Radical Sense
Isolation Reader Volume 6

2021

blues in black and white

over and over again
there are those who are
dismembered, sold off and distributed
those who always are, were, and shall remain the others
over and over again
the actual others declare themselves
the only real ones
over and over again
the actual others declare on us
war

it's the blues in black-and-white
1/3rd of the world
dances over
the other
2/3rds
they celebrate in white
we mourn in black
it's the blues in black-and-white
it's the blues

a reunited germany
celebrates itself in 1990
without its immigrants, refugees, jewish and black people
it celebrates in its intimate circle
it celebrates in white

but it's the blues in black-and-white
it's the blues
united germany united europe united states
celebrates 1992

May Ayim

500 years since columbus
500 years — of slavery, exploitation and genocide in the
americas
asia
and africa

1/3rd of the world unites
against the other 2/3rds
in the rhythm of racism, sexism, and anti-semitism
they want to isolate us; eradicate our history
or mystify it to the point of
irrecognition
it's the blues in black-and-white
it's the blues

but we're sure of it — we're sure
1/3rd of humanity celebrates in white
2/3rds of humanity doesn't join the party

1990

(Translation: Tina Campt; from *blues in schwarz weiss*)

I
Taking Sides: Decolonial Feminism

The turn in feminism, from being long condemned by right-wing ideologies, to becoming one of their spearheads, is worthy of analysis. What is at stake in this ideological deployment? How did this change occur? How did we move from a feminism that was indifferent or ambivalent to racial and colonial issues in the Francophone world, to a white and imperialist feminism? What is femonationalism all about? How has feminism become, in a significant convergence, one of the pillars of several ideologies—liberal, nationalist-xenophobic, extreme right-wing—that, at first glance, are opposed to one another? How has the issue of women's rights become one of the trump cards played by the state and imperialism, one of neoliberalism's last recourses, and the spearhead of the civilizing mission of white, bourgeois feminism? This feminism and these xenophobic-nationalist currents do not profess to having shared objectives, but they do share common *points of convergence*, and it is these that interest us here.[1]

This book wishes to be a contribution to the critical works of feminists in the Global South and their allies in the North on gender, feminism, women's struggles, and the critique of civilizational feminism. I call this feminism 'civilizational' because, in the name of an ideology of women's rights, it has undertaken the mission of imposing a unique perspective

that contributes to the perpetuation of domination based on class, gender, and race. I defend a decolonial feminism whose objective is the destruction of racism, capitalism, and imperialism, an agenda I will try to define more clearly.

"Feminism involves so much more than gender equality. And it involves so much more than gender," Angela Davis explains.[2] It also goes beyond the category of 'women' based on biological determinism, and it restores a radical political dimension to the notion of women's rights: taking into account the challenges faced by a humanity threatened with extinction. I take a stance against a temporality that describes liberation only in terms of unilateral 'victory' against the reactionary. Such a perspective shows an "enormous condescension of posterity"[3] towards those who are defeated. Writing history this way turns the story of oppressed peoples' struggles into one of successive defeats, imposing a linearity in which any setback is taken as proof that the fight was badly conducted (which is, of course, possible), rather than one that exposes the determination of reactionary and imperialist forces to crush any dissent. This is what songs of struggle—Black spirituals, revolutionary songs, gospel songs, songs of slaves and colonized people—recount: the long road to freedom, a never-ending struggle, revolution as daily work. It is in this temporality that I situate decolonial feminism.

Reclaiming Feminism

The term 'feminist' is not always easy to claim. The betrayals of Western feminism are its own deterrent, as are its heartless desire to integrate into the capitalist world and take its place in the world of predatory men and its obsession with the sexuality of racialized men and the victimization of racialized women. Why call yourself 'feminist,' why defend feminism, when these terms are so corrupted that even the

far right can appropriate them? What do you do when the words 'feminist' and 'feminism' are now part of the arsenal of the modernizing neoliberal right wing when, even just a decade ago, they still held radical potential and were lobbed as insults? When, in France, a Minister organizes a "University of Feminism"[4] event in which the majority of the audience is female and claims to be feminist, yet they still jeer at a young, veiled woman and let a man lecture them for 25 minutes (roundly condemned only on Twitter)? What is feminism about once it becomes an exercise in appeasement? If feminism and feminists are in the service of capital, the state, and empire, is it still possible to breathe life back into them, by reanimating the movement with the objectives of social justice, dignity, respect, and the politics of life against the politics of death? But shouldn't we also defend feminism against the onslaught of fascist forces? When rape and murder are not only acceptable but also encouraged weapons to discipline women? When even being a blond woman, a mother, married to a man, a university professor, conforming to all of the standards of white, middle-class respectability, is no protection against the explosion of hatred, as we saw with the hearing of Christine Blasey Ford during the debates on the appointment of Brett Kavanaugh to the United States Supreme Court? Or when various governments across the world turn feminism into an anti-national ideology, foreign to 'the culture of the nation,' to better repress women? For a long time, I did not call myself a feminist; instead I described myself as an anti-colonial and anti-racist activist in women's liberation movements. I have been led to call myself a feminist, on the one hand because of the re-emergence of a feminism based in broad, transnational, pluralist, decolonial politics, and on the other because of the capture of women's struggles by civilizational feminism.

An Anti-Colonial Trajectory

Biography does not explain everything, and often, it does not explain very much at all, but in a book on feminism I owe it to myself to say something about my own trajectory, not because it is at all exemplary, but because women's struggles have played a major role in it. I was, for many years, an activist inside women's liberation groups; these struggles were always linked to more general liberation projects, in my own case, to the liberation from post-1962 French colonialism. My interest, curiosity, and commitment to emancipatory struggles is grounded in the political and cultural education I received on Réunion Island.[5] As a little girl who was raised in a context where school, media, and cultural activities were all subject to the post-1962 French colonial order, my experience was exceptionally transnational. For a long time, I did not call myself a feminist activist, but rather a 'women's liberation activist'. I had the privilege of growing up in a family of feminist and anti-colonial communists, being surrounded by activists of different backgrounds, religions, and genders, who gave me an insight into the meaning of struggle and solidarity, and I discovered the joy and happiness of collective struggle. As a teenager, I was the kind of idealist who could not stand the idea of setback and defeat; I wanted heroism and the crushing of the enemy. My parents' answer to my naïve and sentimental idealism brought me back to earth: "They are brutes, fascists, scoundrels. You can't expect anything from them. They don't respect any rights, especially our right to exist." There was nothing defeatist in these remarks; rather, they contained a lesson on another temporality of struggle: iconic, though complex, images of the capture of the Winter Palace, of Castro's troops entering Havana, of the National Liberation Army in Algiers. These were powerful images capable of mobilizing my imagination; but if I stopped at

these images, I risked living in perpetual disillusionment. Tomorrow, the struggle would continue. I also learned very early on that if the state wants to crush a movement, it will use all the means and resources at its disposal both to repress and to divide the oppressed. With one hand it strikes and with the other, it tries to assimilate. Fear is one of the state's favorite weapons to produce conformity and consent, and I quickly understood the price to be paid for defying these rules, summarized thus: "Don't stand out, don't protest too much, and you won't get into trouble." The Debré Ordinance of 1960[6] demonstrated this in exiling 13 anti-colonial Réunionese activists (including union leaders). The message was clear: all dissident voices would be punished. The Réunionese historian Prosper Ève has spoken of "the island of fear" to analyze how slavery, post-slavery, and postcolonialism spread fear as a disciplinary technique well into the 1960s (and, I would add, to this day).[7] Fear is certainly not exclusive to the colonial system, but we should remember that colonial slavery was based on the constant threat of torture and death of human beings who were legally transformed into objects, and on the public spectacle of putting them to death. I learned also that one must use the laws of the state against the state itself, but without illusion or idealism, as understood by the enslaved women who fought to win free status, which they passed on to their children, or by the colonized people who used the colonial state's own laws against it (demanding freedom of the press, freedom of association, the right to vote, etc.). This strategy was always accompanied by a critique of the racial colonial state and its institutions. In other words, I understood that struggles are played on multiple fields and for objectives with different temporalities. The existence of a vast world where resistance and a refusal to yield to an unjust global order was part of the worldview that had been passed down to me. It was not when I arrived in France or went to university that

I discovered that capitalism, racism, sexism, and imperialism are fellow travelers, and I did not first encounter anti-colonial or anti-racist feminism by reading Simone de Beauvoir; I have been surrounded by it since early childhood.

The False Innocence of White Feminism

Following Frantz Fanon, who wrote, "Europe is literally the creation of the Third World," because it was built on plundering the world's wealth, and therefore "the wealth of imperialist countries is also our wealth,"[8] I can say that France is literally the creation of its colonial empire, and the North a creation of the South. I am therefore always surprised by the stubborn way in which slavery, colonialism, and everything related to the 'overseas' territories are overlooked in the analysis of contemporary France and the policies of its successive governments since the 1950s. Even more so than the colonial empire, the 'overseas' departments[9] (former slave societies or post-slave colonies) are excluded from contemporary history; no text on political issues, whether in philosophy, economy, or sociology, is interested in these remnants of the French colonial empire. This implies a desire to erase these peoples and their countries from the analysis of conflicts, contradictions, and resistance. What is the purpose of such repression if not to maintain the idea that all of this—slavery, colonialism, imperialism—certainly happened, but by being *outside* of France proper, it did not really matter? It undermines the links between capitalism and racism, between sexism and racism, and preserves French innocence. French feminism keeps its colonial and slave heritage at a distance. We are supposed to believe that since women are victims of masculine domination they have no responsibility for the racist policies deployed by the French State.

Feminism as a Struggle for the Right to Exist

To call oneself a decolonial feminist, to defend feminisms with decolonial politics today, is not only to tear the word 'feminism' out of the greedy hands of reactionaries' empty ideologies. It is also to affirm our fidelity to the struggles of the women of the Global South who have come before us. It is to recognize their sacrifices, honor their lives in all their complexity, the risks they took, and the difficulties and frustrations they experienced; it is to receive their legacy. On the other hand, it means recognizing that the offensive against women that is now openly justified and acknowledged by state leaders is not simply an expression of a brazen, masculinist dominance, but a manifestation of the destructive violence generated by capitalism. Decolonial feminism leads to de-patriarchalizing revolutionary struggles. In other words, feminisms with decolonial politics contribute to the struggle, undertaken for centuries by part of humanity, to assert its *right to existence*.

Feminisms with Decolonial Politics[10]

One of the significant developments of this still young twenty-first century, and one that has been growing in strength for several years, is the movement of decolonial feminisms the world over. This current has developed a multitude of practices, experiences, and theories; the most encouraging and original are the movements for land rights that address issues in a transversal and intersectional way. Unsurprisingly, this movement provokes violent reaction from heteropatriarchs, feminists in the North, and governments. It is in the Global South that these movements have developed, reactivating the memory of previous feminist struggles which have never been lost because they have never been abandoned, despite the terrible attacks against them. Joined by feminists in Spain,

France, and the United States, these movements declare war on racism, sexism, capitalism, and imperialism through mass demonstrations in Argentina, India, Mexico, and Palestine. These activists denounce rape and femicide, linking this struggle to the fight against policies of dispossession, colonization, extractivism, and the systematic destruction of the living.

This is not a 'new wave' or a 'new generation,' according to the favored formulas that mask the multiple lives of women's movements. It is rather a new stage in the process of decolonization, which we all know is a long historical process. These two formulas—wave and generation—contribute to erasing the long underground work that allows forgotten traditions to be reborn and obscures the fact that these currents have been buried; this metaphor also confers historical responsibility on a mechanism ('wave') or a demographic phenomenon ('generation'). Decolonial feminisms reject these segmenting formulas because these politics rest on the long history of the struggles of their elders: Indigenous women during colonization, enslaved women, Black women, women involved in the struggles for national liberation and the feminist subaltern internationalism of the 1950s–1970s, and racialized women who struggle daily even today.

Decolonial feminist movements, along with other decolonial movements and all movements for emancipation, are facing a period of acceleration in capitalism, which now regulates the functioning of its old accomplice, liberal democracy. These movements must find alternatives to economic absolutism and the infinite manufacture of goods. Our struggles are a threat to the authoritarian regimes that accompany the economic absolutism of capitalism. They also threaten masculinist domination, which is afraid of having to give up power—and which, everywhere, shows its proximity to fascistic forces. Our struggles also undermine civilizational feminism, which,

having made women's rights into an ideology of assimilation and integration into the neoliberal order, reduces women's revolutionary aspirations to an equal share of the privileges granted to white men by white supremacy. As active accomplices of the racial capitalist order, civilizational feminists do not hesitate to support imperialist intervention policies, as well as Islamophobic and even "Negrophobic" policies.[11]

The stakes are high and the danger is dire. It is a question of opposing authoritarian nationalism and neo-fascism, both of which see racialized feminists as enemies to be destroyed. Western democracy will no longer even claim to protect us once the interests of capitalism are truly threatened. Capitalist absolutism encourages all regimes that allow it to impose its own rules and methods, open previously un-colonized spaces to it, and grant it access to the ownership of water, air, and land.

The rise of reactionaries of all kinds shows one thing loud and clear: a feminism that fights only for gender equality and refuses to see how integration leaves racialized women at the mercy of brutality, violence, rape, and murder, is ultimately complicit in it. This is the lesson to be learned from the election of a white man, supported by major landowners, the business world, and the evangelical churches, to the presidency of Brazil in October 2018. This is a man who openly declared his misogyny, homophobia, Negrophobia, and contempt for Indigenous people. This is a man who openly declared his willingness to sell Brazil to the highest bidder, to trample on social laws that protect the poorest classes and on those that protect nature, and to renege on the agreements signed with Amerindian peoples—and all of this came just a few months after the assassination of queer, Black, elected city councilor Marielle Franco. A simple approach to gender equality reveals its own limits when parties of the authoritarian right and

far-right elect women as leaders or choose them as muses—Sarah Palin, Marine Le Pen, Giorgia Meloni…

Critique of Epistemicides

In Fernando Solanas' magnificent film *The Hour of the Furnaces* (1968), the following phrase appears: "the price we pay to be humanized." Indeed, the price we pay has always been high, and remains so. We are fighting against a system that has dismissed scientific knowledge, aesthetics, and entire categories of human beings as non-existent. Although the European world never succeeded in being completely hegemonic, it appropriated without hesitation or shame the knowledge, aesthetics, techniques, and philosophies of the people it enslaved and whose civilizations it denied. The rhetoric and practices of the colonial civilizing mission are still used to justify and legitimize the politics of theft. Without denying the complexities and contradictions of centuries of European colonialism (or what has escaped its surveillance techniques) and without overlooking the techniques of borrowing and *détournement* that colonized people have used as well, an in-depth understanding of South–South exchanges (cultural, technical, and scientific) is still lacking. In large part, this lack is due to research funding policies. The struggle for epistemic justice, which is to say, a struggle that demands equality between knowledges and contests the order of knowledge imposed by the West, is central. Decolonial feminisms are part of the long movement of scientific and philosophical reappropriation that is revising the European narrative of the world. They contest the Western-patriarchal economic ideology that turned women, Black people, Indigenous people, and people from Asia and Africa into inferior beings marked by the absence of reason, beauty, or a mind capable of technical and scientific discovery. This ideology has provided

the basis for development policies that essentially say: "You are underdeveloped, but you can be developed if you adopt our technologies, our ways of solving social and economic problems. You must imitate our democracies, the best system, because you do not know what freedom, respect for the law, or the separation of powers is." This ideology nourishes civilizational feminism which says, in essence, to women: "You don't have freedom. You don't know your rights. We will help you reach the right level of development." The work of rediscovering and valuing knowledge, philosophies, literature, and imagination does not begin with us, but one of our missions is to make the effort to know and disseminate them. Feminist activists know the transmission of struggles can often be broken; they are often faced with ignorance of struggles and resistance movements. They often hear "our parents bowed their heads; they let themselves be pushed around." The history of feminist struggle is full of holes, approximations, and generalities. Decolonial feminist activists and academics have understood the need to develop their own modes of transmission and knowledge; through blogs, films, exhibitions, festivals, meetings, artworks, pieces of theater and dance, song, and music, through circulating stories and texts, through translating, publishing, and filming, they have made their movements and the historic figures of those movements known. It is a movement that should be highlighted, in particular, by making the effort to translate texts from the African continent, Europe, the Caribbean, South America, and Asia into many languages.

What Is Coloniality?

Among the main avenues of struggle pursued by a decolonial feminism, it is necessary first of all to highlight the fight against police violence and the accelerated militarization

of society. These are underpinned by an idea of protection entrusted to the army and a classed/racialized concept of justice that the police are tasked with carrying out. This implies rejecting carceral and punitive feminism, which is satisfied with a judicial approach to violence that does not question the deaths of racialized women and men, since it is considered 'natural,' a cultural fact, an accident, or just a sad occurrence in our democracies. Efforts must be made to denounce systemic violence against women and transgender people, but we must do so without pitting victims against each other; we must analyze the production of racialized bodies without forgetting violence against transgender people and sex workers. We must de-nationalize and decolonize the narrative of white, bourgeois feminism without obscuring internationalist, anti-racist feminist networks. We must be attentive to policies of cultural appropriation and be wary of powerful institutions' attraction to 'diversity.' We should not underestimate the speed with which capital is able to absorb ideas and turn them into empty slogans. Why wouldn't capital be able to incorporate the idea of decolonization or decoloniality? Capital is a colonizer; the colony is consubstantial with it. In order to understand the colony's endurance, it is necessary to free oneself from an approach that sees the colony exclusively through the form Europe gave it in the nineteenth century. It is also necessary not to confuse colonization with colonialism. Peter Ekeh makes this helpful distinction: colonization is an event or a period, while colonialism is a process or a movement, a total social movement whose perpetuation is explained by the persistence of social formations resulting from this order.[12] Decolonial feminists study the way in which the complex of racism/sexism/ethnocentrism pervades all relations of domination, even when the regimes associated with these phenomena have disappeared. The notion of coloniality is extremely important for analyzing

contemporary France, at a time when so, so many, even on the left, still believe colonialism is over. According to this narrative, decolonization simply put an end to colonialism. However, in addition to the fact that the Republic continues to have control over dependent territories, the institutions of power are still structured by racism. For decolonial feminisms in France, analyzing the coloniality of the French Republic remains central. It is a coloniality that inherits the division of the world that Europe traced in the sixteenth century and that has continually asserted through the sword, the pen, the faith, the whip, torture, threat, law, text, painting, and later, photography and cinema. It is a coloniality that establishes a politics of disposable life, of *humans as waste*.

However, we cannot limit our discussion to the space-time of the European narrative. The history of decolonization is also that of the longstanding struggles that have shaken up the world order. Since the sixteenth century, people have fought against Western colonization (for example, the struggles of Indigenous peoples and enslaved Africans, and the Haitian Revolution). Moreover, erasing the South–South transfers and routes of liberation and obscuring the internationalist experiences of anti-colonial forces suggests that decolonization has meant nothing more than independence under the law, and even that decolonization is a ploy. Ignorance of the circulation of people, ideas, and emancipatory practices within the Global South preserves the hegemony of the North–South axis; and yet, South–South exchanges have been crucial for the spread of dreams of liberation. These spatio-temporal re-readings are essential to stimulate the imagination of decolonial feminists.

Against Eurocentrism

To give our criticism the necessary scope, we must go so far as to say that civilizational feminism is born with the colony,

insofar as European feminists develop a discourse of their own oppression by comparing themselves to slaves. The metaphor of slavery was a powerful one, for weren't women the property of their fathers and husbands? Were they not subordinated to the sexist laws of the church and the state? But, European Enlightenment feminism did not recognize the women who participated in the Haitian Revolution (which would be subsequently celebrated by the Romantic poets), nor did it recognize the enslaved women who revolted, resisted, or participated in *marronnage*.[13] The question here is not about passing judgment in retrospect, but about asking, in regard to this blindness and indifference, why the critical analysis of the racial genealogy of European feminism is still marginal. Rewriting the history of feminism from the colony is a central issue for decolonial feminism. We cannot simply consider the colony as a side issue of history. It is about considering that, without the colony, we would not have a France with structurally racist institutions. For racialized women in the North and the Global South, all aspects of their lives, the risks they face, the price they pay for misogyny, sexism, and patriarchy remain to be studied and made visible. To fight against femoimperialism is to bring the lives of 'anonymous' women back from silence, to reject the process of pacification, and to analyze why and how women's rights have become an ideological weapon in the service of neoliberalism (which can also fully support a misogynistic, homophobic, and racist regime). When women's rights are reduced to the defense of individual freedom—'to be free to, to have the right to…'—without questioning the content of this freedom, without questioning the genealogy of this notion in European modernity, we are entitled to wonder whether all these rights were granted because other women were not free. The narrative of civilizational feminism continues to be contained in the space of European modernity and never takes into account the fact that it is based on the denial of the role of

slavery and colonialism in its own formation. The solution is not giving a place (even a marginal one) to enslaved, colonized, and racialized women, or those from overseas. What is on the agenda is how Western feminisms have been imbued with the division of the world that slavery and colonialism have enacted since the sixteenth century (between a humanity that has the right to live and one that can die). If feminism remains based on the division between women and men (a division that precedes slavery), but does not analyze how slavery, colonialism, and imperialism affect this division—nor how Europe imposes its conception of the division between women and men on the peoples it colonizes or how this division creates others—then this feminism is racist. Europe remains its center, and all its analyses begin from this part of the world: the colonial roots of fascism are forgotten, racial capitalism is not a category of analysis, enslaved and colonized women are not perceived as constituting the negative mirror-image of European women. Rare are the European feminists who have been resolutely anti-racist and anti-colonial. There have, of course, been exceptions—journalists, lawyers, activists who declared their solidarity with colonized people, but it has not constituted the basis of French feminism, despite its indebtedness to anti-racist struggles. Even the support for the Algerian nationalists that has been so important to French feminists has not led to an analysis of the boomerang effect described by Aimé Césaire in *Discourse on Colonialism*: "Colonization works to decivilize the colonizer."[14] Speaking of civilizational feminism or white, bourgeois feminism, has in this sense, a very specific meaning. It is not 'white' simply because white women adopt it, but because it claims to belong to the part of the world, Europe, that was built on a racialized division of the world. It is bourgeois because it does not attack racial capitalism. We are entitled to ask this question: how, why, and by what means could European feminism have avoided being

affected by centuries of racial laws, imperialist domination, and the ideology of white supremacy? Since racism is too often conflated with the extreme right, pogroms, and ghettos in Europe, we often do not pay enough attention to the extent to which racism also spread and disseminated quietly and dispassionately, through the naturalization of the state of racialized servitude and the idea that some civilizations have been incompatible with progress and the rights of women. Saving racialized women from 'obscurantism' remains one of the main principles of civilizational feminisms. This policy was aimed at women in the colonies and at racialized and working-class women domestically. We cannot deny that for some, these actions were based on a desire to do the 'right thing,' they were driven by a strong belief in the righteousness of their feelings and of their desire to improve the condition of women; nor can we deny that some colonized people benefited from their actions. But there is a difference between aid and radical criticism of colonialism and capitalism, and between aid and fighting against exploitation and injustice. Or, to quote Australian Indigenous activist Lilla Watson: "If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."[15]

For a Critical Decolonial Pedagogy

The theories and practices forged within the anti-racist, anti-capitalist, and anti-colonial struggles are invaluable resources. Decolonial feminisms bring the following to other struggles that share the goal of re-humanizing the world: their library of knowledge, their experience of practices, and their anti-racist and anti-sexist theories, which are thoroughly linked to anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist struggles. A feminist cannot claim to possess *the* theory and *the* method;

she seeks to be multidimensional and intersecting. She asks herself what she does not see, she seeks to deconstruct the malignance of school education that has taught her not to see, feel, or know how to read, but to suffocate her senses, be divided within herself and be separated from her world. She must relearn how to hear, see, and feel in order to be able to think. She knows that the struggle is collective, and she knows that the determination of her enemies to defeat liberation struggles must not be underestimated, that they will use all the weapons at their disposal—censorship, defamation, threats, imprisonment, torture, and murder. She also knows that the struggle brings difficulties, tensions, and frustrations, but also joy and gaiety, discovery and expansion of the world.

Decolonial feminism is a feminism that offers a multidimensional analysis of oppression and refuses to divide race, sexuality, and class into mutually exclusive categories. Multidimensionality, a concept proposed by Darren Lenard Hutchinson, responds to the limits of the notion of intersectionality in order to better understand how "racist and heteronormative power not only creates precise exclusions at the intersection of domination, but shapes all social proposals and subjectivities,"[16] including among those who are privileged. This notion echoes the 'feminism of totality,' a methodology that aims to take into account the *totality* of social relationships.[17] I share the importance given to the state and I adhere to a feminism that thinks about patriarchy, the state, *and* capital; reproductive justice, environmental justice, *and* criticism of the pharmaceutical industry; the rights of migrants, refugees, *and* the end of femicide; the fight against the Anthropocene, racial Capitalocene, *and* the criminalization of solidarity. It is not a question of connecting elements in a systematic and ultimately abstract way, but of making the effort to see if, and what, links exist. A multidimensional approach makes it possible to avoid a hierarchy of struggles

based on a scale of urgency whose framework often remains dictated by prejudice. The challenge is to hold several threads at once, to override ideologically induced segmentation, and "to grasp how production and social reproduction are historically articulated."[18] This approach has guided me in my analysis of the thousands of abortions and sterilizations perpetrated annually on Réunion Island in the 1970s. If I had stopped at an explanation that only blamed the white, French doctors who performed them, I would have reduced the story to one about greed among a few white men. Rather, a study of all the elements highlighted a French State policy of natalism in France and of anti-natalism towards the racialized and poor women in its 'overseas' departments, a policy that was part of a global reconfiguration of Western birth-control policies in the context of national liberation struggles and the Cold War.[19] Similarly, in a presentation of a critical decolonial pedagogy,[20] I used a familiar fruit, the banana, to shed light on a number of analogies and elective affinities: the banana's dispersion from New Guinea to the rest of the world, the banana and slavery, the banana and US imperialism (banana republics), the banana and agribusiness (pesticides, insecticides—the chlordecone scandal in the Antilles), the banana and working conditions (the plantation regimes, sexual violence, repression), the banana and the environment (monocultures, polluted water and land), the banana and sexuality, the banana and music, the banana and performance (Josephine Baker), the banana and branding (Banana Republic), the banana and racism (when did the association of bananas and Negrophobia begin?), the banana and science (researching the 'perfect' banana), the banana and consumption (bringing bananas into the home, suggesting recipes), the banana and rituals for ancestors, and the banana and contemporary art. The method is simple: starting from one element to uncover a political, economic, cultural, and social ecosystem in order to avoid the segmen-

tation that the Western social-science method has imposed. The most enlightening and productive analyses in recent decades have been those that have drawn the greatest number of threads together to highlight the concrete and subjective networks of oppression that weave the web of exploitation and discrimination.

Decolonial Feminism as a Utopian Imaginary

In the context of a capitalism with increased destructive power, of racism, and of murderous sexism, this book affirms that, yes, feminism, which I call *decolonial feminism*, must be defended, developed, affirmed, and put into practice. *Maroon feminism* offers decolonial feminism a historical anchor in the struggles to resist the slave trade and enslavement. All the initiatives, actions, gestures, songs, rituals that night or day, hidden or visible, represent a radical promise, I understand as 'maroon'. *Marronnage* affirmed the possibility of a future, even when one was foreclosed by law, church, state, and culture, all of which proclaimed that there was no alternative to slavery, that slavery was as natural as day and night, that the exclusion of Blacks from humanity was a *natural* thing. The maroons tore the veil of lies by revealing the fictional aspect of these naturalizations. They created sovereign territories at the very heart of the system of slavery and proclaimed their freedom. Their dreams, their hopes, their utopias, as well as the reasons for their defeats, remain spaces we can turn to in order to think about action. Therefore, it is a utopia, in the sense of a radical promise, that constitutes a space from which to attack capitalism's proclamation that there is no alternative to its economy and ideology, that it is as natural as day and night, and its promises that technological and scientific solutions will transform its ruins into spaces of happiness. Against these ideologies, *marronnage* as a politics of disobe-

dience affirms the existence of a futurity, to borrow a concept from Black American feminists. In claiming *marronnage*, feminism anchors itself in questioning the naturalization of oppression; by claiming to be decolonial, it fights the coloniality of power. But is using the term 'feminism' the appropriate response to the rise of political fascism, capitalist predation, and the destruction of the ecological conditions necessary for living beings? Or to the policies of dispossession, colonization, erasure and commodification, and criminalization and imprisonment as responses to an increase in poverty? Does it even make sense to dispute the terrain civilizational feminism occupies—also called *mainstream* or white, bourgeois feminism—which envisions correcting injustices by sharing equal positions between women and men (without questioning the organization of society, economics, or culture), and tries to make gender, sex, class, origin, and religion into an entirely private matter—or into a commodity? Fighting femonationalism and femoimperialism (I develop their content below) seems reason enough for defending a decolonial feminism. But that is not enough. The essentialist argument of a female nature that would be better able to respect life and would desire a just and egalitarian society does not hold: women are a political category neither spontaneously nor in themselves. What justifies a reappropriation of the term 'feminism' is that its theories and practices are rooted in the awareness of a profound, concrete, daily experience of oppression produced by the state–patriarchy–capital matrix, which manufactures the category of 'women' to legitimize policies of reproduction and assignment, both of which are racialized.

Decolonial feminisms do not aim to improve the existing system but to combat all forms of oppression: justice for women means justice for all. It does not hope naïvely, nor does it feed on resentment or bitterness; we know that the road is long and fraught with pitfalls, but we keep in mind the courage

and resilience of racialized women throughout history. This is not a new wave of feminism, but the continuation of the struggles for the emancipation of women in the Global South.

Decolonial feminisms draw on the theories and practices that women have forged over time in anti-racist, anti-capitalist, and anti-colonial struggles, helping to expand theories of liberation and emancipation around the world. It is about firmly combatting police violence and the accelerated militarization of society, along with the conception of security that entrusts the army, class/race-based machine of justice, and the police with the task of ensuring it. It rejects carceral and punitive feminism.

In this cartography of struggle of women in the South, colonial slavery still plays a foundational role in my view. It constitutes the "matrix of race" to use philosopher Elsa Dorlin's apt phrase.[21] Slavery links the history of wealth accumulation, plantation economics, and rape (the basis of a reproductive policy in the colony) to the history of the systematic destruction of social and family ties, and to the race/class/gender/sexuality knot. The European temporality of slavery/abolition relegates colonial slavery to a historical past and therefore ignores how its strategies of racialization and sexualization continue to cast their shadows on our time. The immense contribution of Afro-feminism (Brazil, United States) to the importance of colonial slavery in the formation of the modern world, in the invention of the white world, and its role in the prohibition of family ties, has still not affected the analyses of white, bourgeois feminism. Feminists in the West have analyzed how 'good motherhood,' 'good mothers,' and 'good fathers' of the heteronormative family have been constructed, but always without taking account of the 'boomerang effects' of slavery and colonization. We know that under slavery, children could be taken from their mothers at any time, that mothers were not allowed to defend their children, that Black

women were available to the children of their owners as wetnurses and nannies, that Black children were available to the master's children as companions or playmates, that Black girls and women were sexually exploited, and that all of these roles were subject to the whims of the master, his wife, and his children. Enslaved men were deprived of the social role of father and partner. This legally established destruction of family ties continues to hang over family policies targeting racialized minorities and Indigenous peoples.

