Radical Sense
Isolation Reader Volume 3

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DOING

I often don't know what to do. Or if I want to.
Dawn has long broken while I still drag my feet in the mud inside my head, hope for coffee, make a B-flat moan.
To prepare the plunge into action. Or not.
Maybe I want to cast only a passing shadow. Feel like my mother's "Thank God" when she took off her corset.
But I am worried there's something I ought to be doing. Afraid I'll die without having done anything.
"Realized" myself, you call it, but wouldn't that just mean limited myself? A cement mixer stuck in one motion, even if it helps build a house?
So I delude myself into thinking I'm doing something when thinking. Or when descending into the night with the cat and dreams of the cat.
You say, no doing without sweat of the face, thorns and thistles, and bringing forth children.
Should I look, instead of worrying about fine distinctions that escape my eyes? Listen, instead of fretting about the size of my ears? But can I cultivate my garden without becoming a cabbage head?
The hand gets ready to write. Could we not call this manual labor? Or a stage in the Great Work of rendering the corpereal cat incorporeal while giving her body to the bodiless word? Even if it's from despairing of my own body?
You say, my writing is so slow it's more like gravitational condensation. Or dust gathering on the cleaning supplies.
It's true I'm dawdling as if I had time to watch the formation of geological layers. Though night already seeps through my brittle bones.
I certainly don't know what to do to end my days "gracefully." But the body dies all through our life, thousands of cells every second.
So everything should be very clear.

Chapter 1

Visualizing the Body

WESTERN THEORIES AND AFRICAN SUBJECTS

THE IDEA that biology is destiny — or, better still, destiny is biology — has been a staple of Western thought for centuries.[1] Whether the issue is who is who in Aristotle's polis[2] or who is poor in the late twentieth-century United States, the notion that difference and hierarchy in society are biologically determined continues to enjoy credence even among social scientists who purport to explain human society in other than genetic terms. In the West, biological explanations appear to be especially privileged over other ways of explaining differences of gender, race, or class. Difference is expressed as degeneration. In tracing the genealogy of the idea of degeneration in European thought, J. Edward Chamberlain and Sander Gilman noted the way it was used to define certain kinds of difference, in the nineteenth century in particular. "Initially, degeneration brought together two notions of difference, one scientific — a deviation from an original type — and the other moral, a deviation from a norm of behavior. But they were essentially the same notion, of a fall from grace, *a deviation from the original type.*"[3] Consequently, those in positions of power find it imperative to establish their superior biology as a way of affirming their privilege and dominance over "Others." Those who are different are seen as genetically inferior, and this, in turn, is used to account for their disadvantaged social positions.

The notion of society that emerges from this conception is that society is constituted by bodies and as bodies — male bodies, female bodies, Jewish bodies, Aryan bodies, black bodies, white bodies, rich bodies, poor bodies. I am using the word "body" in two ways: first, as a metonymy for biology and, second, to draw attention to the sheer physicality that seems to attend being in Western culture. I refer to the corporeal body as well as to metaphors of the body.

The body is given a logic of its own. It is believed that just by looking at it one can tell a person's beliefs and social position or lack thereof.

As Naomi Scheman puts it in her discussion of the body politic in premodern Europe:

> The ways people knew their places in the world had to do with their bodies and the histories of those bodies, and when they violated the prescriptions for those places, their bodies were punished, often spectacularly. One's place in the body politic was as natural as the places of the organs in one's body, and political disorder [was] as unnatural as the shifting and displacement of those organs.[4]

Similarly, Elizabeth Grosz remarks on what she calls the "depth" of the body in modern Western societies:

> Our [Western] body forms are considered expressions of an interior, not inscriptions on a flat surface. By constructing a soul or psyche for itself, the "civilized body" forms libidinal flows, sensations, experiences, and intensities into needs, wants.... *The body becomes a text, a system of signs to be deciphered, read, and read into. Social law is incarnated, "corporealized"[;] correlatively, bodies are textualized, read by others as expressive of a subject's psychic interior.* A storehouse of inscriptions and messages between [the body's] external and internal boundaries... generates or constructs the body's movements into "behavior," which then [has] interpersonally and socially identifiable meanings and functions within a social system.[5]

Consequently, since the body is the bedrock on which the social order is founded, the body is always *in* view and *on* view. As such, it invites a *gaze,* a gaze of difference, a gaze of differentiation — the most historically constant being the gendered gaze. There is a sense in which phrases such as "the social body" or "the body politic" are not just metaphors but can be read literally. It is not surprising, then, that when the body politic needed to be purified in Nazi Germany, certain kinds of bodies had to be eliminated.[6]

The reason that the body has so much presence in the West is that the world is primarily perceived by sight.[7] The differentiation of human bodies in terms of sex, skin color, and cranium size is a testament to the powers attributed to "seeing." The gaze is an invitation to differentiate. Different approaches to comprehending reality, then, suggest epistemological differences between societies. Relative to Yorùbá society, which is the focus of this book, the body has an exaggerated presence in the Western conceptualization of society. The term "worldview," which is used in the West to sum up the cultural logic of a society, captures the

West's privileging of the visual. It is Eurocentric to use it to describe cultures that may privilege other senses. The term "world-sense" is a more inclusive way of describing the conception of the world by different cultural groups. In this study, therefore, "worldview" will only be applied to describe the Western cultural sense, and "world-sense" will be used when describing the Yorùbá or other cultures that may privilege senses other than the visual or even a combination of senses.

The foregoing hardly represents the received view of Western history and social thought. Quite the contrary: until recently, the history of Western societies has been presented as a documentation of rational thought in which ideas are framed as the agents of history. If bodies appear at all, they are articulated as the debased side of human nature. The preferred focus has been on the mind, lofty and high above the foibles of the flesh. Early in Western discourse, a binary opposition between body and mind emerged. The much-vaunted Cartesian dualism was only an affirmation of a tradition[8] in which the body was seen as a trap from which any rational person had to escape. Ironically, even as the body remained at the center of both sociopolitical categories and discourse, many thinkers denied its existence for certain categories of people, most notably themselves. "Bodylessness" has been a precondition of rational thought. Women, primitives, Jews, Africans, the poor, and all those who qualified for the label "different" in varying historical epochs have been considered to be the embodied, dominated therefore by instinct and affect, reason being beyond them. They are the Other, and the Other is a body.[9]

In pointing out the centrality of the body in the construction of difference in Western culture, one does not necessarily deny that there have been certain traditions in the West that have attempted to explain differences according to criteria other than the presence or absence of certain organs: the possession of a penis, the size of the brain, the shape of the cranium, or the color of the skin. The Marxist tradition is especially noteworthy in this regard in that it emphasized social relations as an explanation for class inequality. However, the critique of Marxism as androcentric by numerous feminist writers suggests that this paradigm is also implicated in Western somatocentricity.[10] Similarly, the establishment of disciplines such as sociology and anthropology, which purport to explain society on the bases of human interactions, seems to suggest the relegation of biological determinism in social thought. On closer examination, however, one finds that the body has hardly been banished from social thought, not to mention its role in the constitution of social status. This can be illustrated in the discipline of sociology. In a monograph on the body and society, Bryan Turner laments what he perceives

as the absence of the body in sociological inquiries. He attributes this phenomenon of "absent bodies"[11] to the fact that "sociology emerged as a discipline which took the social meaning of human interaction as its principal object of inquiry, claiming that the meaning of social actions can never be reduced to biology or physiology."[12]

One could agree with Turner about the need to separate sociology from eugenics and phrenology. However, to say that bodies have been absent from sociological theories is to discount the fact that the social groups that are the subject matter of the discipline are essentially understood as rooted in biology. They are categories based on perceptions of the different physical presence of various body-types. In the contemporary U.S., so long as sociologists deal with so-called social categories like the underclass, suburbanites, workers, farmers, voters, citizens, and criminals (to mention a few categories that are historically and in the cultural ethos understood as representing specific body-types), there is no escape from biology. If the social realm is determined by the kinds of bodies occupying it, then to what extent is there a social realm, given that it is conceived to be biologically determined? For example, no one hearing the term "corporate executives" would assume them to be women; and in the 1980s and 1990s, neither would anyone spontaneously associate whites with the terms "underclass" or "gangs"; indeed, if someone were to construct an association between the terms, their meanings would have to be shifted. Consequently, any sociologist who studies these categories cannot escape an underlying biological insidiousness.

