable human beings" because the invention of Blackness was central to the invention of modern "human beings." Blackness via Africa is synonymous with unreason (pace Hegel), hence it is not due to the native African's violence against his "brother" when "faced with danger" that the settler receives proof of the inhumanity of Black people. Within the imaginary and the symbolic, Blackness and violence are so inextricably linked, that the real demands its forgetting within the unconscious, even in the most radical, and revolutionary, thinkers on colonial violence. The return to repression, policing, and pathologizing of Black violence as an organizing tactic is reified in the pathologizing of the most intimate spheres of Black life lived "underground." This policing, whether by Black or non-Black people, of the Black political (which is always already one of broken ties of consanguinity and affinity) accedes to white desire: white desire for Black violence, in and of mythological proportion, as a defense against the violence of their jouissance. And Black social life lived and fought underground contains psycho-political resistances to white desire for Black violence, for Black pathology in and through the intramural, as a defense against white jouissance[50]. We can

[50] Moreover, Black resistance to the violence of white jouissance can never be categorized as its own version of jouissance. Since desire is a defense against jouissance, and Black desire is obfuscated in ways white, or human

see this resistance no more clearly than within the experimental fiction of Carlene Polite and her novel, *The Flagellants*, which illustrates how the "antithesis of love is indifference."[51]

The ego is not master in its own house.
—Sigmund Freud, "A Difficulty in the Path of Psycho-Analysis"

Lonely was much better than alone.
—Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye: A Novel*

Claudia Tate, in her introduction to *The Flagellants*, inserts a profound provocation, questioning whether the novel suggests that the "discipline of suffering has transformative power."[52] Conflating ecclesiastical authority, or discipline, with the function of flagellation—punishment—Tate observes, intentionally or not, the primacy of structural violence for the narrative's architecture. Verbal and physical violence permeate the text in its intimate portrait of a Black couple during the height of the Black power movement in the US. But rather than view this text as a lens into the interior lives of two flagellants for whom punishment eludes transformation, I view it as a testament to the tenuous nature of Black filiation and affiliation generated by the preservation of white violence and/as the trauma of slavery. The excess of white life in the death drive of the human subject is its excessive jouissance. This excess is asserted in the most intimate of spheres of the Black intramural and within the individual Black psyche. Lacan's description of "life envy" (*Liebensneid*) suggests that "a certain form of *jouissance* or superabundant vitality, that the subject perceives as something that he cannot apprehend"[53]

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desire, is not, anti-Blackness suturing the symbolic (and obscured by the machinations of the unconscious in the real) bars Black jouissance.

[51] Giovanni, Nikki, and Margaret Walker. *A Poetic Equation: Conversations between Nikki Giovanni and Margaret Walker* (Washington: Howard University Press, 1974), 28.

[52] Tate in preface of Polite, Carlene H. *The Flagellants* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), xii.

[53] Lacan, Jacques, and Jacques-Alain Miller. *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII* (New York: Norton, 1992), 237.

creates a jouissance of suffering that is envied. This envy creates avarice that "is not addressed to anything that I might desire but to a thing that is my neighbor's Thing."[54] I have suggested in the context of apartheid that one of the many manifestations of white violence is the desire for Black violence. In the US context of *The Flagellants*, I am suggesting that one modality of the extremity of white violence is the necessity for Black suffering and its erasure as byproducts of white jouissance: its need for a Black other to suffer, and a need for proximity to the Black suffering other, as both the "Thing" and "my neighbor's Thing." Ultimately, whiteness' "life envy" remains a libidinally masturbatory enterprise as excess life belongs solely in the realm of the human subject, and not Black people. The deployment of aggressivity and violence against Black people, which is a jouissance of suffering that is envied but is never its own (Black) jouissance, is psychically recorded through Black psychic resistance in and through Black political poiesis as well as the sphere of Black intimacy, a sphere brilliantly theorized in *The Flagellants*.

The context of the Black power movement proves critical to the historical milieu in which Polite published her novel. While much of what has been written about *The Flagellants* argues one of the main aspects of the text is a critique of the masculinist discourse of the Black Power movement, I read a more comprehensive critique in Polite's novel. Tate discusses the "intimate space" of the novel's setting, arguing that the text also "depicts Black male brutality as a sign of the corruption of personal freedom." Additionally, Madu Dubhey argues that in the text "Black nationalist discourse repeatedly figured the oppressive past through the imagery of a vicious circle or cycle."[55] This "viscous circle" of history to which Dubey refers is the material

[54] Ibid., 83.
[55] Dubey, Madhu. *Black Women Novelists and the Nationalist Aesthetic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 26.

and psychic afterlife of slavery reflected in the protagonists' present and past. Arguing that the form and language "impedes the linear progress of the narrative," employing "figuration of the oppressive past as cyclic" and enacting "the repetition of the past in the present," Dubey maintains that this narrative representation delineates the distinction between the Civil Rights Movement and Black Nationalist discourse, with the former's focus on non-violence and the latter on violence. Aided by its experimental form, the novel indeed, as Tate suggests, presents itself as a "puzzle." However, while I question Tate's assertion that the novel invites "the reader to solve the puzzle of the text," I do agree that "embedded in her past life in the Black community of Black Bottom" provides confirmation, rather than "answers," to a truth of Black relationality.[56] Only a handful of literary critics have published on *The Flagellants*, with Nikki Giovanni, in her review for *Negro Digest*, commenting that the portrayal of "naked selves" of the two protagonists in their embattled relationship "hurts," not because they elicit sympathy or guilt, but because "it is so near a truth." She maintains, "We hope it is not the truth. For if the Black man and the Black woman must leave each other to be happy and fulfilled people, then we are damning untold generations to hopelessness."[57] I agree with Giovanni's assessment of the pain the novel elicits, but I doubt the novel's primary rendering of Black relationality encourages a reading that the characters must "leave one another" to achieve happiness and fulfillment. Rather, happiness and fulfillment are presented as ontological conditions that escape Blackness, as much as punishment appears as a concomitant condition of Black love. Tate raises the stakes of Giovanni's assessment, suggesting that "Ideal's transformation is incomplete at the novel's conclusion...Ideal can only perceive the possibility for such wholeness—an ideal self—at the novel's closure. That possible ideal self emerges at the end of the journey through her recollected

[56] Tate, *The Flagellants,* xvii-xviii.
[57] Giovanni, Nikki. "Review of The Flagellants by Carlene Polite." Negro Digest 17.3 (1968): 97-98.

past, as she resolves the conflicts in her life."[58] I agree that Ideal fails to achieve any transformation at the end of the novel, but the vision of what would constitute "an ideal self" also remains elusive, unless one is to consider the role of Black love and collectivity and how they are rendered within the text. The poignancy of *The Flagellants* is its portrayal of Black desire outside of a libidinal economy that would cede "the possibility for such wholeness" granted to non-Black subjects. The journey "through her recollected past" is a cyclic journey through "conflicts in her life" within the present, conflicts that highlight the encroachments of history upon the psychic constructions of the two protagonists. Ideal's desire for and libidinal attachment to punishment illuminate remorse, or the act of biting again (derived from the Latin *remorsus),* as testimony to the ways late twentieth century Black psychic life mirrors the social death of the formally enslaved.

The novel paints the trauma of slavery's aftermath within the quotidian life of the characters. Through allegories, racist intrusions, and the gendered tropes of Black dysfunction the characters hurl at one another, the novel depicts the "wholeness" eluding Ideal as one of ontological negation rather than individual deficiency. Stanley Kauffmann of *The New Republic* hailed the novel after its initial publication, praising it as an example of work from Black artists that moved beyond realism. He declares boldly that the text is "art and not argument," "Negroes must face their own psyches, molded by the American past and the white-washed American present" and that "they have been liberated to their own species of 20th century alienation."[59] Indeed, the characters experience "their own species of…alienation," albeit it not as a form of "liberation," I would contest. I maintain that the novel is both art and argument, as the protagonist Ideal is appropriately named if one reads the signifier, 'ideal', to designate thought

[58] Tate, *The Flagellants,* xiii.
[59] Tate, *The Flagellants,* ix-x.

and imagination, existing only in idea, and formed by abstracting properties found and experienced.[60] Similar to the conceptual allegory tied to Ideals' name, Jimson provides a political allegory for the inaugural violence of the novel. Jimson weed, as is known in common parlance, is etymologically rooted in the plant found in Jamestown during the seventeenth century: Jamestown weed. Beginning the with naming of the characters, the past of slavery enters the present of a narrative that "prohibits a smooth reading" while succeeding "in derealizing the seeming transparency of ideological discourse."[61] The ideological discourse of slavery haunts the text, as its prologue begins with a description of Ideal's great-grandmother as an "old woman, warped and reduced by slavery."[62] I argue that the novel is an experimental articulation that the warping committed by slavery is not a physical or psychic condition alone. Rather, this narrative of the corruption of slavery delineates the construction and perpetuation of a metaphysics of Blackness: violence as the configuring medium of a globalized psychic and ontological racialized landscape politicized within the imaginary. In other words, the deformation of slavery extends beyond slave material and political economy and reflects the libidinal investments white violence deploys to order the world. The novel presents a portrait of the hyper internalized landscape of Ideal and Jimson's relationship wherein Black suffering is staged not as a result of agency, but the effect of the agency of white violence in and as the Black psyche. Through this structure, which is as political as it is libidinal, we see a split Black psyche wrestle with its inability to conceive and experience a self.

> The poor ego has a still harder time of it; it has to serve three harsh masters, and it has to do its best to reconcile the claims and demands of all three…The three tyrants are the external world, the superego, and the id.
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> —Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*

[60] "Ideal." *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2000). Web. 12 Nov. 2016.
[61] Dubey, 152.
[62] Polite, *The Flagellants*, 5.

"I WANT"

The Flagellants provides testimony to Black psychic suffering made illegible. Utilizing tropes disseminated by white racist and Black nationalist discourses, the text demonstrates the repetition of the symbolic order through a jouissance barred to the Black psyche. For instance, Jimson asks, "What other lovers do you know, Ideal, who are able to survive this degree of pain?" to which Ideal responds, "Yes, Jimson, but we are practicing hatred. We have transcended that pain which is existent in the world…We have gone a step further. We create it. We inflict each other with cruelty, not pain."[63] Ideal, here, narrates a fantasy of mastery over pain through her and Jimson's agency to engage in cruelty. This cruelty indicates a transcendence of pain, which is a transcendence of suffering caused by their Blackness, how Blackness orders them politically and metaphysically in, or outside of, the world. Indicating how prescient Polite's novel was for its time, Ideal's response to Jimson repeats the discourse of Black respectability politics which, in the late twentieth century through the present, trump the Black power and Black nationalist discourses of the 1960s and the 1970s. The text illuminates how the Black psyche copes through another trope, the notion of survival, suggesting that all Black love is survival in pain or, arguably, that all love is violent. As much as the novel is an excruciating look at how Black people can "inflict each other with cruelty," it is also a vignette into a metaphysics of Blackness through the loves of two ordinary Black people: those who struggle in love, in Blackness, and the pain therein. For Ideal, pain is a tolerable threshold, if not expectation. Instead of an expectation of transcendence through love, or through noble suffering in love, the novel presents transcendence through its inverse: the barbarity of masochism. This is as much a

[63] Polite, *The Flagellants*, 50-51

political statement as it is an emotional compass, demonstrating how the rhetoric of Black respectability, or nobility in suffering, is a corruption of Black political poiesis. Moreover, this concept of transcendence of the pain of Black experience, albeit in the negative form of malice, demonstrates Black collectivity in its most apolitical modes. The antipolitical space and time of Black subjectivity is rendered as a feigned ontology, of mastery over one's own suffering. The novel's elaboration of the impossibility of Black relationality outside of a discourse of suffering—the transcendence of pain—signals the effects of a rejection of a poiesis of political desire within the impossible space and state of Black intimacy. This effect is a wall of silence rendering empathy as solipsism, a form of Black narcissism captured in the self-flagellation of the characters and their cruelty toward one another. This wall of silence reflects a symbolic order wherein "borrowed institutionality" appears as an escape from one's social death, rather than the seemingly suicidal mission that would be a revolutionary politic to eliminate the categories of one's [I]deal. It governs what is legible within the space of romantic desire, the torment we execute on one another, evincing the only legible affect, and action, as cruelty. Because it is a metaphysics of Blackness elucidated in our affiliation and filiation, what is easily registered when the optics of one's "retina,"[64] one's consciousness, is not buttressed by a poiesis of revolutionary desire but rather a reactionary one. Indeed, I am suggesting a link between reactionary politics and the psychic processes of projection and identification as manifest in the circulation of gendered tropes of Blackness the characters utilize to destroy one another. For Black people's desires are as intimately attached to a politics of liberation or a "slavery-time credo,"[65] as every other facet of Black social life in social death lived "underground." Polite inserts this "credo" in Jimson's recollections of Papa Boo, his progenitor also "warped" by

[64]Brand, Dionne. *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2002), 2.
[65] Polite, *The Flagellants*, 57.

slavery's ideological mandate and whose discourse of Blackness as degradation Ideal elicits and deploys against Jimson by referring to him as a "Black dog." But it is a poignant observation that the only means to transcend pain is to employ aggressivity and malice. This fantasy of agency, or access to a coherent self, is displayed in the text through the performance of cruelty: "borrowed institutionality" as a means to access tools of power is paralleled in this intimate space of Black love. Within this sphere, characters borrowed access to a capacity for sadism, and masochism, to transcend pain: the quintessential loneliness of the Black psyche. This is why flagellation, or punishment, figures so prominently for characters who have yet to devise modes of psychic resistance, the praxis of a poiesis of revolutionary desire—a politic to confront the "truth" rather than the fantasy of agency to manage the void of relationality.

Cruelty figured as transcendence is another ruse of the fantasy of a coherent self that would soon be deployed by race men and women in the late twentieth century US to replace radical and revolutionary politics. Rendering violence as a phenomenon solely in the agency of Black people rather than the state, or a mode of being demonstrating sloth of character rather than psychic trauma, Polite warns of deploying Black respectability politics which she characterizes, implicitly, as a direct byproduct of the least effective facet of Black nationalism (and perhaps, the Black Power movement): misogynoir. For just as Wilderson claims that the world is "sutured by anti-Black solidarity,"[66] the Black intramural is catalyzed around solidarity against Black women in particular[67]. Recourse to the rhetoric of Black pathology, especially the tropes of mammy, female slaves who collude against other Black people in the interests of the master, and the Moynihan report, are directly linked to the Pan-African masculinist rhetoric displayed during moments in the Black power movement. But Polite's novel takes pains to

[66] Wilderson III, *Red, White & Black*, 58.
[67] With Black transwomen being the most vulnerable to this violence.

disentangle rhetoric from a politic, and psychic trauma from political praxis and poiesis, demonstrating that the void of relationality that Black people navigate is concomitant with the void of a revolutionary politic. Pain, again, in the arc of the novel, is not to be transcended but meditated upon and worked through (pace Freud) with a lens aimed at the proper target of Black cruelty. Speech fails in the text—there is no possibility for full speech (a la Lacan) or working through. Rather, the ways in which Black people relate to one another, conjure memory, and cycle the past through the present is rendered as the Black Power movement's grandest failure—it's apolitical, if not antipolitical, step child. Perhaps this is a warning for those of writing and reading in the future.