White Women and Women of the Global South

White women do not like to be told they are white. To be white is to be constructed as a being so ordinary, so devoid of characteristics, so normal, so meaningless that, as Gloria Wekker points out in *White Innocence*,[22] it is practically impossible to make a white woman recognize that she is white. You tell her, and she's upset, aggressive, horrified, practically in tears. She finds your remark 'racist.' For Fatima El-Tayeb, arguing that modern European thought has given birth to race is an intolerable violation of what is dear to Europeans, the idea of a 'colorblind' continent, devoid of the devastating ideology that it has exported throughout the world.[23] The feeling of being innocent is at the heart of this inability to see themselves as white and thus protects them from any responsibility in the current world order. Therefore, there can be no *white* feminism (since there are no white women), only a universal feminism. The ideology of women's rights that civilizational feminism promotes could not be racist, since it comes from a continent free of racism. Before continuing, it should be reiterated—since any reference to the existence of whiteness leads to an accusation of 'reverse racism'—that it is not a question of skin color nor of racializing everything, but of admitting that the long history of racialization in Europe (through anti-Semi-

tism, the invention of the 'Black race' and of the 'Asian race,' or the 'East') has not been without consequences for the conception of human beings, sexuality, natural rights, beauty, and ugliness. Admitting to being white—that is, admitting that privileges have historically been granted to this color—would be a big step. By privileges, I even mean ones as banal as being able to enter a store without being automatically suspected of wanting to steal, or not being systematically told that the apartment you want is already rented, or being naturally taken for the lawyer rather than the assistant, the doctor rather than the nurse, the actress rather than the cleaning lady. There are admittedly white women who have shown, and are showing, deep solidarity with anti-racist political struggles. But white women also need to understand how tiring it is, always having to educate them about their own history. After all, whole libraries on this topic are available to them. What is holding them back? Why are they waiting to be educated? Some say that we are forgetting about class, that racism was invented to divide the working class, that, paradoxically, we bolster the far-right by talking about 'race.' It is always up to racialized people to explain, justify, and accumulate the facts and figures, while neither facts, figures, nor moral sense change anything in the balance of power. Reni Eddo-Lodge expresses a familiar and legitimate feeling when she explains "why I am no longer talking to white people about race." Claiming that the debate on racism can take place as if the two sides were equal is illusory, she writes, and it is not for those who have never been the victims of racism to impose the framework of the discussion.[24]

The white woman was literally the product of the colony. Philosopher Elsa Dorlin explains how, in the Americas, the first naturalists took sexual difference as their model for the concept of 'race': Amerindians in the Caribbean or imprisoned slaves were taken to be populations with pathogenic, effeminate, or

weak temperaments. The definition of a "sexual temperament" moved, Dorlin writes, to that of a "racial temperament." She concludes that the body-politics of the nation was grounded in the opposition between the feminine model of the "mother"—white, healthy, and maternal—and figures of a "degenerate" femininity—the witch, the enslaved African.[25] European women did not escape the epistemological division that took place in the sixteenth century and rendered a significant wealth of knowledge 'non-existent.'[26] In their view, women in the South were deprived of knowledge, a real concept of freedom, of what made up a family or constituted 'a woman' (not necessarily linked to gender or sex defined at birth). Perceiving themselves to be victims of men (and, indeed, they legally remained minors for centuries), European women do not see that their desire for equality with European men was based on the exclusion of racialized people. Nor do they see that the European conception of the world and modernity (of which they are themselves a part) relegated those who belonged neither to their class nor to their race to de facto and de jure inequality. When European women make their experience (often the experience of bourgeois women) universal, they contribute to dividing the world in two: civilized/barbarian, women/men, white/Black, and the binary conception of gender becomes universal. María Lugones has spoken of the "coloniality of gender": the historical experience of colonized women is not only that of racial devaluation,[27] she writes, but also of sexual assignment. Colonized women were reinvented as "women" in light of the norms, criteria, and discriminatory practices used in Medieval Europe.[28] Racialized women have therefore faced a double subjugation: that of colonizers and that of colonized men. The Nigerian feminist philosopher Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí also questions the universality of Euro-modern gender formations. She sees this universality as the manifestation of the hegemony of Western biologism

and the domination of Euro-American ideology in feminist theory.[29]

Feminism and Its Repression of Slavery

By drawing an analogy between their situation and that of slaves, European feminists denounced a position of dependence, a status of minors-for-life. But in doing so they erased the central elements of slavery—capture, deportation, sale, trafficking, torture, denial of social and family ties, rape, exhaustion, racism, sexism, and death that framed the lives of female slaves—appropriating through analogy a condition that was not theirs. It is not denying the brutality of masculine domination in Europe to insist on its distinction from colonial slavery. The Enlightenment, the century of the publication of historical feminist texts for the European continent, is also the century when the Transatlantic Slave Trade peaked (70,000 to 90,000 Africans trafficked per year, whereas up until the eighteenth century, the figure was 30,000 to 40,000 per year). The (few) French abolitionist feminists of the eighteenth century used a sentimentalist vision, a literature of pity, to denounce slavery as a crime.[30] One of the most famous works of this genre, Olympe de Gouges' play *Zamore and Mirza*, gives a white woman the main role: it is she who performs the emancipation of Blacks from slavery. Renamed as *Negro Slavery or the Happy Shipwreck*[31] at the request of the Comédie Française in 1785, the play tells the story of a couple of two young maroons on the run taking refuge on a desert island. Zamore, who is a wanted man because he killed a commander who was harassing Mirza, rescues a young French couple from drowning, one of whom, Sophie, is the daughter of the island's governor, Saint-Frémont. Sophie helps Zamore and Mirza escape their enslavement by asking her father for mercy and at the end of the play, the governor frees them. Or, in summary,

without the white woman, there would be no freedom. Even this play, timid in tone and content, nevertheless caused a scandal. It was considered subversive because the author suggested "a widespread freedom [that] would make the Negro race as essential as the white race" and that one day "they will cultivate freely their own land like the farmers in Europe and will not leave their fields to go to foreign nations."[32] This account, in which the intervention of whites changes the fate of enslaved Blacks, and in which Blacks must present qualities of gentleness, sacrifice, and submission to deserve freedom, was hegemonic. Only direct testimonies of former captives and slaves contested this narrative of white saviorism. In *Paul and Virginia*, one of the most widely read books of the eighteenth century, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre softened the nature of white–Black relations. One of the most stunning episodes of the novel features a young, enslaved woman who, having fled because she was mistreated by a slave-master, appears one Sunday morning in front of Virginia's house. The latter takes her in and feeds her before persuading her to return to her master's house and to apologize for running away. The young slave is brought back by sweet Virginia to her master, who, of course, punishes her.

Virginia's absurd naivete is the result of her 'innocent' refusal to acknowledge racism. She transforms slavery into a simple individual relationship where the master's gesture of forgiveness overcomes the violence of the enslaved. The testimonies left by female slaves absolutely contradict this absurdity with their accounts of the brutal consequences that white women refuse to see. In the nineteenth century, most feminists—with a few rare exceptions like Louise Michel and Flora Tristan—supported the colonial empire, which they saw as a lever for releasing colonized women from the shackles of sexism in their societies. They did not reject the civilizing mission; they only wanted to ensure that its feminine side

would be respected. They created schools for colonized girls, encouraged service and domestic work, protested against abuse, but never attacked colonization itself. They accepted its structure and institutions, finding in the colony the possibility of deploying the principles and values of their feminism, which adhered to the colonial republican order. Faced with the colonists' hostility, they sublimated their actions. The study of travelers' journals and feminists' reports could make us forget that the military colonial conquest offered the terrain for their travels and their actions, that it is thanks to colonial armies that travel routes opened up, and that places for European women to live were built.

In the hegemonic account of women's rights struggles, one omission in particular highlights the refusal to consider the privileges of whiteness. The hegemonic story features women deprived of their rights who obtain them progressively, leading up to the right to vote, which is the hallmark of European democracies. But, although for a long period of time white women were effectively unable to enjoy many civil rights, they did have the right to own human beings; they owned slaves and plantations and, following the abolition of slavery, headed colonial plantations where forced labor was rampant.[33] They were not denied access to human property and were granted this right because they were white. One of the greatest enslavers on Réunion Island was a woman, Madame Desbassyns, who had neither the right to vote nor to sit for the baccalaureate,[34] nor to be a lawyer, doctor, or university professor, but she did have the right to own human beings, who were classified as chattel in her estate. As long as the history of women's rights is written without taking this privilege into account, it will be misleading.

Ignoring the role of enslaved women, female maroons, and colonized women workers who were committed to the struggles for freedom and racial equality, white, French

feminism does establish the only framework for women's struggles. It aims at equality with bourgeois, white men and is confined to mainland France. Deafness and blindness towards the wellsprings of 'women's rights,' towards the role of colonialism and imperialism in their vision, could only feed an openly nationalist, unequal, and Islamophobic feminist ideology where the term 'French' comes to delineate, not a linguistic field as a common tool, but a national/imperial space.

What were the genders under slavery? Enslaved women were Black and women, but on the plantations all enslaved human beings were beasts of burden. In the eyes of slave owners, Black women were sexual objects and not human beings whose gender would require them to be treated with gentleness and respect. As slaves, their legal status was as objects and therefore they did not fully belong to humanity. In other words, gender does not exist in itself; it is a historical and cultural category, which evolves over time and cannot be conceived in the same way in the metropole and the colony, nor from one colony to another, or even within one colony. For racialized women, affirming what it means *to be a woman* has been a battleground. Women, as I said, are not a political class in itself.

French Exceptionalism: The Republic of Innocence

In France, where republican doctrine is confronted with the unthinkables of the colonial past and the challenges of the post-colonial present, bourgeois feminism (of Left and Right) has come to the rescue by identifying feminism with the Republic. It does not matter that women only obtained the most basic rights very late in the Republic; the latter is said to be naturally open to differences. The fact that these rights were obtained through costly struggles is erased; in this narrative, they come

from above, from the natural generosity of the Republic. It is also forgotten that, while French women obtained the right to vote in 1944, this right was severely restricted in the so-called 'overseas' departments until the 1980s. Not all women living in the French Republic have automatically enjoyed the rights granted to white French women. But it is not only bourgeois women who are racists. In 1976, in the bulletin of a revolutionary group of factory women, women workers in Renault-Flins expressed their anti-Arab racism, adding that it was explained by "the reactionary attitude of Arabs [sic] towards women [and because of] prejudices ingrained in them by the bourgeoisie and which shock their principles: they are the first to be accommodated by the town councils. They do not want to leave their slums, they are dirty, if they returned to their country, there would be less unemployment in France."[35]

Even today, access to prenatal and postnatal care is not equally distributed; racialized women are more easily deprived of access to care, and they are more often victims of medical neglect, if not abuse. The May 2017 death of Naomi Musenga—a 27-year-old woman whose calls to emergency services not only went unanswered but were mocked—highlighted this racist discrimination. No institution appears to be free of structural racism: not schools, not the courts, not prisons, not hospitals, not the army, nor art, culture, or the police. If the debate on structural racism in France is so difficult, it is also because of a passion for abstract principles rather than for studying realities. Despite reports of racist/sexist discrimination even from government agencies, this blindness persists.

Another obstacle to the deracialization of French society is the narcissism maintained through notions of French singularity and exceptionalism. The French language is still presented in the twenty-first century as a vector of the civilizing (feminist) mission because it supposedly carries within it the

idea of equality between women and men. It is this reasoning that justifies the priority given to young African women in obtaining government scholarships.[36] However, language is not neutral, and racism has crept into it. The history of words that begin with 'N' in both feminine and masculine, and which are racist insults, is insightful in this regard. By the end of the eighteenth century, the 'N-word' had fully taken on the meaning of 'Black slave' and the N-word and *Black* were used interchangeably. A legitimate question then arises: by what miracle could feminism's vocabulary have remained untouched by racism? Let us take the example of Hubertine Auclert, one of the great figures of nineteenth-century French republican feminism, known for her tireless struggle for women's suffrage, against the Napoleonic code which had made women legal minors and subjects to their husbands, and against the death penalty. Secretary of the newspaper *L'avenir des femmes* (*Women's Future*), she adopted Victor Hugo's formula, 'women: those I call slaves,'[37] studied the role of women in revolutions, and denounced "the slavery of women."[38] Laurence Klejman and Florence Rochefort, authors of a 1989 book on French feminism, summarize her struggle as follows:

> She drew all her political training from feminism and, impatient, she revolted against her elders who were content either with a principled demand or who simply refused to take women's suffrage seriously because of the danger that this reform would represent for the regime. She chose provocation as her tactic. Astute and imaginative, she immediately asserted a political identity through various acts of civil disobedience: voter registration, tax strikes, refusing the census on the grounds that if French women do not vote, they should not pay tax or be counted either.[39]

In 1881, she founded her own newspaper, *La Citoyenne* (*The Female Citizen*), in which she demonstrated that the principles of the Republic were being flouted, argued that Bastille Day was a celebration of masculinity, and considered the Napoleonic code as a remnant of the monarchy. For Auclert, a dividing line existed: *the color line*. In her text "Women are the Negroes [sic]," she protested against the fact that the right to vote was granted to Black men in the colonies after the abolition of slavery in 1848: "The step given to savage negroes, over the cultured white women of the metropole, is an insult to the white race." The right to vote was colored by the feminist pen: "If negroes vote, why don't white women?" "In our distant possessions," she continued, "Black men, who are not interested in our ideas or our affairs, vote. However, we deny the vote to enlightened women in the metropole, when it would prevent them from being crushed by the burden of social constraints." The *coloring* of suffrage reveals the force of racist prejudice for this feminist: "This comparison between half-savage 'negroes,' who have neither responsibilities nor obligations, voting, and civilized women, taxpayers and non-voters, more than abundantly demonstrates that men retain their omnipotence over women only in order to exploit their disadvantage." It is therefore necessary "to prevent Frenchmen from treating French women as 'negroes'."[40] Opposing enlightenment to obscurantism replays the old opposition between civilization and barbarism, but it is above all, accepting the racialization of feminism. The universal is very difficult to hold on to.

Women in French Colonialism

Frantz Fanon describes the role that twentieth-century colonialism gave to colonized women thus: "At an initial stage, there was a pure and simple adoption of the well-known formula, 'Let's win over the women and the rest will follow.'" He continues,

> This enabled the colonial administration to define a precise political doctrine: 'if we want to destroy the structure of Algerian society, its capacity for resistance, we must first of all conquer the women; we must go and find them behind the veil where they hide themselves and in the houses where the men keep them out of sight. It is the situation of woman that was accordingly taken as the theme of action. The dominant administration solemnly undertook to defend this woman, pictured as humiliated, sequestered, cloistered. It described the immense possibilities of woman, unfortunately transformed by the Algerian man into an inert, demonetized, indeed dehumanized object. The behavior of the Algerian was very firmly denounced and described as medieval and barbaric. With infinite science, a blanket indictment against the 'sadistic and vampirish' Algerian attitude toward women was prepared and drawn up. Around the family life of the Algerian, the occupier piled up a whole mass of judgments, appraisals, reasons, accumulated anecdotes, and edifying examples, thus attempting to confine the Algerian within a circle of guilt.[41]

This ideology feeds twenty-first-century civilizational feminism: negrophobic and orientalist representations, preconceived ideas about *the* oriental or African family, and about the mother and father in these families. Social reality has no place in this ideology because it would then become necessary to analyze the human and economic catastrophe that French republican colonial policies have caused in the colonies.[42] The terrain on which civilizational feminism has developed and garnered the attention of the powerful is multiple: the French Army's attempts to unveil Algerian women; the representation of Algerian women combatants as victims (either of the Army or their fellow male fighters, but never as beings making a free choice); the indifference to the way that republican coloniality

oppresses women of the overseas territories and racialized women in France; the refusal to denounce capitalism; the faith in European modernity.

The fear inspired by women's participation in national liberation movements has led to a mobilization of international institutions, foundations, and ideologues which shape discourses and develop practices, including those based on repression. This is precisely how the notions of development and 'women's empowerment' were spread, just as the discourse of 'women's rights' had been. The latter, which emerged as a feminist technique of discipline in the late 1980s—at the same time as the discourses of the 'end of history' and the 'end of ideologies'—would be propelled by multiple developments throughout the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Developmentalist Feminism

Since the 1970s, international institutions and North American foundations have been active in channeling and steering feminist movements. The 1970s was a decade that saw the entrance of millions of women into the realm of paid work. The transformations of capitalism were decisive moments in bringing about an explosion of low wages and precarity, notably through the worldwide so-called feminization of under-skilled jobs in open economic zones and in the informal economy. During this decade, the progressive feminization of employment went hand in hand with a very clear increase in global inequalities. The conflict between a revolutionary approach to women's liberation and an anti-discrimination approach, which seeks reform within the law and women's integration into capitalism, has thus intensified. The revolutionary approach does not reject the struggle for reforms but it does reject the argument that renders women's entry into the realm of paid work as an opportunity to gain individual

autonomy; the revolutionary approach proposes collective organization in the workplace instead. In the anti-discrimination approach, independence is measured by the capacity to access consumption and individual autonomy (recall the image of the 'corporate woman' and the accompanying trend of blazers with shoulder pads). Lastly, the 1970s was also the decade of the global deployment of anti-natal policies that targeted Third World women. The United States led this effort through financial support of birth control in racialized communities domestically and in South America. In a document that had long been confidential, the National Security Administration clearly exposed the reasons for this policy—too many youths would want to emigrate, thus threatening the security of the free world—and recommended that the federal agency be entrusted with it.[43] In France, sterilization and abortions in the 'overseas' departments were encouraged by the government.[44]

It was not, however, the United States, its government, or its mainstream feminist movement that sought to raise the issue of women's rights at the international level, but rather the Soviet Union and Third World countries. In the early 1970s, they proposed that the United Nations organize a "Decade for Women." Programmed to start in 1975, its aim would be to "ensure women's ownership and control of property, as well as improvements in women's rights with respect to inheritance, child custody and loss of nationality," to affirm that "women's rights are an integral part of human rights," and to "promote gender equality and end violence against women."[45] But these rather modest objectives would be soon discarded in favor of promoting women's entry into the neoliberal order. Indeed, though the US government was initially suspicious of the initiative—as ever, birth control remained the primary basis of their interest in the Third World—by 1979, President Carter announced that for the American government "the key

objective of U.S. foreign policy is to advance worldwide the status and conditions of women."[46] In France, the creation of a State Secretariat for Women's Rights in 1974 indicated the institutionalization of feminism. Women's rights were gradually stripped of their political significance. Yet, things did not go exactly as planned at the four major meetings of the Decade for Women—Mexico City (1975), Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985), and Beijing (1995).[47] The movement to collect information about women around the world largely supported by governments announced the focus on accumulating data and reports and on consolidating the existence of expertise on women's rights. In Copenhagen, feminists from North African and Sub-Saharan countries challenged the terms 'savage customs' and 'backwards cultures' used by Western feminists denouncing female mutilations, genital infibulation, or what they saw as other violations of human rights, and analyzed this insistence as a desire to westernize women's struggles. In Nairobi, the opposition to the occupation of Palestine revealed the opposition between a decolonial feminism and a feminism that did not want to confront coloniality. Ultimately, the question of discrimination rather than of liberation took center stage. In Beijing, the return to order was made clear. Unlike the location of the official meeting in the city center, made fit for an assembly of dignitaries, the alternative forum where thousands of feminist NGOs and activists gathered was outside the city and lacking sufficient facilities.

Government negotiations were held behind closed doors.[48] While the situation of women around the world was worsening because of imperialism and capitalism, the civilizing feminist machine was being built. In her closing speech at the Beijing meeting, Hillary Clinton declared that women's rights were human rights, envisioned through a completely Western frame. Anti-colonial movements for national independence,

which had emphasized the end of the exploitation of the Global South's resources, denounced a Western-dominated organization of information, and defended their own concept of health, education, and women's rights, were marginalized in favor of a discourse that refuses to question the structures of capitalism and makes women into a homogeneous social subject. Throughout all these decades, in Third World countries, women had fought to give decolonial content to women's rights, while simultaneously being subjected to the full force of structural adjustment policies. The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank appropriated the ideology of women's rights as individual rights, and, at the end of the 1970s, the slogan 'women's empowerment' was adopted by the political world, from both the left and the right, from NGOs to feminists of the Global North. For the World Bank, women's empowerment was dependent on policies of both development and of birth rate reduction.[49] For NATO countries, women's rights were integrated into what they claimed were their national values and interest.[50]

The civilizational feminism of the 1980s inherited these ideological frameworks and helped to cement them in place, giving them content. Structural adjustment programs promising development and autonomy took on a female face. Very quickly then, this ploy was mobilized in the service of imperialist campaigns.

While feminism as civilizing mission is not new—it served colonization—by that time, it benefited from exceptional means of dissemination: international assemblies, support from Western and postcolonial states, women's media, economic journals, government and international institutions, grants and support from the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, foundations, and NGOs. International aid and development institutions made women the pillar of development in the Global South claiming that they were better

than men at managing the money they received,[51] that they knew how to save money, and that they complied better with the regulations of the granting programs. In summary, women are good customers, so they will change the world. Women in the Global South have become the custodians of hundreds of development projects—workshops or cooperatives, where the production of local products, like weaving, crafts, and sewing, are valued. Women in the Global North are encouraged to support their 'sisters' of the South by buying their products or by opening up boutiques to sell them, by getting involved in funding and organizing programs to increase their autonomy, their *empowerment* or to teach them management. There are certainly some women in the Global South who have without doubt benefited from these projects, been able to send their kids to school, or risen out of poverty, but these projects can also fail while reinforcing the narcissism of white women who are so happy to 'help' as long as it does not upset their own lives. For the feminist Jules Falquet, 'women's *empowerment*' was set up to respond to the feminization of poverty, in other words, to prop up and perfect policies of pacification and control.[52]

I would like to give an example of the grip of NGO vocabulary in women's groups of the Global South. In March 2018, I was at a meeting in the Northeast of India, attended by about a hundred women from the tribes of Nagaland, a region occupied by the Indian Army. These women experience violence from the army and traffickers, systemic rape, and a high rate of alcoholism and suicide of young men in their communities; they hold their communities on their shoulders. When they presented their actions, they systematically used the language of NGOs: empowerment, capacity building, leadership, governance. They had, one could say, lost their own voices and become custodians of NGO language. I found a way to suggest a critique of this 'language,' inspired by the

feminist critique of the ideology of care. I pointed out to them that somehow Western NGOs were condemning them to constant cleansing and to constant repairing of the shattered lives of their communities, while being careful about holding the real perpetrators accountable. Why didn't we spend a little time understanding how their communities had been broken and who had done the breaking? Who was responsible for the hopelessness of the youth? Who was responsible for the rapes and arbitrary arrests? Of course, the women knew the answers to all of these questions, but at first their analyses had been overshadowed by the depoliticizing discourse of NGOs. The latter certainly did face government censorship, but their apolitical discourse was perpetuating the women's oppression. By adopting a gender theory that masks relations of power and political choices, NGOs accepted the narrow path that the Indian government was imposing in the region. My goal here is not to make an easy critique of NGOs, but to study not only how they depoliticize but also how they contribute to new oppressions. The range of pacification techniques is very wide and we must include the 'Girl Power' (women forever remain *girls*) trope of television shows and films. Many of these series, films, and articles are not all bad (I may enjoy some of them), and I do not deny that they can represent important counter-models for little girls, young women, and women, but the massive diffusion of individual stories perpetuates the idea that anyone can fulfill her dream if she is not afraid of challenging certain norms, but never politically. These stories are often based on a psychologization of discrimination. The struggle is rarely collective; the structural cruelty and brutality of power are rarely shown in an explicit way. Heroines are dealing with individuals whose power exceeds their own, but narratives barely touch on what makes up this structure, and how it is based in deep-seated mechanisms of domination and exploitation that have the police, army, court, and state at

their disposal. They never show the amount of courage, daily effort, and collective organization needed to change these structures.The decades of the 1970s–1990s saw the development of a proactive strategy intended to counter and weaken decolonial feminisms. Feminism would become reasonable, no longer equated with the '*pétroleuses*,'[53] 'hysterics,' 'man-haters,' 'dykes,' or 'the unfucked and the unfuckable'[54] of the 1970s. The foothold of 'true' feminism and women's rights in Europe was constantly reaffirmed, and the hostility towards Muslims and migrants has offered this feminism the opportunity to demonstrate its adherence to European values.

IT'S JUST THAT I'M NOT REALLY INTO POLITICS

by HANIF WILLIS-ABDURRAQIB

violence begets more / violence / or so I've been told / but all of this country's skyscrapers / are still standing / despite the blood / that builds a boat underneath the tongue / after speaking its name / violence begets / more photo opportunities / at the feet of a burning / temple / I show up to the resistance / and someone hands me a rose / the color of surrender / violence begets thirst / a new thing in need / of clean water / once / towards the black / and spotted sky / I raised a fist / inside of a glove / sewn in a country / torn apart by our bombs / I purchased the gloves in a store / after midnight / from a cashier who wore a picture / of her daughter on her chest / and looked as though she might have been crying / before I arrived / violence begets a hunger for warmth / at all costs / I sit in a running car / and count all of the things / yet to be swallowed / by the horned ghosts of empire / If you make your own prison / you can find your own map / to freedom / the smoke from all our engines / is beckoning the sun / close / the oceans are rising / to the height of a child / sitting on a mother's shoulders / pointing to the horizon with a single / trembling / finger

Neocolonialism and Indigenous Structures

In August 1990, my sister, Mililani, and I traveled to Karasjokka, Norway, to attend a world conference of Native women sponsored by the Sami people of the Arctic.

Despite profound geographic, cultural, and physical differences among the delegates attending, our similarities as colonized indigenous women—from the Americas, the Pacific, the Middle East, Africa, Europe and Asia—were obvious. This speech was intended to underscore our shared conditions and commonalities.

In this mysterious northern land of ice and eternal light, we, the indigenous women of the world, are embarking on a timely path. This week, history is being made by the very fact of this conference and its focus on indigenous women. We are here to speak for ourselves, to decide our own strategies, and to plan our own futures. We are not here as members of minority groups or as adjuncts to male organizations but as Native women determined to link our peoples in a common cause for self-determination.

We come from diverse communities at varied levels of forced assimilation, economic exploitation, religious missionizing, political and cultural oppression, and physical extermination as peoples. Many of us are survivors of earlier genocidal campaigns, while some of us are no doubt fighting current genocidal campaigns. Clearly, we are vastly different from each other, not only geographically, but culturally, linguistically, and historically as well.

And yet, I believe, we share many more similarities than differences. We have a common heritage as aboriginal peoples, that is, as First Nations of the world. We are all land-based people, and some of us also sea-based people, who are attuned to the rhythms of our homelands in a way that assumes both protection of and an intimate belonging to our ancestral places. We have all been colonized by imperialist powers more or less resistant to our human needs for self-determination and self-government. And, at this moment, we face grave problems that range from environmental poisoning, nuclear radiation, and high infant mortality to land dispossession, economic marginalization, and militarization of our areas.

These large commonalities have brought us together as indigenous women fighting for our peoples, our lands, and our very survival.

In this context of shared experiences, I have been asked to address neocolonialism and the co-optation of indigenous sociopolitical structures. Obviously, these categories are both large and extremely varied. Our cultures, our geographies, and our responses to colonialism shape how and what we experience as Native nations. But given this, and acknowledging that I am working at a broad level of generalization, I will attempt an outline of concerns that others here should feel free to enlarge, modify, or otherwise change.

For the purposes of discussion, I have defined neocolonialism as the experience of oppression at a stage that is nominally identified as independent or autonomous. I use *nominally* to underscore the reality that independence from the colonial power is legal but not economic. Some examples of neocolonialism include the control by multinational corporations of former territorial colonies. Latin American, African, and Asian countries come to mind. Other examples include the persistence of social and cultural practices imposed by colonial powers during the first stages of imperialism even after independence, for example, Anglo-American legal and land tenure systems in places as diverse as the Philippines, Fiji, and parts of Africa. Finally, neocolonialism refers not only to dominant colonial retentions but also to psychologi-

cal injuries suffered by the colonized that continue to wound our internal and external lives.

Part of neocolonialism, of course, is the ideological position that all is well; in other words, that decolonization has occurred. Therefore, problems and conflicts are post-colonial and the fault of the allegedly independent peoples. Nothing could be more inaccurate.

To begin with, indigenous peoples *by definition* lack autonomy and independence. In the modern, post-war world, we are surrounded by other, more powerful nations that desperately want our lands and resources and for whom we pose an irritating problem. This is just as true for the Indians of the Americas as it is for the tribals of India and the aborigines of the Pacific. This economic reality is also a political reality for most if not all indigenous peoples. The relationship between ourselves and those who want control of us *and* our resources is not a *formerly* colonial relationship but an *ongoing* colonial relationship. That is to say, we are not now autonomous yet dependent. Rather, we are dependent *and* subjugated. Part of our subjugation is the unequal relationship to our numerous colonizers.

In the world system today, natural and human resources, markets, and technology determine the value of indigenous peoples to the colonial powers. Tragically, this is a truism for every woman in this room. Thus, land is no longer our mother, source of physical and spiritual sustenance. She is now a resource for consumption and profit. Our children are no longer the flower of our nations but the labor units of industry and the military. Our cultures are no longer the expressions of harmony and beauty between our people and our gods but the source of entertainment and recreation for the world's rich. Our spiritual values and philosophical systems are no longer the guides to daily and generational life but the playthings of First World adventurers. Even our ancestors, long dead, have not escaped these degradations. Their bones and artifacts are now displayed in museums and antique shops as "primitive" curiosities.

These transformations continue to occur not only as a result of brute physical and economic violence but also as a by-product of skillful co-optation of our own cultural forms. At the risk of over-generalizing, I want to suggest five areas in which co-optation occurs and then use a vivid example from my own culture to illustrate how successfully "colonial" such co-optation can be.

I begin with our own self-definitions, that is, with how and what we call ourselves. Unless I am mistaken, most indigenous nations sim-

ply say they are the "people" or the "people of the land," or "human beings." The sense of this identity is an attachment to place and a differentiation from other living things in the natural world.

Under colonialism, this identification is transformed into pejorative categories that take on legal force. For example, the U.S. government has defined a Native Hawaiian as someone with 50 percent or more blood quantum. Those who meet this blood requirement are eligible for lands and revenues. Those who do not meet this test are completely dispossessed. As a result, our people are divided by race, something foreign to us and to our identity as a nation.

Beyond the question of who is and is not indigenous looms the power to define and thus to determine who we, as Native peoples, will be in the future. Imposed systems of identification are instituted to separate our people from our lands and from each other in perpetuity. Again using my own people as an example, the white people who created our classification hoped that Hawaiians of 50 percent or more blood quantum would eventually die out, thus leaving our lands and revenues not to Hawaiians of less than 50 percent blood but to the state and federal governments.

The experience of a legal identity is, as all identities, both psychological and political. Who we believe ourselves to be is often *not* what the colonial legal system defines us to be. This disjunction causes a kind of suffering nearly impossible to end without ending the colonial definitions of who we are. Barring this, we are constantly in struggle with government agencies and, sometimes, with our own people. We are besieged by state powers attempting to decrease our numbers and therefore our claims by merely defining us out of existence. Or, we are categorized in a manner alien to our cultures in the hopes of strangling our ancestral attachments to our own people.

If we are tribal, the colonial power defines us so as to minimize the powers of the tribe. If we are not tribal, the colonial power uses our self-definition against us by claiming that we are not indigenous because we are not tribal. If we are of mixed bloodlines, we are often not indigenous enough and therefore not able to claim lands. But if we are not of mixed blood, we are required to substantiate our ancestry.

Definition, then, has served to co-opt our identity. Naming has been, for many of us, a theft of matrilineal descent by Western patriarchal descent. In the case of Hawaiians, legal imposition of Christian, English, and patrilineal names meant the loss of our ancestral names. This imposed system greatly weakened and, in some areas, destroyed our indigenous practice of genealogical naming.

Definitions of who we are closely parallel where we live and with whom we live. Thus, our extended families have suffered incessant pressures to fragment into nuclear units of only parents and children. In nuclear families, women's power, as the power of the mother generally, is reduced from life-giver to domestic servant. When industrial capitalism penetrates our societies, our people are driven into the labor market, where production takes place outside the family, which declines to a mere consumer unit. This sundering of our functions also severs our people from their traditional work. The devaluing of traditional, cultural kinds of work accompanies the forcing of our people into the labor market. Depending on where we live, women's "work" then ranges from domestic labor and prostitution to sales clerkship and *hula* dancing. Such work has no meaning and no status in our cultures; therefore, we lose both our traditional work and the high valuation that attached to our roles.

In the Pacific, "big nation" dominance has meant that labor markets develop to serve the needs of American, French, Japanese, New Zealand, and Australian interests. Two well-known cases will suffice to illustrate my point.

American military dominance in the Pacific has meant that enormous amounts of land, water, and other resources are diverted to satisify American military needs. The Marshall Islands and Hawai'i are clear examples of how a dominant power's so-called "national interests" result in the loss of lands and the skewing of employment opportunity because of the burdensome presence of military personnel, bases, training areas, and ports. Such a large military presence both directs the kinds of employment that will develop and limits the opportunity for work in traditional fields such as agriculture and fishing. A substantial military presence also creates a second economy, with special privileges for its personnel, including housing, elite consumer goods, and exclusive recreational areas. This misuse of land is coupled with the ill-effects of the military on Islanders' physical and mental health. Finally, there is the ultimate injury: the frightening risk of becoming "strategically important" in the game of superpower politics.

If the American military exemplifies one way in which foreign impingement structures labor demand, Japanese corporate invasion of the Pacific, meanwhile, spells dangerous foreign control of fragile island economies and, in the case of tourist investments, the inundation of small land bases and populations by hordes of visitors. The indigenous people are then presented with the alleged opportunity of

waiting on tourists, cleaning their rooms, selling them artifacts, and smiling for a living.

In the case of Hawaiian women, the definition of us as alluring, highly eroticized Natives is anchored by a tourist economy that depends on the grossest commercialization of our culture. Because of mass-based corporate tourism, our women have become purveyors of our dances, our language, our islands, in other words, all that is beautiful about us. This is cultural prostitution, often with our own people's willing, if unexamined, participation.

We, in the Pacific, do not take this kind of cultural degradation lightly. The Japanese in particular are investing heavily all over the Pacific, including Fiji, Vanuatu, Tahiti, Sāmoa, and of course, most spectacularly in my own Native land, Hawai'i. The disastrous effects of mass tourism on island cultures is best observed in Hawai'i, where the multibillion dollar industry has resulted in grotesque commercialization of our Native culture, creation of a racially stratified, poorly paid servant class of industry workers, transformation of whole sections of our major islands into high-rise cities, contamination and depletion of water sources, intense crowding—with densities in the worst areas exceeding that of Hong Kong—increases in crimes against property and violent crime against tourists, and increasing dependency on corporate investments.