This omnipresence of biologically deterministic explanations in the social sciences can be demonstrated with the category of the criminal or criminal type in contemporary American society. Troy Duster, in an excellent study of the resurgence of overt biological determinism in intellectual circles, berates the eagerness of many researchers to associate criminality with genetic inheritance; he goes on to argue that other interpretations of criminality are possible:

> The prevailing economic interpretation explains crime rates in terms of access to jobs and unemployment. A cultural interpretation tries to show differing cultural adjustments between the police and those apprehended for crimes. A political interpretation sees criminal activity as political interpretation, or pre-revolutionary. A conflict interpretation sees this as an interest conflict over scarce resources.[13]

Clearly, on the face of it, all these explanations of criminality are nonbiological; however, as long as the "population" or the social group

they are attempting to explain — in this case criminals who are black and/or poor — is seen to represent a genetic grouping, the underlying assumptions about the genetic predisposition of that population or group will structure the explanations proffered whether they are body-based or not. This is tied to the fact that because of the history of racism, the underlying research question (even if it is unstated) is not why certain individuals commit crimes: it is actually why black people have such a propensity to do so. The definition of what is criminal activity is very much tied up with who (black, white, rich, poor) is involved in the activity.[14] Likewise, the police, as a group, are assumed to be white. Similarly, when studies are done of leadership in American society, the researchers "discover" that most people in leadership positions are white males; no matter what account these researchers give for this result, their statements will be read as explaining the predisposition of this group to leadership.

The integrity of researchers is not being questioned here; my purpose is not to label any group of scholars as racist in their intentions. On the contrary, since the civil rights movement, social-scientific research has been used to formulate policies that would abate if not end discrimination against subordinated groups. What must be underscored, however, is how knowledge-production and dissemination in the United States are inevitably embedded in what Michael Omi and Howard Winant call the "everyday common sense of race — a way of comprehending, explaining and acting in the world."[15] Race, then, is a fundamental organizing principle in American society. It is institutionalized, and it functions irrespective of the action of individual actors.

In the West, social identities are all interpreted through the "prism of heritability,"[16] to borrow Duster's phrase. Biological determinism is a filter through which all knowledge about society is run. As mentioned in the preface, I refer to this kind of thinking as body-reasoning;[17] it is a biologic interpretation of the social world. The point, again, is that as long as social actors like managers, criminals, nurses, and the poor are presented as groups and not as individuals, and as long as such groupings are conceived to be genetically constituted, then there is no escape from biological determinism.

Against this background, the issue of gender difference is particularly interesting in regard to the history and the constitution of difference in European social practice and thought. The lengthy history of the embodiment of social categories is suggested by the myth fabricated by Socrates to convince citizens of different ranks to accept whatever status was imposed upon them. Socrates explained the myth to Glaucon in these terms:

> Citizens, we shall say to them in our tale, you are brothers, yet God has framed you differently. Some of you have the power of command, and in the composition of these he has mingled gold, wherefore also they have the greatest honor; others he has made silver, to be auxiliaries; others again who are to be husbandmen and craftsmen he has composed of brass and iron; and the species will generally be preserved in the children.... An Oracle says that when a man of brass or iron guards the state, it will be destroyed. Such is the tale; is there any possibility of making our citizens believe in it?

Glaucon replies, "Not in the present generation; there is no way of accomplishing this; but their sons may be made to believe in the tale, and their sons' sons, and posterity after them."[18] Glaucon was mistaken that the acceptance of the myth could be accomplished only in the next generation: the myth of those born to rule was already in operation; mothers, sisters, and daughters — women — were already excluded from consideration in any of those ranks. In a context in which people were ranked according to association with certain metals, women were, so to speak, made of wood, and so were not even considered. Stephen Gould, a historian of science, calls Glaucon's observation a prophecy, since history shows that Socrates' tale has been promulgated and believed by subsequent generations.[19] The point, however, is that even in Glaucon's time, it was more than a prophecy: it was already a social practice to exclude women from the ranks of rulers.

Paradoxically, in European thought, despite the fact that society was seen to be inhabited by bodies, only women were perceived to be embodied; men had no bodies — they were walking minds. Two social categories that emanated from this construction were the "man of reason" (the thinker) and the "woman of the body," and they were oppositionally constructed. The idea that the man of reason often had the woman of the body on his mind was clearly not entertained. As Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality* suggests, however, the man of ideas often had the woman and indeed other bodies on his mind.[20]

In recent times, thanks in part to feminist scholarship, the body is beginning to receive the attention it deserves as a site and as material for the explication of European history and thought.[21] The distinctive contribution of feminist discourse to our understanding of Western societies is that it makes explicit the gendered (therefore embodied) and male-dominant nature of all Western institutions and discourses. The feminist lens disrobes the man of ideas for all to see. Even discourses like science that were assumed to be objective have been shown to be male-biased.[22]

The extent to which the body is implicated in the construction of sociopolitical categories and epistemologies cannot be overemphasized. As noted earlier, Dorothy Smith has written that in Western societies "a man's body gives credibility to his utterance, whereas a woman's body takes it away from hers."[23] Writing on the construction of masculinity, R. W. Connell notes that the body is inescapable in its construction and that a stark physicalness underlies gender categories in the Western worldview: "In our [Western] culture, at least, the physical sense of maleness and femaleness is central to the cultural interpretation of gender. Masculine gender is (among other things) a certain feel to the skin, certain muscular shapes and tensions, certain postures and ways of moving, certain possibilities in sex."[24]

From the ancients to the moderns, gender has been a foundational category upon which social categories have been erected. Hence, gender has been ontologically conceptualized. The category of the citizen, which has been the cornerstone of much of Western political theory, was male, despite the much-acclaimed Western democratic traditions.[25] Elucidating Aristotle's categorization of the sexes, Elizabeth Spelman writes: "A woman is a female who is free; a man is a male who is a citizen."[26] Women were excluded from the category of citizens because "penis possession"[27] was one of the qualifications for citizenship. Lorna Schiebinger notes in a study of the origins of modern science and women's exclusion from European scientific institutions that "differences between the two sexes were reflections of a set of dualistic principles that penetrated the cosmos as well as the bodies of men and women."[28] Differences and hierarchy, then, are enshrined on bodies; and bodies enshrine differences and hierarchy. Hence, dualisms like nature/culture, public/private, and visible/invisible are variations on the theme of male/female bodies hierarchically ordered, differentially placed in relation to power, and spatially distanced one from the other.[29]

In the span of Western history, the justifications for the making of the categories "man" and "woman" have not remained the same. On the contrary, they have been dynamic. Although the boundaries are shifting and the content of each category may change, the two categories have remained hierarchical and in binary opposition. For Stephen Gould, "the justification for ranking groups by inborn worth has varied with the tide of Western history. Plato relied on dialectic, the church upon dogma. For the past two centuries, scientific claims have become the primary agent of validating Plato's myth."[30] The constant in this Western narrative is the centrality of the body: two bodies on display, two sexes, two categories persistently viewed — one in relation to the other. That narrative is about the unwavering elaboration of the body as the site

and cause of differences and hierarchies in society. In the West, so long as the issue is difference and social hierarchy, then the body is constantly positioned, posed, exposed, and reexposed as their cause. Society, then, is seen as an accurate reflection of genetic endowment — those with a superior biology inevitably are those in superior social positions. No difference is elaborated without bodies that are positioned hierarchically. In his book *Making Sex*,[31] Thomas Laqueur gives a richly textured history of the construction of sex from classical Greece to the contemporary period, noting the changes in symbols and the shifts in meanings. The point, however, is the centrality and persistence of the body in the construction of social categories. In view of this history, Freud's dictum that anatomy is destiny was not original or exceptional; he was just more explicit than many of his predecessors.

Social Orders and Biology: Natural or Constructed?

The idea that gender is socially constructed — that differences between males and female are to be located in social practices, not in biological facts — was one important insight that emerged early in second-wave feminist scholarship. This finding was understandably taken to be radical in a culture in which difference, particularly gender difference, had always been articulated as natural and, therefore, biologically determined. Gender as a social construction became the cornerstone of much feminist discourse. The notion was particularly attractive because it was interpreted to mean that gender differences were not ordained by nature; they were mutable and therefore changeable. This in turn led to the opposition between social constructionism and biological determinism, as if they were mutually exclusive.

Such a dichotomous presentation is unwarranted, however, because the ubiquity of biologically rooted explanations for difference in Western social thought and practices is a reflection of the extent to which biological explanations are found compelling.[32] In other words, so long as the issue is difference (whether the issue is why women breast-feed babies or why they could not vote), old biologies will be found or new biologies will be constructed to explain women's disadvantage. The Western preoccupation with biology continues to generate constructions of "new biologies" even as some of the old biological assumptions are being dislodged. In fact, in the Western experience, social construction and biological determinism have been two sides of the same coin, since both ideas continue to reinforce each other. When social categories like gender are constructed, new biologies of difference can be invented.

When biological interpretations are found to be compelling, social categories do derive their legitimacy and power from biology. In short, the social and the biological feed on each other.

The biologization inherent in the Western articulation of social difference is, however, by no means universal. The debate in feminism about what roles and which identities are natural and what aspects are constructed only has meaning in a culture where social categories are conceived as having no independent logic of their own. This debate, of course, developed out of certain problems; therefore, it is logical that in societies where such problems do not exist, there should be no such debate. But then, due to imperialism, this debate has been universalized to other cultures, and its immediate effect is to inject Western problems where such issues originally did not exist. Even then, this debate does not take us very far in societies where social roles and identities are not conceived to be rooted in biology. By the same token, in cultures where the visual sense is not privileged, and the body is not read as a blueprint of society, invocations of biology are less likely to occur because such explanations do not carry much weight in the social realm. That many categories of difference are socially constructed in the West may well suggest the mutability of categories, but it is also an invitation to endless constructions of biology — in that there is no limit to what can be explained by the body-appeal. Thus biology is hardly mutable; it is much more a combination of the Hydra and the Phoenix of Greek mythology. Biology is forever mutating, not mutable. Ultimately, the most important point is not that gender is socially constructed but the extent to which biology itself is socially constructed and therefore inseparable from the social.