Since Black experience is the psyche's arbitration of violence as much as it is a reflection of the Black psyche being mediated by violence, I find the discourses of resistance and survival anemic in their analytical capacity to elaborate the extent to which violence, rather than culture, identity, or experience, is the structuring agent of a metaphysics of Blackness. As a result, I wish to diverge from the discourse of self-hate and internalized racism that dominates scholarship on narratives of intramural Black violence. Black Feminist studies has developed integral tools to discuss and theorize intramural violence outside of simplified dialectics of self-esteem vs self-hate. Yet even the most groundbreaking theories, such as the work of Kimberly Crenshaw, focus on the role of positive versus negative images of Black people in their assessments. For instance, Crenshaw declares, "The problem, however, is not so much the portrayal of violence itself as it is the absence of other narrative and images portraying a fuller range of Black experience."[68] While I agree there are accounts that *portray* Black experience in a "fuller range," I am unsure about what certain portrayals would *illuminate* about Black experience that would be significantly

[68] Crenshaw, K. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review*. 43.6 (1991), 1257.

different. Additionally, I question *for whom* the political purpose different "narratives and images" serves. Even Tate describes the "anguish that Ideal and Jimson experience" is "because they have internalized stereotyped racial identities instead of accepting the responsibility of self-definition."[69] Tate's rhetoric of "responsibility of self-definition" mirrors the discourse of Black respectability, a discourse the novel vehemently rejects. Because Polite's work highlights violence or the inner dynamics of social life in social death as a more truthful articulation of the metaphysics of Blackness does not render this representation as denying a "fuller range of Black experience." In fact, it clarifies what dominant discourses within and outside of Black collectivities evade by pathologizing the world's dysfunction: placing the onus on what Black people have "internalized," and cannot--and would refuse to, if possible--transcend. But I must reiterate, in Ideal's estimation, transcending pain equates to cruelty, hence I read a much more radical message in the dizzying pages of the text.

Ideal and Jimson are both marked by the "slavery-time credo" that persecutes Papa Boo. Tate defines Papa Boo as "not only Jimson's mythic boogie man and the white man's stereotyped projection of evil, he is also the figurative representation of Jimson's 'id,' his 'shadow,' the racial self-obliterated by economic privilege and familiar protectiveness."[70] If we extend the representation of Papa Boo as Jimson's id, positing that the (Black) id is also comprised of white desires, fantasies and aggressivities meted out on the individual and collective psyches of Black people, we may find that this displacement of "the white man's stereotyped projection of evil" is reductively assigned as internalized racism. To what extent has Black critical theory writ large agreed upon what constitutes what is internal to Blackness as much as it has agreed upon how, and to whom, Blackness has been assigned? I suggest that this

[69] Tate, *The Flagellants*, xxvi.
[70] Ibid., xix.

lack of consensus as to the constitution of the Black psyche extends to my discussion of the impossibility of Black relationality created by a void of a singular, constitutive, and coherent Black self. In other words, regardless of how the characters define themselves or identify, the novel demonstrates that the world's political order is the edifice of the Black psyche. For instance, the text opens with Ideal's great-grandmother, a former slave, guiding Ideal to "Always walk tall. Never bow down to anything or to anyone; unless, of course, you feel like bowing."[71] The time of less than ideal circumstance and station to which Ideal's great grandmother was born is juxtaposed with the self-assuredness she mandates to Ideal to never make herself servile or "bow down." The novel ends, appropriately, with Ideal telling Jimson, "Let me be alone. And, Jimson, please remember to close the door."[72] As much as Ideal wishes to extricate herself, to "be alone," part of the "puzzle" the novel leaves unsolved is whether or not the "door" which she requests be closed upon Jimson's exit is the curtain closing in on the reader's access to the intimate spheres of Ideal's psyche and her relationship with Jimson. Moreover, after the vitriol, physical violence, and love mixed with antipathy we view between the lovers, Ideal ends the text with a request rather than a demand. She simply asks. Yet, the reader is left to wonder if there could ever be a door "door" that would prevent outside intrusions from entering the porous space of Ideal's psyche: a psyche rendered defenseless. Hence, what the novel illuminates as illegible in terms of the void of relationality is legible with respect to its attitude toward Black love: the impossibility of Black relationality does not preclude the existence, or conditions, of Black love, even though Black people are in no position to determine how that love is overdetermined by violence. This overdetermination is elucidated as the haunting of slavery in every facet of the

[71] Polite, *The Flagellants*, 5.
[72] Ibid., 214.

characters' lives; a haunting that leaves them with a desire for relationality as much as their desire for agency, mastery, and capacity.

Ideal and Jimson are both controlled by the past, not solely through the political or material factors in the present, but the memory of slavery's "credo" they wish to escape. The binds of Papa Boo's "slavery-time credo" underscore the novel's confinement—the aggressive language, the racial stereotypes, the characters' delight in self-flagellation as much as their rapture in repulsion toward one another. The confining language and descriptions of cramped domestic spaces in the text provides an optimal lens into the irreconcilability of the evacuated space of Black selfhood. The physical and emotional violence that Jimson deploys against Ideal is metaphorized in the tropes of Blackness with which Ideal verbally and emotionally abuses Jimson: "I hate you, you Black dog…You are nothing"[73] Much later in the text, Jimson responds to the barrage of references to Papa Boo's disparaging commentaries on Blackness, as Jimson tells Ideal, "you resort to the myth, Ideal, and summon the Black dog to berate me…I was the one to whom Papa Boo dreamed to issue orders…He fulfilled his intention with his house nigga consciousness. I became representative of the Black dogma."[74] The "myth" of self-possession, the "Ideal" of abolition, is juxtaposed with the "credo" and "dogma" of slavery and resistance. Jimson and Ideal spar ideologically as much as they tear one another down emotionally. "House niggah consciousness" is the only currency freedom has granted to Papa Boo, searing a representation of "Black dogma" that articulates the violence of anti-Blackness. Ideal is baptized into slavery's "credo" by not only her great grandmother, but also her childhood town of the Bottom. The Black town of the Bottom instilled a "self-destroying root," where "punishment" became a "divining rod" which "the depth of love could be measured and angled": slavery and

[73] Ibid., 39.
[74] Ibid., 59.

its psychic afterlife is the "hurting root" of her, Jimson, Papa Boo, and the Bottom's past.[75] Subsequently, Blackness becomes the "divining rod" measuring both the "depth of love" and modes of "punishment" for the characters.

Memories for Ideal and Jimson aid in the confining structure of the text, the circular movement of time rendering that movement a stasis. The novel declares, "Time and distance overwhelmed memory's fervor. Time and distance were probing the very fragile depth of Jimson and Ideal's intimacy."[76] The "time and distance" of slavery are its reproduction, creating the "fragile depth of Jimson and Ideal's intimacy" which overrides "memory's fervor." Rather than the fragmentation favored by other Black women writers in the Black Arts Movement, such as Adrienne Kennedy, Polite prefers to translate how the afterlife of slavery orders the world via ontological and libidinal cathexis *in and as* the edifice of the Black psyche rather than its fragmented intrusions alone. The novel is driven by ideological movement through dialogue (which is distinct from merely dialogue driven) rather than through action within the plot. This technique allows Polite to demonstrate how Black love weaponizes anti-Blackness as a recourse when there is no imagination left for political resistance. Ideal's verbal assaults against Jimson remind him of how Blackness has been weaponized against him all his life. He responds to Ideal's abuse in the following passage:

> But if you ever call me Black dog, Ideal, I promise you that I will crush you to bits. For as long as I am able to recall, I have had that Black business hammered into my head. Papa Boo, God bless his sweet soul, is my experienced definition of the pitiful huckster of the American Negro's paradoxical tragedy. His natural intelligence was involuntarily thwarted, so that he possessed only that intelligence which was the effect of the emulation of the white man...Only from his brothers did he demand, only among his brothers did he accuse and deny, or choose to act, at last, like a man…Papa Boo's ignorance was oppressive. He had been deathly frightened and, in turn, propagated the

[75] Ibid., 17.
[76] Ibid., 126.

> fright that consumed him…miserable old Uncle Tom…papa Boo did a thorough job of convincing me that I was the Prince of Darkness, a shame before God, the ugliest child in the world…persecuting discourse on my intense brown skin…[god warned Papa Boo that] I had been issued from the devil to blaspheme my father. My mother, he vowed, was blinded at the first sight of me. I was the reason my people were kept down; anything that looked like me had to be kept back.[77]

Blackness, which is Black love, always resists anti-Blackness, but in one of two ways: by either fighting the source—anti-Black structures and policies, anti-Black attitudes and identifications, preconscious desires and beliefs; or, secondly, by instrumentalizing tools of anti-Blackness (via a granted "borrowed institutionality") against other (more) vulnerable Black people. Jimson, here, is aware of Papa Boo's preconscious interests, a state of Blackness residing outside of time and space but not memory. This becomes Jimson's excess memory, what overwhelms memory's "fervor," when and where fantasy fails, until it is Jimson's turn to wield it against Ideal. The physical and verbal assaults against Ideal which serve as the novel's denouement satisfy Ideal's preconscious desire for punishment, but leave her feeling bereft of love, leave her wanting. Her desire for love, which both Jimson and Ideal misread as a demand for violence, is what both characters feel inaccessible to their objects of desire.

The longing, or drive, throughout the text is not just for love, but a particular kind of love that does not exist within the parameters of a metaphysics of Blackness that rests between dissociative states of desire--political and emotional. The type of love that comprises Ideal's dreams and wishes conflicts with her apolitical stance in the novel. During one of the rare scenes that takes place within the streets of the city, Jimson and Ideal come upon two Black men discussing politics as they are flanked by a multiracial crowd. Unlike the other sections in the text, the dialogue, narrated as "gospel" that "lit the corner," is linear and clear:

[77] Polite, *The Flagellants*, 56-58.

> [B]ecause some Ofays are unready for their own world. Some Negroes are unready for white man's world and that's where we live, brother…We have been birthed in the dark, suckled on degradation…We are outside, detached, viewing the arena as eternal spectators evaluating the conquerors, uncovering their weaknesses…. We have been taught to fear and idolize them while despising ourselves…We have been taking it out among ourselves, practicing among each other all that we resent, all that we have received. We have associated authority, liberation, right with white. The happy thought is that victims transcend masters. It is the time for us to perceive the power of violence, the might-and-right use of it.[78]

Indeed, as demonstrated here, theories of transcendence are central for the novel, especially in relation to transcendence through violence, whether weaponized against oneself as a form of flagellation, or against others to "transcend masters." Yet, slippages in the characters' speech betray a more complicated analysis of violence than the well-recycled postulates of self-inflicted, internalized violence of the powerless, such as the concepts of "internalized racism" or "auto-destruction." While the gentleman subsequently engages in debate over the use of violence against white people, he does suggest that Black people instrumentalize violence against one another in lieu of wielding it against "masters." However, he discusses the dialectics of means and ends violence presented within a theorization of a metaphysics of Blackness as a negative ontology: Black people as "birthed in the dark," "outside," and "detached," in a world made for "Ofays." The debate on the corner continues as the gentleman's interlocutor responds with astonishment and consternation:

> we can never get anywhere by fighting it out…We will never make it. We have to develop a revolutionary dogma and use it, not as a weapon to would or offend, but as a wage, a guiding principle…Faith in the Universal Law transfigures the chaos, enables liberation rather than annihilation…Are we seeking, brother, the destruction of man or the destruction of the concept?[79]

The novel, here, subtly stages a debate between the ideological divide between the two major freedom movements of the second half of the twentieth century in the US: The Civil Rights

[78] Ibid., 97.
[79] Ibid., 101.

Movement and the Black Power Movement. Although Dubey argues that violence in the novel is "invariably sexual and domestic rather than racial and public," as well as that violence "becomes itself a contributory part of the meaningless temporal cycle, far from heralding the liberatory rupture of the cycle as envisioned in Black nationalist discourse,"[80] I do not read *The Flagellants'* representation of intimate partner violence fundamentally distinct from the "racial and public" violence the protagonists experience or discuss. The violence that continues to buttress the current episteme bolstering "the concept," the epistemologies and metaphysics yoking their Blackness to slaveness, is the cause par excellence of the violence Jimson and Ideal not only experience, but crave. For the condition of Blackness, "birthed in the dark, suckled on degradation," is as much onto-political as it is psycho-political. For example, the first sentence of the last chapter of the novel begins by defining what a kaleidoscope is: "[a] kaleidoscope is defined as a devise containing loose bits of colored glass and mirrors so placed that any change of position of the bits of glass is reflected in an endless variety of patterns."[81] Reference to an optical instrument that can alter reflections based on a simple rotation of the device is a fitting metaphor for the novel. For the Black psyche, violence, Black love, and Black liberatory politics are presented as entwined within the whims of white jouissance mirror in the "bits and pieces of glass" that reflect "an endless variety of patterns." The patterns are reflected in moments that vacillate between conceptual certainty and psychic breakdown, political paradigms and the rhetoric of Black pathology. The corner scene ends when a white bystander is asked a question by one of the men debating. The white man is described as "listening attentively" before being asked by one of the Black men, "if he felt free. The white man pondered the question for a minute and answered a slowly declared, 'Yes.' He had never given the question much

[80]Dubey, *Black Women Novelists and the Nationalist Aesthetic*, 26.
[81] Polite, *The Flagellants*, 191.

consideration. Of course he felt free; he had been born without the nightmare of proof."[82] Here, the dialogue illuminates the positive ontology of whiteness, of humanness, illustrating that freedom is not solely a political condition, but one that one enters upon birth in contrast, and due to, the construction of a metaphysics of Blackness: the "nightmare of proof." Ideal cannot handle the political debate for it makes her immediately place these two politicos in contradistinction to Jimson who she idealizes, and berates, for his dreams of being a writer. She calls the two men "monkeys" while narrating that Jimson would be a better interlocutor as he would "have employed the dialectic." The recourse to idealizing Jimson, however, vanishes as often as it appears. The novel resists stasis, preferring to narrate the protagonists' psychic and ontological torture through a kaleidoscope of projections, defenses, and aggressivities. The subjectivities the characters inhabit are decentered for the reader, with Ideal's quixotic episodes of demoralization and optimism carried by violence.