The co-optation of indigenous ways does not work without complicitous Natives. Some of our people are bought, some are crushed between impossible demands, others are squeezed until they become but images of their former selves. Those who resist often find the price too high. In Hawai'i—the world's most isolated archipelago—Native resistance no longer results in death or imprisonment, as it once did, but now brings chronic unemployment or threats of law suits or constant hounding and public ridicule that threatens our sanity. For the sake of our loved ones, our families, our elders, and our relatives, we participate in the wage system because we feel there is no other way.

And yet, throughout our Native nations, there are attempts to rebuild self-sufficiency projects that begin with our traditional subsistence activities—such as farming, fishing, and gathering—and proceed outward to Native crafts, and further still to the performing arts, such as dance and theater. These are healthy signs of resistance to co-optation, but not all of us have this opportunity.

While our naming and our family structures have been subjugated to Western systems, so too have our land tenure and inheritance customs been co-opted. Land, once held in common for use by all has

nearly everywhere come under the threat of private property tenure, and all the bureaucratic papers that trail along with it, like deeds, mortgages, and bank notes. The constant fighting over land and water that we see throughout Indian country, in Hawai'i, New Zealand, Australia, and other parts of the world is played out in the language of property law. The inevitable conflict between land that is collectively held and land that is individually owned will never cease because it is a conflict between cultures whose values are directly opposed.

For our peoples, this means only ill-health, poor living conditions, urbanization, and continued theft. As the industrial countries increase their stockpiles of waste and weapons, they will need to bury them somewhere. Of course, that unspecified "somewhere" is our Native lands and waters. Thus, Japanese plans to bury their nuclear waste in the Mariana trench; the Euro-American plan to incinerate chemicals on Johnston Island in the Pacific; French testing of nuclear weapons in Tahiti and their pretense that radiated water does not circulate throughout the Pacific. I understand that here, in Samiland, there are plans to bury nuclear waste in the Arctic. As with our labor, so with our lands: we are reserved for First World needs.

And this leads me to political co-optation. Our leaders are tremendously vulnerable to the pressures of colonial governments, insidious anthropologists, greedy financiers, and a host of other predators. The politics of co-optation, in other words, are treacherous and not immediately obvious.

For example, it seems that some of our people, once educated in colonial systems and yearning for colonial things, have a very difficult time returning to help their nations. This is not to say that we do not need lawyers, scientists, and other technical people who are familiar with the colonizer and colonial ways.

But as peoples, we need to convey to our younger siblings that learning about and understanding the outside world has a goal other than individual success or money. *Our* goal is to help our people. Co-optation occurs so frequently once our people leave us, which is why the colonizer tries to take our children, to force our families into urban areas, and to separate our generations. Indeed, the entire policy of the United States regarding its Native people can be seen as various confusions over how to destroy or co-opt us. The failure of the first policy leads to the inevitability of the second.

The United States now seeks to avoid confrontation with us by creating false Native governments, like tribal councils, or in Hawai'i the Office of Hawaiian Affairs. The Brazilian, New Zealand, Canadian,

and other governments seek to do the same. Once these false fronts are in place, agreements for natural resources, militarization, waste burial, and a host of other things are immediately drawn up and signed. Co-optation triumphs in the guise of Native self-determination.

In Hawai'i, the effectiveness of co-optation is very visible. We have had a Hawaiian governor who behaves like a white man. We have Hawaiian representatives in the electoral system, including the Congress of the United States, who think, talk, and act like capitalist entrepreneurs bargaining off our natural and human resources. And I have Hawaiian students at the university who yearn to sell our culture in the tourist spots in our islands.

All these Hawaiians think, to greater or lesser degrees, that they are helping their people. Personal advancement has become the proof of self-determination, a ridiculous belief but one that is nevertheless strongly held. The breakdown of collective identification, which I referred to earlier, has set in motion an increasing individualist identification fed by popular culture, the structure of the market, and the bureaucracy of everyday life. As a result, personal achievement becomes the mirage of our movement, beckoning our people down a path of falsity and emptiness.

For my people, and perhaps for many others, neocolonialism *is* co-optation. Apart from the loss of our lands, the fracturing of our identities and collectivities, and the psychological impairment of our understanding, co-optation is the ever-ready reply from Native sell-outs to those of us who continue to organize among our people. Our young people, especially, are vulnerable to co-optation.

The problem, then, for all of us, is to strengthen our resolve; to learn from each other about strategies and linkages; and to create alternatives. This last possibility is the most difficult to fulfill.

But that is why we are here. Not merely to meet, exchange, and console, but to fashion new ways of resisting, of continuing as Native people. Specifically, we are here to build women's organizations focused on the needs of other women and their families and to work these organizations into political forces that will continue to be the backbone of our people.

And for this, we are remarkably gifted. At home, our movement is led by women, like the Kia'āina of our nation, my sister, Mililani. The few men present are overshadowed by our strong women leaders who constantly confront establishment Hawaiians who have become politically assimilated. Indeed, everywhere in the Pacific strong indigenous female leadership is the norm: in Belau, where women traveled to the

U.S. Congress to lobby against the Reagan-inspired economic and political chaos that has drowned that tiny nation in violence; in Aotearoa and Te Wai Pounamu, also called New Zealand, where articulate women leaders are fighting for language, land, and cultural rights; in Guam, where indigenous Chamorro women are organized to gain some form of autonomy from the U.S. government; in West Papua and East Timor, where genocide by Indonesia has driven out thousands of refugees and given rise to new, young leadership; in Kanaky, also known as New Caledonia, where the Kanak liberation front is locked in a battle with the French; in Tahiti, where the Polynesian Liberation Front is pushing for independence and, of course, in the Pan-Pacific Nuclear-Free and Independent Pacific Movement, where indigenous women from throughout the Pacific, such as Hilda Lini of Vanuatu and Hilda Harawira of Aotearoa, have been guiding lights.

Let me suggest, in closing, a few things to keep in mind. We need to be inclusive in our categories of analysis. We need to work toward resolutions regarding land and resources, family issues, militarization and nuclearization and, of course, self-government.

Let me offer now a favorite saying of Hawaiians. It was uttered by one of our great chiefs before the worst battle of his life:

Imua e na poki'i
Forward my younger siblings

A inu i ka wai 'awa'awa
And drink the bitter water

A loa'a ka lei
Of opposition until we wear the lei

O Ka Lanakila
of Victory.

From a Native Daughter

E noi'i wale mai nō ka haole, a,
'a'ole e pau nā hana a Hawai'i 'imi loa

Let the *haole* freely research us in detail
But the doings of deep delving Hawai'i
will not be exhausted.

Kepelino
Nineteenth-century Hawaiian historian

When I was young the story of my people was told twice: once by my parents, then again by my school teachers. From my *'ohana* (family), I learned about the life of the old ones: how they fished and planted by the moon; shared all the fruits of their labors, especially their children; danced in great numbers for long hours; and honored the unity of their world in intricate genealogical chants. My mother said Hawaiians had sailed over thousands of miles to make their home in these sacred islands. And they had flourished, until the coming of the *haole* (whites).

At school, I learned that the "pagan Hawaiians" did not read or write, were lustful cannibals, traded in slaves, and could not sing. Captain Cook had "discovered" Hawai'i, and the ungrateful Hawaiians had killed him. In revenge, the Christian god had cursed the Hawaiians with disease and death.

I learned the first of these stories from speaking with my mother and father. I learned the second from books. By the time I left for college, the books had won out over my parents, especially since I spent four long years in a missionary boarding school, called the Kamehameha Schools, for Hawaiian children.

When I went away, I understood the world as a place and a feeling divided in two: one *haole* (white) and the other *kānaka* (native). When I returned ten years later with a Ph.D., the division was sharper, the lack of connection more painful. There was the world that we lived in—my ancestors, my family, and my people—and then there was the world historians described. This world, they had written, was the truth. A primitive group, Hawaiians had been ruled by bloodthirsty priests and despotic kings who owned all the land and kept our people in feudal subjugation. The chiefs were cruel, the people poor.

But this was not the story my mother told me. No one had owned the land before the *haole* came; everyone could fish and plant, except during sacred periods. And the chiefs were good and loved their people.

Was my mother confused? What did our *kūpuna* (elders) say? They replied: Did these historians (all *haole)* know the language? Did they understand the chants? How long had they lived among our people? Whose stories had they heard?

None of the historians had ever learned our mother tongue. They had all been content to read what Europeans and Americans had written. But why did scholars, presumably well-trained and thoughtful, neglect our language? Not merely a passageway to knowledge, language is a form of knowing by itself; a people's way of thinking and feeling is revealed through its music.

I sensed the answer without needing to answer. From years of living in a divided world, I knew the historian's judgment: *There is no value in things Hawaiian; all value comes from things* haole.

Historians, I realized, were very like missionaries. They were a part of the colonizing horde. One group colonized the spirit; the other, the mind. Frantz Fanon had been right, but not just about Africans. He had been right about the bondage of my own people: "By a kind of perverted logic, [colonialism] turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it."[1] The first step in the colonizing process, Fanon had written, was the deculturation of a people. What better way to take our culture than to remake our image? A rich historical past became small and ignorant in the hands of Westerners.

And we suffered a damaged sense of people and culture because of this distortion.

Burdened by a linear, progressive conception of history and by an assumption that Euro-American culture flourishes at the upper end of that progression, Westerners have told the history of Hawai'i as an inevitable if occasionally bittersweet triumph of Western ways over "primitive" Hawaiian ways. A few authors—the most sympathetic—have recorded with deep-felt sorrow the passing of our people. But in the end, we are repeatedly told, such an eclipse was for the best.

Obviously it was best for Westerners, not for our dying multitudes. This is why the historian's mission has been to justify our passing by celebrating Western dominance. Fanon would have called this missionizing, intellectual colonization. And it is clearest in the historian's insistence that pre-*haole* Hawaiian land tenure was "feudal," a term that is now applied, without question, in every monograph, in every schoolbook, and in every tour guide description of my people's history.

From the earliest days of Western contact, my people told their guests that *no one* owned the land. The land—like the air and the sea—was for all to use and share as their birthright. Our chiefs were *stewards* of the land; they could not own or privately possess the land any more than they could sell it.

But the *haole* insisted on characterizing our chiefs as feudal landlords and our people as serfs. Thus, a European term that described a European practice founded on a European concept of private land tenure—*feudalism*—was imposed upon a people halfway around the world from Europe and vastly different from her in every conceivable way. More than betraying an ignorance of Hawaiian culture and history, however, this misrepresentation was malevolent in design.

By inventing feudalism in ancient Hawai'i, Western scholars quickly transformed a spiritually based, self-sufficient economic system of land use and occupancy into an oppressive, medieval European practice of divine right ownership, with the common people tied like serfs to the land. By claiming that a Pacific people lived under a European system—that the Hawaiians lived under feudalism—Westerners could then degrade a successful system of shared land use with a pejorative and inaccurate Western term. Land tenure changes instituted by Americans and in line with current Western notions of private property were then made to appear beneficial to our people.

But in practice, such changes benefited the haole, who alienated Hawaiians from the land, taking it for themselves.

The prelude to this land alienation was the great dying of the people. Barely half a century after contact with the West, our people had declined in number by eighty percent. Disease and death were rampant. The sandalwood forests had been stripped bare for international commerce between England and China. The missionaries had insinuated themselves everywhere. And a debt-ridden Hawaiian king (there had been no king before Western contact) succumbed to enormous pressure from the Americans and followed their schemes for dividing up the land.

This is how private property land tenure entered Hawai'i. The common people, driven from their birthright, received less than one percent of the land. They starved, while huge *haole*-owned sugar plantations thrived.

And what had the historians said? They had said that the Americans "liberated" the Hawaiians from an oppressive "feudal" system. By inventing a false feudal past, the historians justify—and become complicitous in—massive American theft.

Is there "evidence"—as historians call it—for traditional Hawaiian concepts of land use? The evidence is in the sayings of my people and in the words they wrote more than a century ago, much of which has been translated. Historians however, have chosen to ignore any references here to shared land use. But there is incontrovertible evidence in the very structure of the Hawaiian language. If the historians had bothered to learn our language (as any American historian of France would learn French), they would have discovered that we show possession in two ways: through the use of an "a" possessive, which reveals acquired status, and through the use of an "o" possessive, which denotes inherent status. My body *(ko'u kino)* and my parents *(ko'u mākua)*, for example, take the "o" form; most material objects, such as food *(ka'u mea'ai)*, take the "a" form. But land, like one's body and one's parents, takes the "o" possessive *(ko'u 'āina)*. Thus, in our way of speaking, land is inherent to the people; it is like our bodies and our parents. The people cannot exist without the land, and the land cannot exist without the people.

Every major historian of Hawai'i has been mistaken about Hawaiian land tenure. The chiefs did not own the land, they *could not* own the land. My mother was right, and the *haole* historians were wrong. If they had studied our language, they would have known that

no one owned the land. But was their failing merely ignorance, or simple ethnocentric bias?

No, I did not believe them to be so benign. As I read on, a pattern emerged in their writing. Our ways were inferior to those of the West, to those of the historians' own culture. We were "less developed," or "immature," or "authoritarian." In some tellings we were much worse. Thus, Gavan Daws, the most famed modern historian of Hawai'i, had continued a tradition established earlier by missionaries Hiram Bingham and Sheldon Dibble, by referring to the old ones as "thieves" and "savages" who regularly practiced infanticide and who, in contrast to "civilized" whites, preferred "lewd dancing" to work. Ralph Kuykendall, long considered the most thorough if also the most boring of historians of Hawai'i, sustained another fiction, that my ancestors owned slaves, the outcast *kauwā*. This opinion, as well as the description of Hawaiian land tenure as feudal, had been supported by respected sociologist Andrew Lind. Finally, nearly all historians had refused to accept our genealogical dating of A.D. 400 or earlier for our arrival from the South Pacific. They had, instead, claimed that our earliest appearance in Hawai'i could only be traced to A.D. 1100. Thus, at least seven hundred years of our history were repudiated by "superior" Western scholarship. Only recently have archaeological data confirmed what Hawaiians had said these many centuries.[2]

Suddenly the entire sweep of our written history was clear to me. I was reading the West's view of itself through the degradation of my own past. When historians wrote that the king owned the land and the common people were bound to it, they were saying that ownership was the only way human beings in their world could relate to the land, and in that relationship, some one person had to control both the land and the interaction between humans.

And when they said that our chiefs were despotic, they were telling of their own society, where hierarchy always resulted in domination. Thus, any authority or elder was automatically suspected of tyranny.

And when they wrote that Hawaiians were lazy, they meant that work must be continuous and ever a burden.

And when they wrote that we were promiscuous, they meant that lovemaking in the Christian West was a sin.

And when they wrote that we were racist because we preferred our own ways to theirs, they meant that their culture needed to dominate other cultures.

And when they wrote that we were superstitious, believing in the *mana* of nature and people, they meant that the West has long since lost a deep spiritual and cultural relationship to the earth.

And when they wrote that Hawaiians were "primitive" in their grief over the passing of loved ones, they meant that the West grieves for the living who do not walk among their ancestors.

For so long, more than half my life, I had misunderstood this written record, thinking it described my own people. But my history was nowhere present. For we had not written. We had chanted and sailed and fished and built and prayed. And we had told stories through the great bloodlines of memory: genealogy.

To know my history, I had to put away my books and return to the land. I had to plant *taro* in the earth before I could understand the inseparable bond between people and *'āina*. I had to feel again the spirits of nature and take gifts of plants and fish to the ancient altars. I had to begin to speak my language with our elders and leave long silences for wisdom to grow. But before anything else, I had to learn the language like a lover so that I could rock within her and lay at night in her dreaming arms.

There was nothing in my schooling that had told me of this or hinted that somewhere there was a longer, older story of origins, of the flowing of songs out to a great but distant sea. Only my parents' voices, over and over, spoke to me of a Hawaiian world. While the books spoke from a different world, a Western world.

And yet, Hawaiians are not of the West. We are of *Hawai'i Nei*, this world where I live, this place, this culture, this *'āina*.

What can I say, then, to Western historians of my place and people? Let me answer with a story.

A while ago I was asked to share a panel on the American overthrow of our government in 1893. The other panelists were all *haole*. But one was a *haole* historian from the mainland who had just published a book on what he called the American anti-imperialists. He and I met briefly in preparation for the panel. I asked him if he knew the language. He said no. I asked him if he knew the record of opposition to our annexation to America. He said there was no real evidence for it, just comments here and there. I told him that he did not understand and that at the panel I would share the evidence. When we met in public and spoke, I said this:

There is a song much loved by our people. It was written after Hawai'i had been invaded and occupied by American marines.

Addressed to our dethroned Queen, it was written in 1893 and tells of Hawaiian love of our homeland as well as our feelings against annexation to the United States.

Kaulana nā pua a'o
Hawai'i
Kūpa'a mahope o
ka 'āina
Hiki mai ka 'elele o ka loko 'ino
Palapala 'ānunu me ka pākaha.

Famous are the children of
Hawai'i
Who cling steadfastly to
the land.
Comes the evil-hearted with
A document greedy for plunder.

Pane mai Hawai'i moku o
Keawe.
Kōkua nā Hono a'o
Pi'ilani.
Kāko'o mai Kaua'i o Mano
Pa'apū me ke one o
Kakuhihewa.

Hawai'i, island of Keawe,
answers.
The bays of Pi'ilani [of Maui,
Moloka'i, and Lana'i] help.
Kaua'i of Mano assists
Firmly together with the sands of
Kakuhihewa.

'A'ole 'a'e kau i ka pūlima
Maluna o ka pepa o ka 'enemi
Ho'ohui 'āina kū'ai hewa
I ka pono sivila a'o
ke kanaka

Do not put the signature
On the paper of the enemy.
Annexation is wicked sale
Of the civil rights of the
Hawaiian people.

'A 'ole mākou a'e minamina
I ka pu'ukālā a ke aupuni.
Ua lawa mākou i ka pōhaku,
I ka 'ai kamaha'o o ka 'āina.

We do not value
The government's sums of money
We are satisfied with the stones,
Astonishing food of the land.

Mahope mākou o Lili'ulani
A loa'a 'ē ka pono o
ka 'āina.
(A kau hou 'ia e ke kalaunu)
Ha'ina 'ia mai ana ka puana
Ka po'e i aloha i ka 'āina.

We support Lili'uokalani
Who has earned the right to
the land.
(She will be crowned again)
The story is told
Of the people who love the land.[3]

This song, I said, continues to be sung with great dignity at Hawaiian political gatherings, for our people still share the feelings of anger and protest that it conveys.

But our guest, the *haole* historian, answered that this song, although beautiful, was not evidence of either opposition or of imperialism from the Hawaiian perspective.

Many Hawaiians in the audience were shocked at his remarks, but, in hindsight, I think they were predictable. They are the standard response of the *haole* historian who has no respect for Native memory.

Finally, I proceeded to relate a personal story, thinking that surely such a tale could not want for authenticity, since I myself was relating it. My *tūtū* (grandmother) had told my mother, who had told me, that at the time of the overthrow a great wailing went up throughout the islands, a wailing of weeks, a wailing of impenetrable grief, a wailing of death. But he remarked again, this, too, is not evidence.

And so, history goes on, written in long volumes by foreign people. Whole libraries begin to form, book upon book, shelf upon shelf. At the same time, the stories go on, generation to generation, family to family.

Which history do Western historians desire to know? Is it to be a tale of writings by their own countrymen, individuals convinced of their "unique" capacity for analysis, looking at us with Western eyes, thinking about us within Western philosophical contexts, categorizing us by Western indices, judging us by Judeo-Christian morals, exhorting us to capitalist achievements, and finally, leaving us an authoritative-because-Western record of their complete misunderstanding?

All this has been done already. Not merely a few times, but many times. And still, every year, there appear new and eager faces to take up the same telling, as if the West must continue, implacably, with the din of its own disbelief. But there is, as there has been always, another possibility. If it is truly our history Western historians desire to know, they must put down their books, and take up our practices: first, of course, the language, but later, the people, the *'āina*, the stories. Above all, in the end, the stories. Historians must listen; they must hear the generational connections, the reservoir of sounds and meanings.

They must come, as American Indians suggested long ago, to understand the land. Not in the Western way, but in the indigenous way, the way of living within and protecting the bond between people and *'āina*. This bond is cultural, and it can be understood only culturally. But because the West has lost any cultural understanding of the bond between people and land, it is not possible to know this connection through Western culture. This means that the history of indige-

nous people cannot be written from within Western culture. Such a story is merely the West's story of itself.

Our story remains unwritten. It rests within the culture, which is inseparable from the land. To know this is to know our history. To write this is to write of the land and the people who are born from her.

Notes

1. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1968), p. 210.

2. Gavan Daws, *Shoal of Time: A History of the Hawaiian Islands* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1968). Hiram Bingham, *A Residence of Twenty-one Years in the Sandwich Isles* (Hartford, CT: H. Huntington, 1848); reprinted in 1981 (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle). Sheldon Dibble, *A History of the Sandwich Isles* (Honolulu: Thrum Publishing, 1909). Ralph Kuykendall, *The Hawaiian Kingdom, 1778–1854: Foundation and Transformation* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1978); originally published in 1938. Andrew Lind, *An Island Community: Ecological Succession in Hawai'i* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938). H. David Tuggle, "Hawai'i," in *The Prehistory of Polynesia*, Jessie D. Jennings, ed. (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1979). See also Abraham Fornander, *An Account of the Polynesian Race, Its Origins, and Migrations and the Ancient History of the Hawaiian People to the Times of Kamehameha I* (Rutland and Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle, 1969); originally published in 1878–1889. Lest one think these sources antiquated, it should be noted that there exist only a handful of modern scholarly works on the history of Hawai'i. The most respected are those by Kuykendall (1938) and Daws (1968) and a social history of the twentieth century by Lawrence Fuchs, *Hawai'i Pono: A Social History* (New York: Harcourt Brace & World, 1961). Of these, only Kuykendall and Daws claim any knowledge of pre-*haole* history, while concentrating on the nineteenth century. However, countless popular works have relied on these two studies, which, in turn, are themselves based on primary sources written in English by extremely biased, anti-Hawaiian Westerners, such as explorers, traders, missionaries (e.g., Bingham [1848] and Dibble [1909]), and sugar planters. Indeed, a favorite technique of Daws'—whose *Shoal of Time* is the most acclaimed and recent general history—is the lengthy quotation, without comment, of the most racist remarks by missionaries and planters. Thus, at one point, half of a page is consumed with a "white man's burden" quotation from an 1886 *Planters Monthly* article ("It is better here that the white man should rule.") Daws's only comment is, "The conclusion was inescapable" (p. 213). To get a sense of such characteristic contempt for Hawaiians, one has to read only the first few pages, where Daws refers several times to the Hawaiians as "savages" and "thieves" and where he approvingly has Captain Cook thinking, "It was a sensible primitive who bowed before a superior civilization" (p. 2). See also—among examples too numerous

to cite—his glib description of sacred *hula* as a "frivolous diversion," which, instead of work, the Hawaiians "would practice energetically in the hot sun for days on end . . . their bare brown flesh glistening with sweat" (pp. 65–66). Daws, who repeatedly displays an affection for descriptions of Hawaiian skin color, taught Hawaiian history for some years at the University of Hawai'i. He once held the Chair of Pacific History at the Australian National University's Institute of Advanced Studies.

3. Samuel H. Elbert and Noelani Mahoe, *Nā Mele o Hawai'i Nei: 101 Hawaiian Songs* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1970), pp. 62–64.

order

1. in sleep the descent pales
   against the hurt incurred
   at the end of it. objects fall
   away one by one: only
   more marauders

2. let go the last defense:
   although our bodies
   linger in each other
   let go the last defense —
   in that dark let go the
   speech, admit a new
   vocabulary, renew such
   ties the mind denies

3. the mind is plucked, raped
   it rapes back — that is its
   only order. objects demand
   at least the space in which
   they are. we admit each
   other as only words allow
   and follow fallen objects

4. in the fall we follow
   and demand a hurt at
   the end of our descent —
   the last defense let go
   renews the mind and gnaws.
   we watch the objects we make
   each other follow some other
   order and deny such ties
   as we renewed: this is our
   only order and in it our
   bodies no longer linger

Chapter Two | **Abandoning the Personal:** The State and the Production of Abuse

Criticism must think of itself as life enhancing.
— EDWARD SAID

SOMETIMES INVOKING the language of abuse is an avoidance of responsibility, just like speaking in metaphors. Like when people say, "I feel like I've been raped," to mean they are upset. In reality, what they feel is nothing like what they would feel if they'd been raped. It's a turn of phrase that means they don't like what is happening and don't know how to make it better. It's an overstatement of harm using Abuse tropes. And sometimes we are so insistent on our right to overstate that we do things that are not merited by the actual dimensions of the conflict. Sometimes, when we are upset, we pretend or convince ourselves that Conflict is actually not only Abuse, but a crime. Sometimes, we really do not want to face ourselves, our own participation, our own painful pasts, the facts of our own projections, distorted thinking, mental illness. When we have nowhere to go but inside ourselves, and when that self that we inhabit is convinced that it cannot bear to be seen, we call the police. And then we are in the arms of The State. And there we are.

On a freezing, snowy day in 2014, I was invited to a workshop run by social worker Catherine Hodes. A native New Yorker in her fifties, Hodes is an experienced professional with over twenty years of development and leadership in what was once known as "The Battered Women's Movement" back when she was called an "activist." The field has since transformed, first into "Domestic Violence" and then "Intimate Relationship Abuse Advocacy" where she is now known as "a service provider." Intimate abuse is a real crisis for many New Yorkers. *The New York Times* reported in

which is about 800 a day, and make 46,000 intimate abuse arrests every year. Citywide, almost half of all felony assaults and one-third of all rapes in New York City are related to intimate abuse, the overwhelming majority conducted by men against women and children. According to Jane Stoever, writing in the *Vanderbilt Law Review:*

> While an overreliance on gender as the explanation for domestic violence undermines efforts to address same-sex domestic violence, most abuse is committed by men against women, with approximately eighty-five percent of victims being female and ninety percent of perpetrators being male.

Stoever concludes that, in the United States, every year 1.3 million women are physically assaulted by a male partner at a rate that is higher than "automobile accidents, muggings and stranger rape" combined. Given these complex quantitative and emotional realities, in order to be able to serve clients maximally, social workers need a sophisticated understanding of what constitutes intimate abuse, what causes it, how to respond to it, and how to prevent it.

This training was held in a pristine classroom with stained glass windows at a classic Gilded Age Protestant church on Fifth Avenue in Greenwich Village, far away from the normal daily routines of both Hodes and her young students. Becoming a social worker is often a first step by new immigrants into the professional class, and these young men and women in their twenties came from Sri Lankan, West Indian, West African, Cambodian, Russian, Chinese, Albanian, and Dominican backgrounds. They were sincere, committed, and working in community-based services, often within their own neighborhoods and ethnicities. It was a fantastic class, offering wisdom and provoking a lot of re-thinking. In an environment like New York City that is filled with violence, Hodes had boldly started to notice that clients were increasingly confused about what the word "Abuse" actually means. That it was overused. The paradox is, of course, that many women are unable to recognize that they are being abused, or cannot get acknowledgment of this reality from others. But at the very same time, Hodes found that some women were applying the term Abuse to situations that were really something else. Increasingly, she

noticed that women who did not know how to resolve a problem sometimes described that feeling with the word Abuse. So this session had been convened to address that trend directly with service providers.

Hodes' focus was to help social workers differentiate between Abuse and Conflict so that they could be effective, and directed in helping clients in ways that would speak to their real experiences. While identifying Abuse is essential to saving lives and providing services, differentiating Conflict from Abuse is also essential to meeting clients' real need to learn how to face and deal with obstacles, and to develop truthful assessments of themselves and others. Hodes offered many insights rooted in decades of work on the issues of violence and nonviolence in New York, many of which shook the foundational assumptions that the young social workers and I shared despite a thirty-year age difference. The centerpiece of her presentation emerged early and with simple clarity. She started by making us look at common misuses of the word "Abuse." For example, Hodes told us:

"There is no such thing as mutually abusive relationships."

Of course this was startling, because the concept of "mutual abuse" is so commonplace in our culture that its construction is never questioned. Don't we all often get into fraught situations with other people where we both have a role to play? In fact, in our contemporary world, it is a sign of maturity and decency to acknowledge that often all parties participate in making mistakes that can produce discord. In our time, recognizing this fact is part of being an honest person of depth. It helps us understand that trouble between people gets transformed when everyone takes responsibility for their part. Negotiation is a process, first of acknowledgment, and then adjustment to the new information produced by that acknowledgment. Recognizing mutuality of cause is a principle that allows progressive change without scapegoating. Scapegoating, after all, is often rooted in the false accusation that one person or group is unilaterally responsible for mistakes that are actually contributed to by multiple parties. So what did she mean by undoing an insight that so many of us have spent years learning how to apply?

What's wrong with this concept, Hodes quickly clarified, is not the recognition of mutual *responsibility,* but rather the use of the word Abuse, because once the dynamic is mutual, it is not Abuse, which inherently implies one person's domination.

"Differentiating between *Power Struggle* and *Power Over*," Hodes explained, "is the difference between Conflict and Abuse." Abuse is Power Over and Conflict is Power Struggle.

As we students discussed and grappled with this insight over the course of the day, my understanding consistently deepened. While obviously significant abuse does take place in life, where one person is being controlled by another or by a group in a manner that the recipient has not contributed to and can't change, the word "Abuse" has become overused:

- People may feel angry, frustrated, upset. But this does not mean they are being abused. They could, instead, be in Conflict. Instead of identifying as a victim, they might be, as Matt Brim suggested, Conflicted. Therefore the fact that one person is suffering does not inherently mean that the other party is to blame. The expectation that we will never feel badly or anxious or confused is an unreasonable expectation and doesn't automatically mean that someone else is abusing us. These emotions are part of the human experience.
- People may not know how to make things better, how to look at their own participation, how to deal with feeling badly about themselves. They may not know how to understand their own actions, and are afraid of the implications of their actions on the meaning of their lives. And this may be devastating, tormenting, and painful. But this is not being Abused. It doesn't get resolved by organizing punishment of another person. And someone who feels conflicted in this way does not have the right to take punitive actions against another person because they feel bad.
- People may be part of negative friendships, families, or communities who attack outsiders instead of being self-critical. They may be receiving encouragement to blame and scapegoat others. They may live within groups, relationships or families that do not tolerate the admission of mistakes, and that reinforce Supremacy ideologies about each other in order to maintain illusions of righteousness. This pressure, resulting in the action of collectively deflecting blame, does not mean that the person being blamed is abusive. In fact, it says nothing at all about that person, except that they are in turn being caused great pain for no reason. And in my mind, they have the right

to resist that unilateral blame. In this way, group bullying is multiplicative of injustice, even though it is done in the name of nation, family, friendship, or distorted renditions of "loyalty."

- Being in a negative moment with another person can be destabilizing, hurtful, and stressful, especially if a person's self-concept requires them to think of themselves as perfect. But it is not, by definition, Abuse. It could be Abuse, if one has power over another, but if not, it's a Conflict. And being in a Conflict is a position that is filled with responsibility and opportunity.

"All human relationships have power dynamics and that is neither good nor bad. Power is not the problem," Hodes said. "It's how it is wielded." There is a "difference between volatility and abuse," she added. "But not enough understanding of that difference." The discussion went on to carefully examine the consequences of over-simplifying and obscuring these definitions. Hodes made clear that "as a victim advocate, my *first* concern is always for those being abused." But that part of this responsibility is to find out *if* anyone is actually being abused, or if instead the person is mired in Conflict that they have some role in escalating and consequently some power to resolve. And Hodes' job is to assist these young service providers "in being able to do better and deeper differential assessments."

Her insights produced new knowledge in me, and I saw clearly that this confusion between Abuse and Conflict exists in our historic moment in all structured relationships: from the most intimate partnerships to the government's relationship to its own people, and to the geopolitical dynamics between nations. Her primary concern that afternoon, of course, was specifically between the State of New York and its individual residents. After all, social workers are licensed by the government, often employed by the government, and certainly have influence on the government's findings and conclusive actions regarding very crucial issues in people's lives. Social workers can influence immigration, incarceration, custody, benefits, health care, housing, food, education, and other services. Their misapplications of the word "Abuse" can have profound consequences on how individuals are treated by the state and are viewed by their communities, and thus also on their lives and the lives of the people around them.