The way in which the conceptual categories sex and gender functioned in feminist discourse was based on the assumption that biological and social conceptions could be separated and applied universally. Thus sex was presented as the natural category and gender as the social construction of the natural. But, subsequently, it became apparent that even sex has elements of construction. In many feminist writings thereafter, sex has served as the base and gender as the superstructure.[33] In spite of all efforts to separate the two, the distinction between sex and gender is a red herring. In Western conceptualization, gender cannot exist without sex since the body sits squarely at the base of both categories. Despite the preeminence of feminist social constructionism, which claims a social deterministic approach to society, biological foundationalism,[34] if not reductionism, is still at the center of gender discourses, just as it is at the center of all other discussions of society in the West.

Nevertheless, the idea that gender is socially constructed is significant

from a cross-cultural perspective. In one of the earliest feminist texts to assert the constructionist thesis and its need for cross-cultural grounding, Suzanne J. Kessler and Wendy McKenna wrote that "by viewing gender as a social construction, it is possible to see descriptions of other cultures as evidence for alternative but equally real conceptions of what it means to be woman or man."[35] Yet, paradoxically, a fundamental assumption of feminist theory is that women's subordination is universal. These two ideas are contradictory. The universality attributed to gender asymmetry suggests a biological basis rather than a cultural one, given that the human anatomy is universal whereas cultures speak in myriad voices. That gender is socially constructed is said to mean that the criteria that make up male and female categories vary in different cultures. If this is so, then it challenges the notion that there is a biological imperative at work. From this standpoint, then, gender categories are mutable, and as such, gender then is denaturalized.

In fact, the categorization of women in feminist discourses as a homogeneous, bio-anatomically determined group which is always constituted as powerless and victimized does not reflect the fact that gender relations are social relations and, therefore, historically grounded and culturally bound. If gender is socially constructed, then gender cannot behave in the same way across time and space. If gender is a social construction, then we must examine the various cultural/architectural sites where it was constructed, and we must acknowledge that variously located actors (aggregates, groups, interested parties) were part of the construction. We must further acknowledge that if gender is a social construction, then there was a specific time (in different cultural/architectural sites) when it was "constructed" and therefore a time before which it was not. Thus, gender, being a social construction, is also a historical and cultural phenomenon. Consequently, it is logical to assume that in some societies, gender construction need not have existed at all.

From a cross-cultural perspective, the significance of this observation is that one cannot assume the social organization of one culture (the dominant West included) as universal or the interpretations of the experiences of one culture as explaining another one. On the one hand, at a general, global level, the constructedness of gender does suggest its mutability. On the other hand, at the local level — that is, within the bounds of any particular culture — gender is mutable only if it is socially constructed as such. Because, in Western societies, gender categories, like all other social categories, are constructed with biological building blocks, their mutability is questionable. The cultural logic of Western social categories is founded on an ideology of biological determinism: the conception that biology provides the rationale for the organization

of the social world. Thus, as pointed out earlier, this cultural logic is actually a "bio-logic."

The "Sisterarchy": Feminism and Its "Other"

From a cross-cultural perspective, the implications of Western bio-logic are far-reaching when one considers the fact that gender constructs in feminist theory originated in the West, where men and women are conceived oppositionally and projected as embodied, genetically derived social categories.[36] The question, then, is this: On what basis are Western conceptual categories exportable or transferable to other cultures that have a different cultural logic? This question is raised because despite the wonderful insight about the social construction of gender, the way cross-cultural data have been used by many feminist writers undermines the notion that differing cultures may construct social categories differently. For one thing, if different cultures necessarily always construct gender as feminism proposes that they *do and must,* then the idea that gender is socially constructed is not sustainable.

The potential value of Western feminist social constructionism remains, therefore, largely unfulfilled, because feminism, like most other Western theoretical frameworks for interpreting the social world, cannot get away from the prism of biology that necessarily perceives social hierarchies as natural. Consequently, in cross-cultural gender studies, theorists impose Western categories on non-Western cultures and then project such categories as natural. The way in which dissimilar constructions of the social world in other cultures are used as "evidence" for the constructedness of gender and the insistence that these cross-cultural constructions are gender categories as they operate in the West nullify the alternatives offered by the non-Western cultures and undermine the claim that gender is a social construction.

Western ideas are imposed when non-Western social categories are assimilated into the gender framework that emerged from a specific sociohistorical and philosophical tradition. An example is the "discovery" of what has been labeled "third gender"[37] or "alternative genders"[38] in a number of non-Western cultures. The fact that the African "woman marriage,"[39] the Native American "berdache,"[40] and the South Asian "hijra"[41] are presented as gender categories incorporates them into the Western bio-logic and gendered framework without explication of their own sociocultural histories and constructions. A number of questions are pertinent here. Are these social categories seen as gendered in the cultures in question? From whose perspective are

they gendered? In fact, even the appropriateness of naming them "third gender" is questionable since the Western cultural system, which uses biology to map the social world, precludes the possibility of more than two genders because gender is the elaboration of the perceived sexual dimorphism of the human body into the social realm. The trajectory of feminist discourse in the last twenty-five years has been determined by the Western cultural environment of its founding and development.

Thus, in the beginning of second-wave feminism in Euro-America, sex was defined as the biological facts of male and female bodies, and gender was defined as the social consequences that flowed from these facts. In effect, each society was assumed to have a sex/gender system.[42] The most important point was that sex and gender are inextricably bound. Over time, sex tended to be understood as the base and gender as the superstructure. Subsequently, however, after much debate, even sex was interpreted as socially constructed. Kessler and McKenna, one of the earliest research teams in this area, wrote that they "use gender, rather than sex, even when referring to those aspects of being a woman (girl) or man (boy) that have been viewed as biological. This will serve to emphasize our position that the element of social construction is primary in all aspects of being male or female."[43] Judith Butler, writing almost fifteen years later, reiterates the interconnectedness of sex and gender even more strongly:

> It would make no sense, then, to define gender as the cultural interpretation of sex, if sex itself is a gendered category. Gender ought not to be conceived merely as a cultural inscription of meaning on a pregiven surface (a juridical conception); gender must also designate the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established. As a result, gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which "sexed nature" or "a natural sex" is produced.[44]

Given the inseparability of sex and gender in the West, which results from the use of biology as an ideology for mapping the social world, the terms "sex" and "gender," as noted earlier, are essentially synonyms. To put this another way: since in Western constructions, physical bodies are always social bodies, there is really no distinction between sex and gender.[45] In Yorùbá society, in contrast, social relations derive their legitimacy from social facts, not from biology. The bare biological facts of pregnancy and parturition count only in regard to procreation, where they must. Biological facts do not determine who can become the monarch or who can trade in the market. In indigenous Yorùbá conception, these questions were properly social questions, not biological

ones; hence, the nature of one's anatomy did not define one's social position. Consequently, the Yorùbá social order requires a different kind of map, not a gender map that assumes biology as the foundation for the social.

The splitting of hairs over the relationship between gender and sex, the debate on essentialism, the debates about differences among women,[46] and the preoccupation with gender bending/blending[47] that have characterized feminism are actually feminist versions of the enduring debate on nature versus nurture that is inherent in Western thought and in the logic of its social hierarchies. These concerns are not necessarily inherent in the discourse of society as such but are a culture-specific concern and issue. From a cross-cultural perspective, the more interesting point is the degree to which feminism, despite its radical local stance, exhibits the same ethnocentric and imperialistic characteristics of the Western discourses it sought to subvert. This has placed serious limitations on its applicability outside of the culture that produced it. As Kathy Ferguson reminds us: "The questions we can ask about the world are enabled, and other questions disabled, by the frame that orders the questioning. *When we are busy arguing about the questions that appear within a certain frame, the frame itself becomes invisible; we become enframed within it.*"[48] Though feminism in origin, by definition, and by practice is a universalizing discourse, the concerns and questions that have informed it are Western (and its audience too is apparently assumed to be composed of just Westerners, given that many of the theorists tend to use the first-person plural "we" and "our culture" in their writings). As such, feminism remains enframed by the tunnel vision and the bio-logic of other Western discourses.