Flagellation via literal and figurative scourging appears quixotic in some sections of the novel, and pronounced and motivated, if not motivating, during others. I do not define flagellation here as a form of askesis or discipline delivering a form of sexual pleasure, but that does not preclude its interpretation as a mode of libidinal cathexis within the development of the text. Recalling the prologue wherein the narration states that for Ideal, "punishment became…a divining rod" "by which the depth of love could be measured and angled," punishment for Ideal and Jimson foreshadows the psychic turmoil they endure in terms of negotiating how they individually respond to the psychic demands they place on one another. I wish to demonstrate that although punishment for this couple, like the practice of sadomasochism, may be read as signification for how the Black intramural operates, I read these practices neither as metaphors for Blackness nor as an allegory for self-transformation in the novel. Conversely, I interpret how

[82] Ibid., 101-102.

the characters abuse one another as tropes for a metaphysics, rather than transcendence: metaphysics that indicate both the void of a self as well as how violence in and through Blackness within the racial imaginary is mobilized as the sine qua non of violence writ large. For instance, early in the novel the reader is informed, "we have some to suspect Blackness. It has affected us, so that in each moment we live we see the foul mouthed lie."[83] The irony of this testament of the fabrication of Blackness is that it is indecipherable once the characters' psyches are exposed, to one another and the reader. The narrative voice here establishes the relationship between violence, enlightenment modernity, and Blackness through racial slavery, yet the narrator's reliability concerning the extent to which all are aware, or see "the foul-mouthed lie," is called into question throughout the text. Ideal's ideological equilibrium is inconsistent as she shifts from positing race, class, then gender as singular geneses structuring the brutal material and psychic conditions that permeate their lives. More importantly, however, is the profound recognition of the psychic economy of desire, demand and wish fulfillment subtending these practices of intrapsychic and intramural violence when Ideal ruminates, "[w]e are at pleasure only when we wish; but then the paradox cajoles again, and we wind up wishing even during pleasure…I cannot take people. I cannot take me. I am afraid to think on that one act that will forever relieve me. Jimson, you beautiful Black man, we cannot stay it."[84] Here, the novel depicts Ideal as the quintessential psychoanalytic subject attempting to stave off desire to keep it going, in order to continue "wishing." Lacan outlines jouissance and its relation to an economy of desire, lack and pleasure in the following section of *Écrit*s:

> We must keep in mind that jouissance is prohibited to whoever speaks… it can only be said between the lines by whoever is a subject of the Law, since the Law is founded on that very prohibition…But it is not the Law itself that bars the subject's access to

[83] Ibid., 59.
[84] Ibid., 26-27

> jouissance—it simply makes a barred subject out of an almost natural barrier. For it is pleasure that sets limits to jouissance, pleasure as what binds incoherent life together, until another prohibition – this one being unchallengeable — arises from the regulation that Freud discovered as the primary process and relevant law of pleasure.[85]

"Even during pleasure," however, Ideal's psychic economy, her desire is not a "vain detour with the aim of catching the jouissance of the other,"[86] as Lacan describes in one of his seminars. Ideal's and Jimson's Blackness bar one another from being an Other. In other words, desire, or jouissance in Lacan's formulation, does not "make a barred subject" where Black people are concerned unless it is the jouissance of humanity of which we speak: the jouissance that requires Blackness for its existence, for Blackness to be equated with violence and death to redeem whiteness as purity and life. Jouissance's relationship to Blackness reflects a constitutive negation of entering the field of subjectivity equal to those whose access to it was formed by the very conditions that created the prohibitions barring Black objects. Jimson and Ideal's self-punishment, therefore, in and through the performance of flagellation, is the performance of an unconscious recognition that their desire, their wish to elicit the desire of the Other is more so a desire for access to a self that could be recognized as Other, that could access desire and pleasure outside of this economy of violence that is performed as relationality—outside of a relationality that is excised as, and from, desire, negation and pleasure mastered as violence.

Ideal and Jimson are depicted as inhabitors of violence, similar to how they animate the allegorical meanings conceptualized within their names. Ideal is described as laying wait "for the time when it would be out in the open, when she would be carried away playing the savage, versed witch…Her mind had re-entered the whip handle" (28). Here, she is neither an agent of

[85] Lacan, Jacques, and Bruce Fink. *Ecrits: The First Complete Edition in English* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2006), 696.
[86] Lacan, Jacques, Jacques-Alain Miller, and Alan Sheridan. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), 183-184.

violence nor wields the whip; instead, she "re-entered the whip handle." Ideal is described as an object penetrating a tool of violence, with the "whip" being both an allegory representing the practice of flagellation as well as an implement handed down from slavery's "credo." Ideal as the allegorized representation of a principle yet to be realized with the anti-Black imaginary is a "savage, versed witch" not by virtue of her actions. Rather, she is doubly versed. First, she is literally written into the novel and turned into text. Secondly, she is skilled in the art of cruelty vis-à-vis the governing structure and drive of white jouissance. White jouissance carries her to play "the savage" since it is white desire[87] that needs Blackness to be an Other who lacks desire. Black desire for a self, to be a Black other to an other Black subject, is read as demand. And Black desire can only be read as demand through an anti-Black symbolic order dictated by white disavowal: repudiation of the excess pleasure derived from the structural violence constitutive of onto-political categories which deem whose life and death registers as such. Unable to withstand the metaphysical bind that refuses her agency but bestows her flesh, what banishes her from subjectivity and instead makes her an instrument, Ideal struggles with a subjectivity that feels void of capacity: "I was willing that the end came as a retributive act committed against myself, but now I am subjected to another's will."[88] Polite illustrates the split Black psyche's attempts to reconcile this fissure through binaries that betray this psychic splitting: "[t]he chase after the alternative contains all and nothingness, Black and white, punishment and beatification."[89] Blackness is juxtaposed with both "all" and "punishment" while whiteness is conflated with "nothingness" and "beatification." However, the dissonances in Ideal's psyche reflect her

[87] I do not mean to suggest that white jouissance and white desire are synonymous. In *Anxiety: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book X*, Lacan delineates the relationship between anxiety, jouissance, and desire, stating: "…desire is law…desire presents itself as a will to jouissance" (150) in addition to the following: "…so long as desire has not been structurally distinguished from the dimension of jouissance and so long as the question hasn't been posed as to whether for each partner there is a relation, and which, between desire, namely the desire of the Other, and jouissance, the whole affair is doomed to obscurity" (168) (Polity Press, 2014).
[88]Polite, *The Flagellants*, 24.
[89] Ibid., 59.

attempts throughout the text to stave off the "nothingness" of her reality. The novel paints her thoughts, "I don't want to see the affirmation of nothingness in our faces"[90] as she bemoans her relationship with Jimson, yet she thinks to herself, "[i]t was better that nothing bothered nothing"[91]when she considers herself with her white co-worker. Her and Jimson's "nothingness" juxtaposed with the "nothing" of the white extramural leaves one constant variable within the equation—the recognition of her own negation and her psyche's attempts to negotiate that within a subjectivity that craves, if not requires, punishment.

Ideal and Jimson cannot reconcile love with Blackness outside of an economy requiring both the renunciation of desire and retaliation. Blackness threatens to expose the truth that Blackness has yet to be free from this economy of desire and revulsion. Desire, need, and want converge in the most violent scenes of the novel, marking retaliation as the currency through which the conflation of unconscious (political) desire is masked as demand for violence. Shortly after the text characterizes Ideal's thoughts thusly, "[a]cross her mind's eye, each moving disappearing flash of Jimson counterfeited itself. Could time and distance have seduced them out of their ecstasy, out of their exclusive, fey-living selves?"[92] Jimson scrawls on the bathroom mirror in lipstick the words, "I WANT."[93] Ideal questions Jimson's sanity, to which he responds: "[q]uite the contrary, my love. I have just found my mind again…Look at it. What does it say? I want, you want, he wants, we want, they want. It is the root, Ideal, the cause. This suit of flesh is not my nature…My father used to say, 'Have you ever had your wants to hurt you?'"[94] The "very fragile depth of Jimson and Ideal's intimacy" hinges upon a desire for relationality that can never be articulated or read as such. Rather, desire for Black love, for a Black self, for a Black

[90] Ibid., 31-32.
[91] Ibid., 87.
[92] Ibid., 126.
[93] Ibid., 127.
[94] Ibid., 128.

other to see one as a self—these desires cannot be extricated from psychic demands articulated as needs, or "wants" that "hurt you." Hence, shortly after Jimson's diatribe on wanting, Jimson interrogates Ideal, asking her: "[c]an you tell me if need and desire are in unison? I am awaiting my truth, Ideal."[95] Overwhelmed by his and Ideal's demands (misread as Ideal's desire), Jimson retaliates with physical violence:

> All of a sudden, Jimson whirled around, grabbed Ideal out of bed and began beating, raining down upon her head with palms and fists mimicking the rhythmic outpouring of his can-you-tell. Between screams of "Jimson, stop it and please leave me alone," he bellowed that she respond, fight him like a man. If this was what Jimson needed in order to calm down, take away his throe, Ideal would respond. Flinging her whole body against him, flailing, she bit, clawed, kicked and held on with her not-too-dear life to any part of his wailing body that extended itself…With a virgin energy, Jimson trounced upon her as if she were the original sin, the cause of all suffering, the original slave trader, the civil service executioner, the stoker of the furnaces for nine million Jews…Somehow the furniture joined in the fight. Plaster dropped shrapnel. Floorboards moaned. Glass shattered. Blood decorated the walls. A corner reached out and grabbed Ideal…Jimson spit in contempt, panting the words, "You just don't love me, Ideal. That's all…"[96]

Jimson's feelings of rejection are infused with him positioning Ideal as both "original slave trader" and "the original sin." Jimson's want for love, and his fear of Ideal's renunciation of that—"You just don't love me, Ideal," is the "all" of his nothingness. In other words, what is distinct about the impossibility of Black relationality, or intramural violence, is two-fold. First, Black people are subjected to violence as a political and ontological intrusion at the outset—"the original sin, the cause of all suffering, the original slave trader"—and (once again) must fight anti-Blackness within the intramural. Secondly, the violence that undergirds the Black intramural, unlike non-Black relations, stems from the condition of negation: that relationality is an impossibility for the very reason that violence is "all." Black relationality cannot exist because violence is everything.

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[95] Ibid., 129.
[96] Ibid., 130

"Borrowed institutionality" is weaponized in these scenes of rage where the fragility of Jimson's Black masculinity cannot recognize his own void outside of an ideology that ventriloquizes anti-Black patriarchy. His recourse is, once again, to violence in defense of dissociative psychic states wherein Blackness resides outside of time and space, the "[t]ime and distance…probing the very fragile depth of Jimson and Ideal's intimacy." Jimson's course of action is not agency but recourse, a resorting to or turn to someone else with agency—to the "original sin" of slavery, to the "original slave trader"—as he deploys misogynoiristic tropes against Ideal:

> You are the personification, the effete symbol of the enduring Black matriarch equating. You are a holdover from slavery, the privileged nonentity who was allowed free run of Miss Ann's house to dispense domestic order as you saw fit, suckle her children, give them home-training…Your men were devaluated, reduced to eunuchs; although some of them could have surpassed you in running Miss Ann's house…Escaping together to freedom, though, more often with you in the foreground; you and your man [white slave master] sneaked away concealed under your mammy-made skirts…You sat reigning majestically, stuffed with house vittles, growing toward an obesity visually accentuating your picture of power. Up North, you again had the upper hand…Euphemistically, you can be named housekeeper, my woman, Mammy, any name that please you what, objectively, is nothing but a slave…At home…Kicking your man around, you spit upon him for not making you a Miss Ann, taught your children to be patterns of hers…you beat him, castrated him. He had to be kept down in order to keep you feeling worthy, important...colored men are just as proud, respectful, appreciative of their matriarchal mothers as you are... Are you too stupid to create your eminence in a more rational, contemporary manner? Although you are educated, intelligent, some of you Black bitches cannot overcome the stamp of matriarchy. You are perceptive to recognize that it is not my fault. Why cannot you help to vindicate, uplift us? Bury white him, blast him, Blacklist him—not us. Having grown up in the matriarchy, you desire through your emotional needs to construct a patriarchy, romantically, but never actually…[97]

Jimson recycles a litany of familiar tropes of Black womanhood, from the antebellum period to the post-civil rights era, and identifies them as the cause for Black men's disempowerment. Whether through the rhetoric of the castrating and "enduring Black matriarch," the "Mammy"

[97] Ibid., 178-181.

who cared for "Miss Ann's" house and suckled her children more than her own, the Jezebel who ran off with the master to gain "power" over Black men, or "Black bitches" who had to keep Black men down in order to feel "worthy," Jimson deploys the basest stereotypes circulating within Black nationalist discourse. Depicting what is vertical within the intramural— Black women's vulnerability via white men, white women, *and* Black men's unrestricted access to their bodies—in its inverse, Jimson's reading of power relations is as violent as his rhetoric. Power, one supposes from Jimson's rant, is gained through Black women willingly granting white slave masters and mistresses access to their bodies in order to "construct a patriarchy, romantically, but never actually." Interestingly, Jimson places Black men within the same economy of desire directly after, stating, "Father…If he were a perceptive Black man he returned with the same wants coupled with the agonizing futility of his endeavors…Through his inhibited appraisals, he associated retardation with his family since he, too, could love only master."[98] While Jimson's disdain reaches the Black patrilineal, his rhetoric once again fails to diverge from the binaries of "nothingness" and "all" that Ideal's psyche deliberates. Jimson presents Blackness' capacity to "love only master" as the explanation for Black men's, and women's, inability to love one another. Failing to diverge from the obfuscating treatise of self-love, or racial pride, as a balm, a "Universal Law" which could "transfigure the chaos" and "enable liberation," Polite's text implicitly questions the relationship between self-love, love of Blackness, and Black love through critiques of Black nationalist rhetoric. Moreover, undergirding these critiques remains an enduring political statement about the relationship between liberation and love, what Hortense Spillers questions decades later, positing that "unless one is free, love cannot and perhaps will not matter."

[98] Ibid., 181.