In order for people who work with the state and for providers, friends, and community members to actually *help* others, they must have crucial

information about specific events and a deeper understanding of power dynamics. In this way they can identify "Power Over" situations and intervene before calamity strikes. Or they can identify "Power Struggle" situations of Conflict and not only avoid the unjustified punishment and stigma of those falsely accused of Abuse, but they can also help people who simply can't problem-solve because they lock themselves into a victimized self-perception. Lacking the support and encouragement to successfully negotiate does not mean that someone is being victimized. True, we have to recognize that the frustration of not knowing how to solve problems and only knowing how to escalate can feel like a response to an outside force, but it is, in fact, internal. Differentiating requires awareness, and we may be dependent on our surrounding communities, including social workers, to achieve this.

Understanding Is More Important than Producing a Victim

"When a provider is trained, they are told what domestic violence is," Hodes said in her presentation. "But I was never told what it is not. And based on what I was taught, I could have looked at every relationship I know and called it *abusive*."

She suggested that social workers change their methodology, and instead of simply asking, "Are you abused?" ask clients questions that would elicit more information. She encouraged the workshop's new professionals to create interactive conversation with clients, rather than narrow experience down into easy categories. This strategic evolution reveals a newly articulated goal to stop organizing the conversation in a way designed to automatically produce the pre-determined revelation that the person is being abused. Instead, the conversation should be redirected to elicit a deeper and more multifaceted factual understanding of what is *actually happening,* in order to reveal more nuance and dimension that could lead to real solutions. Knowing what really happened is more important than deciding who to punish. One suggestion was to ask the client: "Are you unsafe, or are you instead uncomfortable, angry, or hurt?"

People who describe themselves as "Abused" when they are actually in Conflict are not lying; they usually don't know the difference. We're not talking here about the tired false cliché of the vindictive woman who "cries

rape" or diabolically constructs the other as an abuser while knowing full well that the charge is false. What we have instead is a devolved definition of personal responsibility, which constructs avoidance as a right regardless of the harm it does to others. This negative standard persuades some people to feel that being uncomfortable signals that they are being Abused, because they don't have the option of describing themselves as Conflicted. So asking a distressed person if they are unsafe, or rather, uncomfortable, angry, or hurt provides them with an alternative idea that might fit better with their actual experience. It not only elicits helpful information, but encourages the individual to start to think about themselves in a more adult, complex, and responsible manner. What I learned at this point was that if we stop asking people, "Are you being Abused?" and start asking key questions about *what actually occurred,* we can move forward from a fixed expression of victimology, and determine the true nature of events, which could be Abuse, or it could be Conflict. If the person is part of a negative clique, community, family, or group, this maturation is an implicating and therefore forbidden endeavor and will require overt support from the social worker.

The question "Are you unsafe or uncomfortable?" was very inspiring. Does the person feel unsafe when they are not actually unsafe, but rather because the other party, with whom they are in Conflict, is bringing up issues about their life that are troublesome and therefore initially feel overwhelming and difficult to face. Accusations of Abuse, when it is in fact Conflict, can be a smokescreen, obscuring the real problems at hand and making effective response difficult. Are they being asked to confront the consequences of childhood sexual abuse on how they handle conflict as an adult? That is not an instance of Power Over. Are they being asked to recognize that they or a family member have addiction or mental health issues? That too is not Power Over. Or, on the other hand, is the person physically unsafe because the other party beats them, possesses a gun, or makes real and credible threats, as many have actually experienced? Does the other have so much psychological power and control over them that they are unable to exercise separation or independent action? Is the person being confronted with emotionally terrifying threats such as kidnapping their children, exposing their undocumented status, withholding medication, calling the police for no reason, interfering with their banking, credit, or benefits, or organizing others to shun them? Which kind of *safety* are we

endorsing here? Is it the safety from psychological "power over" and actual harm? Or is it the safety from being made uncomfortable by accurate information that challenges one's self-perception?

If it is the latter, it is an assertion of this book that we owe it to each other to help one another tolerate the temporary discomfort that is necessary for the personal and social change produced by positive, interactive problem-solving. In fact, helping each other negotiate is the bedrock of a healthy and active community, clique, family, country. Instead of shunning, shutting down information and scapegoating from a place of non-responsibility, the Conflicted must express, focus, listen, and transform. It is my claim that in situations of Conflict, accusations that attribute sole responsibility to one party and then construct them as deserving of punishment or shunning are unjust.

In my book *The Gentrification of the Mind: Witness to a Lost Imagination* (2012), I discussed the phenomena of mixed, interactive, dynamic neighborhoods being characterized as "dangerous." I address how homogenizing those neighborhoods through displacement and cultural flattening was falsely characterized as "getting better." The gentrification mentality, which I showed to be a product of suburbanization (gated communities, privatized living, gendered and racially segregated social strata) involves understanding difference as discomfort, and being uncomfortable is equated with being abused or in "danger." Those who avoid change view this discomfort as a threat. Certainly no good can come from us continuing to treat the discomfort of social and personal insight as Abuse.

Asking, "What exactly are you afraid of?" can produce answers that reveal either Conflict or Abuse. Avoiding a complete shutdown and instead encouraging a client or friend's thorough exploration of anxiety is beneficial to the accuser and essential to their object of punishment. A woman stating that she is "afraid" of her partner may produce a knee-jerk superficial reaction confirming her as a *victim* and her partner as a perpetrator because she used *fear* terminology. This resonates with the government's use of the vocabulary of "terror" to keep citizens from looking at the consequences of our national policy on other people's lives, or causing us to racially profile people of color, Muslims, and others. But if instead, enough of a conversation of depth ensues to produce concrete articulation of what

exactly she fears, or that citizens fear discovering about ourselves, more layers may emerge.

For example, "I am afraid that she wants me to confront my son's depression, exploitative behavior, or supremacy" might actually be at the core of the Conflict. "And I live inside a community which would make me feel responsible for his anxiety, if I acknowledge it, which is more guilt than I can face." If deep and nuanced support produced this insight, the situation would be revealed as Conflicted. On the other hand, if the same person says, "I am afraid that she will run me over with her car," it could be Abuse. What makes the difference is if the latter is a substitute for the former, that is, if she suggests a scenario of victimization *because* she doesn't have the support to face the actual issue. Real conversation will reveal quickly if the partner has threatened this action, implied or suggested it, or has any history of running people over with cars. But real conversation can also reveal that the partner has never owned a car and the fear is overwhelmingly a deflective projection, which requires yet another path of response. Shallow engagement by a social worker, service provider, or bad friend with the accuser produces outcomes that are detrimental to her, to the person she is blaming, and also to her son, whose stasis remains ignored by the smokescreen of misdirected blame.

Authentic Relationships of Depth vs. Bonding by Bullying

Hodes' illuminations brought many complexities to light about how we, as a community, respond to accusation. Sometimes a person in our lives—a friend, a student, a neighbor or relative—makes negative insinuations about a third party ("He's a stalker" or "She's abusive") and they want us to shun, be cold to, exclude, or in other ways punish this person. Our first responsibility is to determine if they are in physical danger from real violence. If not, then we ask to think with them about the *order of events* so that the complexities of the situation and how it unfolded can be revealed. It is unethical to hurt someone because we have been told to do so. We are required by decency to ask both the complainant and the accused how they understand the situation. And this, I truly believe, requires an in-person discussion. Asking hard questions and creating an environment in which complexities can be faced is, after all, what a real friend does. The

possibility that the person is not in physical danger but is experiencing their reasonable needs being over-powered and controlled by others will be revealed by this process. Similarly, discussion will also reveal if they are blaming, scapegoating, or punishing the other and imposing unjustified conditions of harm. What if we cared enough and took the time to have the full conversation, focusing on details? Not only could we get away from the buzz words and their implied helplessness or innocence, but we could finally do what friends, teachers, caseworkers, family, and community members are supposed to do: help the person to understand what is actually happening in their life, their role in it, and the impact of their past experiences on their present perceptions so that they can produce real choices about how to create peace and resolution. In other words, we could have honest relationships of depth. We could be truly "supportive."

"The question *Are you being abused?,* at this point, can be a meaningless question," Hodes said. Instead, she advised her students to take an entirely different path and suggested alternative questions:

- "What was happening when the behavior occurred? What happened before? What was the outcome? What is the context?"
- "How would you describe your partner?"
- "Who makes the decisions? What usually leads up to a fight and how do they usually end?"

This real engagement will reveal whether the person is being Abused or is Conflicted. It will not obscure Abuse, but it also will not assume it. These questions not only elicit information for the advocate, but more importantly, they help the person in distress look at their own participation and acquire a different level of understanding and inquiry.

Again, I was inspired. Instead of encouraging people to label themselves either as *victim* or as *abuser* when that may or may not be the case, the role of the friend, caseworker, family member, or witness here was not to reinforce distorted thinking or justifications of punishment and victimology, but rather to elicit a truthful and complex telling, at the base of which is something that novelists, like myself, know very well: Truths can be multiple and are revealed by *the order of events.* As I teach in my creative writing classes, each moment is a consequence of the previous moment. So

truths can be complex, and complexity is articulated by its details. Anyone who refuses to hear the details is making a deliberate decision not to understand.

"She yelled at me; she's abusive."

Is that an originating action? Or is that a response? Were you sitting innocently eating your breakfast and she yelled at you because there was no milk, and you are responsible for serving her at every turn, which would be Abuse? Or did she yell at you because you stole her milk money in order to buy drugs? Which would mean that *you* created the originating action and the yelling was a consequence of that action. So there is Conflict about *your* addiction, and the Abuse accusation is a smokescreen to avoid facing it. Or were you so traumatized from being demeaned constantly as a child that as an adult you can't tolerate difference, and any normative challenge is perceived of as an assault or threat? Is it that, in fact, nothing really happened, and yet you feel terrible? And maybe, rather than face the betrayal of your parents, it's a lot easier to put the whole thing on your partner?

Only by examining the details, asking interactive questions in person (and not by email), and understanding the order of events can we differentiate between these three possible interpretations of the same complaint. The most destructive answer, of course, is "She yelled at you? I will hurt her," which is a shallow relationship manifested as bullying. The best answer is, "If you two can't communicate right now, let me talk to her in person and see how she understands what is happening." Or, "How can I help you sit down and talk this through with her?"

Of course, conflicted people can mutually agree that limiting contact between them is best. Or someone in Conflict (not Abuse) may not have the skills or sense of self to be able to communicate productively for some period of time, and can responsibly and kindly request a limit with terms. For example, "I'm not able to act responsibly; let's have a separation and meet in three weeks and ask our friend Joe to help us communicate." Even in an Abuse situation, terms should be responsible and reasonable. For example, "You stole my money to buy drugs, therefore when you have three years sober, we can get together and talk." But if shunning in the context of Conflict is detrimental to the other person and has no terms, it is purely employed as an act of cruelty/punishment or avoidance/denial of

responsibility, and is not justified. At all times, Hodes says, there needs to be articulation of "context, objective, impact."

Just because one conflicted person wants to hurt the other through shunning does not make it a right. For example, if Al wanted to organize a group shunning of Bob overtly because Bob was Black, very few people would theorize that as a right. Nor if it was because Al owed Bob a thousand dollars that he didn't want to pay and so created a diversionary smokescreen. If Al wants to shun Bob because "Bob has three legs," that is not a right. After all, Bob does not have three legs, but even if he did, it would not be legitimate grounds for punishment. If Bob finds the shunning profoundly detrimental and unjustified, he has the right to resist and oppose this form of bullying. Refusing to be shunned for unjust, nonexistent, or absurd reasons is not "stalking." Resisting unjustified punishment is not Abuse. And people who are being asked to stand by and passively allow shunning to take place certainly should know exactly what the accuser is claiming and exactly what the shunned party is experiencing. Without that information, the decision to be a complicit bystander is an unjustified one.

Simply *wanting* to exclude, silence, or dehumanize someone through forced absence is not an inherent right. In the case of Conflict, saying "I refuse to speak to her" can be a behavior that performs the role of "righteous victim of abuse" without the actor actually being in that situation. As always, the people who determine whether or not unjust shunning take place are the surrounding community—they can refuse to participate, or they can blindly endorse it. In my book *Ties That Bind: Familial Homophobia and Its Consequences* (2009), I go into this in detail, using the example of the shunning or exclusion of the queer family member by the homophobic family. There, the family members falsely claim that homosexuality is the Abuse, when in fact the homophobia of the family is the real pathology. This is the perfect example of a process that can only be disrupted by third-party intervention.

At the root of these questions is the responsibility of the caring listener. A shallow relationship with a friend, relative, co-worker, or advocate means that they will not take the time to ask the meaningful questions and to help the person involved overcome shame, anger, and disappointment so they can get to a complex truth about their own participation and how to achieve repair. Who the person talks to is an essential factor in whether they understand or claim their Conflict as Abuse, and establishing the moral

standard within the group. *Are we a family who scapegoats outsiders to avoid facing our own long-standing problems? Do we join in on cruel practices of shunning and punishment as a bond of false loyalty? Or, Are we a family whose standard is to support each other in taking responsibility for dysfunctions and developmental problems and not project them onto other people who see them clearly?* It is up to each family member to decide what kind of group their family will be. The same is true for a group of friends, a workplace, a legal apparatus, a government, or a national or ethnic or religious identity, as well as for those constituted by their HIV status or citizenship. Members have to actively take responsibility for the ethics and moral values that their small or large group claims to represent and actually enact this responsibility. And nothing reveals this more clearly than how difference is treated. Is difference a welcomed perspective to keep the relationships honest, or is it a threat to shared myths of Supremacy or vulnerability? How questions are asked fundamentally reveals the value systems at play, particularly whether or not there is a real desire to know what's true.

In my 1999 interview with Kate Kendell, founding director of the National Center for Lesbian Rights (reproduced in my book *Ties That Bind: Familial Homophobia and Its Consequences*), she made an observation that has haunted me to this day. We were discussing a subject that was quite prominent at the time, the trend for lesbian biological mothers to use the absence of legal relationship recognition to deny custody to former female partners who had fully participated in raising a child. We were discussing the cruelty to the former partner and to the child, the vindictiveness, the destruction of the community, the endless longing and irresolution that it produces, and I asked Kendell how these women justified these actions.

"It's the cadre of friends," she said.

This insight has stayed with me ever since. There is often a "cadre" of bad friends around a person encouraging them to do things that are morally wrong, unjustified, and unethical, because endorsing each other's negative actions is built into the group relationship. Kendell recognized how crucial the surrounding community is in determining if a person will insist on false claims of harm or, the opposite, face their own participation.

Therefore, to Hodes' list of questions, I would add a trope of my own, something that I think a good friend, family member, or citizen would ask:

“What would the other person say happened? What would she say is going on here, and how does she understand it?”

Again, this is my perspective as a novelist, where my job is to convey how each character experiences their own life. If the complainant can’t reproduce the other person’s understanding, then they don’t have enough information to complete their story.

Just last night as I was writing this book, my friend Dirk told me about a friend of his whose female partner, the mother of a young child, was “stalking” him. He described how the woman came to his friend’s workplace with her seven-year-old, and “made a scene,” jeopardizing the man’s job.

“Why did she do that?” I asked.

“I don’t know. She was harassing him.”

Now, I can think of a lot of reasons that could produce the moment where a woman feels she must bring her child with her to talk to her boyfriend at work, in front of others, about a wide range of concerns: she didn’t have childcare, she was locked out of the apartment, she had been evicted, there had been a fire, her child was too distressed or unwell to be separated, she was on her way to the doctor and needed cash. Perhaps she wanted to remind her boyfriend of who their child really was, how vulnerable, how beautiful, how loving, how hurt, the child missed his father, and so on. He had an obligation to fulfill and was avoiding it by refusing to answer the phone or talk. There are many imaginable scenarios where this *Conflicted* couple could have substantive difference, the resolution of which would make the man uncomfortable, so he could imagine or employ the language of Abuse in order to avoid taking responsibilities. No one in the community surrounding this couple can start to understand if this is Abuse or Conflict if they never talk to the woman in question.

According to my logic, Dirk has an ethical responsibility to understand what the woman’s motive and objective were when she came to his friend’s workplace in order to be able to evaluate the events *before* he reinforces his male friend in the accusation that she was “stalking” him. Once Dirk and I started actually discussing the situation, he revealed that this responsibility was something that simply never occurred to him. He somehow had gotten the wrong message that “being a good friend” meant *not* asking questions that reveal truths. Instead he was expected to join in, uninformed, on the

condemnation of the woman. Instead, Dirk could have tried to understand the motives and objectives of his friend's girlfriend, who was obviously already in a place of distress and pain, something that his male friend may have helped to create.

In other words, despite the fact that Dirk's friend *said* that he was being "abused" and "stalked," and that he may even believe that his girlfriend talking to him about conflicts at work means that he is her victim, many other things could be taking place. They could simply be Conflicted; involved in a disagreement that needs to be faced and dealt with, perhaps with helpful outside parties who can produce meaningful communication. Or, even more importantly, her actions could be *resistance* to his unfair and unjustified behavior. He might be blaming her for something she did not do or blaming her for something that never happened, which is not anyone's *right.* He could be projecting onto her from traumas caused by other people earlier in his life, which, if harmful to her, is not his right. Or he could be overreacting to normative conflict and, by overstating harm, finding justification for his own excessively punitive or cruel behaviors.

"Lack of understanding," Hodes underlined for the class, "about the difference between Conflict and Abuse has negative outcomes."

When the Community Encourages Overreaction

I once had a young male graduate student from a marginalized and oppressed community whose work I very much liked, and whom I liked personally. One day I learned that he had a blog where he wrote that he was in love with me. These were in the early days of the internet, and I didn't even know what a "blog" was, revealing our generational differences. There he made comments about my appearance, discussed his feelings about me, and shared information about my life. Coincidentally, one of his criticisms of an aspect of my appearance hit exactly a place where I felt insecure, something he could not know. And I was so embarrassed, I actually made changes in myself in response to his statements. Although I felt bad, I was still clear that if I hadn't already had a pre-conditioned history of sensitivity to this area, his comments would not have affected me in the same way. They could, in fact, have been benign.

All of my colleagues, with one exception, described his actions as "stalking." None of these people suggested that I talk to him in order to understand what he thought he was doing. None of them offered to have that conversation with him themselves. All but one (a woman from the same oppressed group as the student) assumed as a matter of course that I should expose him to the administration, humiliate him, perhaps endanger his career, and most importantly make accusations against him through authoritative channels. At first, I assumed they were correct. His actions, on the surface, fit behaviors that were undesirable and in response I felt uncomfortable. I, too, lived inside the paradigm where being uncomfortable was grounds for accusing someone of abuse. I contemplated following what seemed to be the obvious, convenient, and socially condoned path of accusing him of "stalking" followed by condemnation, cut-off, and punishment. I accepted the group's offer of approval based on the idea that I was an innocent victim of someone who should, therefore, be hurt.

But at the same time, I discovered that I was disturbed by the rapidity with which my colleagues drew conclusions, the viciousness of their suggestions, the unquestioned reliance on punitive authorities, and their own sense of themselves as superior to him at the root of these impulses. I was most disturbed by them drawing these conclusions *without ever speaking to* him. I realized that, in fact, I had two clearly different options of how to respond. I could solidify my relationship to the group by being outraged, violated, damaged, angry, and fearful and elevate them into rescuers, loyal protectors of my womanhood. Or I could find out what he thought he was doing, and perhaps discover that he had made an error in judgment that we had to address. I realized that I actually had a choice about how to respond, even though my professional community was pushing me toward victimology. In this particular case, I was uncomfortable, in part because of him, but also in part because of earlier experiences in which he had played no part. I thought over my colleagues' advice, and then refused it. I knew that "stalking" was and is a real thing. That ex-husbands and other aggrieved types like fans of movie stars sit outside their homes with guns, and actually do murder people. To use this word, which represents a literal experience of real violence, metaphorically, to describe discomfort or a situation that merits conversation in order to be understood, was absurd.

In fact, I did the opposite. I avoided all third parties, all institutions of power, and took the time to speak to him directly so that we could negotiate a resolution. I told him that I could no longer be his thesis advisor because his comments made me uncomfortable. I made myself available to him for in-person conversation (not through email or third parties) and conveyed that I was transferring him to someone who was appropriate to his project, and that I still supported his work. I told him that I was available to discuss this matter with him until he felt it was resolved. And I kept my word; we had a few conversations. I refused to shun him, or to limit our conversations because my goal was mutual resolution, not punishment, dominance, or assertion of either my victimhood or Supremacy.

A few things surfaced that I could not have known without talking it over, and this new information was enriching. First of all, I became more aware that younger people had a different relationship to the internet than I did. Talking about difficult feelings and sharing information on this level was generationally culturally appropriate for him. That based on our different age positions, we experienced those actions differently. I also learned that I was the first authority figure to take him seriously, from his marginalized position, as an artist and intellectual. And that this had overwhelmed him with feeling, perhaps at a level that maybe should have been contained, but wasn't.

Once he saw that I was establishing a new parameter for the relationship by resigning as his advisor, but that at the same time I was neither punishing him, invoking authority, shunning him, nor withholding, we transitioned positively into the next phase. I was invited into victimology, but I am very glad that I found the strength to resist the image of myself as being more aggressed than I actually was. While my discomfort had multiple sources, he was only one of them. So falsely projecting that my partner in Conflict had sinister intentions, which my colleagues felt sure they could automatically intuit, would have been an error. Instinctually, I applied what Catherine Hodes would years later articulate as "context, objective, impact." Now, more than a decade after these events, this man and I are active friends in the same arts community. But for years I have been grappling with my colleagues' almost prescribed instinct to punish, using the language originated initially by a radical movement but now co-opted to deny complexity, due process, and the kind of in-person, interactive conversation that produces resolution.

I discussed this with my therapist, now deceased, who had treated victims of McCarthyism later on in their lives. He told me that some of his patients had found themselves caught up in the whirlwind smoke of shunning and innuendo, whisper campaigns and exclusions. No one ever sat down and told them what they were being accused of, and they never had a chance to discuss or inform or respond. Instead, group pressures, intimidations, and false loyalties produced a climate of mysterious chill, in which they were denied jobs, kept out of social events, shunned by acquaintances. People were mean to them without ever saying why, and no opportunity for clarification or repair was ever presented. These people found both the material and emotional consequences overwhelming, but even more so they were hurt by the amorphous nature of the problem. Not being able to know exactly what they were charged with, not being able to talk through the accusations, never knowing where they would face these hostile expressions drove many people to extreme suffering. Even later when classic McCarthyism was dismantled and delegitimized, these unnecessarily broken relationships could not be healed. My therapist explained to me that taking extreme bullying actions, like signing a petition against a friend, or denouncing a colleague to others or to the state, as often happened under McCarthyism, was so extreme in its pathology that the participants could never repair. They were so defended against the reality of the injustice of their own action that they couldn't reconcile it to their false image of themselves as righteous. In listening to him, I came to believe that the same personality type who would ice out or attack someone without talking to them first out of false "loyalty" would be the same person who would later be unable to apologize. It's a character issue that becomes the building blocks of fascism or any supremacist construction. And for those people, a commonly held expectation or standard of asking targeted people what they feel or how they understand their experience could be a life-enhancing or even life-saving corrective.

False Accusations and the State

The lack of engaged, compassionate conversation of depth by the community surrounding an accusing party and by the authority to which the accuser would turn has terrible consequences. These include, interestingly,

as Hodes informed us, “Perpetrators, themselves, [who] often initiate the complaint of abuse.” The legal apparatus that has been put in place ostensibly to assist a victim can and often is used to extend the cruelty as well as to keep the perpetrator from facing their own issues. The system by which we help people step out of conflict is so flawed, and the general understanding in the population so over-simplified that, for example, when the police answer a distress call to a private home, “Survivors may be arrested at the scene,” Hodes said. “Or cross complaints may be issued.”

Perpetrators increasingly are the ones to call the police, threaten legal action, send lawyer letters, or threaten or seek restraining orders as part and parcel of their agenda of blame and unilateral control. It is an agenda designed to avoid by any means necessary having to examine their own behavior, history, or participation in the Conflict. Actively violent and truly abusive people are hard to convict, and innocent people are convicted of crimes every day. At the same time a targeted victim may rarely be convicted and incarcerated based on exclusively harassing uses of the law, but the stigma, the anxiety, the expense and fear caused by cynical manipulation of police, lawyers, and courts can be the punitive, avoidant goal. The state’s protective machine becomes an additional tool of harassment.

“Anyone can use the apparatus,” Hodes said. “Including abusers, to mete out punishment.”

The National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs’ 2014 report on LGBTQI Intimate Partner Abuse noted that “in 2013 the police mis-arrested the survivor as the perpetrator of violence” in over half of all queer domestic abuse arrests. There are particular dangers in misidentifying the perpetrator in same-sex relationships. The one who is butch, of color, not a mother, not a citizen, is from another culture, or HIV-positive can be falsely construed as the assailant. In all cases, the perpetrator may get control of the Abuse discourse as a denial, defense, or deflection of their own behavior. And just because someone doesn’t call the police certainly does not mean they are guilty. There is often the false assumption that the one calling the police is innocent and the one who doesn’t call the police is guilty. The real violated party may refuse to engage with the legal system for ethical reasons, or fear of the police, or they may refuse to grandstand on that level of language, punishment, or intimidation. They may simply recognize that the trouble is a Conflict and therefore inappropriate for punishment. And in

cases of Conflict, where Abuse is not present, service providers from the New York LGBT Anti-Violence Project told me that false accusations and illegitimate claims to orders of protection were present among the client base, and that they understood these actions of overstating harm as consequences of "trauma."

"Threats," Hodes points out, "are an effective means of control." So just because someone makes the charge of Abuse, organizes group shunning or even generates lawyer letters or calls the police, it is not in any way proof or evidence that they are being "abused." They could be mischaracterizing the other's attempt to straighten things out, to communicate, to de-escalate because they fear the information that real negotiation would reveal. Or they may be so expectant of obedience and successful control of the other that that person's *resistance* to being scapegoated, shunned, or bullied gets called Abuse. Despite the assertions of Supremacy ideology, projecting onto another person or blaming them for things they have not caused, punishing them for things that never happened, organizing group shunning against them, or any other manifestation of mislabeling Conflict as Abuse are not "rights." "In court," Hodes said, "survivors do poorly in forensics and perpetrators do well." Reactions to scapegoating, assault, shunning, the denial of due process, i.e., assertion of what Hannah Arendt called "The right to appear," can all be spun through the language of victimology.

Since perpetrators may refuse to participate in negotiation, group shunning is often one of their strategies. "A perpetrator can isolate their partner from the community," Hodes offered. They can organize or instrumentalize that community to punish or shun the partner, thereby restricting further the partner's ability to provide information, details, ask for help, or engage in negotiation. Hodes advocates for clients to be asked, "What did *you* do? What was the purpose behind your behavior?" Over and over again she recommends an analytical focus on the self: one's own actions, their chronological order, their intent and outcome.

"Abusers externalize," she says. "It's always somebody else's fault." So if the parties are able to spell out and honestly discuss their own roles, then they are more able to create solutions, which is what the abuser fears.

In the workshop we discussed a then-recent case in Connecticut where two men married to each other were issued cross-restraining orders. They both had serious crystal meth problems; there was a lot of acting out, and they each, in a grandstanding way, went to the police asking for protective

orders, thereby avoiding the actual problem, which was the drug addiction. Of course, being the one to receive a restraining order in no way means that he is the one being "abused." It may simply mean nothing more than that he wanted to and was able to get a restraining order. Another personality, in the same position, may feel that getting a restraining order would be an escalation and an overstatement. But in this case, both parties decided to overstate harm, with the exaggeration augmented, or perhaps even caused, by addiction. Because the courts were confused by the question of determining who was "the" aggressor when there were two men involved, they were both given restraining orders by the state.

"There should never be cross-restraining orders," Hodes said. That's like saying *we agree to not see each other.* Restraining orders should only be issued if one person is deemed to be a perpetrator and the restraining order is necessary to save the other from Power Over. It's not a tactical strategy designed to prove a point. If both people are contributing to the problem, then it is *mutual* and therefore Conflict, and the intervention of the court is unreasonable. And asking for that intervention is similarly unreasonable. In this case, both men manipulated the Abuse apparatus as smokescreens to avoid dealing with the real issue, addiction. And the state happily enabled them, by reaffirming Abuse claims without providing an investigative process that would have revealed and focused on their drug use. Of course, in this mangled set of missteps, disaster ensued. When they came together again and had another conflict, the police arrived and ridiculously enforced both restraining orders; absurdly, both men were arrested. Unfortunately one had a heart attack while in jail and died. As we learn over and over again from police violence in the United States, calling the police over Conflict can result in violence and death.

"Mainstream Domestic Violence advocacy," Hodes said in a correspondence later that year, "is committed to assuming that *the victim is telling the truth,* and any exploration around that trope is met with heavy resistance. Historically, that makes sense for a host of reasons. But *this* analysis is not about disbelieving, it's about pinpointing where the problem lies."

One of Hodes' many valuable suggestions is to lower the bar for what must happen in a person's life for their suffering to be acknowledged.

"The current paradigm is encouraging all of us to think we are in abusive relationships," Hodes explained. "And if you are not in an abusive

relationship, you don't deserve help. Being 'abused' is what makes you 'eligible.' But everyone deserves help when they reach out for it."

This is a strikingly humane idea: that the collapse of Conflict and Abuse is partly the result of a punitive standard in which people are made desperate, yet ineligible, for compassion. This is a non-cynical reading of a human condition in which people who have suffered in the past, or find themselves implicated in situations in which they are afraid to be accountable, fear that within their group acknowledging some responsibility will mean being denied their need to be heard and cared for. So they fall back on the accusation of Abuse to guarantee that they will not be questioned in a way that confirms these fears. Especially vulnerable to this are those who experienced profound disapproval and criticism early on as children, who are later locked into self-righteous families or Supremacy communities with negative bonds. Ultimately, the blurring of Conflict and Abuse, Hodes says, "is epidemic, and leads to everyone identifying as a victim, which is paralyzing the search for solutions."

I was moved and enlightened by her insight that conflicted people have to prove they are "eligible" for compassion. No one can negotiate without being heard. Shunning, therefore, is designed to maintain a unilateral position of unmovable superiority by asserting one's status as Abused and the implied consequential right to punish without terms. This concept, of having to earn the right to have pain acknowledged, is predicated on a need to enforce that one party is entirely righteous and without mistake, while the other is the Specter, the residual holder of all evil. If conflicted people were expected and encouraged to produce complex understandings of their relationships, then people could be expected to negotiate, instead of having to justify their pain through inflated charges of victimization. And it is in the best interest of us all to try to consciously move to that place.

muscle memory

sarah mccarry

The weather changed & my heart changed with it; I am one of those people who is glad for fall, glad always, glad as my whole life opens up again & I remember what is possible & all the things I want to do.

It was, for the most part, a hard summer. I am running forty miles a week, a thing I would not have thought doable very long ago, before a few weeks ago, before I did it & realized I could. I was trying to explain to someone how this happened, how my body became a body that is capable of this doing, & I said I think it is mostly a matter of scale. Of how your perspective changes when the undone thing becomes done.

I am tired of trauma & of writing about trauma & of the idea that trauma is the only experience women have to offer the world, the only piece of our lives that matters, the only story we have to tell (over & over & over & over), tired even as these stories repeat themselves ad nauseam in the public eye, even as trauma is reproduced endlessly & in a thousand novel ways, trauma against all bodies othered and queered, all bodies brown & black & female & trans, that even as trauma metastasizes & our naming of it is met with refusal, our demand that it be recognized is turned aside, trauma is still the only story that is given to us to tell.

We do other things besides bleed. We fight and set fires, we build communities, we love in the face of all that does not love us. We knit bright clothes out of shrapnel. We drink on railroad bridges under the broad white moon & name all our dreams in order, one by one, the train cars passing behind us so close they'd shear us clean through if we leaned back too far. We tattoo one another's names with needles & India ink; we make our memories into our skins. We make lives. We make living.

I am working on a book about monsters & I have been afraid of it for a while. I look at the notes, the blank document, put them away, do it again. Do we want to go back to those places? Is it worthwhile? I don't know. But the story keeps calling my name. A friend of mine who used to be a distance swimmer told me that she had fallen once from a great distance & when she went to the hospital they told her she had shattered her spine but her muscles were so massive they held the splinters of bone in place, that that was what saved her, her own strength born of practice. We spend all our days making muscle for this. We run and run and run until distance is only a matter of time.

1

Wanted: Men Who Love

Every female wants to be loved by a male. Every woman wants to love and be loved by the males in her life. Whether gay or straight, bisexual or celibate, she wants to feel the love of father, grandfather, uncle, brother, or male friend. If she is heterosexual she wants the love of a male partner. We live in a culture where emotionally starved, deprived females are desperately seeking male love. Our collective hunger is so intense it rends us. And yet we dare not speak it for fear we will be mocked, pitied, shamed. To speak our hunger for male love would demand that we name the intensity of our lack and our loss. The male bashing that was so intense when contemporary feminism first surfaced more than thirty years ago was in part the rageful cover-up of the shame women felt not because men refused to share their power but because we could not seduce, cajole, or entice men to share their emotions—to love us.