Yorùbá society of southwestern Nigeria suggests a different scenario, one in which the body is not always enlisted as the basis for social classification. From a Yorùbá stance, the body appears to have an exaggerated presence in Western thought and social practice, including feminist theories. In the Yorùbá world, particularly in pre-nineteenth-century[49] Ọ̀yọ́ culture, society was conceived to be inhabited by people in relation to one another. That is, the "physicality" of maleness or femaleness did not have social antecedents and therefore did not constitute social categories. Social hierarchy was determined by social relations. As noted earlier, how persons were situated in relationships shifted depending on those involved and the particular situation. The principle that determined social organization was seniority, which was based on chronological age. Yorùbá kinship terms did not denote gender, and other nonfamilial social categories were not gender-specific either. What these Yorùbá categories tell us is that the body is not always in view

and on view for categorization. The classic example is the female who played the roles of *ọba* (ruler), *omo* (offspring), *ọkọ, aya, ìyá* (mother), and *aláwo* (diviner-priest) all in one body. None of these kinship and nonkinship social categories are gender-specific. One cannot place persons in the Yorùbá categories just by looking at them. What they are heard to say may be the most important cue. Seniority as the foundation of Yorùbá social intercourse is relational and dynamic; unlike gender, it is not focused on the body.[50]

If the human body is universal, why does the body appear to have an exaggerated presence in the West relative to Yorùbáland? A comparative research framework reveals that one major difference stems from which of the senses is privileged in the apprehension of reality — sight in the West and a multiplicity of senses anchored by hearing in Yorùbáland. The tonality of Yorùbá language predisposes one toward an apprehension of reality that cannot marginalize the auditory. Consequently, relative to Western societies, there is a stronger need for a broader contextualization in order to make sense of the world.[51] For example, Ifá divination, which is also a knowledge system in Yorùbáland, has both visual and oral components.[52] More fundamentally, the distinction between Yorùbá and the West symbolized by the focus on different senses in the apprehension of reality involves more than perception — for the Yorùbá, and indeed many other African societies, it is about "a particular presence in the world — a world conceived of as a whole in which all things are linked together."[53] It concerns the many worlds human beings inhabit; it does not privilege the physical world over the metaphysical. A concentration on vision as the primary mode of comprehending reality promotes what can be seen over that which is not apparent to the eye; it misses the other levels and the nuances of existence. David Lowe's comparison of sight and the sense of hearing encapsulates some of the issues to which I wish to draw attention. He writes:

> Of the five senses, hearing is the most pervasive and penetrating. I say this, although many, from Aristotle in *Metaphysics* to Hans Jonas in *Phenomenon of Life,* have said that sight is most noble. But sight is always directed at what is straight ahead.... And sight cannot turn a corner, at least without the aid of a mirror. On the other hand, sound comes to one, surrounds one for the time being with an acoustic space, full of timbre and nuances. It is more proximate and suggestive than sight. Sight is always the perception of the surface from a particular angle. But sound is that perception able to penetrate beneath the surface.... Speech is the communica-

> tion connecting one person with another. Therefore, the quality of sound is fundamentally more vital and moving than that of sight.[54]

Just as the West's privileging of the visual over other senses has been clearly demonstrated, so too the dominance of the auditory in Yorùbá-land can be shown.

In an interesting paper appropriately entitled "The Mind's Eye," feminist theorists Evelyn Fox Keller and Christine Grontkowski make the following observation: "We [Euro-Americans] speak of knowledge as illumination, knowing as seeing, truth as light. How is it, we might ask, that vision came to seem so apt a model for knowledge? And having accepted it as such, how has the metaphor colored our conceptions of knowledge?"[55] These theorists go on to analyze the implications of the privileging of sight over other senses for the conception of reality and knowledge in the West. They examine the linkages between the privileging of vision and patriarchy, noting that the roots of Western thought in the visual have yielded a dominant male logic.[56] Explicating Jonas's observation that "to get the proper view, we take the proper distance,"[57] they note the passive nature of sight, in that the subject of the gaze is passive. They link the distance that seeing entails to the concept of objectivity and the lack of engagement between the "I" and the subject — the Self and the Other.[58] Indeed, the Other in the West is best described as another body — separate and distant.

Feminism has not escaped the visual logic of Western thought. The feminist focus on sexual difference, for instance, stems from this legacy. Feminist theorist Nancy Chodorow has noted the primacy and limitations of this feminist concentration on difference:

> For our part as feminists, even as we want to eliminate gender inequality, hierarchy, and difference, we expect to find such features in most social settings.... We have begun from the assumption that *gender is always a salient* feature of social life, and we do not have theoretical approaches that emphasize sex similarities over differences.[59]

Consequently, the assumption and deployment of patriarchy and "women" as universals in many feminist writings are ethnocentric and demonstrate the hegemony of the West over other cultural groupings.[60] The emergence of patriarchy as a form of social organization in Western history is a function of the differentiation between male and female bodies, a difference rooted in the visual, a difference that cannot be reduced to biology and that has to be understood as being constituted within particular historical and social realities. I am not suggesting that

gender categories are necessarily limited to the West, particularly in the contemporary period. Rather, I am suggesting that discussions of social categories should be defined and grounded in the local milieu, rather than based on "universal" findings made in the West. A number of feminist scholars have questioned the assumption of universal patriarchy. For example, the editors of a volume on Hausa women of northern Nigeria write: "A preconceived assumption of gender asymmetry actually distorts many analyses, since it precludes the exploration of gender as a fundamental component of social relations, inequality, processes of production and reproduction, and ideology."[61] Beyond the question of asymmetry, however, a preconceived notion of gender as a universal social category is equally problematic. If the investigator assumes gender, then gender categories will be found whether they exist or not.

Feminism is one of the latest Western theoretical fashions to be applied to African societies. Following the one-size-fits-all (or better still, the Western-size-fits-all) approach to intellectual theorizing, it has taken its place in a long series of Western paradigms — including Marxism, functionalism, structuralism, and poststructuralism — imposed on African subjects. Academics have become one of the most effective international hegemonizing forces, producing not homogenous social experiences but a homogeny of hegemonic forces. Western theories become tools of hegemony as they are applied universally, on the assumption that Western experiences define the human. For example, a study of Gã residents of a neighborhood in Accra, Ghana, starts thus: "Improving our analysis of women and class formation is necessary to refine our perceptions."[62] Women? What women? Who qualifies to be women in this cultural setting, and on what bases are they to be identified? These questions are legitimate ones to raise if researchers take the constructedness of social categories seriously and take into account local conceptions of reality. The pitfalls of preconceived notions and ethnocentricity become obvious when the author of the study admits:

> Another bias I began with I was forced to change. Before starting fieldwork I was not particularly interested in economics, causal or otherwise. But by the time I had tried an initial presurvey,... the overweening importance of trading activities in pervading every aspect of women's lives made a consideration of economics imperative. And when the time came to analyze the data in depth, the most cogent explanations often were economic ones. I started out to work with women; I ended by working with traders.[63]

Why, in the first place, did Claire Robertson, the author of this study, start with women, and what distortions were introduced as a result?

What if she had started with traders? Would she have ended up with women? Beginnings are important; adding other variables in midstream does not prevent or solve distortions and misapprehensions. Like many studies on Africans, half of Robertson's study seems to have been completed — and categories were already in place — before she met the Gã people. Robertson's monograph is not atypical in African studies; in fact, it is one of the better ones, particularly because unlike many scholars, she is aware of some of her biases. The fundamental bias that many Westerners, including Robertson, bring to the study of other societies is "body-reasoning," the assumption that biology determines social position. Because "women" is a body-based category, it tends to be privileged by Western researchers over "traders," which is non-body-based. Even when traders are taken seriously, they are embodied such that the trader category, which in many West African societies is non-gender-specific, is turned into "market women," as if the explanation for their involvement in this occupation is to be found in their breasts, or to put it more scientifically, in the X chromosome.[64] The more the Western bio-logic is adopted, the more this body-based framework is inscribed conceptually and into the social reality.

It is not clear that the body is a site of such elaboration of the social in the Gã world-sense or in other African cultures. This warrants investigation before one can draw conclusions that many studies are drawing on gender in African cultures. Why have African studies remained so dependent on Western theories, and what are the implications for the constitution of knowledge about African realities? Contrary to the most basic tenets of body-reasoning, all kinds of people, irrespective of body-type, are implicated in constructing this biologically deterministic discourse. Body-reasoning is a cultural approach. Its origins are easily locatable in European thought, but its tentacles have become all pervasive. Western hegemony appears in many different ways in African studies, but the focus here will be on the hand-me-down theories that are used to interpret African societies without any regard to fit or how ragged they have become.

Western Hegemony in African Studies

An assessment of African studies as an interdisciplinary field will reveal that it is by and large "reactionary."[65] Reaction, in essence, has been at once the driving force of African studies and its limitation in all its branches. It does not matter whether any particular scholar is reacting for or against the West; the point is that the West is at the center of

African knowledge-production. For instance, a whole generation of African historians have reconstructed African history, complete with kings, empires, and even wars, to disprove European claims that Africans are peoples without history.[66] In other fields, a lot of ink has been spilled (and trees felled) to refute or support assertions about whether some African peoples have states or are stateless peoples. Now, in the closing years of the twentieth century, arguably the hottest debate in African studies is whether Africans had philosophy before European contact or whether Africans are best described as "philosophyḷess" peoples.[67] This is perhaps the most recent phase in an old Western concern with the evolving status of African primitivism, where the indices have moved from historylessness to statelessness and now to philosophylessness.