The novel's ending depicts Black liberation through self-love in a perfunctory, rather than transcendent, vain, with Ideal entreating Jimson to rely on memory. Requesting that Jimson "please remember to close the door," signals Ideal's recourse once again to the retreat of subjective psychic and emotional isolation instead of the risk of battle that the intramural entails: understanding that this isolation is an ontological rather than purely phenomenological. Chapter one begins with a door as well, yet pushed open by the wind. Ideal is described as doing "nothing to stop the back-and-forth slamming. Counting the pauses between noise and silence was far less nerveracking than digging up the past."[99] Both Ideal and Jimson suffer from a "paralysis"[100] of memory and political action caused by the past, a past that cycles through the present. The psychic afterlife of slavery inhabits the memories they wish to forget, dictates unfulfilled desires they misread as love withheld willingly from one another. Polite's work forces the reader to meditate on the empty rhetoric of discourses of liberation and transcendence without a revolutionary politic to upend the chaos of the characters' psychic lives. Polite refuses to depict the closed symbols of Black subjectivity that are performed within the text as substitutes for a revolutionary politic. Instead, she provides a critique of the direction of the Black Power movement during the era of the novel's publication by allowing her experimental form to trope the masked, and masking, machinations of the split Black psyche. Bifurcated between the want for white love and how to use Blackness as a revolutionary organizing principle, Polite's novel demonstrates that the only action to address, and perhaps redress, a metaphysics of Blackness is its correlate in chaos: a metaphysics of violence.

The Flagellants, in its unflinching analysis of Black nationalism's reactionary politics and elaboration of the metaphysics of Blackness, enriches both Fanon's critiques of Negritude

[99] Ibid., 22.
[100] Ibid.

and his interventions within psychoanalytic theory: locating the etiology of Black suffering within the onto-political, as well as identifying it as a psycho-political problem. In fact, Polite's work is as much of an intervention into Fanon's insights as it is an elaboration, allowing us to devise critical theoretical interventions that use Black women's subjective experiences as the locus of our theorizations of Black suffering *and* Black revolutionary politics. In so doing, the process of reading and experiencing violence through the kaleidoscope of Ideal's psyche renders a truth so brutal that even Giovanni cautiously hopes "we would not deny" "because it hurts."[101] Giovanni's concern over the hopelessness the text may illicit is eclipsed by the truth's potential to decenter us out of a psycho-political orientation where "time and distance overwhelm memory's fervor" and toward the "fragile depth" of Black "intimacy," the fragility of Black relationality, impossibly yet to be.

> It begins with a tickle and ends with a blaze of petrol. That's always what jouissance is.
> —Jaques Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*

> And there seemed to be no way whatever to remove this cloud that stood between them and the sun, between them and love and life and power, between them and whatever it was that they wanted.
> —James Baldwin, "Letter from a Region in my Mind"

Blackness as Constitutive of the Political

Blackness is as constitutive of the political as Black political poiesis is to its demise. With each revolutionary turn in Black political organizing—from abolition, to Black Power, decolonization, and anti-apartheid—the Black intramural has been weaponized by both Black and non-Black people alike. At least one truth obfuscated in the US post-Civil Rights and South

[101] Giovanni, *Negro Digest,* 98.

African post-apartheid decades concerns the unavoidability, if not necessity, of Black violence deployed in defense and/or part of a revolutionary, epistemic, and onto-political undoing. Foci on forgiveness, reconciliation, and Black dysfunction have dominated social discourse and Black political organizing, further perpetuating interpretations of the onus of Black suffering as primarily within the purview of the Black intramural. Put differently, Black intramural violence is often highlighted within dominant discourses to mitigate, rather than end, anti-Black violence. Mitigation banishes Black people to hopelessly respond to our subjective experiences of violence solely through the prism of Black intramural violence. The latter option, ending anti-Black violence, often renders us mute out of legitimate fears of state repression and banishment from circles within the social life of social death. Hence, both modes signal a retreat from a poiesis of Black revolutionary desire, leaving one as a "being for the captor,"[102] still.

The case for, and against, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, along with a narrative of the void of Black relationality in *The Flagellants*, illuminate the relationship between intramural politics and intramural violence, how the latter is a byproduct of the former and not vice versa. In other words, that the Black intramural is an explicitly political formation in as much as it is ontologically negated. Discussing love and the "Negro question," in "Letter from a Region in My Mind," James Baldwin declared that love was "the enormous contribution that the Negro has made to this otherwise shapeless and undiscovered country."[103] Stating that she was "entitled," to raise questions about Baldwin's statements, since the "Negro question" "is a question which concerns us all," Hannah Arendt wrote a letter to James Baldwin where she delivered the following in response: "[ha]tred and love belong together, and they are both destructive; you can

[102] Spillers, Hortense J. "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." *Diacritics* 17.2 (1987): 67.
[103] Baldwin, James. "Letter from a Region in My Mind." *The New Yorker*, 17 November, 1962. www.newyorker.com/magazine/1962/11/17/letter-from-a-region-in-my-mind.

afford them only in the private and, as a people, only so long as you are not free."[104] Arendt's disdain for Black demands within the political sphere are well documented within her work as well as emerging work on her anti-Black racial animus. Yet, I find her assessment of the relationship between Black demands and the political sphere relevant to this chapter's discussion regarding how violence is deployed discursively through disavowing the primacy of anti-Black violence in the formation of the political. For instance, Arendt, in *The Human Condition*, argues, "[l]ove, by its very nature, is unworldly, and it is for this reason rather than its rarity that it is not only apolitical but antipolitical, perhaps the most powerful of all antipolitical human forces."[105] While Kathryn Gines argues that Arendt's position "negates the agency of Blacks as intellectuals and political subjects grappling with the white problem," I read a more striking revelation in Arendt's work: confirmation of the threat that Black political poiesis and/as Black love (inseparable from Black violence) pose to the constitution of the political. Figuring Blackness through Black love as the antithesis of politics is a precondition for Black love and Black politics' disavowal Moreover, to understand intramural politics is to understand not only the truth of intramural violence, but also how politics and violence are constituted in and through Blackness (as its construction), and anti-Blackness (as its erasure). Black transgression, then, becomes contained within a closed symbolic system of subjectivity—a subjectivity that cannot create a self—and the Black intramural is overdetermined as maladjusted from the moment of Blackness' creation. Differently put, the relationship between Black being (within the racial imaginary) and violence becomes causal, rather than Blackness being recognized as an effect of violence. Hence, Blackness pathologized as violence tyrannizes how the psyche processes the truth of Black love. Black subjectivity and "borrowed institutionality" in lieu of a self are

[104] Gines, Kathryn T. *Hannah Arendt and the Negro Question* (Indiana University Press, 2014), 5.
[105] Arendt, Hannah, and Margaret Canovan. *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 242.

pathologized as criminal—the locus of the problem rather than its effect. An essential construction buttresses an entire episteme upon which categories of being, thought, and the Human hinge—Blackness. To account for the political (in)capacity of Black people subtended in white violence would be to cede to the recognition that whiteness—(white) life and humanity writ large—and every discursive formation established in slavery's wake would have to be dismantled. In other words, to avow, acknowledge and define Black love, which is inseparable from Black violence in its formation, would force whiteness to lose itself, and possibly disappear, into its own violence. Hence, white jouissance undergirds every facet of our conceptions of violence—white disavowal appears even within the most intimate and most revolutionary spheres of Black psychic and social life.

Black love, Black demand, and Black relationality can never be read outside of the signifying chain of non-being, violence, that produces Blackness as the disavowed imago par excellence of the unconscious—dangerous, controllable only through recourses of denial and repression. Black demand, which is foundational to Black desire, is a longing for an affective relation to an other Black recognized as other, that could be recognized as a relation. Black demand threatens the foundation of the political, if not the world. A constant marker of the precondition of the political is Black demand, hence Black insurgency through Black love, Black collectivity, and Black revolutionary praxis counterfeits white agency and desire. This simulation appears as the performance of white violence in and through intramural violence, casting white jouissance in the spotlight, if even for a moment. The performance of political desire, whether through the practice of necklacing or, as Ideal states, "[w]e…seek…cruelty…painful conflicts as expressions of love and power,"[106] counterfeits death denied to Blackness through "white

[106] Polite, *The Flagellants*, 189.

jouissance" as "the path towards death." For Blackness is a construct for whiteness to evade its own fear of death. If deathliness can be symbolized through Blackness, only whiteness can reap its benefits—transcendence, memory, progress—while Blackness remains a barred object: that is, unless Black poiesis paves the way for what has yet to be. Differently put, just as Ideal and Jimson are allegories mirroring the conceptual categories underwriting their invention, the performance of Black political desire mirrors the psychic condition undergirding anti-Black violence: white jouissance. Whiteness has capacity to parse out death and love in their affective parameters—the power to declare love recognized as love and not violence. The practice of policing how one loves is concomitant with policing how one punishes, subsequently all facets of Black social life in social death are elaborated within an ethical and psycho-political historical schema foundational to non-Black desire. In so doing, all Black intramural relations are mediated by a past which cannot be disclosed as past, but as a present denied to Blackness. This foreclosure feels like a withholding of love, at best, and a betrayal ventriloquized as a desire for whiteness at worst.

The mediated experience of Black relation through white violence is a non-relation, hence Black demand is perhaps best defined as a drive to inhabit the politics of desire. Here lies the danger of Black revolutionary poiesis and the performance of the political as it is simultaneously the safety of Black violence. To obliterate the psychic and material conditions of existence in (anti)Blackness requires recontextualizing libidinal investments in pathologizing Black affect—collectivity, family, love and revolutionary desire—and policing Black revolutionary demands. Because although white jouissance sanctions Black desire, it fears Black demand to efface the political, a sphere constitutive of yet denied to Blackness. Borch Jacobsen's work on Lacan, specifically his interpretation of Lacan's view of repression as "equivalent to

(not being capable) of speaking the truth,"[107] specifically, highlights what is "radically forbidden" within desire:

> "Repression and the return of the repressed," Lacan repeats after Freud, "are merely the inside and the outside of the same thing"…and for him this means that repression is the truth of desire, its one and only (re)presentation. To repress is undoubtedly to lie, to not speak the truth of desire…but to repress is also to speak the truth—the empty, deadly truth that can only be (not) said, "half-said" (mi-dite), since all adequacy of discourse to the "thing itself" of desire is radically forbidden (interdite). It follows, in the strange "logic" established here, that there is only a lying truth, only repressed desire.[108]

Disavowal of white violence is also a repression, "to not speak the truth of desire" for white violence. White mythologies regarding Black violence "also speak the truth—the empty, deadly truth that can only be (not) said" in white repressed desires. Differently put, white disavowal of its own thirst for violence is manifest in white jouissance which projects fear of Black violence in a program of white disavowal. Black violence can only enter the realms of the symbolic and imaginary through the filtered lens of the truth of white desire, a repression of a truth which is also undoubtedly a "lie." Accordingly, every act of Black violence, intramural or extramural, is instantiated performatively. Black violence adulterates capacity for a desire that could be repressed—that could shift truth into a lie, disavowing and projecting its violence onto an Other. Thus, Black political desire as an imitation of white violence threatens a "return of the repressed" whereby Black poiesis becomes a revolutionary psychic act of enunciation—but never speech—of Black demands. In this process, Black violence, whether Winnie's enunciation, "[w]ith our boxes of matches and our necklaces we shall liberate this country," or Jimson's entreaty to Ideal, "[n]ame it, so that I can whip your behind until we can eradicate the world of hurt," is not only a performance, but also a threat of Black desire: *if* Blackness could be catapulted out of its

[107] Borch-Jacobsen, Mikkel. *Lacan: The Absolute Master* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1991), 102.
[108] Ibid., 104

metaphysics of negation, if its demands could to be fulfilled, to co-opt the captor's violence *for* the captor.

Perhaps Black political desire misread as demand, for Blackness as non-being, is the only way forward for politics—for the destruction of the political in the current episteme. The Black revolutionary impulse also demands the destruction of a symbolic order governed by white violence, or jouissance, as "the path towards death." Counterfeiting the white imaginary, Black poiesis as both Black love and Black violence threatens the system of deferral and repression foundational to the truths of repression and reconciliation. *The Flagellants* states that "[w]e are panted into the world in the wake of breath,"[109] and if we return to Freud where he writes, "[t]o the ego, therefore, living means the same as being-loved,"[110] we may begin understand both the truth of intramural violence and Black demand. Black life lived "underground" entails forms of "being-loved" illegible within the symbolic, yet palpable within the social life of social death. White fear of Black violence, which is also its enjoyment of Black suffering, becomes rendered within the Black psyche as "borrowed institutionality," or Black anti-Blackness.[111] For Blackness to be denied desire as such, negated from the field of being, Blackness has no defense against white enjoyment of Black suffering. However, Black political poiesis in and as a demand for Black love refuses a horizon for the past's remainder—the mark of absence. Within this absence is "nothingness" and "all," Black love and the psychic afterlife of slavery.

[109] Polite, *The Flagellants*, 192.
[110] Freud, Sigmund, and James Strachey. *The Ego and the Id* (New York: Norton, 1989), 61.
[111] See the chapter "Black Anti-Blackness in an Anti-Black World" in Lewis Gordon's *Bad Faith and Anti-Black Racism* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J: Humanities Press, 1995).

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There is a loneliness that can be rocked. Arms crossed, knees drawn up, holding, holding on, this motion, unlike a ship's, smooths and contains the rocker. It's an inside kind--wrapped tight like skin. Then there is the loneliness that roams. No rocking can hold it down. It is alive. On its own. A dry and spreading thing that makes the sound of one's own feet going seem to come from a far-off place. Everybody knew what she was called, but nobody anywhere knew her name. Disremembered and unaccounted for, she cannot be lost because no one is looking for her, and even if they were, how can they call her if they don't know her name?
…It was not a story to pass on.
Toni Morrison, *Beloved*

The door exists as an absence…
To live at the Door of No Return is to live self-consciously. To be always aware of your presence as a presence outside of yourself. And to have "others" constantly remark on your presence as outside of itself. If to think is to exist, then we exist doubly.[1]
-Dionne Brand, *A Map of the Door of No Return*

Chapter 3: No/Know Hope: The Semiotics of Madness

Toni Morrison ends her critically acclaimed novel, *Beloved*, where this chapter begins: locating those inscribed by slavery's ontology (its limit) and epidermal branding (its circuit) vis-à-vis what I call the onto-thanatology of the slave. Indeed, the psychic afterlife of slavery, its emotional impasse, is "not a story to pass on." Like the "ship's motion" *Beloved'*s narrator refuses, this place and state of negation resists metonymic signification, even while opting for containment within epidermalization, "alive" and "[o]n its own." The deadlock between "a loneliness that can be rocked" and "the loneliness that roams" illuminates Black people's psychic disarticulation as a concomitant condition of their political and ontological deracination, or onto-thanatology. A drive against what catalyzes her absence, the relationship between Blackness and death is the lexicon of Beloved's loneliness. This impasse operates as a circuit, both real and imaginary, unable to contain the "rocking" of the "loneliness that roams." Morrison elevates the language of the "ship's motion" to describe an impossible "inside," what could "hold" "down"

[1] Morrison, Toni. *Beloved: A Novel* (United States: Paw Prints, 2008), 322.

and soothe "the rocker." Respite in the corporeal language of the body, "loneliness" "wrapped tight like skin" "that can be rocked," buttresses against the laws of the symbolic that govern her irremediable and structural absence: "[d]isremembered and unaccounted for, she cannot be lost because no one is looking for her."