By claiming that they wanted the power men had, man-hating feminists (who were by no means the majority) covertly proclaimed that they too wanted to be rewarded for being out of touch with their feelings, for being unable to love. Men in patriarchal culture responded to feminist demand for greater equity in the work world and in the sexual world by making room, by sharing the spheres of power. The place where most men refused to change—

believed themselves unable to change—was in their emotional lives. Not even for the love and respect of liberated women were men willing to come to the table of love as equal partners ready to share the feast.

No one hungers for male love more than the little girl or boy who rightfully needs and seeks love from Dad. He may be absent, dead, present in body yet emotionally not there, but the girl or boy hungers to be acknowledged, recognized, respected, cared for. All around our nation a billboard carries this message: “Each night millions of kids go to sleep starving—for attention from their dads.” Because patriarchal culture has already taught girls and boys that Dad’s love is more valuable than mother love, it is unlikely that maternal affection will heal the lack of fatherly love. No wonder then that these girls and boys grow up angry with men, angry that they have been denied the love they need to feel whole, worthy, accepted. Heterosexual girls and homosexual boys can and do become the women and men who make romantic bonds the place where they quest to find and know male love. But that quest is rarely satisfied. Usually rage, grief, and unrelenting disappointment lead women and men to close off the part of themselves that was hoping to be touched and healed by male love. They learn then to settle for whatever positive attention men are able to give. They learn to overvalue it. They learn to pretend that it is love. They learn how not to speak the truth about men and love. They learn to live the lie.

As a child I hungered for the love of my dad. I wanted him to notice me, to give me his attention and his affections. When I could not get him to notice me by being good and dutiful, I was willing to risk punishment to be bad enough to catch his gaze, to hold it, and to bear the weight of his heavy hand. I longed for those hands to hold, shelter, and protect me, to touch me with tenderness and care, but I

accepted that this would never be. I knew at age five that those hands would acknowledge me only when they were bringing me pain, that if I could accept that pain and hold it close, I could be Daddy's girl. I could make him proud. I am not alone. So many of us have felt that we could win male love by showing we were willing to bear the pain, that we were willing to live our lives affirming that the maleness deemed truly manly because it withholds, withdraws, refuses is the maleness we desire. We learn to love men more because they will not love us. If they dared to love us, in patriarchal culture they would cease to be real "men."

In her moving memoir *In the Country of Men* Jan Waldron describes a similar longing. She confesses that "the kind of father I ached for I have never seen except in glimpses I have embellished with wishful imaginings." Contrasting the loving fathers we long for with the fathers we have, she expresses the hunger:

Dad. It is a vow against all odds, in the face of countless examples to the contrary. Dad. It does not have the utilitarian effect of Mum or Ma. It's still spoken as a ballad refrain. It's a pledge that originates in the heart and fights for life amid the carnage of persistent, obvious history to the contrary and excruciatingly scant follow-through. Mother love is aplenty and apparent: we complain because we have too much of it. The love of a father is an uncommon gem, to be hunted, burnished, and hoarded. The value goes up because of its scarcity.

In our culture we say very little about the longing for father love.

Rather than bringing us great wisdom about the nature of men and love, reformist feminist focus on male power

reinforced the notion that somehow males were powerful and had it all. Feminist writing did not tell us about the deep inner misery of men. It did not tell us the terrible terror that gnaws at the soul when one cannot love. Women who envied men their hardheartedness were not about to tell us the depth of male suffering. And so it has taken more than thirty years for the voices of visionary feminists to be heard telling the world the truth about men and love. Barbara Deming hinted at those truths:

I think the reason that men are so very violent is that they know, deep in themselves, that they're acting out a lie, and so they're furious at being caught up in the lie. But they don't know how to break it.... They're in a rage because they are acting out a lie—which means that in some deep part of themselves they want to be delivered from it, are homesick for the truth.

The truth we do not tell is that men are longing for love. This is the longing feminist thinkers must dare to examine, explore, and talk about. Those rare visionary feminist seers, who are now no longer all female, are no longer afraid to openly address issues of men, masculinity, and love. Women have been joined by men with open minds and big hearts, men who love, men who know how hard it is for males to practice the art of loving in patriarchal culture.

In part, I began to write books about love because of the constant fighting between my ex-boyfriend Anthony and myself. We were (and at the time of this writing still are) each other's primary bond. We came together hoping to create love and found ourselves creating conflict. We decided to break up, but even that did not bring an end to the conflict. The issues we fought about most had to do with the practice of love. Like so many men who know that the

women in their lives want to hear them declare love, Anthony made those declarations. When asked to link the "I love you" words with definition and practice, he found that he did not really have the words, that he was fundamentally uncomfortable being asked to talk about emotions.

Like many males, he had not been happy in most of the relationships he had chosen. The unhappiness of men in relationships, the grief men feel about the failure of love, often goes unnoticed in our society precisely because the patriarchal culture really does not care if men are unhappy. When females are in emotional pain, the sexist thinking that says that emotions should and can matter to women makes it possible for most of us to at least voice our heart, to speak it to someone, whether a close friend, a therapist, or the stranger sitting next to us on a plane or bus. Patriarchal mores teach a form of emotional stoicism to men that says they are more manly if they do not feel, but if by chance they should feel and the feelings hurt, the manly response is to stuff them down, to forget about them, to hope they go away. George Weinberg explains in *Why Men Won't Commit:* "Most men are on quest for the ready-made perfect woman because they basically feel that problems in a relationship can't be worked out. When the slightest thing goes wrong, it seems easier to bolt than talk." The masculine pretense is that real men feel no pain.

The reality is that men are hurting and that the whole culture responds to them by saying, "Please do not tell us what you feel." I have always been a fan of the *Sylvia* cartoon where two women sit, one looking into a crystal ball as the other woman says, "He never talks about his feelings." And the woman who can see the future says, "At two P.M. all over the world men will begin to talk about their feelings—and women all over the world will be sorry."

If we cannot heal what we cannot feel, by supporting patriarchal culture that socializes men to deny feelings, we doom them to live in states of emotional numbness. We construct a culture where male pain can have no voice, where male hurt cannot be named or healed. It is not just men who do not take their pain seriously. Most women do not want to deal with male pain if it interferes with the satisfaction of female desire. When feminist movement led to men's liberation, including male exploration of "feelings," some women mocked male emotional expression with the same disgust and contempt as sexist men. Despite all the expressed feminist longing for men of feeling, when men worked to get in touch with feelings, no one really wanted to reward them. In feminist circles men who wanted to change were often labeled narcissistic or needy. Individual men who expressed feelings were often seen as attention seekers, patriarchal manipulators trying to steal the stage with their drama.

When I was in my twenties, I would go to couples therapy, and my partner of more than ten years would explain how I asked him to talk about his feelings and when he did, I would freak out. He was right. It was hard for me to face that I did not want to hear about his feelings when they were painful or negative, that I did not want my image of the strong man truly challenged by learning of his weaknesses and vulnerabilities. Here I was, an enlightened feminist woman who did not want to hear my man speak his pain because it revealed his emotional vulnerability. It stands to reason, then, that the masses of women committed to the sexist principle that men who express their feelings are weak really do not want to hear men speak, especially if what they say is that they hurt, that they feel unloved. Many women cannot hear male pain about love because it sounds like an indictment of female failure. Since sexist norms have taught us that loving is our task

whether in our role as mothers or lovers or friends, if men say they are not loved, then we are at fault; we are to blame.

There is only one emotion that patriarchy values when expressed by men; that emotion is anger. Real men get mad. And their mad-ness, no matter how violent or violating, is deemed natural—a positive expression of patriarchal masculinity. Anger is the best hiding place for anybody seeking to conceal pain or anguish of spirit. My father was an angry man. At times he still is, even though he is past eighty years old. Recently when I called home he said, speaking of me and my sister, “I love you both dearly.” Amazed to hear Dad speak of love, I wanted us to talk but I could not find words. Fear silenced me, the old fear of Dad the patriarch, the silent, angry man and the new fear of breaking this fragile bond of caring connection. So I could not ask, “What do you mean, Dad, when you tell me that you love me dearly?” In the chapter focusing on our search for loving men in *Communion: The Female Search for Love* I make this observation: “Lots of women fear men. And fear can lay the foundation for contempt and hatred. It can be a cover-up for repressed, killing rage.” Fear keeps us away from love. And yet women rarely talk to men about how much we fear them.

My siblings and I have never talked with Dad about the years he held us hostage—imprisoning us behind the walls of his patriarchal terrorism. And even in our adult years we are still afraid to ask him, “Why, Daddy? Why were you always so angry? Why didn’t you love us?”

In those powerful passages where she writes of her father’s death, Barbara Deming names that fear. As death is swiftly taking him beyond her reach, she sees clearly that fear had kept him away from her all along—his fear of her

being too close, and her fear of seeking to be close to him. Fear keeps us from being close to the men in our lives; it keeps us from love.

Once upon a time I thought it was a female thing, this fear of men. Yet when I began to talk with men about love, time and time again I heard stories of male fear of other males. Indeed, men who feel, who love, often hide their emotional awareness from other men for fear of being attacked and shamed. This is the big secret we all keep together—the fear of patriarchal maleness that binds everyone in our culture. We cannot love what we fear. That is why so many religious traditions teach us that there is no fear in love.

We struggle then, in patriarchal culture, all of us, to love men. We may care about males deeply. We may cherish our connections with the men in our lives. And we may desperately feel that we cannot live without their presence, their company. We can feel all these passions in the face of maleness and yet stand removed, keeping the distance patriarchy has created, maintaining the boundaries we are told not to cross. In a class with students who are reading the trilogy of books I have written about love, with forty men talking about love, we talk of fathers. A black male in his late thirties, whose father was present in the home, a hard worker, talked about his recent experience of parenthood, his commitment to be a loving father, and his fear that he will fail. He fears failure because he has not had a loving role model. His father was almost always away from home, working, roaming. When he was home, his favorite way of relating was to tease and taunt his son mercilessly, in a biting voice full of sarcasm and contempt, a voice that could humiliate with just a word. Reflecting the experience of many of us, the individual telling his story talked about wanting the love of this hard man but then learning not to

want it, learning to silence his heart, to make it not matter. I asked him and the other men present, “If you have closed off your heart, shut down your emotional awareness, then do you know how to love your sons? Where and when along the way did you learn the practice of love?”

He tells me and the other men who sit in our circle of love, “I just think of what my father would do and do the opposite.” Everyone laughs. I affirm this practice, adding only that it is not enough to stay in the space of reaction, that being simply reactive is always to risk allowing that shadowy past to overtake the present. How many sons fleeing the example of their fathers raise boys who emerge as clones of their grandfathers, boys who may never even have met their grandfathers but behave just like them? Beyond reaction, though, any male, no matter his past or present circumstance, no matter his age or experience, can learn how to love.

In the past four years the one clear truth I have learned from individual men I have met while traveling and lecturing is that men want to know love and they want to know how to love. There is simply not enough literature speaking directly, intimately, to this need. After writing a general book about love, then one specifically about black people and love, then another focusing on the female search for love, I wanted to go further and talk about men and love.

Women and men alike in our culture spend very little time encouraging males to learn to love. Even the women who are pissed off at men, women most of whom are not and maybe never will be feminist, use their anger to avoid being truly committed to helping to create a world where males of all ages can know love. And there remains a small strain of feminist thinkers who feel strongly that they have given all they want to give to men; they are concerned

solely with improving the collective welfare of women. Yet life has shown me that any time a single male dares to transgress patriarchal boundaries in order to love, the lives of women, men, and children are fundamentally changed for the better.

Every day on our television screens and in our nation's newspapers we are brought news of continued male violence at home and all around the world. When we hear that teenage boys are arming themselves and killing their parents, their peers, or strangers, a sense of alarm permeates our culture. Folks want to have answers. They want to know, Why is this happening? Why so much killing by boy children now, and in this historical moment? Yet no one talks about the role patriarchal notions of manhood play in teaching boys that it is their nature to kill, then teaching them that they can do nothing to change this nature—nothing, that is, that will leave their masculinity intact. As our culture prepares males to embrace war, they must be all the more indoctrinated into patriarchal thinking that tells them that it is their nature to kill and to enjoy killing. Bombarded by news about male violence, we hear no news about men and love.

Only a revolution of values in our nation will end male violence, and that revolution will necessarily be based on a love ethic. To create loving men, we must love males. Loving maleness is different from praising and rewarding males for living up to sexist-defined notions of male identity. Caring about men because of what they do for us is not the same as loving males for simply being. When we love maleness, we extend our love whether males are performing or not. Performance is different from simply being. In patriarchal culture males are not allowed simply to be who they are and to glory in their unique identity. Their value is always determined by what they do. In an antipatriarchal culture

males do not have to prove their value and worth. They know from birth that simply being gives them value, the right to be cherished and loved.

I write about men and love as a declaration of profound gratitude to the males in my life with whom I do the work of love. Much of my thinking about maleness began in childhood when I witnessed the differences in the ways my brother and I were treated. The standards used to judge his behavior were much harsher. No male successfully measures up to patriarchal standards without engaging in an ongoing practice of self-betrayal. In his boyhood my brother, like so many boys, just longed to express himself. He did not want to conform to a rigid script of appropriate maleness. As a consequence he was scorned and ridiculed by our patriarchal dad. In his younger years our brother was a loving presence in our household, capable of expressing emotions of wonder and delight. As patriarchal thinking and action claimed him in adolescence, he learned to mask his loving feelings. He entered that space of alienation and antisocial behavior deemed “natural” for adolescent boys. His six sisters witnessed the change in him and mourned the loss of our connection. The damage done to his self-esteem in boyhood has lingered throughout his life, for he continues to grapple with the issue of whether he will define himself or allow himself to be defined by patriarchal standards.

At the same time that my brother surrendered his emotional awareness and his capacity to make emotional connection in order to be accepted as “one of the boys,” rejecting the company of his sisters for fear that enjoying us made him less male, my mother’s father, Daddy Gus, found it easier to be disloyal to patriarchy in old age. He was the man in my childhood who practiced the art of loving. He was emotionally aware and emotionally present, and yet he also

was trapped by a patriarchal bond. Our grandmother, his wife of more than sixty years, was always deeply invested in the dominator model of relationships. To macho men Daddy Gus, Mama's father, appeared to be less than masculine. He was seen as henpecked. I can remember our patriarchal father expressing contempt for Daddy Gus, calling him weak—and letting Mama know via domination that he would not be ruled by a woman. Dad took Mama's admiration for her dad, for his capacity to love, and made it appear that what was precious to her was really worthless.

Back then Mama did not know how lucky she was to have a loving father. Like so many females, she had been seduced by myths of romantic love to dream of a strong, domineering, take-control, dashing, and daring man as a suitable mate. She married her ideal only to find herself trapped in a bond with a punishing, cruel, unloving patriarchal man. She spent more than forty years of marriage believing in the patriarchal gender roles that told her he should be the one in control and that she should be the one to submit and obey. When patriarchal men are not cruel, the women in their lives can cling to the seductive myth that they are lucky to have a real man, a benevolent patriarch who provides and protects. When that real man is repeatedly cruel, when he responds to care and kindness with contempt and brutal disregard, the woman in his life begins to see him differently. She may begin to interrogate her own allegiance to patriarchal thinking. She may wake up and recognize that she is wedded to abuse, that she is not loved. That moment of awakening is the moment of heartbreak. Heartbroken women in longtime marriages or partnerships rarely leave their men. They learn to make an identity out of their suffering, their complaint, their bitterness.

Throughout our childhood Mama was the great defender of Dad. He was her knight in shining armor, her beloved. And even when she began to see him, to really see him, as he was and not as she had longed for him to be, she still taught us to admire him and be grateful for his presence, his material provision, his discipline. A fifties woman, she was willing to cling to the fantasy of the patriarchal ideal even as she confronted the brutal reality of patriarchal domination daily. As her children left home, leaving her alone with her husband, her hope that they might find their way to love was soon dashed. She was left face-to-face with the emotionally shut down cold patriarch she had married. After fifty years of marriage she would not be leaving him, but she would no longer believe in love. Only her bitterness found a voice; she now speaks the absence of love, a lifetime of heartache. She is not alone. All over the world women live with men in states of lovelessness. They live and they mourn.

My mother and father were the source figures who shaped my patterns of love and longing. I spent most of the years between twenty and forty seeking to know love with intellectually brilliant men who were simply emotionally unaware, men who could not give what they did not have, men who could not teach what they did not know—men who did not know how to love. In my forties I began a relationship with a much younger man who had been schooled in the art and practice of feminist thinking. He was able to acknowledge having a broken spirit. As a child he had been a victim of patriarchal tyranny. He knew there was something wrong within, even though he had not yet found a language to articulate what was missing.

“Something missing within” was a self-description I heard from many men as I went around our nation talking about love. Again and again a man would tell me about early

childhood feelings of emotional exuberance, of unrepressed joy, of feeling connected to life and to other people, and then a rupture happened, a disconnect, and that feeling of being loved, of being embraced, was gone. Somehow the test of manhood, men told me, was the willingness to accept this loss, to not speak it even in private grief. Sadly, tragically, these men in great numbers were remembering a primal moment of heartbreak and heartache: the moment that they were compelled to give up their right to feel, to love, in order to take their place as patriarchal men.

Everyone who tries to create love with an emotionally unaware partner suffers. Self-help books galore tell us that we cannot change anyone but ourselves. Of course they never answer the question of what will motivate males in a patriarchal culture who have been taught that to love emasculates them to change, to choose love, when the choice means that they must stand against patriarchy, against the tyranny of the familiar. We cannot change men but we can encourage, implore, and affirm their will to change. We can respect the truth of their inner being, a truth that they may be unable to speak: that they long to connect, to love, to be loved.

The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity and Love answers the questions about love asked by men of all ages in our culture. I write in response to questions about love asked me by the men I know most intimately who are still working to find their way back to the open-hearted, emotionally expressive selves they once were before they were told to silence their longings and close their hearts.

The Will to Change is the offering I bring to the feast of male reclamation and recovery of self, of their emotional right to love and be loved. Women have believed that we could save the men in our lives by giving them love, that

this love would serve as the cure for all the wounds inflicted by toxic assaults on their emotional systems, by the emotional heart attacks they undergo every day. Women can share in this healing process. We can guide, instruct, observe, share information and skills, but we cannot do for boys and men what they must do for themselves. Our love helps, but it alone does not save boys or men. Ultimately boys and men save themselves when they learn the art of loving.

7

Feminist Manhood

Say that you are feminist to most men, and automatically you are seen as the enemy. You risk being seen as a man-hating woman. Most young women fear that if they call themselves feminist, they will lose male favor, they will not be loved by men. Popular opinion about the impact of feminist movement on men's lives is that feminism hurt men. Conservative antifeminist women and men insist that feminism is destroying family life. They argue that working women leave households bereft of homemakers and children without a mother's care. Yet they consistently ignore the degree to which consumer capitalist culture, not feminism, pushed women into the workforce and keeps them there.

When feminist women told the world that patriarchy promotes woman-hating, the response was that feminists were being too extreme, exaggerating the problem. Yet when men who knew nothing about feminism claimed that feminists were man-hating, there was no response from the nonfeminist world saying that they were being too extreme. No feminists have murdered and raped men. Feminists have not been jailed day after day for their violence against men. No feminists have been accused of ongoing sexual abuse of girl children, including creating a world of child pornography featuring little girls. Yet these are some of the acts of men

that led some feminist women to identify men as woman-hating.

Even though not all men are misogynists, feminist thinkers were accurate when we stated that patriarchy in its most basic, unmediated form promotes fear and hatred of females. A man who is unabashedly and unequivocally committed to patriarchal masculinity will both fear and hate all that the culture deems feminine and womanly. However, most men have not consciously chosen patriarchy as the ideology they want to govern their lives, their beliefs, and actions. Patriarchal culture is the system they were born within and socialized to accept, yet in all areas of their lives most men have rebelled in small ways against the patriarchy, have resisted absolute allegiance to patriarchal thinking and practice. Most men have clearly been willing to resist patriarchy when it interferes with individual desire, but they have not been willing to embrace feminism as a movement that would challenge, change, and ultimately end patriarchy.

Feminist movement was from the outset presented to most males via mass media as antimale. Truthfully, there was a serious antimale faction in contemporary feminist movement. And even though the man-hating women were a small minority of women's libbers, they received the most attention. Failing to care for women rightly, men through continual acts of domination had actually created the cultural context for feminist rebellion. In the chapter on "Feminist Masculinity" in my recent book *Feminism Is for Everybody,* I write: "Individual heterosexual women came to the movement from relationships where men were cruel, unkind, violent, unfaithful. Many of these men were radical thinkers who participated in movements for social justice, speaking out on behalf of the workers, the poor, speaking out on behalf of racial justice. However when it came to the

issue of gender they were as sexist as their conservative cohorts. Individual women came from these relationships angry. They used that anger as a catalyst for women's liberation. As the movement progressed, as feminist thinking advanced, enlightened feminist activists saw that men were not the problem, that the problem was patriarchy, sexism, and male domination."

It was difficult for women committed to feminist change to face the reality that the problem did not lie just with men. Facing that reality required more complex theorizing; it required acknowledging the role women play in maintaining and perpetuating patriarchy and sexism. As more women moved away from destructive relationships with men, it was easier to see the whole picture. It was easier to see that even if individual men divested themselves of patriarchal privilege, the system of patriarchy, sexism, and male domination would still remain intact, and women would still be exploited and oppressed. Despite this change in feminist agendas, visionary feminist thinkers who had never been antimale did not and do not receive mass media attention. As a consequence the popular notion that feminists hate men continues to prevail.

The vast majority of feminist women I encounter do not hate men. They feel sorry for men because they see how patriarchy wounds them and yet men remain wedded to patriarchal culture. While visionary thinkers have called attention to the way patriarchy hurts men, there has never been an ongoing effort made to address male pain. To this day I hear individual feminist women express their concern for the plight of men within patriarchy, even as they share that they are unwilling to give their energy to help educate and change men. Feminist writer Minnie Bruce Pratt states the position clearly: "How are men going to change? The meeting between two people, where one opposes the other,

is the point of change. But I don't want the personal contact. I don't want to do it.... When people talk about not giving men our energies, I agree with that.... They have to deliver themselves." These attitudes, coupled with the negative attitudes of most men toward feminist thinking, meant that there was never a collective, affirming call for boys and men to join feminist movement so that they would be liberated from patriarchy.

Reformist feminist women could not make this call because they were the group of women (mostly white women with class privilege) who had pushed the idea that all men were powerful in the first place. These were the women for whom feminist liberation was more about getting their piece of the power pie and less about freeing masses of women or less powerful men from sexist oppression. They were not mad at their powerful daddies and husbands who kept poor men exploited and oppressed; they were mad that they were not being giving equal access to power. Now that many of those women have gained power, and especially economic parity with the men of their class, they have pretty much lost interest in feminism.

As interest in feminist thinking and practice has waned, there has been even less focus on the plight of men than in the heyday of feminist movement. This lack of interest does not change the fact that only a feminist vision that embraces feminist masculinity, that loves boys and men and demands on their behalf every right that we desire for girls and women, can renew men in our society. Feminist thinking teaches us all, males especially, how to love justice and freedom in ways that foster and affirm life. Clearly we need new strategies, new theories, guides that will show us how to create a world where feminist masculinity thrives.

Sadly there is no body of recent feminist writing addressing men that is accessible, clear, and concise. There is little work done from a feminist standpoint concentrating on boyhood. No significant body of feminist writing addresses boys directly, letting them know how they can construct an identity that is not rooted in sexism. There is no body of feminist children's literature that can serve as an alternative to patriarchal perspectives, which abound in the world of children's books. The gender equality that many of us take for granted in our adult lives, particularly those of us who have class privilege and elite education, is simply not present in the world of children's books or in the world of public and private education. Teachers of children see gender equality mostly in terms of ensuring that girls get to have the same privileges and rights as boys within the existing social structure; they do not see it in terms of granting boys the same rights as girls—for instance, the right to choose not to engage in aggressive or violent play, the right to play with dolls, to play dress up, to wear costumes of either gender, the right to choose.

Just as it was misguided for reformist feminist thinkers to see freedom as simply women having the right to be like powerful patriarchal men (feminist women with class privilege never suggested that they wanted their lot to be like that of poor and working-class men), so was it simplistic to imagine that the liberated man would simply become a woman in drag. Yet this was the model of freedom offered men by mainstream feminist thought. Men were expected to hold on to the ideas about strength and providing for others that were a part of patriarchal thought, while dropping their investment in domination and adding an investment in emotional growth. This vision of feminist masculinity was so fraught with contradictions, it was impossible to realize. No wonder then that men who cared, who were open to change, often just gave up, falling back on the patriarchal

masculinity they found so problematic. The individual men who did take on the mantle of a feminist notion of male liberation did so only to find that few women respected this shift.

Once the “new man” that is the man changed by feminism was represented as a wimp, as overcooked broccoli dominated by powerful females who were secretly longing for his macho counterpart, masses of men lost interest. Reacting to this inversion of gender roles, men who were sympathetic chose to stop trying to play a role in female-led feminist movement and became involved with the men’s movement. Positively, the men’s movement emphasized the need for men to get in touch with their feelings, to talk with other men. Negatively, the men’s movement continued to promote patriarchy by a tacit insistence that in order to be fully self-actualized, men needed to separate from women. The idea that men needed to separate from women to find their true selves just seemed like the old patriarchal message dressed up in a new package.

Describing the men’s movement spearheaded by Robert Bly in her essay “Feminism and Masculinity,” Christine A. James explains:

Bly claims that women, primarily since feminism, have created a situation in which men, especially young men, feel weak, emasculated, and unsure of themselves, and that older men must lead the way back…. Bly holds up the myth of the Wild Man as an exemplar of the direction men must take and never challenges the hierarchical dualisms that are so integrally linked to the tension he perceives between men and women. Arguably, the notion of the Wild Man merely reinforces clichés about “real masculinity” instead of

trying to foster a new relationship between men and women, as well as the masculine and feminine.

The men's movement was often critical of women and feminism while making no sustained critique of patriarchy. Ultimately it did not consistently demand that men challenge patriarchy or envision liberating models of masculinity.

Many of the New Age models created by men reconfigure old sexist paradigms while making it seem as though they are offering a different script for gender relations. Often the men's movement resisted macho patriarchal models while upholding a vision of a benevolent patriarchy, one in which the father is the ruler who rules with tenderness and kindness, but he is still in control. In the wake of feminist movement and the diverse men's liberation movements that did not bring women and men closer together, the question of what the alternative to patriarchal masculinity might be must still be answered.

Clearly, men need new models for self-assertion that do not require the construction of an enemy "other," be it a woman or the symbolic feminine, for them to define themselves against. Starting in early childhood, males need models of men with integrity, that is, men who are whole, who are not divided against themselves. While individual women acting as single mothers have shown that they can raise healthy, loving boys who become responsible, loving men, in every case where this model of parenting has been successful, women have chosen adult males—fathers, grandfathers, uncles, friends, and comrades—to exemplify for their sons the adult manhood they should strive to achieve.

Undoubtedly, one of the first revolutionary acts of visionary feminism must be to restore maleness and masculinity as an ethical biological category divorced from the dominator model. This is why the term patriarchal masculinity is so important, for it identifies male difference as being always and only about the superior rights of males to dominate, be their subordinates females or any group deemed weaker, by any means necessary. Rejecting this model for a feminist masculinity means that we must define maleness as a state of being rather than as performance. Male being, maleness, masculinity must stand for the essential core goodness of the self, of the human body that has a penis. Many of the critics who have written about masculinity suggest that we need to do away with the term, that we need “an end to manhood.” Yet such a stance furthers the notion that there is something inherently evil, bad, or unworthy about maleness.

It is a stance that seems to be more a reaction to patriarchal masculinity than a creative loving response that can separate maleness and manhood from all the identifying traits patriarchy has imposed on the self that has a penis. Our work of love should be to reclaim masculinity and not allow it to be held hostage to patriarchal domination. There is a creative, life-sustaining, life-enhancing place for the masculine in a nondominator culture. And those of us committed to ending patriarchy can touch the hearts of real men where they live, not by demanding that they give up manhood or maleness, but by asking that they allow its meaning to be transformed, that they become disloyal to patriarchal masculinity in order to find a place for the masculine that does not make it synonymous with domination or the will to do violence.

Patriarchal culture continues to control the hearts of men precisely because it socializes males to believe that without

their role as patriarchs they will have no reason for being. Dominator culture teaches all of us that the core of our identity is defined by the will to dominate and control others. We are taught that this will to dominate is more biologically hardwired in males than in females. In actuality, dominator culture teaches us that we are all natural-born killers but that males are more able to realize the predator role. In the dominator model the pursuit of external power, the ability to manipulate and control others, is what matters most. When culture is based on a dominator model, not only will it be violent but it will frame all relationships as power struggles.

No matter how many modern-day seers assure us that power struggles are not an effective model for human relations, imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchal culture continues to insist that domination must be the organizing principle of today's civilization. In *The Heart of the Soul* Gary Zukav and Linda Francis make it clear that while humans may have needed to create external power to keep the species alive at one time, this is no longer the case: "With or without reverence, the pursuit of external power leads only to violence and destruction. It is an evolutionary modality that no longer works. It is the wrong medicine, and nothing can make it the right medicine again." Patriarchal masculinity teaches men that their selfhood has meaning only in relation to the pursuit of external power; such masculinity is a subtext of the dominator model.

Before the realities of men can be transformed, the dominator model has to be eliminated as the underlying ideology on which we base our culture. We already see that within patriarchal culture men can be more emotional, they can parent, they can break with sexist roles, but as long as the underlying principles are in place, men can never be

truly free. At any moment this underlying patriarchal ethos can overshadow behaviors that run counter to it. We have already seen that many men changed their thinking for a time when feminist movement was a powerful force for social change, but then when the patriarchal thinking that undergirds our society did not change, as the energy of the movement began to wane, the old order began to reestablish itself. Sexist thought and action that had been harshly critiqued during the height of feminist movement have once again become more acceptable. Clearly, ending patriarchy is necessary for men to have collective liberation. It is the only resolution to the masculinity crisis that most men are experiencing.

To offer men a different way of being, we must first replace the dominator model with a partnership model that sees interbeing and interdependency as the organic relationship of all living beings. In the partnership model selfhood, whether one is female or male, is always at the core of one's identity. Patriarchal masculinity teaches males to be pathologically narcissistic, infantile, and psychologically dependent for self-definition on the privileges (however relative) that they receive from having been born male. Hence many males feel that their very existence is threatened if these privileges are taken away. In a partnership model male identity, like its female counterpart, would be centered around the notion of an essential goodness that is inherently relationally oriented. Rather than assuming that males are born with the will to aggress, the culture would assume that males are born with the inherent will to connect.

Feminist masculinity presupposes that it is enough for males to be to have value, that they do not have to "do," to "perform," to be affirmed and loved. Rather than defining strength as "power over," feminist masculinity defines

strength as one's capacity to be responsible for self and others. This strength is a trait males and females need to possess. In *The Courage to Raise Good Men,* Olga Silverstein stresses the need to redefine male sex roles in ways that break with sexist norms. Currently, sexist definitions of male roles insist on defining maleness in relationship to winning, one-upmanship, domination: "Until we are willing to question many of the specifics of the male sex role, including most of the seven norms and stereotypes that psychologist Robert Levant names in a listing of its chief constituents—'avoiding femininity, restrictive emotionality, seeking achievement and status, self-reliance, aggression, homophobia, and nonrelational attitudes toward sexuality'—we are going to deny men their full humanity. Feminist masculinity would have as its chief constituents integrity, self-love, emotional awareness, assertiveness, and relational skill, including the capacity to be empathic, autonomous, and connected." The core of feminist masculinity is a commitment to gender equality and mutuality as crucial to interbeing and partnership in the creating and sustaining of life. Such a commitment always privileges nonviolent action over violence, peace over war, life over death.

Olga Silverstein rightly says that "what the world needs now is a different kind of man"—she posits that we need a "good" man—but this binary category automatically invests in a dominator model of either-or. What the world needs now is liberated men who have the qualities Silverstein cites, men who are "empathic and strong, autonomous and connected, responsible to self, to family and friends, and to society, and capable of understanding how those responsibilities are, ultimately, inseparable." Men need feminist thinking. It is the theory that supports their spiritual evolution and their shift away from the patriarchal model. Patriarchy is destroying the well-being of men, taking their lives daily.

When Silverstein does workshops focusing on changing sexist gender roles, it is women who question her about whether a male with the qualities described above can survive. She responds to their fear by pointing out these truths:

Men aren't surviving very well! We send them to war to kill and be killed. They're lying down in the middle of highways to prove their manhood in imitation of a scene in a recent movie about college football. They're dying of heart attacks in early middle age, killing themselves with liver and lung disease via the manly pursuits of drinking and smoking, committing suicide at roughly four times the rate of women, becoming victims of homicide (generally at the hands of other men) three times as often as women, and therefore living about eight years less than women.

And I would add that many men striving to prove patriarchal masculinity through acts of brutal and unnecessary violence are imprisoned for life. Clearly, lots of women survive leading happy, fulfilling lives because we do not embrace an identity which weds us to violence; men must have the same choice.