Whether the discussion focuses on history or historylessness, on having a state or being stateless, it is clear that the West is the norm against which Africans continue to be measured by others and often by themselves. The questions that inform research are developed in the West, and the operative theories and concepts are derived from Western experiences. African experiences rarely inform theory in any field of study; at best such experiences are exceptionalized. Consequently, African studies continues to be "Westocentric," a term that reaches beyond "Eurocentric" to include North America. The presence of Africans in the academy is important in and of itself and has made possible some important changes. However, it has not brought about fundamental changes — despite the sociology-of-knowledge thesis and the politics of identity.[68] That the Euro-American scholar is Westocentric needs no comment. But what accounts for the persistent Westocentricity of a lot of African scholarship?

This question is posed against the background of a debate among African scholars about the inability of many studies conducted by Africans to grapple with the real issues facing African countries. A number of African thinkers have tried to explain why many studies conducted by Africans fail to deal with those issues. The argument has been put forward that many writings by Africans are too focused on exhibiting Africa as different from Europe, instead of dealing with those real issues. Africa is undoubtedly in the midst of a crisis of global proportions, and this fact has lent an urgency to self-examination by African intellectuals. I shall call one group of scholars the antinativists[69] because of their very critical stance toward any espousals of an African culture. The other group, who entertain a notion of an African way of being, are referred to as nativist[70] in their orientation. For the antinativist, the problem of the avoidance of central issues stems from the fact that many African thinkers are cultural nationalists; the charge is that these thinkers are

unwilling to acknowledge Africa's failures and European technological superiority and thus focus simply on how different Africa is from the West. The antinativists argue further that the nativists set themselves apart from the West in order to shore up their self-esteem. Literary critic Abiola Irele sums up this antinativist viewpoint very well:

> The whole movement in modern African thought has been to define this identity (African id, located in traditional culture). The intellectual reaction to our humiliation under the colonial system and to our devaluation has consisted in *affirming our difference from the white man, the European. This conscious effort of differentiation has produced the well-known ideologies of African personality* and negritude. In Senghor's formulation of the latter, the idea of the African identity takes the form of an irreducible essence of the race whose objective correlative is the traditional culture. This essence is held to confer an estimable value upon our past and to justify our claim to a separate existence. The whole movement of mind in Black cultural nationalism, from Blyden to Senghor, leads to a mystique of traditional forms of life.[71]

In this article, "In Praise of Alienation," Irele suggests that African intellectuals are unduly holding on to their culture. His solution is to accept Africa's defeat and "alienation" and embrace Europe in all its grandeur and scientific capacity. Only then will Africa have the modern tools to confront its predicament. While no one can deny the myriad problems facing Africa today and the need for leadership, intellectual and otherwise, critical thinkers like Irele have misdiagnosed the source of Africa's problem. The solution they proffer, therefore, is suspect. The foundation of Africa's problem is its close identification with Europe, which is the source and the rationale for continued Western dominance of African peoples and African thought.

My point here, then, is that African thought (from Blyden to Senghor; through Kagame, Mbiti, and Idowu; to Irele, Hountondji, Bodunrin, Oruka, and Wiredu), whether nativist or antinativist, has always focused not on *difference* from the West but on *sameness* with the West. It is precisely because African intellectuals accept and identify so much with European thinking that they have created African versions of Western things. They seem to think that the European mind-set is universal and that, therefore, since Europeans have discovered the way the world works and have laid the foundations of thought, all that Africans need to do is to add their own "burnt" bricks on top of the foundation. Senghorian negritude, for example (one of the earliest modern African intellectual movements), far from being an exercise in difference, is ac-

tually a result of Senghor's acceptance of European categories of essence, race, and reason and the linkages among the three. Senghor asserts that since Africans are a race like Europeans, they must have their own brand of essence. The fact that these are European-derived categories is not given enough consideration. Body- or race-reasoning, after all, is not rational; it is not rational or reasonable to declare somebody a criminal just by looking at his face, something racists do relentlessly. Stanislaus Adotevi is correct when he writes that "negritude is the last-born child of an ideology of domination.... It is the *black way of being white.*"[72]

The problem of importing Western concepts and categories into African studies and societies takes a decisive turn in the work of a number of African feminist scholars. I find this development particularly unfortunate because this new generation of scholars has the potential to radically transform African studies, which has by and large mirrored the androcentrism of its European origins. Using all sorts of Western models, writers like Tola Pearce and Molara Ogundipe-Leslie have characterized Yorùbá society as patriarchal. Their mastery of Marxism, feminism, and structuralism is dazzling, but their understanding of Yorùbá culture is seriously lacking. Samuel Johnson, a pioneering Yorùbá intellectual, wrote of late nineteenth-century Yorùbáland that "educated natives of Yorùbá are well acquainted with the history of England and with that of Rome and Greece, but of the history of their own country they know nothing whatever!"[73] More than a century later, Johnson's lament remains relevant. More recently, philosopher and art historian Nkiru Nzegwu clearly framed the problem by asserting that when a number of African feminist scholars rushed to characterize indigenous society "as implicitly patriarchal, the question of the legitimacy of patriarchy as a valid transcultural category of analysis was never raised.... The problem of evaluating Igbó and Yorùbá cultures on the bases of their cultural other (the West) is that African societies are misrepresented without first presenting their positions."[74]

Pearce's description of the Yorùbá household as consisting of "a patriarch, his wives, his sons, and their wives"[75] sounds like a depiction of the *pater familias* of the Greeks or a description of Abraham's family in the Bible and makes me wonder whether she has ever observed an indigenous Yorùbá lineage or has read earlier accounts of the Yorùbá family by N. A. Fadipe[76] or Johnson.[77] Ogundipe-Leslie, in a 1994 collection of mostly outdated essays, defines the Yorùbá institution of *ilémosú* as one in which women are left on the marriage shelf (*ilémosú* is an institution whereby daughters return to their natal families after marriage and make the family home their lifelong residence). She says, metaphorically, that the institution leaves women "growing fungi

on their bodies in the house."[78] It is difficult to account for her interpretation of *ilémosú;* what it shows, however, is her flippant attitude toward Yorùbá culture — she has not bothered to ascertain the nature and the meaning of the institution. The major limitation of Ogundipe-Leslie's collection of essays is that she provides no cultural context for her claims. Because gender is preeminently a cultural construct, it cannot be theorized in a cultural vacuum, as many scholars tend to do. Indeed, one of the useful things that African feminists can learn from their Western "sisters" is the painstaking archaeological approach with which many of them have conducted studies that have elucidated Western culture in previously unimaginable ways. African feminists can learn a lot from the methods of feminist scholarship as they have been applied to the West, but they should scorn methods of Western, imperial, feminist Africanists who impose feminism on the "colonies." African scholars need to do serious work detailing and describing indigenous African cultures from the inside out, not from the outside in. To date, very little has been written about African societies in and of themselves; rather, most scholarship is an exercise in propounding one newfangled Western model or the other. The frame of reference of a culture has to be identified and described on its own terms before one can make the sort of gratuitous claims that are being made about patriarchy and other social ills.

In Yorùbá studies, the manifestation of this preoccupation with finding African equivalents of European things did not originate with feminists. It is apparent in the work of an earlier generation of scholars such as the theologian E. Bolaji Idowu. He writes on religion that "if they [Europeans] have God, we have Olodumare; if they have Jesus Christ, we have Ela the god of salvation, same as them."[79] The theme is manifested in the work of the antinativists when they describe African thought as prephilosophic and prescientific or claim that Africa is late to philosophy. Whether the charge is that Africa was too early or too late in doing philosophy, the idea is that the Western type of philosophy is a human universal. Such thinking suggests that Africa is the West waiting to happen or that Africa is like the West, albeit a preformed or deformed West. With this evolutionary bent, antinativists anthropologize Africa and deny its coevality with the West.[80] There is nothing wrong with Africans affirming their humanity and a common humanity with their nemeses (i.e., Westerners); this affirmation was, indeed, necessary. The problem is that many African writers have assumed Western manifestations of the human condition to be the human condition itself. To put this in another way: they have misapprehended the nature of human universals.