A comportment of the metaphysics of Blackness, as an impossibility of Being (such as being for-itself and in-itself, for instance), onto-thanatology is animated through a drive towards obliteration. Against a drive for stasis, onto-thanatology is distinct from Freudian and neo-Freudian conceptions of the death drive/instinct. This relationship mirrors the tension between theories of Black social life untethered from the analytics of social life *within* social death, and conceptions of Blackness which posit a "living death [is] as much a death as it is a living."[2] Since Blackness has been assigned to the metaphysics of death as much as death has become the condition par excellence, the condition of (im)possibility, of Black life—a "living death"—death precedes, travels with, and haunts Blackness within the material and symbolic, leaving the scarred Black psyche within its limits of signification: the semiotics of psychosis.

This chapter analyzes the Black unconscious through the work of African and African American women's literature of madness. I examine two paradigmatic texts within a transnational literary milieu, Bessie Head's *A Question of Power* and Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro,* to argue that their texts, largely conceptualized under the analytics of (biracial) identity and (post)colonialism, elaborate, in fact, how Black people are barred from the horizon of being, from both immanence and transcendence, (this negation/barring operating) a constitutive element of the slave's onto-thanatology. I investigate the semiotics of psychosis constructed by Head and Kennedy, positing that their narratives of psychic disintegration within

[2] Sexton, Jared. "The Social Life of Social Death: on Afro-pessimism and Black Optimism." *InTensions* 5.1 (2011), 28.

the symbolic order displace Freud's metaphysics of the death drive. Additionally, I demonstrate that while the language the authors employ closely resembles a process of "subjective destitution"[3] unavailable to the Black psyche, the trope of madness appears dissembled within the language of Lacan's conception of "in between two deaths."[4] Head and Kennedy adopt the language of white women's madness—of anti-Black white femininity constructed in relation to and against Blackness— as a proxy for Being. I argue that these texts symptomatically reveal a drive toward death as an end to the current order of the metaphysics of Blackness—a drive to live a life as lived without death being its condition of impossibility. Differently put, the protagonists of both texts reveal a drive to die a death that is not constitutive of life being a living death in the service of others; a drive for one's onto-thanatology to not be the condition of possibility for humanity, for Being to envision a horizon and forge temporality.

Head and Kennedy deploy their protagonists' white mothers, to radically different ends, as props in crafting the subject of their texts. Using the currency of white women's humanity as a proxy for Being's plane of immanence, or presence, Head and Kennedy appropriate the narrative device of the trope of madness from Western white women's literary investments as a vehicle to communicate subjectivity. I am not suggesting that madness and Blackness are mutually exclusive categories, but rather that the signification of Black psychic suffering exceeds the symbolic register and remains illegible within our current analytics. In other words, Black psychic suffering remains illegible within psychoanalytic discourse that disavows the centrality of Blackness, and anti-Blackness, in how the unconscious is structured and analyzed. This is not

[3] Joan Copjec, in *Supposing the Subject* (London: Verso, 1996), writes of subjective destitution in the following excerpt: "Lacan calls the 'subjective destitution' which emerges precisely at the point of 'traversing the fundamental fantasy' (one of Lacan's formulas for the final point of analysis). In fleeing from subjective destitution, the subject plunges itself into action, hoping to preserve its status, unaware that this will entail the destitution anyway," 76.
[4] Lacan, Jacques, and Jacques-Alain Miller, "Antigone Between Two Deaths," *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII* (New York: Norton, 1992), 270-287.

an indictment of psychoanalysis as a field or discipline; rather, I am suggesting that the illegibility and disavowal of the onto-thanatology of the slave in our conceptions of the psyche parallel the foundations of psychoanalytic discourse itself. What exceeds and evades the language of signification is concomitant with what exceeds and evades the structure of the unconscious. With no other recourse than to read the disarticulation of the slave, to trace the path and "sound of one's own feet going," we must proceed toward the "[d]oor of [n]o return" to "always be aware of your [Black] presence as a presence outside of yourself." This present absence that Brand describes, Black thought rather than ontology as a mode of existence, is existing "doubly"—outside of oneself negated as self and a drive away from a metaphysics of stasis.

The "Primal Scene" of the Metaphysics of Blackness

In Head's *A Question of Power*, Elizabeth is the biracial protagonist who flees South Africa, and her husband, for neighboring Botswana. Upon entering the village of Motabeng with her young son, Elizabeth is soon plagued by nightmarish hallucinations, "[h]er so-called analytical mind was being shattered to pieces,"[5] in the form of the following Black figures: Dan, Sello and Medusa, and Sello-of-the-Brown-Suit. The reader learns early in the novel about Elizabeth's birth; her white mother, institutionalized under the Immorality Act after conceiving Elizabeth by a native African, "killed herself in the mental home."[6] Elizabeth's relationship to her own mental breakdown is one enduring tie to her mother. With the help of a white American named Tom and the cooperative farming community in her village, Elizabeth finds solace away from the Black phantasms in her psyche as well as the nationalist political discourse of the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. Head ends the novel claiming that Elizabeth has found

[5] Head, Bessie. *A Question of Power* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1974), 52-53. Hereafter cited as *QOP*.
[6] Head, *QOP*, 17.

"belonging," falling "into the warm embrace of the brotherhood of man."[7] Negro Sarah is similarly positioned as the biracial protagonist of *Funnyhouse of a Negro,* yet she, as the Duchess of Hapsburg (one of her "selves"), declares that Patrice Lumumba is her father who "haunted my very conception. He was a wild Black beast who raped my mother."[8] The drama is enacted by Sarah's various selves as Patrice Lumumba, Jesus, Queen Victoria, and the Duchess of Hapsburg. Described as "the Black shadow that haunted" her "mother's conceptions," the drama reveals that Sarah was born to a mother who "looked like a white woman"[9] and a Black father who eventually begs her forgiveness for contaminating her with his Blackness: "Forgiveness, Sarah, is it that you will never forgive me for being Black."[10] Hence, recognition of the desire to excise Blackness from the psyche appears as psychosis throughout Kennedy's play.

Since the corpus of scholarship on the political import of *A Question of Power* and *Funnyhouse of a Negro* ventures often into foci on biracial identity, autobiography of mental illness, or questions of nationalism and colonialism,[11] mining critical texts for insights about the Black psyche, outside of the recourse to the logic and discourse of multiracialism, remains

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[7] Head, *QOP*. 206

[8] Kennedy, Adrienne. *Funnyhouse of a Negro: A Play in One Act* (New York: S. French, 2011), 13. Hereafter cited as *Funnyhouse*.

[9] Kennedy, *Funnyhouse*, 7

[10] Kennedy, *Funnyhouse,* 23

[11] For a collection on Kennedy's work ranging from structural analyses of form, identity, and discourses on race, gender, and sexuality, see Bryant-Jackson, Paul K, and Lois M. Overbeck. *Intersecting Boundaries: The Theatre of Adrienne Kennedy* (Minneapolis, 1992). For single authored work on Kennedy's oeuvre, see: Diamond, Elin. "Rethinking Identification: Kennedy, Freud, Brecht." *The Kenyon Review* 15.2 (1993): 86-99; Fuchs, Elinor. "Adrienne Kennedy and the First Avant-Garde." *Intersecting Boundaries: The Theatre of Adrienne Kennedy* (1992): 76-84; Kolin, Philip C. *Understanding Adrienne Kennedy* (University of South Carolina Press, 2005); and, Sollors, Werner, "Owls and Rats in the American Funnyhouse: Adrienne Kennedy's Drama." *American Literature* 63.3 (1991): 507-532. For critical work on Head, see the following*:* Susan Gardner and Patricia E. Scott ed. *Bessie Head: A Bibliography* (Grahamstown, 1986); Ibrahim, Huma. *Emerging Perspectives on Bessie Head* (Trenton, 2004) and *Bessie Head: Subversive Identities in Exile* (University of Virginia Press, 1996); Lewis, Desiree. *Living on a Horizon: Bessie Head and the Politics of Imagining* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2007); Sample, Maxime. *Critical Essays on Bessie Head* (Westport, 2003); and, Veit-Wild, Flora. *Writing madness: borderlines of the body in African literature* (James Currey, 2006).

elusive. Reading Head's novel alongside Kennedy's play, however, provides a glimpse into what exceeds narratives of subjectivity mapped onto the authors vis-à-vis the protagonists of their texts. The historical particularities of accounts of psychic disintegration in southern Africa and New York City, the vagaries of the narrative devices of hallucination, delusion, and at times paranoia, also add to the unwieldiness of the works. Perhaps for this reason, Jacqueline Rose describes how "difficult," if not "impossible" it is "to decide on the question of madness in Head's novel."[12] Inarguably, Rose's "On the 'Universality' of Madness: Bessie Head's *A Question of Power*" is a paradigmatic essay in critical scholarship on Head's seminal work, combining research on Head's autobiographical work on writing,[13] with close readings of the novel in question. Similarly, Kimberly Benston delves into Kennedy's prefatorial statements in three of Kennedy's works published subsequent to *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, arguing that "Kennedy's writing exceeds our formulations by putting the question of meaning itself into question."[14] Within this excess of the particular—"madness"—resides the solitariness of a Black psyche "outside" of itself and the singularity of its inconsolability—a "loneliness that roams." While I have reservations with Rose's assertion that "madness" is Elizabeth's "original (mis)naming,"[15] it is for reasons that resonate with Benston's question about "the question of meaning." How does one extract meaning from the disarticulation of the slave when her suffering exceeds the language of signification available within the symbolic?

Benston posits that "Kennedy's work seems driven by a search for an incandescent touchstone of self-reference, some primal image, story, or scene, which would

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[12] Rose, Jacqueline. "On the 'universality' of Madness: Bessie Head's "a Question of Power"." *Critical Inquiry*. 20.3 (1994), 410. Hereafter cited as "On the 'universality' of Madness."
[13] Texts such as Head's *A Woman Alone: Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Craig MacKenzie (Oxford, 1990) and *Tales of Tenderness and Power* (Johannesburg, 1989).
[14] Benston, Kimberly W. *Performing Blackness: Enactments of African-American Modernism* (London: Routledge, 2000), 229
[15] Rose, "On the 'universality' of Madness," 410.

heal the self's constitution as wound or lack, its entrapment in dramas scripted from elsewhere."[16] The "search" for "self-reference" where there is only "lack" leads Benston to the conclusion that "every Kennedy work appears as its own simulacrum or double…casting an aura of compulsive self-exploration while leaving deepest concerns somehow excessive to representation, the subject neither quite present nor absent: familiar, veiled – spectral."[17] Benston's conjuring of the image of a "primary image, story, or scene" which could heal the "lack," or what I interpret as a facet of the metaphysics of Blackness distinct from lack in Lacan's topography, is mirrored in Rose's discussion of the "primal scene" in Head's text. Rose claims, "[I]f all primal scenes are in some sense unthinkable, this one, a case of miscegenation and its silencing, has been made doubly unthinkable for the child."[18] I find Rose's assertion that miscegenation between white women and Black men is a "primal scene" rendered silent, "made doubly unthinkable" for Black children, lacking the nuance of her analyses of the relationship between systems of power and psychoanalysis. Indeed, repression of an original trauma, according to Freud's conception of the repetition compulsion and/or mourning and melancholia, would figure into a schema wherein this "primal scene" of miscegenation would be silenced, only to reappear in the delusions and hallucinations of the protagonist. But how is this silencing experienced in the subjectivity of a Black woman who knows she is Black even though she wishes to wash herself of all residues of this "epidermal racial schema"[19]? The protagonist, Elizabeth, is under no delusions considering the circumstances of her birth which categorize her racially, and like Rose's analysis, Elizabeth's experience of the trauma of her Blackness is delineated through the silencing and shame passed down from white civil society. Being silenced

[16] Benston, *Performing Blackness,* 230.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Rose, "On the 'universality' of Madness," 409.
[19] Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press,1982), 92.

in the political realm, through legal recourse such as the Immorality Act, does not mean that this silencing is enacted within the quotidian lives of those inscribed as Black in anti-Black society. Benston grounds his assertions of Blackness' attempts to find "self-reference" in a "primal image" derived from an ontological experience of "entrapment in dramas scripted elsewhere." These "primal images" in Kennedy's play are the various selves of Sarah's and unlike Elizabeth's delusions, one of Sarah's selves is Black: Patrice Lumumba. This is not a matter of mere representation, but rather demonstrates that Kennedy's mobilization of whiteness alongside Blackness foregrounds the fungibility of the latter and the sedimentation of the former. If we are to take Brand's position, in *A Map to the Door of No Return*, that "[i]f to think is to exist doubly," then we are closer to understanding how the figuration of the biracial Black woman, as developed in both Head and Kennedy's work, resists "entrapment" in the discourse of the liminal—in the space between two structural positions of Blackness and whiteness, the liminal space of Antigone in Lacan's formulation of "in between two deaths," and the figure of the refugee that postcolonial theory would posit for Elizabeth: a 'colored' South African woman seeking exile in Botswana.

I argue that the Black psyche's inability to come to terms with a "living death" is not psychosis in the Freudian sense even though it adopts its semiotics. The psychic space of fantasy, what is deemed fantasy and reality, are wholly comprised by power relations we can map consciously and those that escape the symbolic register. As such, this world of fantasy in which psychosis is bound necessitates signification on the metaphysics of Blackness. Freud writes about psychosis' transformation of reality as follows:

> In a psychosis, the transforming of reality is carried out upon the psychical precipitates of former relations to it - that is, upon the memory-traces, ideas and judgements which have been previously derived from reality and by which reality was represented in the mind….

> Probably in a psychosis the rejected piece of reality constantly forces itself upon the mind, just as the repressed…Thus we see that both in neurosis and psychosis there comes into consideration the question not only of a *loss of reality* but also of a *substitute for reality*.[20]

While in Freud's conception hallucinations arising from psychosis serve as a substitute for reality, corresponding to the internal wishes of the subject and repudiating external factors of reality, we see where the membrane between internal and external, reality and fantasy collapse in the psyche of those marked by slavery's afterlife. Blackness circumvents the material factors internally and externally, turning wish fulfillment and nightmares into one. Put differently, Black life, the Black psyche—its "living death"—manifests as thinking "doubly" via an unyielding process of substituting reality in order to function in the world. Blackness cannot appear as a constitutive element of itself without adopting the grammar of psychosis because knowing so would accede that it is a shared constitution with anti-Blackness (whiteness or humanity). It would necessitate one to see one's psyche as not only split, but also its integrity evacuated.