Women are not the only group who cannot imagine what the world would be like if males were raised with wholeness of being. There seems to be a fear that if men are raised to be people of integrity, people who can love, they will be unable to be forceful and act violently if needed.

A Masai wise man, when asked by Terrence Real to name the traits of a good warrior, replied, "I refuse to tell you what makes a good morani [warrior]. But I will tell you what makes a great morani. When the moment calls for fierceness, a good morani is very ferocious. And when the

moment calls for kindness, a good morani is utterly tender. Now, what makes a great morani is knowing which moment is which." We see that females who are raised with the traits any person of integrity embodies can act with tenderness, with assertiveness, and with aggression if and when aggression is needed.

Men who are able to be whole, undivided selves can practice the emotional discernment beautifully described by the Masai wise man precisely because they are able to relate and respond rather than simply react. Patriarchal masculinity confines men to various stages of reaction and overreaction. Feminist masculinity does not reproduce the notion that maleness has this reactionary, wild, uncontrolled component; instead it assures men and those of us who care about men that we need not fear male loss of control. The power of patriarchy has been to make maleness feared and to make men feel that it is better to be feared than to be loved. Whether they can confess this or not, men know that it just is not true.

This fear of maleness that they inspire estranges men from every female in their lives to greater or lesser degrees, and men feel the loss. Ultimately, one of the emotional costs of allegiance to patriarchy is to be seen as unworthy of trust. If women and girls in patriarchal culture are taught to see every male, including the males with whom we are intimate, as potential rapists and murderers, then we cannot offer them our trust, and without trust there is no love. When I was a girl, my father was respected as the patriarchal provider and protector in our family. And he was feared. That ability to inspire fear was to him the sign of real manhood. Even though the knowledge that our dad could take care of his own was comforting, the moment he unleashed that will to do violence on us—his loved ones—we lost him. We were left with just our fears and the knowledge

that there was no emotional connection great enough to soothe and transform our father's violence, to keep him connected.

How many men have lost this bond of love via acts of relational violence, acting out the notion embedded in patriarchal masculinity that in every male there is a predator, a hunter hungry and ready for the kill? Silverstein argues that men suffer by the patriarchal insistence that they enact rituals of alienation that lead to "estrangement from women." She states, "As anybody who works with the elderly will tell you, when octogenarians utter their dying words, it's 'Mama' the men call for, never 'Daddy.' These men may not even be calling out for an actual mother but for the symbolic mama who stands for nurturance, care, connectedness, whose loving presence lets us know we are not alone."

Patriarchal masculinity insists that real men must prove their manhood by idealizing aloneness and disconnection. Feminist masculinity tells men that they become more real through the act of connecting with others, through building community. There is no society in the world made up of one lone man. Even Thoreau in his solitary cabin wrote to his mother every day. When John Gray tells readers in *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* that men will go into their cave—that is, that men will disassociate and disconnect—he is accurately describing patriarchal masculinity. But he never suggests that men can be fulfilled living their lives in the cave. However, many men caught in patriarchy's embrace are living in a wilderness of spirit where they are utterly and always alone.

Feminism as a movement to end sexist domination and oppression offers us all the way out of patriarchal culture. The men who are awakening to this truth are generally

younger men, who were born into a world where gender equality is more a norm. Unlike older generations of men, they do not have to be convinced that women are their equals. These are the young males who take women's studies classes, who are not afraid to identify themselves as advocates of feminism. They are the feminist sons of feminist mothers. Hence in his afterword to his mother's book *The Courage to Raise Good Men,* Michael Silverstein praises his mother's work: "The notion that men who have lost touch with their mothers have lost touch with parts of themselves is a powerful one—powerful enough to provoke change. I am proud that my mother has had the courage to open these issues for me and herself, and for other mothers and their sons." These men are the living example of the ways feminist masculinity liberates men.

Older generations of men who have shifted from sexist thinking to feminist masculinity were often moved by the women in their lives to make changes in thought and action, but for many it was the experience of assuming an equal parenting role that really transformed their consciousness and their behavior. I have had many conversations with men who in parenting daughters suddenly find themselves enraged by patriarchal biases that they had been unaware of or cared nothing about until the moment when they saw sexism begin to threaten their daughters' action and being. Feminist theorists argued from the onset of the movement that were men to participate in parenting in a primary way, they would be changed. They would develop the relational skills often seen as innate in women. Parenting remains a setting where men can practice love as they let go of a dominator model and engage mutually with women who parent with them the children they share. Male domination does not allow mutual intimacy to emerge; it keeps fathers from touching the hearts of their children.

As long as men dominate women, we cannot have love between us. That love and domination can coexist is one of the most powerful lies patriarchy tells us all. Most men and women continue to believe it, but in truth, love transforms domination. When men do the work of creating selves outside the patriarchal box, they create the emotional awareness needed for them to learn to love. Feminism makes it possible for women and men to know love.

Visionary feminism is a wise and loving politics. It is rooted in the love of male and female being, refusing to privilege one over the other. The soul of feminist politics is the commitment to ending patriarchal domination of women and men, girls and boys. Love cannot exist in any relationship that is based on domination and coercion. Males cannot love themselves in patriarchal culture if their very self-definition relies on submission to patriarchal rules. When men embrace feminist thinking and practice, which emphasizes the value of mutual growth and self-actualization in all relationships, their emotional well-being will be enhanced. A genuine feminist politics always brings us from bondage to freedom, from lovelessness to loving.

“Mutual partnership is the foundation of love. Feminist thought and action create the conditions under which mutuality can be nurtured.”

A true comrade and advocate of feminist politics, John Stoltenberg has consistently urged men to develop an ethical sensibility that would enable them to love justice more than manhood. In his essay “Healing from Manhood” he shares that “loving justice more than manhood, is not only a worthy pursuit, it is the future.” As Stoltenberg explains, “Choosing loyalty to manhood over selfhood leads inevitably to injustice…loving justice more than manhood

relocates personal identity in selfhood—relationally, reciprocally, realistically.” He, like other male advocates of feminist thinking, knows firsthand that it is no easy task for men to rebel against patriarchal thinking and learn to love themselves and others. Feminist masculinity offers men a way to reconnect with selfhood, uncovering the essential goodness of maleness and allowing everyone, male and female, to find glory in loving manhood.

Samiya Bashir
i traveled the world. it was fine.

:: lists ::

genres
not-genres

survival
surveillance

:: states ::

potentially
pointless

surveillance
survival

:: lists ::

bath salts
meds
nail stuff
grapefruit juice
keys
protein
tequila
other keys
gin
grapefruit juice
other other keys
hair

:: states ::

selfish
she invites
all the curses
(no curse for you!)

:: states ::

how are we all so busy now
again

:: lists ::

my name
the way my name
is said

:: lists ::

things i won't be answering:
emails
voice mails
really any mail without a stamp
phone calls
call outs
call ins
ungrounded theories
anything that begins "can i touch..."

yawn

gift of the gods

Is beauty destined to end in tragedy?

What a question! Does it not incur the worst of superstition, a dimly sensed unease that too much of something wonderful leads to too much of something terrible? Does it not suggest that beauty is at root inseparable from terror? Meanwhile, most everything else in the world around us, at least until yesterday, was saying you can have it all, the more the merrier. So what gives with this flash of recognition that beauty lives cheek by jowl with tragedy, or that now as I write, in 2009, we are being told that capitalism is tanking because of years of living high on the hog? Even the economists, masters of rational analysis, know deep down that the economy is but a gloss on fairy-tale logic. Take this recent statement by a Nobel Prize winner in economics: "If you want to know where the global crisis comes from, then think of it this way: we're looking at the revenge of the glut."[1]

Could it be that beauty is a gift of the gods that, like all gifts, comes with a measure of anxiety, only in this case, being a gift of the gods, the burden is close to overwhelming? And is this not just as likely to hold for the fairy-tale realities woven around that euphemism known as progress—more accurately, "the domination of nature"—which now very much includes the surgical intervention on the female body we call cosmetic surgery but which, after due consideration, I now call *cosmic* surgery? In Latin America this is but the latest expression of the colonial baroque, with its "exaggerated aestheticism," artificiality, *and* transgression. What else can you call the current irruption of surgeries to produce bigger and better breasts and asses and calves, not to mention surgeries on the eyelids and labia, vaginal rejuvenation, face-lifting, and, of course, becoming thin with liposuction? And that is just the start. There are so many more interventions, inventions, and return visits, like the monthly Botox and "touch up," the *retoque*.

Surely it is the case that cosmic surgery was among the first technologies in the great drama of the domination of nature, and that beauty has been as much a goal in life as the quest for food and shelter. Surely the aesthetic saturates the arts of survival in the societies studied by anthropologists well into the twentieth century. If hunting and gathering technologies, making bows

and blowpipes and canoes, along with techniques of voyaging across vast deserts and oceans, spinning fibers, weaving cloth, building houses, and the great galaxy of the arts of kinship and ritual are bountifully present, so is being gorgeous and handsome and fastidious about one's appearance. In what the celebrated Marcel Mauss called archaic societies, the economy (based on the gift) is at once religious, magical, political—and aesthetic.

Take heed of the dazzling body painting, fantastic hairdressing, incisions of one sort or another, genital and elsewhere, filing or removal of teeth, amputation of fingers, stretching of earlobes, labia, and necks to unbelievable lengths, flattening of heads of newborn babes, fattening of calf muscles, pharmacopoeias of potions required for beauty magic and love magic (see Malinowski's *Sexual Life of Savages* for starters), and so forth, on and on, very much including surgical intervention. And in all these triumphs of the "domination of nature" it would be most difficult to separate religion or magic from aesthetics, as both join the emotional power and bodily excitement of the beautiful as force.

What sort of force? To read Evans-Pritchard's account of the love of cattle by the Nuer of Africa in the 1930s is to be struck by the role of beauty and cosmic surgery as sacred force in this relationship of man with beast. A young man takes his personal name from the ox his father has given him at initiation, at which time his forehead is incised with markings and the horn of the ox is cut at an angle so it will eventually cross the muzzle or veer upward. If he can procure metal, the young man will at that same time bind his left arm in such a way as to render it useless, just as the left horn of the ox is rendered useless—making the ox more beautiful and therefore all the more perfect for sacrifice.

For underlying this identification of man with ox is the sacrifice of oxen, it being Evans-Pritchard's opinion that the fundamental idea behind the ritualized killing of this beautiful and beautified animal, which is frequent among the Nuer, is the giving to God of the gift of life, what the philosopher, pornographer, aesthetician, and surrealist Georges Bataille conceptualized as *depense*, or *toomuchness*.[2] Indeed, to read accounts of sacrifice is to be struck by the connection between beauty and life, meaning the taking of life, as with the beautification, hence deification, of the human victim for several months prior to his murder in Aztec sacrifice and of the Vedic Hindu preparation of the person for whom the sacrifice of an animal is being made.[3]

Anthropologists have spent a great deal of energy describing symbols active in social life, and this is well and good. But have we not because of this very focus missed the larger and more important influence of beauty in shaping and energizing society and history, beauty not as form but as force? And likewise, have we not ignored not only the aesthetic shaping of everyday life but the aesthetic shaping of terror as well? Is not the synergism between beauty and what I will call the "negative sublime" as much the motor of history as are the means of production of material life?

It was all there, actually, from the beginning, in Malinowski's patient attention to the islanders' untiring attention to the aesthetics of every phase of their farming—the clearing, the planting of tubers, the weeding, the tending of the sculptural quality of climbing vines, the magic associated with each stage, and, of course, the exquisite care for the display of those ungainly tubers at harvest, left in the center of the village till they rot. It was all so beautiful, beginning with the title, *Coral Gardens and Their Magic* (two whole volumes). It was all so aesthetic, not only the dances with the oiling and perfuming of the body and the sculpture of the gardens, but the *kula* ornaments too, the red shell necklaces and the white shell bracelets, around which interisland trade revolved and depended, not to mention storytelling of fantastic voyages and dreams of untold excess:

> My fame is like thunder
> My steps are like earthquake[4]

It was all there, actually, from the beginning, in Malinowski's description of women witches who make themselves invisible, flying though the night to feed off the eyes, tongue, and intestines of a fresh corpse, striking terror in the hearts of men. They turn beauty inside out; that is the way of the witch, that is how you can tell a witch. As young girls, potential witches can be detected by their crude tastes. When a pig is quartered they will drink its blood and tear at its flesh.

Shipwrecked sailors dread witches and therefore recite spells over a root of ginger, spells uttered in a rhythmic and alliterative manner, so as to create a mist that will befog the witch. Maybe it is to befog themselves as well and prevent them seeing the witch's loathsome being:

> The mist springs up
> The mist makes them tremble

Like Evans-Pritchard describing the beliefs in witches among the Zande of Central Africa, Malinowski hastens to assure us that the native "feels and fears his belief rather than formulates it clearly to himself."[5] Feels and fears. In other words, not so much words and not so much "belief" as feelings and fears that arise from images and potent shapes. Is that something emotional or aesthetic, or both? Surely the fear at issue here, the fear of aerial witches roaming the night skies like fireflies, is emotional *and* aesthetic, and it would be wrongheaded to translate such affective and aesthetic intensities into a principle of belief. The idea of the witch is at once an emotion and a picture cast in cascading images of repulsion. It is the possibility, the haze on the horizon of possibilities associated with death and the corpse. To talk here of belief, let alone principles of belief, is to forsake what is potent so as to claim the safe ground of a verbal terra firma hostile to the dangerous realm of images and feeling. Plato's *Republic* is built on this terra firma.

The belief in evil here is patently aesthetic, a chilling sense of the ugliness of the unappeasable appetite for all that is morally wrong—indeed incomprehensible, a veritable charter of the loathsome and the tabooed. How fitting that another aesthetic force should be mobilized against these awful creatures, and those corpses and eyes and tongues, namely the aesthetic of the spell as poetry, which extends for two pages of closely written text, with wondrous metaphors, rhythm, and alliteration, ending with the poet-magician covering the naked body of the imagined witch:

> I take thy sleeping grass skirt
> I cover thy loins
> Remain there; snore within[6]

Be it noted that to the extent that beauty magic is equivalent to love magic (as described by Malinowski), such beauty is likely to be aimed at feeling the charge, making the charge:

> My head, it flares up
> It flashes,
> My red paint, it flares up
> It flashes[7]

Which I assume is more than enough. Who wants more than to put charge into the world, beginning with oneself? But beauty is more than a thing-in-itself. It

speaks to someone or something. There is that other person or god to be attracted, to be attractive to, to be seduced—not just for sexual love but as trading partners, man to man, as in the charged exchange of kula valuables. But then who said trade was sexless, especially when it is conducted under the magical auspices associated with gifting the gift?

Could it be, then, that aesthetics are what prime the pump of life? Only in our modern haste to reduce everything to a means to an end, an fflIcient means to an ever-receding end, we are confused, and mightily so, by the place of art. Having elevated art as both commodity and metaphysical substance, having imprisoned art in museums, galleries, and boardrooms, having thus separated art from the artisan, having opposed "art" to the "useful," have we not become blind to the force of the aesthetic, of beauty, if you will, coursing through everyday life? Surely beauty is as as much infrastructure as are highways and bridges, storytelling and the Internet, rainfall and global warming?

But I sense something wrong in this way of looking at things. Simply inverting what was superstructure, namely the aesthetic, and calling it infrastructure is not good enough. What is lacking has to do with what Mauss in his book on the gift called "the total social fact," in which magic and the aesthetic are inseparable from the economic. He had in mind the economy of the Trobriands and the American Northwest, famous for the potlatch. But what I have in mind is the contemporary globalized economy. Not only is the inseparability of the aesthetic and the magic of the economy now *back* in the saddle but, under the rubric of the postmodern, new worlds of aesthetic intensification and libidinal gratification bound to a new body have taken center stage.

Not only gardens but the gods too are to be won over by beauty—and all this aesthetic lore and artisanry beautifying the work of man can be seen more generally as what goes into designing the world, giving it its "makeover" as well as its *retoque*, or "touch-up," as we say today with regard to cosmic surgery. We may call this culture, and the point then seems obvious that cultures have an aesthetic or several thereof perhaps in stark conflict. More to the point is the dependence on the aesthetic. Something as basic as a language, for instance, not only has its aesthetic but is dependent on such. The flow of sound, the rhythms and cadence, let alone the play and inventiveness, respond to aesthetic desires and aesthetic principles as much as semiotic considerations. And as for language so for all of culture, which

can be viewed as *design*, continuously entertained and indulged. Cosmic surgery provides a stark example of this poesis, which to my mind is present as an active force in designing a new body, a new face, a smile for a paramilitary mass murderer, an airplane, a spark plug, a computer chip, in giving a name to a person, or in a Ronald Reagan ("the Great Communicator") using communication to win elections.

How strange, then, that in this our modern culture we feel it right and natural that design, as such, that beauty, as such, from gods to gardens, should be understood not as infrastructure but as mere ornament—and too much ornament as distasteful. For if my examples so far indicate that bodily beautification entails cosmic concerns, implicating therefore magic and ritual as well as a sense of myth, poetry, and the marvelous, I have to ask, what is bodily beauty today, now that the connection between the body and the stars has long since been cut?

Yet despite—or because of—this free fall, are we not experiencing a sudden rise, nay, a revolution, in surgeries meant to make us look good or better? Do not these procedures, like damming rivers and moon shots, no less than trading in bicycles for automobiles, test, in the language implicit to fairy tales, the patience of the gods? For unlike fairy tales with happy endings, in which Jack defeats the giant and Beauty's tears restore the Beast to his handsome princely self, the tales I have in mind from the agribusiness slums of Colombia are emissions from the dark side of beauty, tales of misfortune that find grim satisfaction in attempts at beautification gone tragically wrong: the breast enlargement that ends with infection and double mastectomy; eye surgery that instead of making you a wide-eyed beauty ends with you not being able to close your eyes day or night; the facelift that twists your most prized possession into horror-movie grotesquerie, neck tendons standing out like the guylines supporting a circus tent; ass uplift or enlargement that slowly slides down the back of your legs—or kills you, as happened to the abolutely gorgeous Solange Magnano, thirty-seven years old and a former Miss Argentina, in 2009; or liposuction that not only sucks out your fat but kills you on the operating table on account of the anesthetic or a day or two later because of desanguination. So the gods return, the connection with the stars returns—this time as disaster.

I imagine most fairy tales were like this, horror stories mixed with potent fantasies about the body and heedless ambition, before they were sanitized by Disney as bedside pabulum for children and their parents. "And they all

lived happily ever after." The hope that lives in the fairy tale is there in every story, says Walter Benjamin, who is of the opinion that the fairy tale lives on secretly in every story—and yet he insists it is death that grants the storyteller authority.[8] Death and hope are reconciled—if that's the word—because what death does is refer the story to *natural history no less than to the supernatural*. And what could be more natural, may I ask, more historical, or more supernatural—all at once—than the human face and human body reconfigured by cosmic surgery?

Let us for the moment think of the face and the body as a jewel and recall Bataille's argument that a jewel—magical and glowing with an inner fire—lends itself to what he called *depense*. This is usually translated as "expenditure," or "profitless expenditure," but that does not seem to me nearly strong enough for what Bataille wants to get at, which is the big flame-out, the passion within the gift, going for broke, living in the fast lane, burning your bridges, etc. *Excess* is another word that looms large here: excessive wanting, excessive spending, excessive consuming and the devil take the hindmost. High on a mix of hashish and a morphine derivative in 1931, Benjamin put it rather well: "To cast purpose to the winds is a properly sporting activity."[9] As for Bataille: "The sun gives without receiving."

"I had a point of view," Bataille wrote in the late 1940s, settling ever so seriously into what he considered his major work, *The Accursed Share*. "I had a point of view from which a human sacrifice, the construction of a church or the gift of a jewel were no less interesting than the sale of wheat. In short I had to try in vain to make clear the notion of a 'general economy' in which the 'expenditure' (the 'consumption') of wealth, rather than production, was the primary object."[10]

To that list, of course, we must add cosmic surgery and the arts of terror. Each, let alone the two combined, would seem to be at the very center of Bataille's general economy.

Let us recall Benjamin recounting the story by the nineteenth-century Russian Nikolai Leskov concerning a precious stone from Siberia, a chrysoberyl called the Alexandrite. It is the deep-in-the-earth home of such stones that assures them prodigous spiritual powers, especially when shaped by the jewel cutter (read, surgeon), who in Leskov's story is obviously a magician as well as a skilled craftsman. Such, in my reckoning, is the human face and the human body readying itself for cosmic surgery: a face and a

body prodigously ripe with spiritual power, like the jewel, both natural and supernatural, awaiting the deft touch of the jewel cutter.

But why should people who comment on cosmic surgery choose to concentrate on the failures (which presumably are less frequent than the successes)? It seems that cosmic surgery taps into a deep vein of discomfort. Death or disfiguration due to cosmic surgery is not fair. That's for sure. But that's not what my stories are about. Think of their shape. Think of their rearing and plunging, reaching out for beauty as of eye, breast, face, and willowy thinness, and then waking up shatteringly ugly, or worse, if there be a worse. These stories are about the sudden dive into the abyss at a moment when the very heavens were in your reach. They are like the old stories about selling your soul to the devil or what tough guys playing the realism card mean when they say, "There's no such thing as a free lunch." Sometimes they add, "my friend."

The first tale of misfortune I have in mind is the swerve by doctors from treating bodily illness to treating bodily appearance. The number one choice of specialization for medical graduates in the United States today is dermatology—or should I say "dermatology"?—very much including cosmic surgery. "It is an unfortunate circumstance that you can spend an hour with a patient treating them for diabetes and hypertension and make $100, or you can do Botox and make $2,000 in the same time," says Eric Parlette, a dermatologist in Massachussets, as reported in the *New York Times*.[11] Small wonder there is a shortage in the USA of primary care or family doctors. You don't have to be superstitious to feel uncomfortable at this turn of events sweeping the world. If you think it is restricted to Miami or LA, check out Beirut, Cali, or Medellin, notorious for their mix of poverty, violence, liposuction, breast enlargement, face-lifting, ass enlargement, and restoration of the hymen. I can hear a famous queen who is reported to have said, "Bread? Let them eat cake!" now saying, "Cake? Let them have a face-lift!"

This much-criticized queen was ahead of her time. She understood what is important in life, and in this she predates by two centuries our philosopher of consumption, Georges Bataille, with his belief that the principle of utility was insufficient for understanding human societies or people. To the contrary, the exuberance of *depense* or unproductive spending (cake versus bread) drove all economic systems, even the production-oriented capitalism of his time, so distinct from today's economy of delirious consumption.

Take Bataille's approach to the beauty of flowers, which he regards as intimately tied to death and decay. What grants flowers their beauty, in his opinion, has a lot to do with their short life span, meaning the ugliness that is their fate, the withering on the stem, petals tired, drooping, discolored, dropping one by one to dissolve in the manure of the flower bed or be swept away as garbage. Leaves may age honestly, but it is flowers, not leaves, that we present at dinner parties, birthdays, weddings, and funerals.[12]

Bataille does not go this far but I would ask, if it is the proximity of decay and death that makes beauty beautiful, then can we not see this as part of the cycle of endless return of a millennial rhythm and millennial hope—the rhythm, long preceeding Christianity, of resurrection following decay and death, as with spring flowers succeeding winter?

In *The Golden Bough* Frazer tells us how a great mother goddess personifying the reproductive energies of nature was worshipped by many peoples of the Middle East. The caption to a color illustration of a flower, a scarlet anemone, in an illustrated version of Frazer's great book, tells us how "spring flowers spoke to the ancients of the resurrection of their gods, while the fading of the same flowers reminded them of their death."[13]

Cosmic surgery contests this eternal rhyhm by trying to hold the female body in a continuous springtime, yet the connection and tension between death and beauty remains. Could it be that the beauty of women today echoes those remote times when people worshipped a female deity whose power was expressed in the passing of the seasons? This is why fashion in women's clothes has its annual rhythm, yet another instance of the power of sympathetic magic.

Not only that, but with the ascension of patriarchy and the displacement of Frazer's great mother goddess, Christ himself came to embody that older fascination, previously restricted to woman, with seasonal death and resurrection. Christ is that cyclically restored woman. And now, is not cosmic surgery itself a replay of spring following winter, not to mention a replay of the redemption achieved through crucifixion? Small wonder that the body thus redeemed exudes the ambiguity of sacred power with its fear and awe, its attraction and its repulsion.

So what happened to those goddesses once the male god gained favor? Here's what happened: the death and resurrection of the goddess became secularized as the realm of feminine beauty. Think twice before you mock

Colombia's fascination with beauty queens and their attendant cosmic surgeries.

In truth, the alternation of bodily beauty and death manifests itself in a rhythm infinitely more rapid than that of the seasons. In the heart-wrenching stories that concern cosmic surgery gone wrong, stories that anticipate and reflect the mutilations and massacres strewn across rural Colombia for many a decade, this alternation of springtime and winter quivers continuously, 24/7, like a leaf in the storm. For such stories are not just stories of *depense*. They are stories as *depense.* Thus does the death that inspires the art of the storyteller expend itself.

the designer smile

It is one thing to reshape a nose or abreast. It is quite another to reshape a smile. In "Surgeons of the Underworld," a September 2009 article following the capture of the drug trafficker Chupeta, a man subject to much cosmic surgery, the newspaper *El Tiempo* included two stories about a Bogotá dentist giving his paramilitary clients new smiles, as if that were like any other cosmic surgery.

But when it comes to one's smile I am struck by an ineffable radiation indicative of a new metaphysical core of personhood that a new nose, for example, would struggle to achieve. The word used is not "make" or even "create" but "design," as in "designer jeans." Surgeons and dentists do not merely make but rather design smiles—and while I can imagine restless nights spent figuring out one's ideal nose, I think it takes a good deal more cosmic tinkering to design a new smile, revelatory of the inner self illuminating the world.

One of the men sporting a designer smile, as illustrated in a photograph in *El Tiempo*, is none other than one of the stars of the Colombia paramilitary pack, Salvatore Mancuso, oIcially accused of at least eighty-six assassinations but in all likelihood responsible for many, many more. He is said to be the brains behind years of unspeakable terror in northern Colombia and as a result to be immensely wealthy. Allied with judges, senators, mayors, police, and the very highest ranking army oIcers—ties often rumored over the past fifteen years but only now confirmed, insofar as anything of this nature is ever "confirmed"—Mancuso had at the time of my writing taken up the government's generous offer to confess his sins (at least some of them) in return for retaining most of his wealth and serving a reduced sentence of four years in a nicely outfitted jail, with cell phones to keep tabs on his affairs.

Many people feel this process of confession and brief imprisonment is a charade that allows the government to feign doing something about the paramilitary terror machine to which it is in fact closely attached, a suspicion only enhanced when you see the photograph of Mancuso in Itaguí prison, close to Medellin, that appeared in a daily newspaper in August 2007. Dressed in a striped shirt of the latest fashion, a little paunchy around the

jowls, Mancuso looks down submissively, hands together under his chin as if in prayer. Mouth partly open like a fish, he is about to say something but cannot. It's all too awful. He is a model of shame. The caption reads, "We were the mist, the smoke curtain, that hid everything."

The designer smile raises many questions, one being why good fortune has continued to smile on these paramilitary mass murderers. But there are more personal questions as well. Ask yourself what sort of smile you would like. Ask yourself if you have asked yourself this question, and ponder your reply. Wasn't your smile all but unknown to you but nevertheless what made you unique and glowingly alive and human for your friends on Facebook and the local shopkeepers? What does it mean to fiddle around with something as mysterious and fundamental as your smile?

Drawing his father's face when he died, John Berger tells us that as he sketched his mouth, his brows, and his eyelids, he felt the history and experience that had made them what they were.[1] What would Berger have felt if his father, like Mancuso, had had his smile replaced? What happens to history itself when the face is thus altered, especially when we gaze at it at death?

As regards the transfiguration of the face that accompanies one's smile, a transfiguration that spreads like magic to the faces around, it is intriguing to consider what Walter Benjamin writes of the connections between death and storytelling. At one point he suggests that when you die a natural death, not one moored to IV drips and monitors, a sequence of images is released from inside you, "unfolding views of yourself under which you encountered yourself without being aware of it." These images emerge and play out on your face, which becomes a screen for the movie now rolling as life winds down. For the people gathered around you this is an unforgettable moment, for this is the face that imparts authority to everything that concerned you and is thus, suggests Benjamin, the source of the storyteller's art.[2]

A bizarre idea, to be sure, but one that might make you think twice before changing your face, for what would happen then to the intricate mechanism, the unfolding sequence of images of self-encounters, and what might be the consequences for the art of storytelling, the glue that holds our lives together on this poor earth?

The ancient arts of physiognomy (discerning insides from outsides, reading the soul in the face) may seem like hocus-pocus today, but when you stop to think about it, you realize it is embedded in our everyday practice, such that

you really have to wonder whether the fundamental reason for cosmic surgery is precisely to reverse this mechanism, to create a new inside by changing the outside.

And once we have gotten a new inside, fate itself will change, making this cosmic tinkering akin to alchemy and related magical practices. This is why cosmetic surgery is best considered cosmic surgery. Physiognomic manipulation aspires to be not simply a face-lift but a soul-lift. Cosmic surgery is nothing more than a gloss on a far more basic operation, the latest expression of ancient magical practices based on mimesis and physiognomy, practices such as masking, face painting, and body painting, carried out so as to greet the gods or become one.

Given the importance of the face as the mother and measure of all images, together with its role in storytelling and the complex sense of surface and depth, outsides and insides, you really have to wonder what would happen if a large number of faces were given designer smiles? Would this not impact decisively on what Baudelaire called "the correspondences"—that poetic network of signs and symbols that make up, or used to make up, our universe? It would be like a computer virus let loose in God's software. I gather that the People in Charge are mightily concerned about cyber attack taking out our electrical networks, water supplies, traffic lights, and so forth (the "next Pearl Harbor," according to CIA chief Leon Panetta). But when are they going to pay attention to the delirious potential of cosmic surgery playing havoc with our semiotic systems?

Once again the vernacular shows more sensitivity than the People in Charge, as with the expression *cara y contra cara*—face and counterface, deception and counterdeception—which is how a young paramilitary, formerly an urban guerrilla fighter in Colombia's National Liberation Army (ELN), described this world of correspondences gone awry to me in a slum on a rainy mountainside overlooking Medellin in 2006. Swaying cable cars creaked overhead as we surveyed the city below. Windswept clouds clung to the mountains, from which mist was rising.

Here nobody could eavesdrop. It was a like a scene in a Hitchcock movie. The city spread out far below as we stood there alone, high on history. Only truth could percolate through these chill heights where the air is thin. Here we could see the big picture, *cara y contra cara,* while the cable cars glided above us bearing messages like those put in bottles thrown into the sea, as if that miracle of public-works engineering represented Nietzsche's eternal return, the whirring of secrets and tides. We were alone, listening to stories about the days when ELN gunmen controlled everything we saw below, until removed by the paramilitaries who now pretend to be disbanding and allow the government troops to pretend to take control. *Cara y contra cara.* As I write in February 2010, the killing in Medellin is off the charts as the paramilitaries now wage war on each other.

El Columbiano.

But real as all that is, it is but an allegory for a larger and denser reality: that for a long time now the state itself has existed as an exercise in extreme makeover, a cosmic surgeon's dreamscape in which the face is continuously being recreated to hide the other face, the face of paramilitary control from the lowest to the highest levels of government, and this to such an extent that it seems entirely warranted to see the largest body under the knife—the cosmic surgeon's knife—as the body of the nation-state itself, like Mancuso, receiving its designer smile.

the designer body

The body of the nation-state under the knife is the same body that Alberto the taxi driver transports, muffled and bound from neck to knee—"like a mummy," he says—in the back of his cab speeding from the clinic in Cali to the patient's home in a small town an hour south.

"90–60–90," he says, gesturing awkwardly to his breasts, waist, and buttocks (the figures being centimeters). "Oh, this makes for problems!" he sighs. "Because today women are vain. They all want to be beauty queens."

Vanity?

It was all rather strange. I mean, who isn't vain? Aren't men vain too—Salvatore Mancuso, for instance, with his "designer smile"? And why is vanity bad?

"Today they are vain." Not yesterday but *today*. By Alberto's account the rapidity of change is electrifying. *En Cali es enfermizo,* he said, *contagious*, like the plague, referring to the current craze for *la lipo* and breast enlargement. Women will prostitute themselves to get the money for this—it is said—inspired by the girlfriends of the *narcos* and the TV newscasters, almost always women with long blonde hair and the obligatory 90–60–90. With that body and hair, and the national anthem playing for them as part of the worship accorded such divinities at the mythologically strategic hours, 6–12–6, the nation-state is in excellent shape, even if most of its citizens are not.

The demand is insatiable. A young producer for *Cambio Extremo*, a Colombian TV show (based on the US show *Extreme Makeover*) that offers free cosmic surgery so as to radically alter a person, tells me that some twenty thousand volunteers responded to a single advertisement for surgery in Bogotá. Everyone will tell you that "beauty opens doors." The women in Congress, including the president of the senate and the new minister of foreign affairs in 2007 are stunningly glamorous. And when the politically progressive mayor of Medellin replaced the city's annual beauty contest with a contest for women of talent, they too seemed like beauty queens. One wonders what it takes to be a humble secretary, let alone the courtesan of a *narco*.