Many African scholars, then, have simply failed to distinguish between universals and Western particulars. That human groups have a remembered past is a universal; that the Sumerians developed writing and produced written history at a certain period in time is a particular manifestation of this. That people organize themselves is universal; that they do so under the structure of a state or some other specific form of organization is a particular. That they organize production and reproduction (marriage) is a universal; that in certain places or during certain epochs production and reproduction appear to be separated and separable are particulars. Exchange has always been the universal; sex, cowry shells, gold, money, and credit cards are a few of its particulars. Self-reflection is integral to the human condition, but it is wrong to assume that its Western manifestation — written philosophy — is the universal. In the era of global capitalism, Coca Cola is universal, but it is hardly inherent in the human condition. To help avoid this confusion, a linguistic distinction should be made between *"universal" as a metaphysical term* referring to an inherent truth and *"universal" as a descriptive term.*

Modern African studies has remained dominated by Western modes of apprehension of reality and knowledge-production for a number of reasons. From a materialist perspective, Western dominance in academics is only a reflection of Western global economic and cultural dominance. But that is not an adequate explanation because there are non-Western regions in the world beyond Africa where indigenously grounded studies and concerns have developed to a considerable degree.[81] In the case of Africa, explanations about this dependency on the West have focused on the colonial mentality of African intellectuals, the politics of research funding, and the common class interests or privileged position of intellectuals wherever they are found. These explanations have validity. There is, however, another reason that is rarely acknowledged, and even when it is highlighted, its effect is underestimated: that is, the nature of the academy, especially its logic, structure, and practices. At the core of the problem is the way in which business is conducted in the knowledge-producing institutions; the way in which the foundational questions that inform research are generated in the West; the way in which theories and concepts are generated from Western experiences; and the way in which scholars have to work within disciplines, many of which were constituted to establish dominance over Africa and all of which have logics of their own quite distinct from questions about the social identity of scholars. The point is that as long as Africans take Western categories, like universities, bounded disciplines, and theories, for granted and array themselves around them — for or against does not matter — there can be no fundamental difference in

scholarship among these practitioners of knowledge, no matter what their points of origin.

My claim here can be illustrated with reference to the debate about African philosophy. In an anthology entitled *African Philosophy: The Essential Readings,* Tsenay Serequeberhan, the editor of the volume, notes that only African scholars are represented in the book; he goes on to defend what he calls the exclusionist policy:

> In my perception, this exclusionist approach is necessary — at least at this time in the development of African Philosophy — precisely because African philosophers need to formulate their differing positions in confrontation and in dialogue *on their own, that is minus foreign mediators/moderators or meddlers.* African Philosophers must engage in a theoretical threshing in confrontation and dialogue on their own.[82]

Looking at the papers in the collection, no matter their ideological bent, one finds that they quote Lévy-Bruhl, Descartes, Kant, Plato, and Tempels, to mention a few names. These authors are, obviously, not Africans. Europeans, in other words, were not excluded; they might be dead Europeans, but they are still setting the agenda and consequently the terms of discourse. In fact, the question should be asked as to who made these congregated Africans philosophers. How were they initiated? By the so-called mediators/moderators and meddlers?[83] These questions are pertinent since there were some real unnamed and unacknowledged exclusions being practiced in the assembling of the anthology. These other exclusions should be part of the discussion because they underscore very graphically the dilemmas of African scholarship.

This practice of excluding non-Africans as contributors while at the same time accepting the Western/academic terms of discourse as givens is problematic and unrealistic. It should be obvious that it is next to impossible to create an African theoretical space when the ground of discourse has been crowded by the DWEMs — dead, white, European males.[84] The "culture wars" over what should be included in the canon and indeed the curriculum in universities in the United States in the 1980s underscored this point. Let me be clear about what the concern is here. It is not that Africans should not read whatever they please — in fact we must read widely in order to be able to face the challenges posed by late twentieth-century global capitalism. The point is that the foundations of African thought cannot rest on Western intellectual traditions that have as one of their enduring features the projection of Africans as Other and our consequent domination.

At the level of intellectual production, we should recognize that theories are not mechanical tools; they affect (some will say determine) how we think, who we think about, what we think, and who thinks with us. Sometimes scholars seem to forget that intellectual tools are supposed to frame research and thinking. As long as the "ancestor worship"[85] of academic practice is not questioned, scholars in African studies are bound to produce scholarship that does not focus primarily on Africa — for those "ancestors" not only were non-Africans but were hostile to African interests. The foundational questions of research in many disciplines are generated in the West. A recent anthology entitled *Africa and the Disciplines* asks the very Westocentric and ridiculous question: What has Africa contributed to the disciplines?[86] (Following the logic of the question, consider what Africans contributed to craniometry — our heads; and to French *anthropologie* — our butts!)[87] The more important issue for Africa is what the disciplines and the practitioners of disciplines like anthropology have done *to* Africa.[88]

In general, African intellectuals seem to underestimate or fail to grasp the implications of academic practices for the production of knowledge. Research, teaching, and learning in academic institutions are not innocuous business practices. Kwame Anthony Appiah makes this point in an essay reflecting on the limitations of what he calls the nativist critique of the West in the field of African literature: "The Western emperor has ordered the natives to exchange their robes for trousers: their act of defiance is to insist on tailoring them from homespun material. Given their arguments, plainly, the cultural nationalists do not go far enough; they are blind to the fact that their nativist demands inhabit a Western architecture."[89] Appiah's own unabashed and uncritical acceptance of the West and his dismissal of Africa are understandable given his matrilineal descent lines,[90] but this is hardly the solution for other African scholars whose *abusua* (matrilineage) is located on African soil, not in England. It is remarkable that despite Appiah's antinativist stance in relation to African culture, he is an unapologetic nativist himself. Appiah is a Euro-nativist; what he opposes is African nativism. His privileging of European categories of thought and practice (such as patrilineality) over Akan matrilineality in his book *In My Father's House* attests to his erasure of the norms of his father's house (African norms) and the imposition of the values of his mother's house (Anglo-Saxon norms) on Africa.[91]

Appiah, however, makes a valid point when he notes that many African critics of the West fail to realize that acceptance of the Western "architecture" at one level necessarily means embracing the "furnishings" also. In short, certain things go with the territory — academic and

otherwise. To think that one can inhabit the territory and then change the rules is a fallacy because the rules and the territory are not separable; they are mutually constituting. The one does not exist without the other.

That said, the position of Appiah and other antinativists is still deeply flawed, in part because of a huge oversight. The antinativist admonition that Africa should embrace the West as a new strategy for the future is flawed because this is actually what African leaders have done in the past and where we still are at present: that is, in the critical embrace of the West. Embracing the West is nothing new; it is actually a failed program of action. The idea that Africa can make a choice about whether it wants to embrace the West or not is a displaced metaphor. The point is that Africa is already locked in an embrace with the West; the challenge is how to extricate ourselves and how much. It is a fundamental problem because without this necessary loosening we continue to mistake the West for the Self and therefore see ourselves as the Other.

Appiah makes the claim that the nativist call for Afrocentricity in the reading and writing of African literature fails to appreciate the multiplicity of the heritage of modern African writers and hence fails to see that, for example, "Soyinka's reference to Euripides is as real as his appeal to Ògún."[92] Appiah himself, however, fails to understand the nature of Soyinka's references to Ògún and Euripides. The problem is not Soyinka's appeal to Euripides; the problem is Appiah's failure to grasp that Soyinka's appeals to Euripides and Ògún are not of the same order.[93] To take a cue from Yorùbá culture: in the practice of Yorùbá religion, despite the 401[94] *òrìṣà* (gods) to which anybody can appeal, all lineages and individuals have their own *òrìṣà* that they propitiate first before they appeal to the other gods. They secure their own base first, and it is only after this has been done that they can join in the worship of other gods. There is no question that people can and do change their gods; the fallacy here is the idea that one can start with multiple gods. There is always a privileging going on, whether this is acknowledged or not. Ògún and Euripides cannot be passed off as an expression of "on the one hand and on the other hand (*otoh-botoh*)" — one must be a foundational "god."

More fundamentally, Appiah fails to grasp that almost all institutionally privileged African scholars are being trained in the Western tradition; there is hardly any training at the academic level in African traditions and cultures. Because of this, it is rare if not impossible to find scholars who can discuss Ògún with the same sophistication and depth of knowledge with which they discuss Zeus. It is no wonder then that for many African intellectuals, Africa remains only an idea. Philosopher V. Y. Mudimbe's experience is telling enough. In his appraisal of

anthropological texts on Luba peoples, Mudimbe poses the following question, "Whence comes my authority?" He answers:

> It is true that I am not an anthropologist and do not claim to be one. I spent at least ten years of my life studying ancient Greek and Latin for an average of twelve hours each week, with more than that amount of time devoted to French and European cultures, before being eligible for a doctorate in philology (Greek, Latin and French) at Louvain University. I do not know many anthropologists who could publicly demonstrate a similar experience about their specialty in order to found their authority in African studies.[95]

The more interesting question is this: What is Mudimbe's own claim to authority in African studies? He confesses that this authority rests on "my Luba-Lulua mother, my Songye father, the Swahili cultural context of my education in Katanga (Shaba), the Sanga milieu of my secondary education."[96] The contrast between his sources of knowledge about the West, on the one hand, and Africa, on the other, is striking. Knowledge about the West is cultivated over decades, but knowledge about Africa is supposed to be absorbed, so to speak, through the mother's breast milk. I have nothing against mothers (I am one myself). But while we as African scholars are busy developing the "mother of all canons," who do we suppose will develop the knowledge-base for transforming Africa? Of course, one cannot dismiss the knowledge of one's culture acquired during the crucial formative years. Neither can the possession of the mother tongue be overstated as a key to the understanding of a culture. Even so, many Western-educated Africans do not stay long enough with their mothers to absorb the essentials of an African education. Like Mudimbe, many enter European-derived boarding schools or monasteries at an early age, embarking on a life-long process of absorbing European cultures at the expense of their own. Like Appiah, they may have been tucked away behind "the hibiscus hedge" and subsequently sent to school in Europe while Africa unfolded in the march of history.