The semiotics of psychosis allow these Black protagonists to reveal Blackness' banishment from the possibility of immanence even though the language of Head's narrative states otherwise. This banishment, through reference to the death drive, repeats, resists and is continually folded into whiteness as a drive not towards death, but for the destruction of the category of Blackness that plagues their psyches. Indeed, Lacan's reading of Antigone's "in between two deaths" is a tempting parallel. Antigone, in defiance of Creon's edict banning the burial of her brother, Polyneices, performs burial rites for him nevertheless causing Creon to sentence her to death. Rather than execute her directly, he decides to entomb her alive so that she will die a slow, protracted, and torturous death. Once entombed, however, Antigone chooses her second death—she hangs herself—just as she has chosen her first death by defying Creon. In

[20] Freud, 'The Loss of Reality in Neurosis and Psychosis' 1924 *C.P., 2,* 277-82. (Tr. Joan Riviere), 4096-4097.

Lacan's reading, Antigone declares herself both dead and as having a desire for death.[21] Her material death is repeated within the symbolic, and Lacan is most interested in the "second death, the one that you can still set your sights on once death has occurred…the human tradition has never ceased to keep this second death in mind by locating the end of our sufferings there."[22] While Antigone's sacrifice is most appealing to Lacan, so much so that he deems the "limit of the second death" the "phenomenon of the beautiful," Black suffering and the onto-thanatology of the slave are barred from the horizon of Lacan's "second death." For the first death, the material death which Antigone chooses is precisely that—a choice. The gratuitous violence constitutive of Blackness precedes death as a singular event since violence is a structuring agent in the (non)ontology of Black people. Moreover, the "second death" in the symbolic is also refused to Blackness: Black suffering, Black loss, Black life as value in excess of fungibility and accumulation is non-existent. In other words, in order for humanity to be seen as human—to be free—Blackness must be positioned as available for death, if not always already dead. As such, a "second death" within the symbolic would threaten the foundation of humanity, ontological presence. Black death must remain disavowed, invisible, and unregistered within the symbolic for death to be imagined as a location wherein "the end of our sufferings" could be exceeded by "the limit of the second death."[23] Lacan further defines the "second death" as "the point where the false metaphors of being…can be distinguished from the position of Being…itself."[24] Here, Lacan has effectively defined the metaphysics of humanity in relation to a disavowed metaphysics of Blackness—how the onto-thanatology of the slave is constructed through the similar "false metaphors of being," yet *indistinguishable* from the "position of Being...itself." In

[21] Lacan, Jacques, and Jacques-Alain Miller. *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII* (New York: Norton, 1992), 281.
[22] Ibid. 294-295.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid., 248.

so much as the past is relived in the present for Black people, and hospice is akin to all Black relational practice—from healing practices, cultural production, and Black radical politics—the metaphysics of Blackness have always already included a resistance to the contingency of its "living death." For Black people, there is no respite in death as an ethical choice when Black death is produced by the very unconscious posited, by Lacan, as an ethical injunction: "[th]e status of the unconscious is ethical, not ontic."[25]

The space of the Black psyche is the space of Black thought existing "doubly," experiencing one's "presence outside" as an absence. Blackness, then, is relegated to death twice over. Firstly, the gratuitous violence attendant to Black experience globally sediments Blackness as a structural position wherein material death—high infant and maternal mortality rates in the US and Africa, HIV and AIDS related deaths across the continent and diaspora, increasing suicide rates for Black children in the US, mass incarceration, neo-imperialism, migrant deaths in the Mediterranean, and continued enslavement of Black Africans by non-Blacks, to name but a few modes—is an intractable continuum. Secondly, there is a "living death" wherein Blackness is in a state of complete absence tethered to deathliness without end, unable to evade a circuit of existing "outside" of a door of no return. Patrice Lumumba, as Negro Sarah's father in the play, is dead yet is active, and activated, in his death, coming "through the jungle"[26] to find Sarah's selves. As opposed to the finite experience of death of Sarah's white mother, "she died," "my mother died," Lumumba is destined to keep returning, as Victoria proclaims, "Why does he keep returning? He keeps returning forever, coming back ever and keeps coming back forever. He is

[25] Lacan, Jacques, Jacques-Alain Miller, and Alan Sheridan. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), 34.
[26] Kennedy, *Funnyhouse*, 6, 10.

my father."[27] Deconstructing Blackness as a category through disarticulating the protagonist, Kennedy's text proclaims: "out of life and death essential—I find it necessary to maintain a stark fortress against recognition of myself. My white friends, *like myself*, will be shrewd, intellectual and anxious for death. Anyone's death**.** I will mistrust them, as I do myself, waver in their opinion of me, as I waver in the opinion of myself**.**"[28] The disavowal of Black death, its refusal to be made meaningful in the symbolic, cannot be articulated as truth because it cannot speak itself into existence. Black death animated in the flesh becomes conjoined with death in the abstract when Black absence as a phenomenological, ontological and psychic condition is cast aside as unreal, or unimaginable. In other words, one's feeling of/as nothing is it is all in Black people's heads. Yet, this positionality of Blackness—its metaphysics—is the unconscious foundation to how *all* psyches operate. Elizabeth's phantasms are governed by the Blackness of the night, hating Dan and Sello's "black hands," pervasive "black shadows" and "black, deep bitter rage."[29] The epidermalization of Blackness becomes secondary to it as an idea and category that can be weaponized in the service of white supremacy. For instance, in her work on Fanon, Ann Pellegrini writes:

> white and black subjects alike form their body-selves intersubjectively, in a dialectic of inside/outside…what starkly distinguishes "white" and "black" experiences of bodily consciousness, however, is their differential situation within the historico-psychical network of "race"… the push-pull between "what is real and what is psychical" is all the more jarring for subjects who must embody and signify the borderlands of dominant frames of reference.[30]

In contrast to Pellegrini, I argue that Blackness, and Black people, do not "signify the borderlands of dominant frames of reference" even though they embody a positionality outside

[27] Kennedy, *Funnyhouse*, 6.
[28] Kennedy, *Funnyhouse*, 9.
[29] Head, *QOP*, 128, 183, 97, 17.
[30] Pellegrini, Ann. *Performance Anxieties: Staging Psychoanalysis, Staging Race* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 103.

of it. Blackness, although relegated outside, destined to not return in one sense, is both predicative and attributive. Hence, when Fanon states, "A feeling of inferiority? No, a feeling of not existing,"[31] he is discussing how the "historico-psychical network" of "race" as an outcome of Blackness being made a category, turned into irremediable, and unredressed, loss has undergird ontology since racial slavery. As such, the relationship between Blackness and deathliness, Black death not recognized as loss and barred from the horizon of death, is metaphorized in both primary textual sites of this chapter as the Black psyche's resistance to (its own) anti-Blackness.

The protagonists' psychic resistance, a drive toward the eradication of anti-Black intrusions—one death of sorts—is distinct from a desire for physical death in Kennedy's work, even though the protagonist, Negro Sarah, at the end of the play, is declared to have died by hanging: "The poor bitch has hung herself."[32] In contrast, Head's protagonist is rescued, brought back from being "nearly dead,"[33] by Tom, a white peace core volunteer. Head describes the scene as a war over the soul of Elizabeth—a soul entombed in a "coffin"—in the following passage: "The two men were conducting, in different ways, a fierce struggle over her nearly dead coffin. He was screwing in the nails. That afternoon he dramatically produced the day and time of death."[34]Striving for what Fanon calls "lactification,"[35] Elizabeth, like Fanon's description of the Black man who "cannot take pleasure in his insularity" and for whom "there is only one way out, and it leads to the white world,"[36] is not just rescued from the brink of death, she is rescued from her own Blackness and *into* the fold of humanity according to the narrative logic of the text.

[31] Fanon, *BSWM*, 118.
[32] Kennedy, *Funnyhouse*, 24.
[33] Head, *QOP*, 187.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Fanon, *BSWM*, 29.
[36] Ibid., 33.

After declaring to Tom, "I love you" to which he responds, "Don't you love everyone?... Isn't that love, not only for people but vegetables too," Elizabeth experiences a recovery: "Her soul-death was really over in that instant, though she did not realize it. He seemed to have, in an intangible way, seen her sitting inside that coffin, reached down and pulled her out. The rest she did herself. She was poised from that moment to make the great leap out of hell."[37] Elizabeth's ties to Blackness, the "coffin" in which Sello and death have reserved for her, are dissimulated in the love she feels for Tom. In so doing, she achieves immanence through whiteness—white love, white comradery, white companionship—as signification for life itself. I am not positing that there is something abnormal in Elizabeth's behavior or desires. Rather, I am suggesting that the world constructed of white psychic investments bound in the ontological closure necessitating Blackness as negation and absence require us to explore how the metaphysics of Blackness operates in the Black psyche as an effect of a historical schema. I argue that there is much more to learn about the relationship between Blackness and death, death as in both the deathliness that is averred in Black people's lives—materially—and a second death that occurs when the Black psyche realizes that she is "always already dead to the world."[38] Rose is correct in positing "a question of madness" in Head's text. Elizabeth's attempt to steal herself away from Blackness through phantasmatically entering into the social category of whiteness is certainly *a*, if not the, question of power. Perhaps Freud's assessment of the recalcitrance of "the kernel of the ego,"[39] its resistance to change, is fruitful for diagnosing the violence of a world that perpetuates such

[37] Head, *QOP*, 188
[38] Moyaert, P. "The Death Drive and the Nucleus of the Ego: an Introduction to Freudian Metaphysics." *Southern Journal of Philosophy*. 51 (2013): 118.
[39] Freud, Sigmund, and C J. M. Hubback. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (London: The International Psycho-analytical Press, 1922), 19.

fantasy.[40] Yet how does the Black psyche negotiate this recalcitrance to change, "being anxious about death," *in others*?

I do not believe that this recalcitrance appears similarly in the structure of the Black psyche since Freud's formula is dependent upon an ego that is structured as white, meaning already recognized in the world—inside of it. For those who are socially dead, this "inertia"[41] that Freud posits is what makes objects out of *people*, not solely civilization in an abstract manner. This negotiation of knowing oneself as an object made from other people's imagination appears as the Black psyche's own disarticulation, a reflection of its ontological banishment. Within the symbolic, it is made to appear within the language of psychosis and its vehicle is madness. It is no wonder, then, that Rose compares Elizabeth's recourse to a multiracial community at the end of the novel to the ends of analysis: "Bessie Head's character goes through something we could call-with the crucial difference that there is no analyst present-her own talking cure."[42] The ends of analysis, or 'subjective destitution' in Lacan's formulation, would entail disavowing Elizabeth, and Sarah's, desire for their own destruction by coming into a whiteness of their own. This whiteness, however, can only be achieved by proxy—through the mental illness their mothers suffer. White femininity is an implicit trope in these texts, with the use of feminine subjectivity as a narrative device indicating a death drive undergirding these texts. Rose's essay includes discussion of the use of madness in Head's novel, stating: "Charles Larson wrote: 'Bessie Head's *A Question of Power* is important not solely because it is an introspective novel by an African woman but because the topics of her concern are also, for the most part, foreign to African fiction... madness, sexuality, guilt'; 'almost single-handedly [she

[40] Similar to how Freud implicates the death instinct as a destructive force in the world in *Civilization and its Discontents.* But as Moyaert's essay brilliantly discusses, there is a different aspect of Freud's death instinct that is passive rather than aggressive. It is this aspect to which I will return later.
[41] Moyaert, The Death Drive and the Nucleus of the Ego," 102, 104, 113.
[42] Rose, "On the 'universality' of Madness," 408.

has] brought about the inward turning of the African novel'."[43] Indeed, one must be attentive to the historical record whenever writing about the relationship between Blackness and mental illness when the historical discourse concerning psycho-pathology and the development of conjectured mental illnesses (such as schizophrenia and drapetomania,[44] for instance) is deeply embedded in racial regimes that assign pathology to Africans and African descended peoples. I am neither suggesting that madness, or mental illness, evades Black people, nor am I implying that there is no interiority of which to speak when it concerns the subjective experiences of Black women. What I am proposing, however, is that the Black psyche is as fungible as the Black body, mobilized at the whims of discourse as much as by others (including Black people) for the purposes of white enjoyment. Both Head and Kennedy's texts animate the Black psyche's awareness of itself as an object of traumas, fears, and anxieties as well as Blackness as a shorthand for death. This does not indicate a lack of mastery over the mind or mental faculties, but rather the antithesis. Thinking "doubly," the split Black psyche can mobilize its unconscious recognition of wanting to be a life rather than a "living death" *and* simultaneously mobilize its fungibility in the service of that resistance. The unavoidable dissonance of this process is when the Black unconscious attempts to excise Blackness out of itself by mobilizing *anti-Black*ness. Moreover, this process is not about choice: it is a fundamental condition of a split Black psyche reckoning with the white psyche's embeddedness within its own, viewing itself from "outside." The split Black psyche constituted by anti-Blackness wanting to excise Blackness from the self is not the same as wanting to die, as we see in the incongruity between the endings of both texts.

[43] Rose, "On the 'universality' of Madness," 402-403.
[44] Jonathan Metzl opens his text, *The Protest Psychosis: How Schizophrenia Became a Black Disease*, with the following: "It is well, known, of course, that race and insanity share a troubled past. In the 1850's, American psychiatrists believed that African American slaves who ran away from their white masters did so because of a mental illness called drapetomania," ix. *The Protest Psychosis: How Schizophrenia Became a Black Disease* (Boston, Mass: Beacon, 2011).

Unlike the "gesture of belonging" in the "brotherhood of man" Elizabeth finds in "the opposite of Africa"[45]—or Blackness' antagonist, the Human community comprised of everyone else but Black people—Kennedy's text ends after Sarah's landlady discloses that "[t]he poor bitch has hung herself," with one line about Sarah's father: "Her father is a nigger who eat [sic] his meals on a white glass table."[46] There is nothing linear about the narrative of *Funnyhouse of a Negro* and the ending refuses the horizon bestowed upon Head's protagonist. The reader, and audience, are unclear about whether or not Sarah, or her father, have hung themselves, but that is precisely the point; the material death of these two characters are secondary, albeit linked by virtue of the death attendant to Blackness *beyond* the physical.