At times it seems that all the girls in Cali have been put to the knife, for it would be difficult to find in that city today young or middle-aged women without enlarged breasts, made all the more visible, or might I say, astounding, by their low necklines. Close by lies the city of Pereira, home of the recent best seller and TV drama *Sin tetas no hay paraiso*, which could be translated, awkwardly enough, as *Without (Artificially Augmented) Breasts, There Can Be No Paradise.* The most crushing disillusionment for a young Dutch militant, Tanja Nimeijer, member of the FARC guerrilla army, whose personal diary was found recently by the Colombian army, was that the girlfriends of the guerrilla commanders had breast implants and fancy lingerie. What happened to the revolution?

"The 800-pound gorilla in the room" is one of those tough-sounding, bullyboy expressions, equivalent to "the emperor's new clothes"—something highly visible but that nobody is able to acknowledge. In the Cali airport, and I dare say the same is true in Pereira, you could just as well evoke the "500 cc breasts" as that 800-pound gorilla. For these breasts remain, as far as I know, unmentioned and, who knows, virtually unseen, like the scotoma, or blind spot, to which Sigmund Freud drew our attention when describing seeing and simultaneously not seeing the mother's absent phallus. Fascinating consequences arise from this scotoma, amounting to what Freud at one point called the fetish, revealing and concealing the mysterious maternal organ to which I have just alluded (allusion itself being a matter of noting and not noting). This must be why Alberto referred so readily to the passengers packed in the back of his yellow taxi speeding home from the clinic as mummies—mummies as in moms, with just the eyes showing above their bandaged bodies bouncing on the back seat.

To make matters still more confusing, Alberto and most everyone else with whom I talked were unembarrassed and matter-of-fact as regards this new topic of liposuction and cosmic surgery. Most times people were clinical and detached, while at other times they acted out the transformations, rippling their hands like waves down their bodies, strutting like beauty queens. Most everyone with whom I speak in Colombia now seems to be an expert on beautifying surgery, just as peasants on remote mountaintops or in impenetrable jungles now deftly open and fix their Nokia cell phones with a penknife, fingernail, or the tip of a machete. What I thought was something private and best left unsaid, the state of a person's breasts and sexual appeal, was actually a public secret known to all. Once the notion of *surgery* and the

aura of *technology* were in the air, it seemed the nature of the conversation altered. Otherwise sacrosanct aspects of self were unwrapped in a jiffy. Could it be that as more attention is paid to the appearance of the body, to its aura and sex appeal, paradoxically the body becomes more of an object, a work of art, to be evaluated and discussed by everyone, acting like art critics or people discussing a soccer match, such that the older, sacred, tabooed qualities of the human body diminish or even disappear?

How precarious and subtle is this movement along the knife edge of taboo! In one moment, in one sphere of activity, nothing could be more shielded and hidden than the naked body. In another, as with these parodic evocations of surgically enhanced bodies, it is all "so yesterday" and unremarkable. Well, almost so. Are not these things a little too unremarkable? I think back to Daniella Gandolfo's remarkably unremarkable conversation in June 1996 with Mr. Morales, a photographer who was present in downtown Lima when an elderly street cleaner took off her blouse during a mass protest against firings of municipal workers. "No one dared touch her," Morales said. It seemed like the woman was in trance. She wandered around screaming unintelligble words. The police recoiled to the sidewalk. More women began to undress. It must have been on impulse, mused the photographer, like what happens in the mind of person when they commit suicide.[1]

All on account of a bared breast.

This seesawing on the taboo matches the movement back and forth between sacred and profane. Take the small city of Pereira in central Colombia. Famous for its cosmic surgery, Pereira is also blessed with the reputation of being home to the best and best-looking whores in Colombia. But does this not present a problem? Do we not get to the nub of the issue concerning vanity and treating one's body as a showpiece when the first images that leap to mind are whores looking for a cheap fix? Actually, no. It does not present a problem, for what is happening here is not gradual acceptance of previously tabooed behavior so much as it is an acceleration of the back and forth between sacred and profane—as in the back seat of a taxi late one night in Bogotá, November 2011, fifteen years after the street cleaner took off her shirt in public in Lima. A mere eighteen inches from my eyes is a video showing, in vivid color, almost nude young women dancing to fast-paced music, the camera fixed on the mesmerizing spaces opened up between the dancers' legs. Can't shut it off. No way. The dark city flits past.

And the driver has this same imagery playing on his instrument panel. Where are we going?

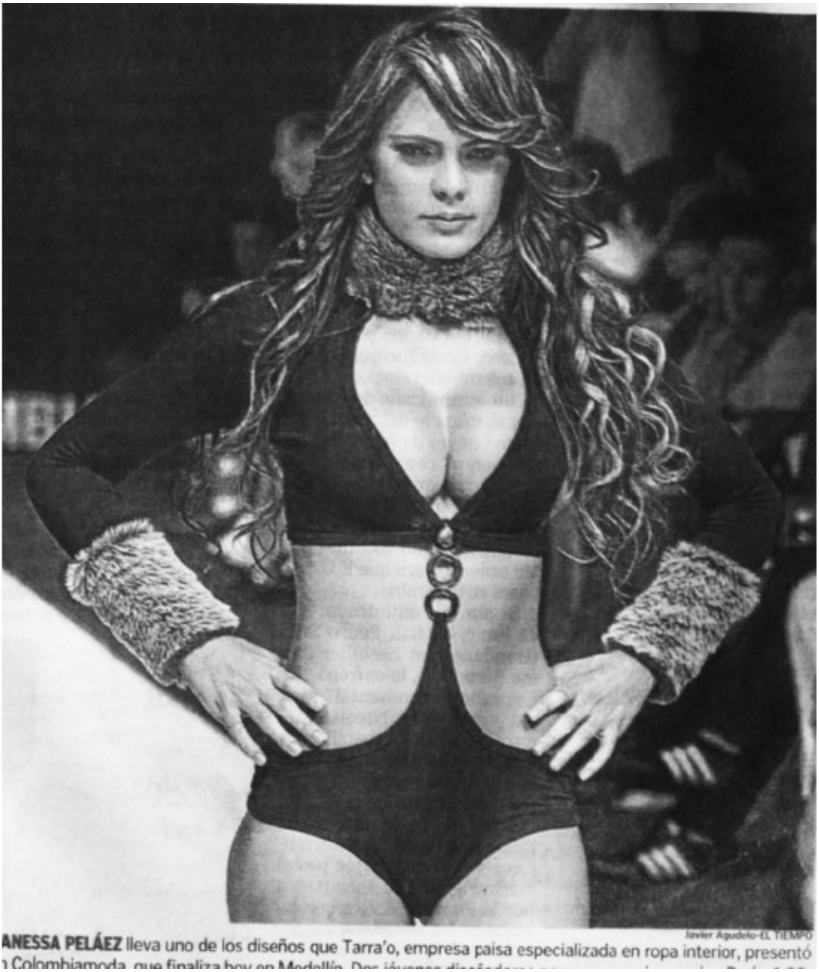
This same opening and closing of the Pandora's box of the female body was manifest in the newspaper *El Tiempo*, August 13, 2007, where six glamorous women, verging on middle age and in various forms of show business, apparently felt no qualms revealing secrets about their never-ending search for bodily perfection and the need to slow down, if not halt, the ravages of time, a search that involved repeated surgeries, often to correct earlier surgeries—of the breast, of the nose, of the smile, liposuction of the waist, facial stretching, elimination of cellulitis, toning of the skin, injections of Botox. Often what is required is a mere "touch-up," a *retoque*, of the ears, for instance, or a small liposuction, claims the celebrated Bogotá surgeon Gustavo Andrés Hincapié, who, as an aside, mentions that his patients include adolescents who come for breast augmentation. One forty-year-old actress says that in addition to surgery to enlarge her breasts, from 34 to 36B, she asked to have her nostrils closed a little. She constantly moisturizes her skin, she adds, and has frequent masages and injections of "mesotherapy," as well as Botox every six months. "For this you need an excellent doctor as your monitor." Another actress, Marabelle, has had eight operations this year alone (and we are only halfway into August), including surgeries to enlarge, then diminish, her breasts.

I am reading this in the heat of a wretched agribussness slum town, wondering what planet I live on. But then has not fashion swept us all into its whirlwind embrace, and has not cosmic surgery sculpting the female body become not only the foundation on which fashion deports itself but the ultimate sacrifice to the gods of fashion? Fashion used to be a discrete and minor affair, something for the back pages of the newspaper and weekend supplements. Fashion was nothing compared with the headlines concerned with drugs and guerrilla, paramilitaries and corruption, football and the exchange rate. But that was then.

My first day back in Colombia in 2009, the main newspaper, *El Tiempo,* carried alarming headlines on its first page concerning the imminence of war with Venezuela. That took up two columns. Next to that, but taking up three columns, was a color photograph of a barely clothed young woman aggressively displaying designer underwear at an annual lingerie fashion show in Medellin.

She glowered as if ready to take on anything the Venezuelans could deliver, her black "underwear" more like armor, a costume from *Star Wars,* accentuating the mostly naked breasts and thighs with some chain links begging to be undone. This is warfare in another key, and all the more delightful for not requiring tanks and guns. "Don't fuck with us" is what I read as the implied caption; bearing in mind Freud's play with "primal words," this means both "Please fuck me" and I will fuck you," meaning destroy you. Seeing this model, with her mighty breasts and hands resolutely on her hips, you realized the country was in good hands. You could now relax and flip the pages of the newspaper to find the glossy magazine dedicated to "the most desired abdomens," with full-page color spreads of a naked young man, Gregorio Pernia, a Bogotá model, his hands pathetically serving as a fig leaf, making you wonder why photographs of naked men, but not of naked women, are invariably awkward.

In other words, the distinction between "news" and "entertainment" has come unstitched, not just as on Fox News, whose poisonous bilge and verbal vomit we have come to expect, but here in a sober and prestigious newspaper. Side by side with what surely amounts to some of the most serious news that can befall a nation, the threat of war with another sovereign state, we find soft porn. Has a mighty taboo fallen away, or has the game of trangressing the taboo become more complex? Under the excuse of fashion and on the brink of war, the nation has become overtly sexualized, as befits a nation girding its loins. What used to be a minor media category, namely "fashion," now permeates not only everyday life but state-craft as well.



El Tiempo, July 30, 2009.

My seamstress friend Olivia Mostacilla, age fifty-eight, whose livelihood has been ruined by the fashion industry and its cheap clothes from China, saw a close connection between the craze for liposuction and the rise of fashion, especially pronounced now in Cali, with its famous designers and models from whom the lower ribs have been extracted to create a thinner waist, as God once did with Adam, for other reasons, setting fashion on its way. "It's everywhere!" she insisted, referring to cosmic surgery. "In whatever garage,

with whatever nurse or whomsoever has taken a health course! It's the growth industry of Colombia! Any defect can be eliminated, any defect whatsoever. Virgins are remade. It was on the TV. You can do anything! Anything at all! All that is left of the person is their name!"

Always a step ahead of conscious awareness, fashion makes language race to keep up. How can I as writer and witness get across the pulsing energy of a craze? I recall when blue jeans were the most sought after item in Colombia in the late 1960s. North Americans in Cali were begged to sell their jeans—their used jeans—at phenomenal prices. Experts predicted a change worldwide in the human body, female and male, so as to fit into them. And they were right. Twenty years later *bluyinería* was a major source of income for enterprising, lower-class Colombian women around Cali, who, believe it or not, were then flying to Korea to buy jeans by the container.

Or Adidas and Nike sneakers! From the late 1980s on young people in the poor parts of town would, so it was said, literally kill to get a pair, real or fake, ripping them off the bleeding corpse. Thirty years earlier people were often barefoot. I mention this contrast not to explain the sudden mania for shoes among a previously shoeless population but to get across the speed of change and the forest-fire furor that fashion can attain as the hitherto unexplored continent of desire is breached, as the mummies wrapped from neck to knee in the back of Alberto's cab, speeding south from the liposuction clinics in Cali to this agribusiness town, bear witness.

You really pay your dues with *la lipo.* Right now Alberto is telling me in his droll, matter-of-fact way, of the woman he recently drove home. She is in a coma on account of *la lipo*. I cannot brush away images of darkness and pain in some airless room filling with waves of fear. Then a friend of mine for four decades tells me that his stepdaughter, Angela María, has been resting at home in the Cali slum of Aguablanca, recuperating for six weeks from a *lipo* of her shoulders, waist, and abdomen that cost twenty-five hundred dollars in Bogotá, where she works as a live-in maid. Her age? Twenty-seven. How could she possibly afford this on a maid's salary? And why? The pain is intense, he tells me, shaking his head. All this time she's lain in a tight corset to reduce swelling. She can't work and requires a special diet. "It recurs if you're not careful," he warns me. "Then you just get another *lipo!"* chimes in Robinson, aged all of fifteen. "Was she fat?" I ask bluntly. "No, Miguel. About the same as Anabeba here," replies my friend,

pointing to his forty-five-year-old cousin, a strong peasant woman with a certain width, that's for sure, but not what I would call fat.

I call Angela María from the airport. "It was horrible," she says. She was madly swollen. The corset from her chin to mid-thigh has to stay on for two months. Like everyone I speak with, she emphasizes the high tech—the lab tests and clinical workup and the fact that the clinic was *recomendada*. "So why did you have the *lipo*?" I ask. "Because my friends are all thin and I wanted to be the same." What more can you say on the phone to a virtual stranger? What her voice conveyed, however, was invigorating, just what I would expect of a young woman from Aguablanca, although it was hard to imagine her resting much at home after I heard about the front door being stove in by young thieves who ran off with a pair of sneakers. What sickening irony. The same forces that led her to surrender her body to the fat vampire stove in her door to steal sneakers.

Are poor people as consumed now with being thin as the well-to-do? And to the extent that they are, does this not amount to a momentous change in the aesthetics at issue in class struggle and imitation? Let us think back to earlier epochs to consider this question and its implications. Let us think back no more than twenty years in Colombia. Did the peasants of the southern Cauca Valley, for instance, or of the Pacific coast, equate personal attraction with thinness then? Of course not. If anything, thinness was ugly and a sign of illness, perhaps sorcery.

And what of black people trying to become white? Does the new thinness amount to an imitation of what we might call a white body? I think it does. But I think there is reverse imitation as well. When I asked two black teenage schoolgirls in the countryside around Cali what they thought about *la lipo*, they responded by telling me about one of their teachers, a white women in her late twenties, who had had her butt made more prominent with implants. "You know," they explained with a giggle, "white women don't have much of an ass." Huge trailers carrying sugarcane rumbled past raising clouds of dust, sugarcane now grown on land that once belonged to Afro-Colombian peasant farmers, who are now forced to work for the plantations (if there is work). I thought how strange it might be for this teacher to stand every day writing on the blackboard in front of these schoolgirls, exhibiting her brand-new, Afro-inspired *pompis*—meaning butt. And if that is strange—a cross-ethnic mimesis, a divine hybrid—how much stranger these terms—*ass, butt, pompis*—words that pop out of the language to skate along the edge dividing

the tabooed from the transgressive, the attractive from the repulsive, the humorous from the beautiful.

And my friend of several decades? I hadn't seen him in ten years and he had fallen on hard times, separated from his wife and unable to make anything but a miserable living as a deadbeat photographer in the slums of Cali. Instead of his fifty-five years he looked like a walking corpse, mere skin and bones, his eyes dark hollows with massive lids, cheekbones standing out, lips retracted over protruding teeth. This was that other "cosmic surgery," enacted by poverty. The other side of thinness.

Actually, this "other side" seems built into cosmic surgery. Countless times I am told of women having their breasts surgically enlarged, but then infection sets in and, horror of horrors, they need a double mastectomy. It is insistent, this story, the imagery grotesque, the punishment biblical. Something else is being expressed here, about something other than breasts. But then, what could be more mythic and more allegorical than a woman's breast?

Only the eyes, which are also enlarged by cosmic surgeons. A friend tells me of women who have had their eyes enlarged—and now can't close them.

"Imagine!" chimes in a neighbor, barely concealing a laugh. "Imagine trying to sleep!"

We are on a roll now. A young doctor who carried out her year of compulsory rural service in the small town of Yopál tells me that even there, stuck way out in the plains stretching to Venezuela, with a population of no more than twenty thousand, a cosmic surgeon would fly in and do four liposuctions every weekend, drawing in patients from the surrounding countryside. She also recalls working in the emergency room of a Bogotá hospital, draining liters of pus from each buttock of a woman whose oil implants had gone septic. Liters!

"People fly in from the USA, and Colombia now leads Brazil in this field," my friend Olivia said as she prepared lunch for me in her stifling cinderblock house at the end of town, while I watched what seemed like a documentary but was actually a ten-minute advertisement for a "vibrating corset" that promised to eliminate fat through *electronic massage*. "People have died," she told me, glancing at the TV. "From perforated intestines."

I suppose death from perforated intestines is worse than what I hear of from my musician friend Gloria. Her friend built up her ass with silicone only to have it gradually slide down her legs. I see it sliding as I write. *Lipo*

is mad dangerous, she tell me. “Some bodies simply can’t take it. Anyway,” she continued, “you love a person regardless of their appearance. As you get older, you lose the beauty of youth, but so what!” That’s all very well for Gloria. She is a fervent Evangelist. The things of this world, other than her singing and music, don’t seem all that important to her, now she has been able to recreate a bond with her husband, thanks to the frenzy of this new passion sweeping through town, a substitute for cosmic surgery.

Close by lives a young nurse who has a job in the organ transplant ward of a fancy clinic in the city of Cali. She is one of the lucky ones. Not only does she have a job, but it’s a good job, way beyond the dreams of her neighbors. One day she decided to have her nose altered by a doctor in the clinic. Like quite a few Afro-Colombian women I have met she disliked her *nariz chata,* as it is called. Her aunt told me that a few days before he went on holiday the cosmic surgeon accosted her. “Oh! I have to fix your nose quickly before I leave!” But the operation went badly. Months later she went to another surgeon for a second operation. “Now she breathes like a cat,” her aunt told me (meaning she purrs, I suppose). “You know how a cat breathes? You can hear her breathing several feet away. She has constant headaches because she goes in and out of air-conditioned rooms and can’t breathe properly.”

A year later she had liposuction. She was only twenty-eight years old. And slender. She said she needed it because she wanted to wear her clothes that were now too tight. But after the operation she found she couldn’t face putting them on! “It makes me ashamed in front of God,” she said, because by then she had become an Evangelist.

Now she spends money wildly, locking her bedroom door in her mother’s home and staying up till dawn sorting through semiprecious stones she has bought, along with the bronze ornaments like miniature stirrups that fill every inch of space other than the bed, which is strewn with money. The neighbors hear her through the wall at two in the morning, moving furniture. She has no girlfriend or boyfriend. She has bought a new car, unthinkable for most of the people in this town. And she drives way too fast.

People come from all over the world to the transplant ward in which she works, especially from Israel, looking for a kidney, and somehow manage to get to the front of the queue. A new kidney, a new nose, a thinner body, bigger breasts, a bigger ass, driving way too fast . . .

A strange young woman, that’s for sure. But the cosmic surgeon sounds pretty strange too. And how might we talk about these strangenesses? Shall

we refer them to standard psychology and pathology, or should we invent a new science?

I am thinking of the cosmic surgeon I met in the city of Pereira, elaborating on the notion that everyone suffers from a gap between the way they see their body and what it "really" looks like. But it seems to me that this is not the only gap. There is also the gap between our appearance and the ideal. Who among us does not see oneself as "off," as incomplete or inadequately endowed? And now—with the advent of cosmic surgery—the gap is made ever larger.

I suppose this is a commonplace observation, yet it is something we don't want to think about too much. It could drive us crazy, as with the nurse-cum-purring cat lady. How do I see myself, anyway? Aren't there many versions of me, according to my mood and the time of day? Who is to say what I "really" look like? Every photograph of me is different. As for feeling the gap between my appearance and "the ideal," the same uncertainties apply. But with the craze for cosmic surgery comes the moment of clarity. Now I am conscious of being less than ideal. Yes, I am lacking! Yes, I carry a stigma! Yes, I will change the way I look! But then, what's this? No sooner have I changed myself than I begin again. Only this time my snub nose has gone and I breathe like a cat.

Today, most everywhere, self-consciousness as to one's appearance is acute. Surely this has been true in many places at many times throughout the history of humankind? But has it ever been as tortured and as cruel as today? Hard on the emotions and harder still on logic. For the whole point of this system is that the gap can never be closed. "Mirror, mirror on the wall. Who is the fairest of them all?"

If I were to try to explain to myself why this tortured dissatisfaction with self—joined to the passions of sex and beauty—is so exquisitely prevalent today, I would resort to the following gobbledygook: the dissatisfaction is the price we pay for the sexualization of commodities in the reign of reality become virtual. The argument would be that now, as never before (a hazardous claim), it is images that grant the world sparkle and substance and that now, just as image-makers have Photoshop, we have extraordinary surgical means to manipulate the image that is one's self.

Yet I would caution here against a one-sided view of humanity struggling pathetically to conform to some postulated ideal. For maybe the gap between one's self-image and the real has a good deal to do with the wish to play with

reality, to play with metamorphoses, to stop being what you are right now and become something else, and then, who knows, become still another something else, and so on? Cosmic surgery does have this potential, as the French performance artist Orlan has in startling ways brought to our attention, as through multiple surgeries she has had to become—not younger or more beautiful—but someone or something else.

Being like a cat is not such a bad thing and maybe even a very good thing. And then she wants to change again. And again. We interpret the story in tragic terms, as a stupid surgical intervention gone wrong, and take note of the labored breathing, which we are told is like that of a cat. What an odd note this provides! The Cheshire cat in *Alice in Wonderland* is nothing but smile, while this cosmically crafted cat is only the noise of its nose, something to be further explored by cosmic surgeons catering to those among us who might wish to breathe like an animal—a camel, perhaps, or a fire-breathing dragon, to ward off threatening young men and obviate the need to hire a temporary bodyguard merely to walk to the town center, which is what other people are now doing.

"He is similar," wrote Roger Caillois in a magnificent essay on mimicry, getting everything right but the gender. "He is similar, not similar to something, but just *similar*. And he invents spaces of which he is the convulsive possession."[2] The cat lady provides us with an instance of just such a space—the bedroom locked late at night, the heaps of jewels and brass, the bed awash with peso notes, the loudly sliding furniture—a space of dreams, of transformation, an invented space of which she is the convulsive possession, breathing hard.

One Art

BY ELIZABETH BISHOP

The art of losing isn't hard to master;
so many things seem filled with the intent
to be lost that their loss is no disaster.

Lose something every day. Accept the fluster
of lost door keys, the hour badly spent.
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

Then practice losing farther, losing faster:
places, and names, and where it was you meant
to travel. None of these will bring disaster.

I lost my mother's watch. And look! my last, or
next-to-last, of three loved houses went.
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

I lost two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster,
some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent.
I miss them, but it wasn't a disaster.

—Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture
I love) I shan't have lied. It's evident
the art of losing's not too hard to master
though it may look like (*Write* it!) like disaster.

ONE

The Wake

I wasn't there when my sister died. I was in Chicago at the Cultural Studies Association meeting and I was finishing the paper that was my first attempt at the work that became this book. My brother Christopher called on that Wednesday in May and asked if I was busy. I told him that I was finishing the paper I would give on Friday. He asked me to call him back when I was done. When two hours passed and I still hadn't called, he called me. He said that he'd wanted to wait but that our brother Stephen and sister Annette had urged him to call me back. They'd told him I would be upset if he waited. Our eldest sister Ida-Marie was dead, Christopher told me. There were very few other details. She lived alone. She was late to work. No more than ten minutes late, but she was always so prompt that ten minutes with no call, text, or email so alarmed her employers that they called the police and convinced them to go to her apartment. They found her there. I put the phone down. I called my partner and two friends. I texted one of my fellow presenters to tell him that I wouldn't be on the panel and why. I texted another friend, a former student who is now a professor at De-Paul University, and he said that he was coming to get me. He told me that I shouldn't be alone. I put down the phone and fell asleep.

That was May 2013 and I had no idea, then, that two more members of my family would also die within the next ten months. This would be the second time in my life when three immediate family members died in close succession. In the first instance, between February 2, 1997, January 19, 1998, and July 4, 1999, we survived the deaths of my nephew Jason Phillip Sharpe; my mother, Ida Wright Sharpe; and my eldest brother, Van Buren Sharpe III. As this deathly repetition appears here, it is one instantiation of

the wake as the conceptual frame of and for living blackness in the diaspora in the still unfolding aftermaths of Atlantic chattel slavery.

No one was with my sister when she died at home less than a week after she, my brother Stephen, my sister Annette, and my brother-in-law James had returned from a ten-day vacation together in Florida. Her death was sudden and alarming. We still don't know what caused IdaMarie's death; the autopsy report was inconclusive.

IdaMarie and I weren't close. We had only ever had moments of closeness, like in the chiasmic aftermath of the death of her son, my nephew, Jason (figure 1.1). This lack of closeness was largely, though not only, because almost twenty-two years my senior we had never spent much time together, we had never really gotten to know each other, and I had grown used to her absence. I didn't, in fact, experience her absence *as* absence because when I was born she was already living in her own life, at a distance from me, because her relationship with our father was irretrievable, for reasons that remain unknown to me.

There are many silences in my family. I am the youngest of six children. My parents were born in Philadelphia in the first quarter of the twentieth century. My father, who went to Overbrook High School, was one of eight children and middle class (his mother had gone to Normal School in Washington, DC; three of my father's brothers went to Howard University), and my mother, who went to West Catholic Girls High School, was the only child of a working poor and single mother. My parents married on my mother's nineteenth birthday; my father was thirty. Neither of my parents went to college. My mother had always wanted to be an artist, but was told by the white nuns who were her teachers at West Catholic Girls that Black girls couldn't do that. So after graduating she trained to become certified as an X-ray technician. My father worked in the sorting room at the post office at Thirtieth Street in Philadelphia. My mother worked as an X-ray technician before I was born and then at *TV Guide* after she was diagnosed with and treated for cancer the first time. After that she worked at Sears, Roebuck, and Co., in St. Davids, Pennsylvania, in the garden department and then in the personnel department. We children went to Archbishop John Carroll High School, St. Katherine of Siena, the Academy of Notre Dame de Namur, Devon Preparatory, and also Valley Forge Junior High School and Conestoga Senior High School; good-to-mediocre Catholic schools, elite private schools, and good public schools. We went there, that is, until

the scholarship money ran out and/or the racism proved too much; sometimes the scholarship money ran out because of racism. In each of these private and public institutions and across generations (there were twenty-one and twenty-two years between my eldest siblings and me) we faced the kinds of racism, personal and institutional, that many people, across race, like to consign to the pre–*Brown v. Board of Education* southern United States. The overriding engine of US racism cut through my family's ambitions and desires. It coursed through our social and public encounters and our living room. Racism, the engine that drives the ship of state's national and imperial projects ("the American ship of state . . . the ark of the covenant that authorized both liberty and slavery": DeLoughrey 2010, 53) cuts through all of our lives and deaths inside and outside the nation, in the wake of its purposeful flow.

> *Wake: the track left on the water's surface by a ship; the disturbance caused by a body swimming or moved, in water; it is the air currents behind a body in flight; a region of disturbed flow.*[1]

In 1948 my parents moved with my two eldest siblings from West Philadelphia to Wayne, Pennsylvania, on the Main Line. They were Black working, middle-class, striving, people who lived at a four-way intersection, at one end of a small mixed-income Black neighborhood called Mt. Pleasant that was surrounded by largely upper-middle-class and wealthy white suburban neighborhoods (up the street were the St. David's Golf Club and the Valley Forge Military Academy). From what I understand, my parents moved to the suburbs for *opportunity*; they wanted what they both imagined and knew that they did not have and their children would not have access to in Philadelphia: from space for their children to grow (there would be six of us and the house was small), to a yard large enough to have fruit trees and a vegetable garden, to easier access to good educations for their children. (*Opportunity*: from the Latin *Ob-*, meaning "toward," and *portu(m)*, meaning "port": What is opportunity in the wake, and how is opportunity always framed?) This, of course, is not wholly, or even largely, a Black US phenomenon. This kind of movement happens all over the Black diaspora from and in the Caribbean and the continent to the metropole, the US great migrations of the early to mid-twentieth century that saw millions of Black people moving from the South to the North, and

those people on the move in the contemporary from points all over the African continent to other points on the continent and also to Germany, Greece, Lampedusa.[2] Like many of these Black people on the move, my parents discovered that things were *not* better in this "new world": the subjections of constant and overt racism and isolation continued. After my father died when I was ten, we slid from lower-middle-class straitened circumstances into straight-up working poor. With all of the work that my parents did to try to enter and stay in the middle class, precarity and more than precarity remained. And after my father died, that precarity looked and felt like winters without heat because there was no money for oil; holes in ceilings, walls, and floors from water damage that we could not afford to repair; the fears and reality of electricity and other utilities being cut for nonpayment; fear of a lien being placed on the house because there was no, or not enough, money to pay property taxes. For my part, my dining services access was cut during my first semester in college, and after that semester the University of Pennsylvania almost did not allow me to return to campus because we were unable to pay the (small but too large for us) parental contribution. But through all of that and more, my mother tried to make a small path through the wake. She brought beauty into that house in every way that she could; she worked at joy, and she made livable moments, spaces, and places in the midst of all that was unlivable there, in the town we lived in; in the schools we attended; in the violence we saw and felt inside the home while my father was living and outside it in the larger white world before, during, and after his death. In other words, even as we experienced, recognized, and lived subjection, we did not *simply* or *only* live *in* subjection and *as* the subjected.[3] Though she was not part of any organized Black movements, except in how one's life and mind are organized by and positioned to apprehend the world through the optic of the door[4] and antiblackness, my mother was politically and socially astute. She was attuned not only to our individual circumstances but also to those circumstances as they were an indication of, and related to, the larger antiblack world that structured all of our lives. *Wake; the state of wakefulness; consciousness*. It was with this sense of wakefulness as consciousness that most of my family lived an awareness of itself as, and in, the wake of the unfinished project of emancipation.[5]

> *So, the same set of questions and issues are presenting themselves to us across these historical periods. It [is] the same story that is telling itself, but through the different technologies and processes of that particular period*. (Saunders 2008a, 67)

It is a big leap from working class, to Ivy League schools, to being a tenured professor. And *a part of* that leap and *apart from* its specificities are the sense and awareness of precarity; the precarities of the afterlives of slavery ("skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment": Hartman 2007, 6); the precarities of the ongoing disaster of the ruptures of chattel slavery. They texture my reading practices, my ways of being in and of the world, my relations with and to others. Here's Maurice Blanchot (1995, 1–2): "The disaster ruins everything, all the while leaving everything intact. . . . When the disaster comes upon us, it does not come. The disaster is its imminence, but since the future, as we conceive of it in the order of lived time belongs to the disaster, the disaster has always already withdrawn or dissuaded it; there is no future for the disaster, just as there is no time or space for its accomplishment."[6] Transatlantic slavery was and is the disaster. The disaster of Black subjection was and *is* planned; terror is disaster and "terror has a history" (Youngquist 2011, 7) and it is deeply atemporal. The history of capital is inextricable from the history of Atlantic chattel slavery. The disaster and the writing of disaster are never present, are always present.[7] In this work, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, I want to think "the wake" as a problem of and for thought. I want to think "care" as a problem for thought. I want to think care in the wake as a problem for thinking and of and for Black non/being in the world.[8] Put another way, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* is a work that insists and performs that thinking needs care ("all thought is Black thought")[9] and that thinking and care need to stay in the wake.

December 2013. I was in the grocery store when my brother Stephen called. I listened to the message and I called him back immediately. The tone of his voice and the fact of the call let me know that something was wrong because in recent years my brother became very bad at making and returning calls, a fact that he was always deeply apologetic about. When he answered the phone, he told me that he had bad news about Annette. I

froze. Asked, “What? Is she okay?” Stephen told me yes, physically she was okay, but Annette and my brother-in-law James’s adopted and estranged son Caleb (called Trey before he was adopted and renamed) had been murdered in Pittsburgh. Stephen had no other information.

Caleb had been severely abused before he was adopted at the age of five. He was very small for his age and quiet, and my sister and brother-in-law at first were not aware of the extent or the severity of the abuse he had suffered. But when Caleb continued to have trouble adjusting, they sought the help of therapists. In response to a therapist’s question about the difficulties he was facing, the then six-year-old Caleb replied, “I’m just bad.” Eventually Caleb was diagnosed with a severe attachment disorder, which meant that it was likely he would never bond with my sister. There are other stories to be told here; they are not mine to tell.