It is crucial that our knowledge of Africa be continuously cultivated and developed; it should not be reduced to the level of the instinctual or the primeval (primitive), as some antinativist/Euro-nativist would like. Too many Africans display a lack of knowledge of African cultures, while reveling in their knowledge of European classics and dead languages. Mudimbe himself noted that his European "codisciples" went through the same kind of training as he for the specialization in philology.[97] Apparently, their mothers' milk was not enough as a source

of knowledge about their European culture; they still had to spend a lifetime studying it.

As a prologue to his acclaimed book *The Invention of Africa,* Mudimbe disseminates what he calls the "good news" — that the African now has "the freedom of thinking of himself or herself as the starting point of an absolute discourse."[98] His claim is surprising given that the content of his book does not derive epistemologically from Africa and is heavily dependent on European thought. This is hardly the multicultural heritage that Appiah wants us to believe obtains in African studies. It is clearly a Western heritage and explains why Ògún does not stand a chance against Zeus and why Africa remains merely an idea in the minds of many African scholars. Of course, in reality Africa continues to unfold in the march of history. The original human history at that!

Writing Yorùbá into English: Propagating the West

To demonstrate concretely the implications for scholarship of the uncritical acceptance of Western categories and questions in the study of African societies, I will now address a specific regional discourse, Yorùbá studies.[99] Yorùbá discourse in English is a particularly good place to examine the problems of Westocentricity in the determination of research questions, because scholars of Yorùbá origin are very well represented. As an anthropologist in a recent monograph put it, "Western scholars don't write *about* the Yorùbá; they write *with* the Yorùbá."[100] Prepositions aside, the reverse is more the case — Yorùbá scholars write with the West about Yorùbá. This is revealed in the failure to take Yorùbá language seriously in Yorùbá scholarship — the language is that of West. The lack of interest in the Yorùbá language beyond "fieldworkese" is not surprising, since African studies is one of the few areas in the academy where one can claim to be an expert without the benefit of language competence.[101] African nationalities are said to be based on language groups, but the marginalization of language in African studies belies this fact. One wonders whether the endurance of the nebulous category "Africa" as the unit of analysis in many studies is related to these facts. No doubt, there is some research that necessitates using Africa as the unit of analysis; however, at this point in the history of the scholarship, Africa, as Paulin J. Hountondji observes, is best used as a descriptive geographic term.[102]

Regional studies that are based on particular cultural groups are essentially exercises in translation at different levels: translation from oral

to written; translation from one culture to another; and finally translation from one language to another. Each category — written, oral, culture, language — is permeated with all sorts of unstated assumptions, and each move is fraught with potentials for missteps. Language is crucial, and Marc Bloch's observation about the problem that discounting language poses for historians is relevant: "What an absurd illogicality that men who half the time can have access to their subject only through words, are permitted, among other deficiencies, to be ignorant of the fundamental attainments of linguistics!"[103] Another absurdity is that Yorùbá scholars continue to build knowledge about our society in the English language. This theater of the absurd expands with the realization that many Africans come to know their societies only through what Western anthropologists and missionaries have written about them.

Against this background, the lack of critical studies on Yorùbá language, despite the expansion of the corpus, is shocking. This is not a minor problem — the lack of appreciation that language carries with it the world-sense of a people has led to the assumption that Western categories are universal. In most studies of the Yorùbá, the indigenous categories are not examined but are assimilated into English. This practice has led to serious distortions and quite often to a total misapprehension of Yorùbá realities. The implications of this situation are not just semantic, however, but also epistemological, in that they have affected the type of knowledge that has been produced and who has done the producing in Yorùbá written discourse. A thorough analysis of the language is essential to the construction of knowledge about the Yorùbá in English. That this has never been done calls into question findings in various disciplines, and this shall be illustrated in subsequent chapters. Granted, linguists have done some studies on the Yorùbá language, but language study cannot be confined to linguists. All researchers, regardless of discipline, are translators in one way or another, and this must be borne in mind in the practice of research. In Yorùbá studies, historians translate the oral traditions of the *aróḳin* (royal bards); orature critics translate *oríkì* (praise poetry); and those in religion may translate Ifá divination, poetry, or the chants of Ṣàngó devotees. These are just a few examples that show the futility of imposing Western disciplinary boundaries on Yorùbá knowledge. Malian philosopher Amadou Hampate Ba underscores the holistic nature of African oral traditions: "Oral tradition is the great school of life, all aspects of which are covered and affected by it. It may seem chaos to those who do not penetrate its secret; *it may baffle the Cartesian mind accustomed to dividing everything into clear-cut categories.* In oral tradition, in fact, *spiritual and material are not dissociated.*"[104] The problem of gender and its constructs

in Yorùbá language, literature, and social practice calls for immediate attention. Yorùbá language is gender-free, which means that many categories taken for granted in English are absent. There are no gender-specific words denoting son, daughter, brother, or sister. Yorùbá names are not gender-specific; neither are *ọkọ* and *aya*—two categories translated as the English husband and wife, respectively. Given that anatomic categories are not used as social categories, it is clear that apprehending the gender of particular individuals or personages in a different time period and across space is at best an ambiguous adventure. In the discipline of history, for example, how should dynastic lists popularly known as "kings' lists" (which have been generated by historians for different Yorùbá polities) be interpreted? Many contemporary historians have assumed that, with a couple of exceptions, all the rulers on the lists are male, but what is their basis for this assumption? At the very least, the basis of assigning sex to each ruler has to be explained for the period during which there were no written accounts. Given the gender-free terms *ọba* (ruler) and *aláàfin* (ruler), historians should provide evidence for such gender assumptions.

Yorùbá scholar of religion Bolaji Idowu was forced to deal with the question of gender in his study of Yorùbá religion. He found that there were two different oral traditions about the sex of Òdùduwà, the Yorùbá progenitor; in one tradition s/he was said to be male, and in the other s/he was female.[105] Idowu suggests that the confusion about the sex identity of Òdùduwà may be due in part to language in that the liturgy that refers to Òdùduwà as mother also calls the progenitor "lord" and "husband." Idowu translates the beginning of this liturgy as follows:

> O mother, we beseech thee to deliver us;
> Look after us, look after (our) children;
> Thou who art established at Ado...

Idowu continues: "But yet, as the ritual ballad is recited, we hear phrases like 'my lord' and 'my husband,' and such phrases strongly indicate that a god is being addressed."[106] It is apparent that Idowu erred in thinking that the presence of the word "husband" constituted evidence of maleness, since the Yorùbá word *ọkọ*, translated as the English "husband," is a non-gender-specific category encompassing both male and female. Thus Òdùduwà can be "husband," lord, and mother. This suggests that Idowu accepted the English category unquestioningly, despite his own awareness of Yorùbá culture. Idowu is not an exception; in fact, he typifies the process of patriarchalizing Yorùbá history and culture. In many intellectual writings, the male is assumed to be the norm, just as

in the West. In the case of historical events and personages, the process has been achieved primarily through translation. That *ọba,* which means "ruler" (non-gender-specific) in Yorùbá, has come to mean "king" in Yorùbá discourse (whatever the historical time period) is symptomatic. Ade Obayemi, another Yorùbá scholar, demonstrates this problem glaringly. In his discussion of the historical records regarding the person of Òdùduwà, he writes: "Taken together, existing genealogical or sex placings of Oduduwa do not and cannot on their own take us far in any attempt to definitively fix his position vis-à-vis other *heroes, kings,* or legendary figures." Obviously, even as Obayemi declaims fixing gender identity, he does so with the help of the English language.[107]

Gender as an analytic category is now at the heart of contemporary Yorùbá discourse. Yet very little has been done to untangle this web of Yorùbá/English mistranslations. Gender has become important in Yorùbá studies not as an artifact of Yorùbá life but because Yorùbá life, past and present, has been translated into English to fit the Western pattern of body-reasoning. This pattern is one in which gender is omnipresent, the male is the norm, and the female is the exception; it is a pattern in which power is believed to inhere in maleness in and of itself. It is also a pattern that is not grounded on evidence. Based on a review of the existing literature, it does not appear that Yorùbá scholars have given much thought to the linguistic divergence of Yorùbá and English and its implications for knowledge-production. This is an issue that will be explored in subsequent chapters.

Different modes of apprehending knowledge yield dissimilar emphases on types and the nature of evidence for making knowledge-claims. Indeed, this also has implications for the organization of social structure, particularly the social hierarchy that undergirds who knows and who does not. I have argued that Western social hierarchies such as gender and race are a function of the privileging of the visual over other senses in Western culture. It has also been noted that the Yorùbá frame of reference was based more on a combination of senses anchored by the auditory. Consequently, the promotion in African studies of concepts and theories derived from the Western mode of thought at best makes it difficult to understand African realities. At worse, it hampers our ability to build knowledge about African societies.