It would be easier to read the variance in the endings of these two works as a matter of political ideology or to deconstruct the social differences between biracial identity in the US versus South Africa. Undoubtedly, history does matter in how we subjectively bear its weight, but the recording of history is also a subjective enterprise. What Head and Kennedy's texts also demonstrate is the impossibility of comparative analysis of African and Black diasporic identity *and* Black (global) structural positionality since the former is multifarious and the latter is singular. However, both are the products of significant historical events underscoring what Anthony Paul Farley has described as "perfecting slavery": "The story of progress up from slavery is a lie, the longest lie…And slavery is death."[47] Achille Mbembe also posits that "[t]he slave trade had ramifications that remain unknown to us; to a large extent, the trade was the event through which Africa was born to modernity."[48] If one were to maintain that these texts were about the vagaries of specific events of twentieth century racial violence or the political

[45] Head, *QOP*, 206
[46] Kennedy, *Funnyhouse*, 24.
[47] Farley, A P. "Perfecting Slavery." *Loyola University of Chicago Law Journal*. 36 (2004): 222.
[48] Mbembe, Joseph A. *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 13.

status of Black people in the US and Africa, then Kennedy's allusions to Africa seem as irreconcilable as Head's reference to the KKK: "What did mothers, Black mothers, say to children whose fathers had been lynched by the Ku Klux Klan in America? She had a picture of a Southern lynch mob, a whole group of white men and women. Two Black men hung dead from a tree. The lynchers were smiling."[49] Elizabeth's question of the Klan's presence in America is directly followed by reference to the Black woman she hallucinates, Medusa, as a displacement for the signifier of racial terror assigned to the KKK: "Medusa smiled like that [the lynchers] in her mental images, but Medusa was as close as her own breathing, and each night she looked straight into Medusa's powerful Black eyes. It was tracing evil to its roots. The eyes of the lynch mob were full of comprehension, bold, consciousness, deliberate."[50] Kennedy's inclusion of Africa, via one of the protagonist's "selves" as Patrice Lumumba, his personification as the continent's "jungle," or the "ebony mask" with which he is bludgeoned links Africa and the US through the metaphysical properties of Blackness as Africanness. Throughout the drama, the long durée of racial slavery and its psychic afterlife appear on a continuum through the "libidinal economy"[51] of violence. *Funnyhouse of a Negro*'s displacement of the sexual violence of miscegenation on the Black male figure of Patrice Lumumba and *A Question of Power*'s displacement of the racial violence of lynching (often a punishment over the perceived threat of miscegenation) onto the figure of Medusa demonstrate how the "epidermal racial schema" of Blackness, or its relegation to the physical alone, is auxiliary to the psychic fantasies in which Blackness, as a product of racial slavery, circulates. As such, I argue that we must investigate the

[49] Head, *QOP*, 44.
[50] Ibid.
[51] I am using Jared Sexton's definition of libidinal economy as cited in Frank B. Wilderson III's *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010): "the whole structure of psychic and emotional life," "the economy, or distribution and arrangement, of desire and identification (their condensation and displacement), and the complex relationship between sexuality and the unconscious" and "a dispensation of energies, concerns, points of attention, anxieties, pleasures, appetites, revulsions, and phobias capable of both great mobility and tenacious fixation," 7.

Black psyche and the figurative registers of the lost archive of racial slavery therein to elucidate what is untranslatable in the magnitude of slavery's breach. One such figuration, the semiotics of psychosis, illuminates Black anti-Blackness as a constitutive element of itself—a product of the white imagination within the foundation of the Black unconscious. This is recognition of one's self as both double and split, a non-being (in relation to Human others) severed from a history one can't quite remember but also cannot forget has been lost, what Brand describes as the "place which holds the before of history."[52] If slavery's archive speaks through the living dead in these texts, it is through and against the language of history, the language of madness, that they *attempt* to speak "outside" of themselves.

I speak for me.
—Jacques Lacan, "Antigone Between Two Deaths"

The comparisons between the two texts appear to rest cursorily at the motif of madness and the protagonists' shared biracial identity as the use of Blackness within the hallucinations described in these works are alarmingly similar. I am not interested in psychoanalyzing the characters, or their authors, although to examine and articulate the effects of the violence of anti-Blackness onto the Black psyche always poses the risk of veering one's discourse to the language of diagnostics. I am prepared to take that risk since to speak of the unspeakable—what these authors have designated through signposts, fragmentation, nightmares, and hallucinations—can never be quantified, or qualified, by the language assigned to diagnosticians. Poets and philosophers are more equipped for the undertaking. To that end, the onto-thanatology of the slave is disclosed through repetitions of the tropes of Blackness in *Funnyhouse of a Negro* and the terrorizing images of Blackness in *A Question of Power*. These figurations of Blackness

[52] Brand, Dionne. *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2002), 89.

are attendant to the manufacturing of a metaphysics in their use, legitimation, and circulation over several centuries in the interests of anti-Blackness, or the humanist project writ large. The repetitions in Kennedy's play engage the tropes of Blackness, "Black is evil" "Black was evil," divulging how the Black psyche continues to struggle with the ongoing condition of ontological negation through the repetition of the material event of death. The Black conscious and unconscious must repeat—reliving physical death as a facet of a "living death"— the trauma of captivity and genocide. Witnessing the continued "fungibility"[53] of Blackness that is not contingent on the historical passage of slavery but as its material record—the bodies made flesh on slave ships quantified in ledgers—the Black psyche battles the stranglehold of the onto-thanatological: recognizing that she cannot die a death recognized as such. This recognition, and resistance to it, is revealed in the Manichean language Kennedy deploys in delineating the function of Blackness within both the symbolic and imaginary. The following phrases echo throughout the drama: "…he who is darkest of them all, the darkest one," "Black man, Black man," "He haunted my very conception. He was a wild Black beast who raped my mother," "haunted my conception, diseased my birth," "Black negro," "He is a Black Negro," "My friends will be white. I need them as an embankment," "Hide me here so the jungle will not find me. Hide me," "Hide me from the jungle," "The wild Black beast put his hands on her," "The wild Black beast raped me and now my skull is shining."[54]Blackness, here, contaminates, negating the discourses of mixed race identity as liminal or shared. Hence, Negro Sarah is not situated within an interstitial space between Black and white, but rather enters the scene described by Kennedy thusly: "She is the NEGRO. The most noticeable aspect of her looks is her wild kinky hair." In

[53] Hartman, Saidiya V. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 21.

[54] Kennedy, *Funnyhouse*, 6.

other words, the play's focus on the "kinky hair" that falls out of balding skulls, the split skull of Patrice Lumumba, and the repeated references to miscegenation within the language of anti-Black anxiety and fantasies—the myth of the Black male rapist, for example—undermines interpretations of Negro Sarah as suffering a liminal position from her mixed raced heritage. Blackness is central to the violence the characters experience in the play, and sexual violence, alongside the language of madness, is one primary mode of its conveyance.

Similarly, *A Question of Power* deploys the language of sexual violence in terms of Blackness, proffering the Black female figure of Medusa to wield some of the novel's most brutal psychic violence. Head portrays Elizabeth as "a pinned down victim of approaching death"[55] as Medusa, described as able to "hurl a thunderbolt like nothing ever seen before and shatter a victim into a thousand fragments,"[56] wields her Black female body against Elizabeth: "Without any bother for decencies she sprawled her long Black legs in the air, and the most exquisite sensation travelled out of her towards Elizabeth."[57] The reader is left to wonder about the nature of Medusa's indecency—is it the act of bearing her legs or is it the sensation that her Blackness creates in Elizabeth? What is so dangerous about the Black female body for this Black protagonist's psyche other than the erotic sensations she induces in Elizabeth? It is not solely Medusa's body that instills terror in Elizabeth, but rather the metaphysical notion of evil that is attendant to her Blackness. The narrator describes Medusa as having the "air of one performing a skilled and practiced murder,"[58] and Elizabeth sees herself as vulnerable to the particular evil that Blackness represents. Medusa becomes the stand in for the world that infects Elizabeth, like Lumumba "contaminates" Sarah, and constructs her openness to violence: "she was in an easily

[55] Head, *QOP*, 87.
[56] Head, *QOP*, 43.
[57] Head, *QOP*, 44.
[58] Head, *QOP*, 87.

invaded world…it had to happen that Medusa should assault her."[59] Elizabeth's projection of aggressivity onto this Black female figuration is heightened in her delusions of Medusa as a symbol for the anti-Black violence of the KKK:

> Medusa was as close as her own breathing, and each night she looked straight into Medusa's powerful Black eyes. It was tracing the evil to its roots. The eyes of the lynch mob were uncomprehendingly evil. Medusa's eyes were full of comprehension, bold, conscienceless, deliberate: 'I will it. Nothing withstands my power. I create evil. I revel in it. I know of no other life. From me flows the dark stream of terror and destruction.[60]

The intimacy of the southern lynch mob smiling at the bodies of two Black men "hung dead from a tree" are infused into "Medusa's powerful Black eyes." Even more startling in Elizabeth's hallucination is the projection of "comprehension"— "bold, conscienceless, deliberate"—she attaches to Medusa in contrast with the "uncomprehendingly evil" eyes of the white mob. Medusa's "power" to "create" and "revel" in "evil," however, is contingent upon the Blackness that is the core of such "evil." It is this nucleus, "evil to its roots," from which "the dark stream of terror and destruction" flows. Thus, the narrative trajectory of Elizabeth's hallucinations is akin to mythic fairy tales of pure-hearted protagonists who must battle the forces of evil threatening to engulf the world. Yet, Elizabeth's psychosis is induced by real historical violence which she communicates clearly at times such as the anti-Blackness of whites and the political violence of apartheid. Part of her subjective interpretations of the racial violence of apartheid concerns her biracial identity and Medusa is the figure par excellence that taunts Elizabeth for not being African, or Black, enough. Medusa tells her, "Africa is troubled waters, you know…You'll only drown here. You're not linked up to the people. You don't know any African languages…that's your people, not African people…You have to die like them…Dog, filth, the

[59] Head, *QOP*, 105-106.
[60] Head, *QOP*, 92.

Africans will eat you to death."[61] This feeling of not being African, or Black, enough for Elizabeth returns at the end of the novel when Elizabeth is rescued by Tom. Again, Elizabeth conjures the KKK, this time (rightly) attributing it to Tom's structural position as he reminds her of what she exclaimed to him during her last hallucination: "Tom, do you think you can escape the taint of the Klu Klux Klan? You're tainted with it too. You're all bastards."[62] Her resolution of this analogy, though, between Tom and the KKK reaches a far different conclusion that when she maps it on to the figure of a Black person. Tom laughs off her reference and they proceed to discuss the Black power movement in the US. Elizabeth states that she would be "ashamed to stick a fist in the air" because these gestures are too exclusive. She tells Tom, "I don't like it…it only needs a Hitler to cause an explosion…I don't like exclusive brotherhoods for Black people only. They wouldn't want you. You're not Black.'" For Elizabeth, expressions of *Black* power, Black nationalism, African languages—all forms of Black communal experience—are *more* perilous, not equal, to the racial violence of the Klu Klux Klan. For a novel that presents itself as "a question," a question of *power*, no less, the protagonist's hallucinations and political disposition mirror the logic of hegemonic structures that would deny the rights of self-definition and self-governance to the oppressed. But perhaps this is the question the novel proposes, a question about power as a malleable entity and condition. A question about whether power is about the ability to act alone or act in concert with the rules of power structures. Or if the question of wielding power resides in the psychic malleability of its hosts. However, Elizabeth is not a political figure; and, a text which speaks of madness must speak madly if the Black figure is to appear to speak at all.

[61] Head, *QOP*, 44-45.
[62] Head, *QOP*, 187.

Kennedy's play heightens the stakes of madness, as *Funnyhouse of a Negro* has been characterized as postmodern, avant-garde, representative of the theatre of the absurd, and surrealist. Unlike *A Question of Power*, Kennedy's one-act drama foregrounds anti-Blackness as a pathology rather than the pharmakon. The text vacillates between a drive to excise Blackness and one to adjudicate its absent presence. Sarah's selves speak explicitly about their disdain and fear of Blackness, so much so that it is the character of Jesus—a non-Black Jesus— that declares bluntly, "I have tried so to escape him, through God Almighty I have tried to escape being Black."[63] The language the play employs indicates that Sarah recognizes her problem, the problem of madness, is an ontological one. Her onto-thanatology is enacted within the dialogue about the idea of Blackness as negation: "I want to possess no moral value, particularly value as to my being. I want not to be. I ask nothing except anonymity."[64] Sarah's assertion that she finds it "necessary to maintain a stark fortress against recognition" of herself (singular, not the multiple "selves" enacted in the play) is buttressed by her father's pleas to seek "forgiveness" for his Blackness: "forgiveness, Sarah, forgiveness for my being Black, Sarah. I know you are a child of torment."[65] Moreover, the "kinky hair" of the protagonist, and the other "selves" on the stage, provide synechdochal reference to the Blackness pervading the piece. The "wild, kinky hair" of Negro Sarah, the Duchess, and Queen Victoria in contrast to the "bald skull shining" of her mother, the "bald head" brought out on stage at the commencement of the drama, and the "ebony skull" her father "carries about with him,"[66] are not meaningful in themselves, but rather to the extent that meaning is attached to the physical and metaphysical properties of Blackness. But what does the play signify in terms of what is the proper of Blackness? The title of the play

[63] Kennedy, *Funnyhouse*, 21.
[64] Kennedy, *Funnyhouse*, 8.
[65] Kennedy, *Funnyhouse*, 18.
[66] Kennedy, *Funnyhouse*, 6, 14, 5-6, 11.

expresses an element of self-derision and is derived from the funhouse: an architecture equipped with floors that shift to impede movement, mirrors that distort—all the accoutrements to disfigure, deceive, and alter reality to create terror and/or laughter. Kennedy's drama shrewdly employs the entertainment venue of the amusement park to craft a non-linear narrative of derangement wherein the disorder of the Manicheanisms undergirding the plays' motifs evince and induce disequilibrium: the disequilibrium reflective of the Black psyche's processing of itself as racially overdetermined and ontologically bound.

The volatility of the narrative, shifts in characters, and repetition of racially overdetermined stereotypes of Blackness, and whiteness, coalesce, prompting psychic insecurity. Here, the ground of ideology and conceptualizations of being are literally, in the funhouse, and metaphorically, through the staging of the play, tipping beneath the landscape of its inhabitants, viewers, and readers. Sarah, however, tells us that she cannot believe in the "places" in which her "selves" "exist."[67] She cannot "believe in places" because "[t]o believe in places is to know hope and to know hope and to know the emotion of hope is to know beauty. It links us across a horizon and connects us to the world."[68] Hence, Sarah finds "there are no places," only her "funnyhouse"[69] wherein she must hide so "the nigger" and "the jungle"[70] will not find her. *Funnyhouse* presents refuge in whiteness, at least in Sarah's delusions, as a space wherein Blackness contaminates physically, yet the ontological negation indicative of Blackness remains "forever": "Why does he keep returning? He keeps returning forever, coming back ever and keeps coming back forever. He is my father."[71] The inversion of *partus sequitur ventrem* provides no protection and that is precisely the point of Kennedy's demonstration of the onto-

[67] Kennedy, *Funnyhouse*, 10, 4.
[68] Kennedy, *Funnyhouse*, 10.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Kennedy, *Funnyhouse*, 12.
[71] Kennedy, *Funnyhouse*, 6.

thanatology of the slave. That the legal status of enslavement, citizenship, and the fortifications of civil society are mere disarticulations of the slave's "banishment" from ontology.[72] This expulsion from the position of the Human plagues Sarah's hallucinations similar to Elizabeth's, yet Kennedy provides no theory of political or ontological redress for the world's perpetual thanatological investment in maintaining Blackness as a shield from anxieties about death. Put differently, the possibility of a horizon—for Elizabeth and Sarah's entrance into humanity, what "links us across a horizon and connects us to the world"—is refuge from Blackness.