I put my basket down and left the store. When I got home I searched online for Caleb’s name, and the brief news stories I found on the websites of the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* and the *TribLive* were about the murder of a twenty-year-old young Black man on Pittsburgh’s North Side, and together they provided all of the details I had of my nephew’s death.[10] “Caleb Williams, a twenty-year-old Black male from Turtle Creek, was fatally shot to death in the trunk and neck as he and another person left an apartment in the 1700 block of Letsche Street in the North Side. Shots were fired from an adjoining apartment. He was taken to Allegheny General Hospital, where he later died. No one has been charged; the investigation is ongoing.”[11]

This wasn’t the first time that I searched newspapers for the details of a murdered family member. In 1994 the Philadelphia police murdered my cousin Robert, who was schizophrenic; he had become schizophrenic after his first year as an undergraduate at the University of Pennsylvania. What I have been able to reconstruct with the help of my brother Christopher, my partner, memory, and online news archives is that Robert was living in an apartment in Germantown not far from my uncle, his father, and my aunt, his stepmother, and he had stopped taking his medication. He was a big man, six foot eight. Apparently he was agitated and had been walking the neighborhood. “A Germantown man was shot and killed last night when he ended an eight-hour standoff with police by walking out of his apartment building and pointing a starter pistol at officers, police said. Robert Sharpe, forty, was shot several times outside the apartment building on Manheim

Street near Wayne Avenue. He was pronounced dead a short time later at Medical College of Pennsylvania Hospital's main campus" (Taylor 1994).

What the paper did not say is that Robert's neighbors knew him and were not afraid of him; they were concerned for him and they wanted help calming his agitation. What the paper did not say is that the police shot Robert, who was unarmed, or armed with a starter pistol—a toy gun—point blank eleven times, or nineteen times, in the back.[12] There was no seeking justice here. What would justice mean?[13] Joy James and João Costa Vargas ask in "Refusing Blackness-as-Victimization: Trayvon Martin and the Black Cyborgs": "What happens when instead of becoming enraged and shocked every time a Black person is killed in the United States, we recognize Black death as a predictable and constitutive aspect of this democracy? What will happen then if instead of demanding justice we recognize (or at least consider) that the very notion of justice . . . produces and requires Black exclusion and death as normative" (James and Costa Vargas 2012, 193). The ongoing state-sanctioned legal and extralegal murders of Black people are normative and, for this so-called democracy, necessary; it is the ground we walk on. And that it *is* the ground lays out that, and perhaps how, we might begin to live in relation to this requirement for our death. What kinds of possibilities for rupture might be opened up? What happens when we proceed as if we *know* this, antiblackness, to be the ground on which we stand, the ground from which we to attempt to speak, for instance, an "I" or a "we" who know, an "I" or a "we" who care?

That these and other Black deaths are produced as normative still leaves gaps and unanswered questions for those of us in the wake of those specific and cumulative deaths. My niece Dianna sent me a video about her cousin, my nephew. It was dedicated to "Little Nigga Trey," and that the video exists speaks to my nephew's life after he relocated and returned to live with and in proximity to his birth family in Pittsburgh and also speaks to the nonbiological family he made as a young adult.[14] Caleb's life was singular and difficult, and it was also not dissimilar to the lives of many young Black people living in, and produced by, the contemporary conditions of Black life as it is lived near death, as deathliness, in the wake of slavery. "The U.S. Marshals this morning arrested a Pittsburgh homicide suspect in New Kensington who has been on the loose since December. [redacted] is charged with killing Caleb Williams, 20, of Turtle Creek on Dec. 10."[15] *Wake; in the line of recoil of (a gun)*.

I include the personal here to connect the social forces on a specific, particular family's being in the wake to those of all Black people in the wake; to mourn and to illustrate the ways our individual lives are always swept up in the wake produced and determined, though not absolutely, by the afterlives of slavery. Put another way, I include the personal here in order to position this work, and myself, in and of the wake. The "autobiographical example," says Saidiya Hartman, "is not a personal story that folds onto itself; it's not about navel gazing, it's really about trying to look at historical and social process and one's own formation as a window onto social and historical processes, as an example of them" (Saunders 2008b, 7). Like Hartman I include the personal here, "to tell a story capable of engaging and countering the violence of abstraction" (Hartman 2008, 7).

Late January 2014. I was preparing to go to Germany to give a talk the first week of February when my niece Dianna, the daughter of my eldest brother Van Buren, called to tell me that Stephen, my second oldest brother, was ill and that she and Karen, my sister-in-law, had called an ambulance to take him to the hospital (figure 1.2). She said he didn't want to go but that he was having difficulty breathing. I knew that Stephen hadn't been well. At IdaMarie's funeral he seemed and looked aged and in pain. I made myself believe that what I was seeing on his face and body were "just" (as if this could be "just" in any meaning of the word) the long-term effects of sickle cell, his deep depression over IdaMarie's death, and the grinding down of poverty—the poverty of the work-too-hard-and-still-can't-make-ends-meet kind. Then I simultaneously thought, *but didn't want to think*, that he was really ill. Now, panicked, I asked Dianna if I should come. When she said no, I told her that I was headed to Germany in a few days and that I would cancel that trip in order to be there; I told her I wanted to see Stephen, wanted to be with him.

The next day I talked to Stephen, and with his assurances I made the trip to Bremen, Germany, where I was to give a talk at the University of Bremen, titled "In the Wake." This was the third iteration of the work that has become this book. In our conversation Stephen told me that he was weak and worried and that the doctors weren't sure what was wrong with him. There were many tests and multiple and conflicting diagnoses.

In the days after I returned from Bremen the doctors finally gave Stephen a diagnosis of malignant mesothelioma. They told him that he likely had between six and nine months to live. We were devastated. None

of us were sure how he got this rare cancer that is usually caused by exposure to asbestos. We learned from the doctors that the dormancy period for mesotheliomas is long, from ten to fifty years. If this mesothelioma was from what and from where we thought, we were struck that the damage from one summer's work forty-five years earlier at a local insulation company in Wayne, Pennsylvania, when he was fourteen years old could suddenly appear, now, to fracture the present. In the wake, the past that is not past reappears, always, to rupture the present.

> *The Past—or, more accurately, pastness—is a position. Thus, in no way can we identify the past as past*. (Trouillot 1997, 15)

In one of the moments that Stephen was alone in his hospital room, before he was moved to a rehabilitation center, then back to the intensive care unit at the hospital, and finally to hospice care, he called me and asked me to do him a favor. He said he knew he could count on me. He asked me to not let him suffer; to make sure that he was medicated enough that he wouldn't suffer. I told him yes, I would do that. We knew that for each of us the unspoken end of that sentence was "the way our mother did" as she was dying of cancer (figure 1.3).

Several nights later Dianna called and told me to come quickly. We rented a car and drove from Cambridge, Massachusetts, to Norristown, Pennsylvania. But my brother was no longer able to speak by the time we got to the hospital, in a repetition of 1998, when I made it to my mother's side from Geneva, New York, where I was teaching in my first job as I completed my PhD dissertation. But I was there. He registered my presence. (I am the youngest child. We were always there for each other.) I could speak with him. I could hold his hand, and stroke his face, and play Stevie Wonder and Bob Marley. I could tell him how much I loved him, how much he would live on in my life, and in the lives of everyone he had touched.

February 21, 2014. My sister Annette and her husband James had just left Stephen's hospital hospice room, and more of Stephen's friends started arriving; they were coming in from Texas and California and other states far from Pennsylvania. My youngest brother, Christopher (he is five years older than I), was traveling the next day from California. My partner and I bought wine and food. We brought it back to the hospital room. Several of Stephen's friends arrived. We opened the wine, we talked and laughed, we

toasted his life. As we gathered around Stephen's bed and shared stories, played music, laughed, and told him how much we loved him, suddenly Stephen sat up, he looked at us, he tried to speak, a tear ran down his face, he exhaled, he lay back down, and he died. *Wake: a watch or vigil held beside the body of someone who has died, sometimes accompanied by ritual observances including eating and drinking*.

Defend the dead. (Philip 2008, 26)

What does it mean to defend the dead? To tend to the Black dead and dying: to tend to the Black person, to Black people, always living in the push toward our death? It means work. It is work: hard emotional, physical, and intellectual work that demands vigilant attendance to the needs of the dying, to ease their way, and also to the needs of the living. Vigilance, too, because any- and everywhere we are, medical and other professionals treat Black patients differently: often they don't listen to the concerns of patients and their families; they ration palliative medicine, or deny them access to it altogether. While there are multiple reasons for this (Stein 2007),[16] experience and research tell us " 'people assume that, relative to whites, blacks feel less pain because they have faced more hardship.' . . . Because they are believed to be less sensitive to pain, black people are forced to endure more pain" (Silverstein 2013).[17] We had to work to make sure that Stephen was as comfortable as possible.

Being with Stephen and other family and friends of Stephen's as he died, I *re*-experienced the power of the wake. The power of and in sitting with someone as they die, the important work of sitting (together) in the pain and sorrow of death as a way of marking, remembering, and celebrating a life. *Wake: grief, celebration, memory, and those among the living who, through ritual, mourn their passing and celebrate their life in particular the watching of relatives and friends beside the body of the dead person from death to burial and the drinking, feasting, and other observances incidental to this*. The wake continued after Stephen's death, to the funeral, and then into the gathering and celebration of his life afterward.

And while the wake produces Black death and trauma—"violence . . . precedes and exceeds Blacks" (Wilderson 2010, 76)—we, Black people

everywhere and anywhere we are, still produce in, into, and through the wake an insistence on existing: we insist Black being into the wake.

On Existence in the Wake/Teaching in the Wake

I teach a course called Memory for Forgetting. The title came from my misremembering the title of a book that Judith Butler mentioned in an MLA talk on activism and the academy in San Diego in 2004. The book was Mahmoud Darwish's *Memory for Forgetfulness*, and the course looks at two traumatic histories (the Holocaust and largely US/North American slavery) and the film, memoir, narrative, literature, and art that take up these traumas. I have found that I have had to work very hard with students when it comes to thinking through slavery and its afterlives. When I taught the course chronologically, I found that many, certainly well-meaning, students held onto whatever empathy they might have for reading about the Holocaust but not for North American slavery. After two semesters of this, I started teaching the Holocaust first and then North American chattel slavery. But even after I made the change, students would say things about the formerly enslaved like, "Well, they were *given* food and clothing; there was a kind of care there. And what would the enslaved have done otherwise?" The "otherwise" here means: What lives would Black people have had outside of slavery? How would they have survived independent of those who enslaved them? In order for the students in the class to confront their inability to think blackness otherwise and to think slavery as state violence, at a certain moment in the course I replay a scene from Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*. The scene is in the section of *Shoah* where we meet Simon Srebnik (one of three survivors of the massacre at Chelmno then living in Israel) on his return to Chelmno, Poland. In this scene Srebnik is surrounded by the townspeople who remember him as the young boy with the beautiful voice who was forced by the Germans to sing on the river every morning. At first the townspeople are glad to see him, glad to know that he is alive. Soon, though, and with ease, their relief and astonishment turn into something else, and they begin to speak about how they helped the Jewish residents of Chelmno, and then they begin to blame the Jews of Chelmno for their own murder. The camera stays on Srebnik's face, as it becomes more and more frozen into a kind of smile as these people

surround him. Some of these people who are brought out of their homes by his singing on the river—as if he is a revenant—are the very people who by apathy or more directly abetted the murder of thousands of the town's Jewish residents. The students are appalled by all of this. They feel for him. I ask them if they can imagine if, after the war's end, Simon Srebnik had no place to go other than to return to this country and this town; to these people who would have also seen him dead; who had, in fact, tried to kill him and every other Jewish person in Chelmno. That is, I say, the condition in the post–Civil War United States of the formerly enslaved and their descendants; still on the plantation, still surrounded by those who claimed ownership over them and who fought, and fight still, to extend that state of capture and subjection in as many legal and extralegal ways as possible, into the present. The means and modes of Black subjection may have changed, but the fact and structure of that subjection remain.

Those of us who teach, write, and think about slavery and its afterlives encounter myriad silences and ruptures in time, space, history, ethics, research, and method as we do our work. Again and again scholars of slavery face absences in the archives as we attempt to find "the agents buried beneath" (Spillers 2003b) the accumulated erasures, projections, fabulations, and misnamings. There are, I think, specific ways that Black scholars of slavery get wedged in the partial truths of the archives while trying to make sense of their silences, absences, and modes of dis/appearance. The methods most readily available to us sometimes, oftentimes, force us into positions that run counter to what we know. That is, our knowledge, of slavery and Black being in slavery, is gained from our studies, yes, but also in excess of those studies;[18] it is gained through the kinds of knowledge from and of the everyday, from what Dionne Brand calls "sitting in the room with history."[19] We are expected to discard, discount, disregard, jettison, abandon, and measure those ways of knowing and to enact epistemic violence that we know to be violence against others and ourselves. In other words, for Black academics to produce legible work in the academy often means adhering to research methods that are "drafted into the service of a larger destructive force" (Saunders 2008a, 67), thereby doing violence to our own capacities to read, think, and imagine otherwise. Despite knowing otherwise, we are often disciplined into thinking through and along lines that reinscribe our own annihilation, reinforcing and reproducing what Sylvia Wynter (1994, 70) has called our "narratively

condemned status." We must become undisciplined. The work we do requires new modes and methods of research and teaching; new ways of entering and leaving the archives of slavery, of undoing the "racial calculus and . . . political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago" (Hartman 2008, 6) and that live into the present. I think this is what Brand describes in *A Map to the Door of No Return* as a kind of blackened knowledge, an unscientific method, that comes from observing that where one stands is relative to the door of no return and that moment of historical and ongoing rupture. With this as the ground, I've been trying to articulate a method of encountering a past that is not past. A method along the lines of a sitting with, a gathering, and a tracking of phenomena that disproportionately and devastatingly affect Black peoples any and everywhere we are. I've been thinking of this gathering, this collecting and reading toward a new analytic, as the wake and wake work, and I am interested in plotting, mapping, and collecting the archives of the everyday of Black immanent and imminent death, and in tracking the ways we resist, rupture, and disrupt that immanence and imminence aesthetically and materially.

I am interested in how we imagine ways of knowing that past, in excess of the fictions of the archive, but not only that. I am interested, too, in the ways we recognize the many manifestations of that fiction and that excess, that past not yet past, in the present.

In the Wake

Keeping each of the definitions of wake in mind, I want to think and argue for one aspect of Black being in the wake as consciousness and to propose that to be *in* the wake is to occupy and to be occupied by the continuous and changing present of slavery's as yet unresolved unfolding. *To be* "in" the wake, to occupy that grammar, the infinitive, might provide another way of theorizing, in/for/from what Frank Wilderson refers to as "stay[ing] in the hold of the ship."[20] With each of those definitions of wake present throughout my text, I argue that rather than seeking a resolution to blackness's ongoing and irresolvable abjection, one might approach Black being in the wake as a form of *consciousness*. Political scientists, historians, philosophers, literary scholars, and others have posed as a question for thought the endurance of racial inequality after juridical emancipation and

civil rights, and they have interrogated the conflation of blackness as the ontological negation of being with Black subjects and communities. That is, across disciplines, scholars and researchers continue to be concerned with the endurance of antiblackness in and outside the contemporary. In that way *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* joins the work of those scholars who investigate the ongoing problem of Black exclusion from social, political, and cultural belonging; our abjection from the realm of the human. But the book departs from those scholars and those works that look for political, juridical, or even philosophical answers to this problem. My project looks instead to current quotidian disasters in order to ask what, if anything, survives this insistent Black exclusion, this ontological negation, and how do literature, performance, and visual culture observe and mediate this un/survival. To do this work of staying in the wake and to perform wake work I look also to forms of Black expressive culture (like the works of poets and poet-novelists M. NourbeSe Philip, Dionne Brand, and Kamau Brathwaite) that do not seek to explain or resolve the question of this exclusion in terms of assimilation, inclusion, or civil or human rights, but rather depict aesthetically the impossibility of such resolutions by representing the paradoxes of blackness within and after the legacies of slavery's denial of Black humanity. I name this paradox the wake, and I use the wake in all of its meanings as a means of understanding how slavery's violences emerge within the contemporary conditions of spatial, legal, psychic, material, and other dimensions of Black non/being as well as in Black modes of resistance.

> *If slavery persists as an issue in the political life of black America, it is not because of an antiquarian obsession with bygone days or the burden of a too-long memory, but because black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago. This is the afterlife of slavery—skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment. I, too, am the afterlife of slavery*. (Hartman 2007, 6)

Living in/the wake of slavery is living "the afterlife of property" and living the afterlife of *partus sequitur ventrem* (that which is brought forth follows the womb), in which the Black child inherits the non/status, the

non/being of the mother. That inheritance of a non/status is everywhere apparent *now* in the ongoing criminalization of Black women and children. Living in the wake on a global level means living the disastrous time and effects of continued marked migrations, Mediterranean and Caribbean disasters, trans-American and -African migration, structural adjustment imposed by the International Monetary Fund that continues imperialisms/colonialisms, and more. And here, in the United States, it means living and dying through the policies of the first US Black president; it means the gratuitous violence of stop-and-frisk and Operation Clean Halls; rates of Black incarceration that boggle the mind (Black people represent 60 percent of the imprisoned population); the immanence of death as "a predictable and constitutive aspect of *this* democracy" (James and Costa Vargas 2012, 193, emphasis mine). Living in the wake means living the history and present of terror, from slavery to the present, as the ground of our everyday Black existence; living the historically and geographically dis/continuous but always present and endlessly reinvigorated brutality in, and on, our bodies while even as that terror is visited on our bodies the realities of that terror are erased. Put another way, living in the wake means living in and with terror in that in much of what passes for public discourse *about* terror we, Black people, become the *carriers* of terror, terror's embodiment, and not the primary objects of terror's multiple enactments; the ground of terror's possibility globally. This is everywhere clear as we think about those Black people in the United States who can "weaponize sidewalks" (Trayvon Martin) and shoot themselves while handcuffed (Victor White III, Chavis Carter, Jesus Huerta, and more), those Black people transmigrating[21] the African continent toward the Mediterranean and then to Europe who are imagined as insects, swarms, vectors of disease; familiar narratives of danger and disaster that attach to our always already weaponized Black bodies (the weapon is blackness). We must also, for example, think of President Obama's former press secretary Robert Gibbs, who said, commenting on the drone murder of sixteen-year-old US citizen Abdulrahman Al-Alwaki, "I would suggest that you should have a far more responsible father if you are truly concerned about the well being [*sic*] of your children" (Grim 2012).[22] We must consider this alongside the tracking of Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent without papers by drones in the midst of the ongoing ethnic cleansing in the Dominican Republic.[23] We must consider Gibbs's statement alongside Barack Obama's reprimands of

Black men in the United States, his admonishing them to be responsible fathers. Consider, too, the resurgence of narratives that Black people were better off in chattel slavery. This is Black life in the wake; this is the flesh, these are bodies, to which anything and everything can be and is done.

In the immediate aftermath of the June 17, 2015, murders of six Black women and three Black men in the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in South Carolina in the United States, the poet Claudia Rankine published a *New York Times* op-ed piece titled "The Condition of Black Life Is One of Mourning." Rankine writes, "Though the white liberal imagination likes to feel temporarily bad about black suffering, there really is no mode of empathy that can replicate the daily strain of knowing that as a black person you can be killed for simply being black: no hands in your pockets, no playing music, no sudden movements, no driving your car, no walking at night, no walking in the day, no turning onto this street, no entering this building, no standing your ground, no standing here, no standing there, no talking back, no playing with toy guns, no living while black" (Rankine 2015). To be in the wake is to live in those no's, to live in the no-space that the law is not bound to respect, to live in no citizenship, to live in the long time of Dred and Harriet Scott; and it is more than that. To be/in the wake is to occupy that time/space/place/construction (being in the wake) in all of the meanings I referenced. To be in the wake is to recognize the categories I theorize in this text as the ongoing locations of Black being: the wake, the ship, the hold, and the weather. To be in the wake is also to recognize the ways that we are constituted through and by continued vulnerability to overwhelming force though not *only* known to ourselves and to each other *by* that force.[24]

In the midst of so much death and the fact of Black life as proximate to death, how do we attend to physical, social, and figurative death and also to the largeness that is Black life, Black life insisted from death? I want to suggest that that might look something like wake work.

Wake Work

> When I finally arrived at the door of no return, there was an official there, a guide who was either a man in his ordinary life or an idiot or a dissembler. But even if he was a man in his ordinary life or an idiot or a dissembler, he was authoritative. Exhausted violet, the clerk interjects. Yes he was says the author, violet snares. For some strange reason he wanted to

> control the story. Violet files. Violet chemistry. Violet unction. It was December, we had brought a bottle of rum, some ancient ritual we remembered from nowhere and no one. We stepped one behind the other as usual. The castle was huge, opulent, a going concern in its time. We went like pilgrims. You were pilgrims. We were pilgrims. This is the holiest we ever were. Our gods were in the holding cells. We awakened our gods and we left them there, because we never needed gods again. We did not have wicked gods so they understood. They lay in their corners, on their disintegrated floors, they lay on their wall of skin dust. They stood when we entered, happy to see us. Our guide said, this was the prison cell for the men, this was the prison cell for the women. I wanted to strangle the guide as if he were the original guide. It took all my will. Yet in the rooms the guide was irrelevant, the gods woke up and we felt pity for them, and affection and love; they felt happy for us, we were still alive. Yes, we are still alive we said. And we had returned to thank them. You are still alive, they said. Yes we are still alive. They looked at us like violet; like violet teas they drank us. We said here we are. They said, you are still alive. We said, yes, yes we are still alive. How lemon, they said, how blue like fortune. We took the bottle of rum from our veins, we washed their faces. We were pilgrims, they were gods. We sewed the rim of their skins with cotton. This is what we had. They said with wonder and admiration, you are still alive, like hydrogen, like oxygen.
>
> We all stood there for some infinite time. We did weep, but that is nothing in comparison.
> —Dionne Brand, *Verso 55*

If, as I have so far suggested, we think the metaphor of the wake in the entirety of its meanings (the keeping watch with the dead, the path of a ship, a consequence of something, in the line of flight and/or sight, awakening, and consciousness) and we join the wake with work in order that we might make the wake and *wake work* our analytic, we might continue to imagine new ways to live in the wake of slavery, in slavery's afterlives, to survive (and more) the afterlife of property. In short, I mean wake work to be a mode of inhabiting *and* rupturing this episteme with our known lived and un/imaginable lives. With that analytic we might imagine otherwise from what we know *now* in the wake of slavery.

Dionne Brand does this wake work as she imagines otherwise in *Verso 55*, a verso in which she not only revisits A *Map to the Door of No Return*'s imagining of diaspora consciousness's relation to that door as mythic and real location but also imagines an encounter between the returned from diaspora and those who were held in the cells of the forts.[25] She imagines those who were held, reconfiguring—coming back together in wonder—the traces of their former selves rising up in greeting. Here the ancestors are like Marie Ursule, who, in *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, reanimates those Ursuline nuns who were her enslavers for the purpose of looking after her daughter Bola whom she dreams into a, into the, future. In *Verso 55*, Brand imagines that with the entrance of the pilgrims those who were held

reconstitute from where they "lay in their corners, on their disintegrated floors, they lay on their wall of skin dust," and stand to greet them; the ancestors, the only gods we had, their traces so much dust and haunt in those holding rooms. With these words Brand produces into the wake *other than* the "production of nothing—empty rooms, and silence, and lives reduced to waste"; she imagines other uses for "the scraps of the archive" (Hartman 2008, 4).[26] Brand, like Hartman, encounters these rooms, this pain of and in the archive, but those rooms are not empty, and though the scraps of cotton, new world slave crop, may in fact be insufficient to our needs and to theirs, they are what we have to offer. And those dwellers of the rooms who had no thoughts of visitors, could not know, but might imagine, that anything, any part, of them would survive the holding, the shipping, the water, and the weather, drink those visitors in like violet tea and lemon air. *Verso 55* is filled with the knowledge that this holding, these deaths, that shipping ought never to have happened, and with that knowledge and "the scraps of the archive" Brand imagines something that feels completely new. The rooms are not empty and the scraps are what we have to offer.

But even if those Africans who were in the holds, who left something of their prior selves in those rooms as a trace to be discovered, and who passed through the doors of no return did not survive the holding and the sea, they, like us, are alive in hydrogen, in oxygen; in carbon, in phosphorous, and iron; in sodium and chlorine. This is what we know about those Africans thrown, jumped, dumped overboard in Middle Passage; they are with us still, in the time of the wake, known as residence time.

> *They said with wonder and admiration, you are still alive, like hydrogen, like oxygen*. (Brand 2015)

Brand does this in *A Map to the Door of No Return* as well, particularly with her "Ruttier for the Marooned in Diaspora," which bristles with her refusal to think return, her dislodging of belonging, and her *hard insisting* on the facts of displacement and the living in and as the displaced of diaspora. NourbeSe Philip does this in *Zong!* through her destruction of the archive in order to tell "the story that cannot be told" but must still be told (Saunders 2008a, 65). We must be (and we already are) about the work of

what I am calling wake work as a theory and praxis of the wake; a theory and a praxis of Black being in diaspora.

I am trying to find the language for this work, find the form for this work. Language and form fracture more every day. I am trying, too, to find the words that will articulate care and the words to think what Keguro Macharia (2015) calls those "we formations." I am trying to think how to perform the labor of them. Or what Tinsley (2008, 191) calls a "feeling and a feeling for" and what Glissant ([1995] 2006, 9) refers to as "knowing ourselves as part and as crowd." This is what I am calling wake work. With Brand and Philip, I want to sound this language anew, sound a new language. Thinking, still, with Brand and Philip, who demand, always, a new thinking, I want to distinguish what I am calling Black being in the wake and wake work from the work of melancholia and mourning.[27] And though wake work is, at least in part, attentive to mourning and the mourning work that takes place on local and trans*local and global levels, and even as we know that mourning an event might be interminable, how does one mourn the interminable event? Just as wake work troubles mourning, so too do the wake and wake work trouble the ways most museums and memorials take up trauma and memory. That is, if museums and memorials materialize a kind of reparation (repair) and enact their own pedagogies as they position visitors to have a particular experience or set of experiences about an event that is seen to be past, how does one memorialize chattel slavery and its afterlives, which are unfolding still? How do we memorialize an event that is still ongoing? Might we instead understand the absence of a National Slavery Museum in the United States as recognition of the ongoingness of the conditions of capture? Because how does one memorialize the everyday? How does one, in the words so often used by such institutions, "come to terms with" (which usually means move past) ongoing and quotidian atrocity? Put another way, I'm interested in ways of seeing and imagining responses to terror in the varied and various ways that our Black lives are lived under occupation; ways that attest to the modalities of Black life lived in, as, under, and despite Black death. And I want to think about what this imagining calls forth, to think through what it calls on "us" to do, think, feel in the wake of slavery—which is to say in an ongoing present of subjection and resistance; which is to say wake work, wake theory. I want, too, to distinguish what I am calling and calling for as care from state-imposed regimes of surveillance.[28] How

can we think (and rethink and rethink) care laterally, in the register of the intramural, in a different relation than that of the violence of the state? In what ways do we remember the dead, those lost in the Middle Passage, those who arrived reluctantly, and those still arriving? To quote Gaston Bachelard, whom I arrived at through Elizabeth DeLoughrey's "Heavy Waters," "water is an element 'which remembers the dead'" (DeLoughrey 2010, 704).

What, then, are the ongoing coordinates and effects of the wake, and what does it mean to *inhabit* that Fanonian "zone of non-Being" within and after slavery's denial of Black humanity?[29] Inhabiting here is the state of being inhabited/occupied and also being or dwelling in. In activating the multiple registers of "wake," I have turned to images, poetry, and literature that take up the wake as a way toward understanding how slavery's continued unfolding is constitutive of the contemporary conditions of spatial, legal, psychic, and material dimensions of Black non/being as well as Black aesthetic and other modes of deformation and interruption. That set of work by Black artists, poets, writers, and thinkers is positioned against a set of quotidian catastrophic events and their reporting that together comprise what I am calling the orthography of the wake. The latter is a dysgraphia of disaster, and these disasters arrive by way of the rapid, deliberate, repetitive, and wide circulation on television and social media of Black social, material, and psychic death. This orthography makes domination in/visible and not/visceral. This orthography is an instance of what I am calling the Weather; it registers and produces the conventions of antiblackness in the present and into the future.

A reprise and an elaboration: Wakes are processes; through them we think about the dead and about our relations to them; they are rituals through which to enact grief and memory. Wakes allow those among the living to mourn the passing of the dead through ritual; they are the watching of relatives and friends beside the body of the deceased from death to burial and the accompanying drinking, feasting, and other observances, a watching practiced as a religious observance. But wakes are also "the track left on the water's surface by a ship (figure 1.4); the disturbance caused by a body swimming, or one that is moved, in water; the air currents behind a body in flight; a region of disturbed flow; in the line of sight of (an observed object); and (something) in the line of recoil of (a gun)"; finally, wake means being awake and, also, consciousness.

In the wake, the semiotics of the slave ship continue: from the forced movements of the enslaved to the forced movements of the migrant and the refugee, to the regulation of Black people in North American streets and neighborhoods, to those ongoing crossings of and drownings in the Mediterranean Sea, to the brutal colonial reimaginings of the slave ship and the ark; to the reappearances of the slave ship in everyday life in the form of the prison, the camp, and the school.

As we go about wake work, we must think through containment, regulation, punishment, capture, and captivity and the ways the manifold representations of blackness become the symbol, par excellence, for the less-than-human being condemned to death. We must think about Black flesh, Black optics, and ways of producing enfleshed work; think the ways the hold cannot and does not hold even as the hold remains in the form of the semiotics of the slave ship hold, the prison, the womb, and elsewhere in and as the tension between being and instrumentality that is Black being in the wake. At stake is not recognizing antiblackness as total climate. At stake, too, is not recognizing an insistent Black visualsonic resistance to that imposition of non/being. How might we stay in the wake with and as those whom the state positions to die ungrievable deaths and live lives meant to be unlivable? These are questions of temporality, the *longue durée*, the residence and hold time of the wake. At stake, then is to stay in this wake time toward inhabiting a blackened consciousness that would rupture the structural silences produced and facilitated by, and that produce and facilitate, Black social and physical death.

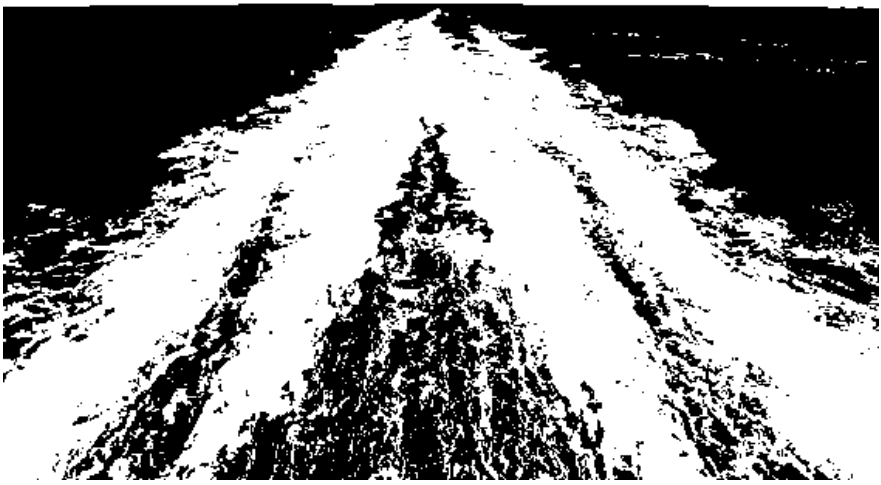
For, if we are lucky, we live in the knowledge that the wake has positioned us as no-citizen.[30] If we are lucky, the knowledge of this positioning avails us particular ways of re/seeing, re/inhabiting, and re/imagining the world. And we might use these ways of being in the wake in our responses to terror and the varied and various ways that our Black lives are lived under occupation. I want *In the Wake* to declare that we are Black peoples in the wake with no state or nation to protect us, with no citizenship bound to be respected, and to position us in the modalities of Black life lived in, as, under, despite Black death: to think and be and act from there. It is my particular hope that the praxis of the wake and wake work, the theory and performance of the wake and wake work, as modes of attending to Black life and Black suffering, are imagined and performed here with enough specificity to attend to the direness of the multiple and

overlapping presents that we face; it is also my hope that the praxis of the wake and wake work might have enough capaciousness to travel and do work that I have not here been able to imagine or anticipate.

1.1 The author (age ten) and her nephew Jason Phillip Sharpe (age approximately one month).

1.2 Stephen Wheatley Sharpe (age eighteen).

1.3 Ida Wright Sharpe (my mother), Van Buren Sharpe Jr. (my father), IdaMarie Sharpe (my sister), Van Buren Sharpe III (my brother), and Stephen Wheatley Sharpe (infant; my brother) in 1954. Everyone in this photograph is now dead.



1.4 The wake of a cruise ship on the open ocean. Photo taken on March 10, 2011. © Bcbounders | Dreamstime.com—Cruise Ship Wake Photo

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Ammiel Alcalay
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Muscle Memory (2014)

Samiya Bashir
i traveled the world. it was fine. (2021)

Elizabeth Bishop
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