Sarah indeed wishes to evade existing "doubly"—among the dead, the living dead who keep returning because it is a deathliness without end. However, it is Elizabeth who by virtue of her hallucinations hides in a "hallucinatory" whiteness, a way out of her epidermal branding. Fanon discloses his role as a psychoanalyst in treating "hallucinatory lactification" thusly: "I must help my patient to *'consciousnessize'* his unconscious, to no longer be tempted by a hallucinatory lactification, but also to act along the lines of a change in social structure."[73] *Funnyhouse*, like Sarah, "knows" no "hope." Sarah identifies with her "almost white" mother but cannot "hide" the fact of her "kinky hair." In addition, her mother's proximity to whiteness cannot, in Sarah's mind, rescue her, or her child, from the contamination of Blackness. In the end, "[i]n life, identification is limited only by the play of endless analogies, but death is like nothing at all."[74] Kennedy's work mocks the notion of a coherent self through the characterization of Negro Sarah's white and Black "selves," delineating the collusion of anti-Blackness along with white supremacy on the psyche of Black people. These manifestations enact a closed circuit of being through the negated spaces of the play—the "funnyhouse" over *there* but not quite *here*, nowhere where Sarah can hide and not be located by the returning dead.

[72] Wilderson III, *Red, White & Black*, 18.
[73] Fanon, *BSWM*, 80.
[74] Wilderson III, *Red, White & Black*, 91.

There is no possibility for Sarah to wrest free of the desire "not to be" because the only recognition of her as non-being derives from the Black psyche split from itself. Thinking, existing "doubly," Sarah recognizes both a necessity "to maintain a stark fortress against recognition" of herself and the futility of the white femininity of her mother—her madness, psychic derangement, and immanence through a white maternal horizon.

The trope that links both protagonists, in their hallucinations, unconscious desires, and/or preconscious interests, is the white mother. And in order for Elizabeth, in *A Question of Power*, to speak, for her speech—for her psyche—to be legible, she must make herself, her suffering, legible. In one sense, the text *is* a quintessential novel of madness because Elizabeth needs to hallucinate herself as the subject of anti-Blackness in order to maintain the fantasy that she is a liminal subject. Rose discusses the literature on the history of conceptions of individual personhood and interiority as they were mapped differentially onto white and Black bodies:

> According to the dominant mythology, African identity was collective (read more dependent, immature), not individual, but African men had gained the rudiments of individual personhood from their contact with Europeans, a contact which African women lacked. The contrast with European womanhood is striking. In the West, women have if anything been reduced to mere interiority; it is their restricted and privileged domain. In Africa, interiority may be a white burden and myth foisted onto the Blacks-the mark of humanity in the Western mind- but that does not prevent it from being something of which the African woman is deprived…Paranoia-voices in the head-is of course the perfect metaphor for colonisation-the takeover of body and mind. In this case, the use which Head makes of it in her writing also serves to undo one of the prevalent myths-African women do not go mad-of colonisation itself. [75]

Rose is accurate that the "social structures" of which Fanon speaks that assign the "privileged domain" of "interiority" onto white women, but as a "burden" to Blacks, is a mode of profound psychic violence. More importantly, Rose equates this interiority as a "mark of humanity in the Western mind" to which African women are "deprived" but fails to delineate exactly how Head

[75] Rose, "On the 'universality' of Madness," 405.

"makes use of" "voices in the head" to "undo" the assumption that Black women do not suffer from colonial violence. A few passages later, Rose assigns Head's biracial status, "[s]ince Head is half white," as the reason for Head's "capacity for psychic crossover and identification which adds a further dimension of 'universality' to her writing."[76] Whiteness, for Rose, Head's "half-white" status, is what bestows "capacity" to Head's subjectivity, her ability to translate how the violence of colonization makes "African women" go mad. But is it by virtue of Head's mixed race or the trope of madness itself that lends her work, her suffering, "crossover and identification"?

Head and Kennedy's use of the traditional trope of the tragic mulata in the Black power and Black internationalist moment of the 1960s and 1970s resurrects, symptomatically, the antebellum literary device. A rich African American literary tradition, the story of the tragic mulata is part of an abolitionist archive and an approximation in the US of the subjectivity of the enslaved that Africa lacks. Africa's reticence to discuss and amnesia about slavery, in terms of literary discourse at least, has had profound psycho-political consequences, as Mbembe has noted. For this reason, placing Head's text in conversation with Kennedy's is a provocation against silence. Illustrative of how anti-Black violence—both inside and outside the psyche (for there is no clear line of demarcation)—begins to destroy one from an *asserted* interior, the interiority that both Elizabeth and Sarah convey is crafted through whiteness as proxy: the whiteness of their mothers' disease of madness. Two Black female protagonists with white mothers, who, like their white mothers, have gone 'mad' subtly invokes how whiteness is still a property of madness in a global racial imaginary. Sarah claims her Black father had raped and killed her mother— "He killed the light"[77]—and the reader learns of Elizabeth's mother's

[76] Rose, "On the 'universality' of Madness," 412-413
[77] Kennedy, *Funnyhouse*, 22.

institutionalization as a result of pregnancy from "the stable boy, who was a native."[78] The creation story of both mixed race protagonists is rendered as an act of violence against white women. By virtue of this perceived violence, then, the products of miscegenation bear the violence of Black anti-Blackness as much as they *psychically* suffer, at least in the semiotics of psychosis, for being "half-white" trapped in bodies read as Black/coloured. However, it is the vulnerability of Blackness, and of Black femininity denied, that is the true *ur* text of both works. Processing Black women's vulnerability to gratuitous violence through the use of white women's psychic property, and "privilege," of madness allows them the fantasy of safety against the "fungibility" of their Black female bodies.

The reader, in following Elizabeth's mental breakdown, witnesses the psychic intrusions couched in the language of anti-Blackness and how they begin to destroy Elizabeth from a borrowed interiority. The ontological paradigm of the world, Blackness as negation and whiteness as presence, is inverted in *A Question of Power*, with Elizabeth being rescued from "near death" by a phantasmatic double entrance into whiteness. She is described as "pulled" out of a "coffin" by Tom, the peace corps volunteer, and she is metaphysically and psychically delivered from near death vis-à-vis her proximity to whiteness: her mother's physical body, her status as 'coloured', and her political status as a refugee. In other words, the narrative unfolds her progressive approximation of her subject status as human through the political category of refugee, but through white humanity, and her adoption of whiteness. Immediately after being told, "[w]hen you were six years old we heard that your mother had suddenly killed herself in the mental home," Elizabeth ruminates about while filiation through her ties with her maternal grandmother: "grandmother, her defiance, her insistence on filial ties in a country where people

[78] Head, *QOP*, 16.

were not people at all."[79] However, what appears as alienated subjectivity through the semiotics of madness is based upon the lexicon of white female interiority through the lineage of her mother—not a biological lineage based on consanguinity, but a lineage based on the etiology of madness. Black women cannot take psychic or material refuge in the fragility of Black female bodies, hence Elizabeth is soothed by the idea of white filiation[80] even though the reader is left to question which people in South Africa, and according to *whom*, "were not people at all." If all drives are paths "toward death,"[81] in the Lacanian schema, then Elizabeth's passage through psychosis serves as a phantasmatic conduit to her entrance into humanity. Madness serves as a hallucinatory passage into filiation that would grant her, in fantasy, access to white subjectivity. Psychosis signifies substitution of a mad self for ontological negation. One drop of Black blood, regardless of whether it comes from the mother or the father, carries metaphysically. For instance, in *Funnyhouse* it is in the dangers of "kinky hair" and the jungles of Africa. In *A Question of Power*, the metaphysics of Blackness pervade every phantasm of Elizabeth's nightmares. And no amount of whiteness can save these protagonists from ontological negation. Elizabeth's transcendence "out of hell"[82] through madness, or the language of immanence through her entrance into multiracial community—"Elizabeth is [God's] prophet"[83]—is a narrative, psychic and ontological foil for the onto-thanatology of the slave.

> You know, in films, when you see dead people, pretending to be dead, and it's just living people lying down? Well, that's not what dead people look like. Dead people… look like things. I like to make people into things, then I can own them.
> —Culvertin Smith, "The Lying Detective," *Sherlock*

[79] Head, *QOP*, 17.
[80] For detailed analysis on white filiation and affiliation as a Human grammar in distinction to the Slave's deracination, see Wilderson III, *Red White & Black*.
[81] Lacan, Jacques. *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Norton, 2006), 18.
[82] Head, *QOP*, 188.
[83] Head, *QOP*, 206.

I do not conceive of the metaphysics of Blackness as an Aristotelean metaphysical principle existing prior to racialized slavery. Rather, the metaphysics of Blackness are born out of a political ontology rooted in a particular, historically contingent metaphysical breach inaugurated by slavery, and persist in its psychic afterlife. If, as Saidiya Hartman states, "history is how the secular world attends to the dead,"[84] then the metaphysics of Blackness through the onto-thanatology of the slave presents us with an opportunity to imagine alternative forms of theorizing not only our relationships to the dead, or death, but also how we are deprived of relationality through death, deathliness—positioned always already outside "the door of no return." Paul Moyaert's reading of Freud's death drive is useful in delineating the distinction between the human death drive and the onto-thanatology of the slave. Moyaert defines Freud's death instinct as the "death that ultimately brings life to an end is thus also seen to come before life and to accompany it along its course."[85] Interpreting the "kernel of the ego" as invaded by this inertia—what is resistant to change, with "no tendency to move, no anima, and no desire to live."[86] Moyaert reads Freud's metaphysics through the death drive, arguing that "[d]eathlike isolation…expresses the very being of what we are in spite ourselves" and "instead of understanding the death drive as a force aiming at death," he contends that "without stimuli, death returns into life."[87] What is inside—the "kernel"—of the ego, in both Freud and Moyaert's assessments, relies upon the intransigence of anti-Blackness that requires Black absence for humanity to exist, to achieve immanence. The metaphysics of Blackness, however, is a drive towards a death that catalyzes rather than stagnates, for the death that precedes the human is distinct from the death in abeyance for the slave.

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[84] Hartman, Saidiya V. *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), 18.
[85] Moyaert, "The Death Drive and the Nucleus of the Ego," 114.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid., 111, 113

The onto-thanatology of the slave is not a resistance to life, but a refusal of the contingency of life and the history that continues to produce it—lost yet repeating, abandoned and disavowed. Violence sutures its outcome and Blackness is entombed within a real that can never be fully articulated. The violence at the "kernel of the ego" imprisons Blackness to exigencies of death, of white denial, and the life affirming death drive of humanity. If death is at the heart of (white) life, then that is where Blackness resides doubly, outside of itself and the world that created it: "[no] Black has to be Black,"[88] but something has to become Black in order for others to be.

[88] Gordon, Lewis R. *Bad Faith and Anti-Black Racism* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1999), 133.

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Epilogue

No Rescue

In April of 2014, 276 Black schoolgirls were kidnapped in Chibok, Nigeria by members of Boko Haram.[1]In an effort to galvanize a search for the abducted, Nigerian women began the movement #BringBackourGirls and a hashtag by the same name was retweeted over a million times in the span of mere weeks.[2] Less than a year later, the African American Policy Forum (AAPF) disseminated the hashtag #SayHerName as part of an intertextual global symphonic to draw attention to the plight of murdered Black women and girls in the US.

Black and Missing, but Not Forgotten; #BringBackourGirls; #SayHerName. The list of address to Black women, Black girls, and Black femmes writ large teeters upon a precipice where the implicit question on the horizon is not what it means to be lost, missing, or forgotten, but what does it mean to be found? In other words, at what moment are our movements—political, intellectual, and quotidian—mere negotiations between crafting elegies for the dead or odes addressed to beloveds? Black love is not a moment of stolen life or fugitivity; rather, it is made to labor elegiacally for the dead while simultaneously bearing the fantasy as a limit of suffering. Black joy, indeed, carries its limit—and beyond. For there is no rescue. In the case of Black social life in social death, can there be any distinction between elegy and ode when in order to be found, to be located, we were already dead to the world?

In the previous chapters I have attempted to address through metaphysical inquiry questions of affect, ethics, and politics at the interstices of fantasy and erasure. And I have posed questions and problems as not only provocations for thought, but also provocations to act.

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[1] *Bring Back Our Girls*. http://www.bringbackourgirls.ng/

[2] "#BBCtrending: Five Facts about #BringBackOurGirls." *BBC News*, BBC, 13 May 2014. http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-27392955.

Therein lies the morass –foreclosure appears as destiny. But is that not what the absented imago of the Black female figure evinces? That perhaps it is not about being lost or missing – but where one could ever be found, or better yet, returned to if one were to act from a provocation to think impossibility couched in refusal. Because Black poetry, like Black love and Black revolution, could smell like gunpowder, as Clay's monologue, in *Dutchman*, pronounces, "If Bessie Smith had murdered some white people she wouldn't have needed that music. She could have talked very straight and plain about the world. No metaphors. No grunts. No wiggles in the dark of her soul. Just straight two and two are four."[3]

Thinking and enacting reformist measures are to make lateral moves from the prism of the prison. And as Gil Scott Heron notes, "not all the dreams you show up in are your own."[4] Black social life, Black radical politics, and Black revolutionary practice have been couched in the language of dreams—dreams of freedom to freedom dreams.[5] Yet, to say we are alone in a shared suffering is the paradox of the Black political: how to act in concert when ontologically negated, alone and outside. Once again that is not a matter of finding what is missing, but locating what could ever be found.

So we continue to perform hospice one on another, for the gone and soon to be missing but never found. But the location, the dreams wherein we appear, are never on our horizon because there is no rescue. There is no rescue for Sky Mockabee, for Breasha Meadows, for Korryn Gaines, for Ayanna Stanley Jones, for Sandra Bland—no rescue.

[3] Baraka, Imamu A. *Dutchman* (New York: Morrow Quill Paperbacks, 1964), 35.
[4] Gil Scott Heron interviewed by Wilkinson, Alec. "The Unlikely Survival of the Godfather of Rap." *The New Yorker*, The New Yorker, 9 August 2010. http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/08/09/new-york-is-killing-me
[5] MLK and Robin Kelley, for instance.

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