Zong! #26

was the cause was the remedy was the record was the argument was the delay was the evidence was overboard was the not was the cause was the was was the need was the case was the perils was the want was the particular circumstance was the seas was the costs was the could was the would was the policy was the loss was the vessel was the rains was the order was the that was the this was the necessity was the mistake was the captain was the crew was the result was justified was the voyage was the water was the maps was the weeks was the winds was the calms was the captain was the seas was the rains was uncommon was the declaration was the apprehension was the voyage was destroyed was thrown was the question was the therefore was the this was the that was the negroes was the cause

Ruha Benjamin
Black AfterLives Matter: Cultivating Kinfulness as Reproductive Justice

Vampirically, white vitality feeds on black demise—from the extraction of (re)productive slave labor to build the nation's wealth to the ongoing erection of prison complexes to resuscitate rural economies—in these ways and many more, white life and black death are inextricable. Racist structures not only produce, but *reproduce* whiteness, by resuscitating the myth of white innocence that inheres in the racial status quo. Racist systems are thereby reproductive systems.

In the U.S., our institutions are especially adept at resurrecting white lives that snuff out black ones. Exhibit A: On October 25, 2017, an Oklahoma judge ruled that officer Betty Jo Shelby would have her record wiped clean after being acquitted of murdering an unarmed black motorist, Terence Crutcher, 40-year-old African American father stranded on the side of a highway. *Wiped clean*. So as to remove any trace she was at the scene of a crime. *Wiped clean*, as one might do in a lab to avoid contamination, or a clinic to avoid infection. Reproducing white lives requires ongoing sterilization. *Wiped clean*, too, as with a baptism. White people are not just born once, but over and over, resurrected through law and custom, in order that they may kill with impunity.

If biological reproduction begets life, then social reproduction begets afterlives. White afterlife is, to be sure, a threat to black life. "Afterlife," in this sense, is a world of second chances. Exhibit B: In December 2014, the hashtag #CrimingWhileWhite went viral with white people across the U.S. admitting to crimes for which they were routinely excused [quoted below as they appeared in original posts]:

> In college I punched a cop in the face while drunk but he drove me and my friends home.

At 13 I stole a car with my friends & drove it 2wks before we got busted. Only one charged was black.

#CrimingWhileWhite at 15, cops search a car I was in, found my weed, my switchblade + my vodka. they called my parents + gave it all back.

Just got pulled over for almost hitting someone. Didn't have my license or insurance. Not even the threat of a ticket #CrimingWhileWhite

I shoplifted when I was 14 and they let me go because my parents came down and we "looked like a nice family."

#CrimingWhileWhite A bunch of bankers took down the economy and never went to jail.

To be white is to colonize the afterlife. Second chances are the currency of white supremacy, "benefit of the doubt" is the credit system, a "fresh start" is the return on investment. If there is a Race Card at play, as so many believers in reverse-racism claim, white people are born with the platinum version and its killer rewards program, in hand. Meanwhile, in a parallel social universe. . .

Blackness is being born under a mountain of racial debt. As Saidiya Hartman writes, "Debt ensured submission; it insinuated that servitude was not yet over and that the travails of freedom were the price to be paid by emancipation." Hence enslaved black people were forced to "self-purchase" their own freedom, for they could not even claim a property right in themselves. Is it any wonder that, as Hartmann describes, the enslaved used "stealing away" to describe not only the act of running away, but also in reference to a wide range of everyday activities:

Stealing away involved unlicensed movement, collective assembly, and an abrogation of the terms of subjection in acts as simple as sneaking off to laugh and talk with friends or making nocturnal visits to visit loved ones . . . These nighttime visits to lovers and family were a way of redressing the natal alienation or enforced "kinlessness" of the enslaved.

Moreover, Hartman aptly dubs the perverse "political arithmetic" that continues to devalue black Americans the "*afterlife* of slavery—skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration and impoverishment," and perhaps most of all, devalued reproduction. If, as I have suggested, whiteness provides countless opportunities for rebirth, the racialized counterpart is a cruel protraction of life, how a torturer (or torturous system) works slowly, methodically, and viciously to render a fate worse than death. For that reason, reproductive justice extends well beyond the body—so often the site of trauma and exploitation—to encompass the full range of life-affirming practices that implicate the body politic writ large.

Black life is expensive, for sure, but so is black death. Even today, the kin of those who are unjustly slain are left holding the bill. Exhibit C: Two months after a grand jury failed to indict the officer who fatally shot Tamir Rice, the 12-year-old who was found playing with a toy gun in a Cleveland park, the city billed the Rice family for the dead child's last ambulance ride.

IN THE PROBATE COURT OF CUYAHOGA COUNTY, OHIO
ANTHONY J. RUSSO, PRESIDING JUDGE

IN RE: ESTATE OF TAMIR RICE

Decedent.

Case No. 2014-EST-203019

Judge Laura J. Gallagher

CREDITOR'S CLAIM FOR DECEDENT'S LAST DYING EXPENSE PURSUANT TO OHIO REVISED CODE §2117.25(A)(5)

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that the City of Cleveland ("Creditor"), located at 601 Lakeside Avenue, Room 122, Cleveland, Ohio 44114, has a claim against the Estate of Tamir Rice in the amount of Five Hundred Dollars ($500.00), *see* Exhibit A, which is past due and owing for emergency medical services rendered as the decedent's last dying expense under Ohio Revised Code §2117.25(A)(5). This notice constitutes a presentation of a creditor's claim pursuant to Ohio Revised Code §2117.06.

Respectfully submitted,

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/s/ Carl E. Mayer

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Claim for Tamir Rice's Last Dying Expense

Racial debt is not only a product of black death, but also its precursor. Well before Michael Brown was murdered in the streets of Ferguson, Missouri, that municipality began exacting a pernicious form of economic terrorism that continues to extract millions of dollars in fines and forfeitures from its predominantly black citizenry. In fact, a recent study by Sances and Young You of 9,000 U.S. cities confirms that municipalities with a higher percentage of African American residents are more likely to use fines as the basis for city revenue. As one observer put it, "It's easy to see the drama of a fatal police shooting, but harder to understand the complexities of municipal finances that created many thousands of hostile encounters, one of which turned fatal." Black debt, in short, begets black death which begets black debt in a recursive chain.

Before 29-year-old Sandra Bland died in a Texas jail, she was charged a $5,000 bail, which she could not afford. According to a federal study there are over half a million people sitting in city and county jails who have not been convicted. In 2016 alone, there were over 800 documented fatalities among those in lockup because they could not post bail. This is a form of "premature death" that political geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore defines as a key feature of racist state violence. A perverse calculus of human worth presses down on kin and community, who are literally left holding the bill, financially as well as emotionally. Speaking at a Congressional Caucus on Black Women and Girls, Sandra Bland's mother, Geneva Reed-Veal, testified:

What I'm going to say to you is that I'm here representing the mothers who are not heard. I am here representing the mothers who have lost children as we go on about our daily lives. When the cameras and lights are gone, our babies are dead. So I'm going to ask you here today to wake up. Wake up. By a show of hands, can any of you tell me the other six women who died in jail in July 2015 along with Sandra Bland? That is a problem. You all are among *the walking dead*, and I am so glad that I have

come out from among you. I heard about Trayvon, I heard about all the shootings, and it did not bother me until it hit my daughter. I was *walking dead* just like you until Sandra Bland died in a jail cell in Texas.

In this testimony, we witness how waking up *after death* is a call for solidarity and an insistence that Black Afterlives Matter. It is part of a broader repertoire of invoking the slain to vivify collective action.

Scholar of modern slavery Zhaleh Boyd connects this form of invocation to the idea of "ancestral co-presence." She refers to hashtag signifiers, like #SayHerName, as gathering points that make present the slain and call upon recent ancestors—Tamir Rice, Sandra Bland, Michael Brown, Ayana Jones, and so many others—as spiritual kin who can animate social movements. Boyd further traces the relationship between this digitally mediated form of connectivity to the use of co-presence by legendary African figures such as Queen Nanny, Boukman, and Gullah Jack, who called upon ancestral powers in their fight against imperialist, white supremacist opponents. Co-presence, in short, troubles the line between the biological living and dead by calling forth spiritual practices of ancestral communication, now taking new forms via social media, yet retaining key features of African diasporic traditions.

Yes, subordination, subjugation, *subaltern*, literally "under the earth," racialized populations are buried people. But there is a lot happening underground. Not only coffins, but seeds, roots and rhizomes. And maybe even tunnels and other lines of flight to new worlds, where alternative forms of kinship have room to grow and to nourish other life forms and ways of living. In her discussion of more contemporary fictive kin networks in the African diaspora, Patricia Hill Collins explains,

> Enslaved Africans were property . . . and one way that many resisted the dehumanizing effects of slavery was by re-creating

African notions of family as extended kin units. . . . Experiences of both being nurtured as children and being held responsible for siblings and fictive kin within kin networks can stimulate a more generalized ethic of caring and personal accountability. . . . At the same time, the erosion of such networks in the face of the changing institutional fabric of Black civil society points to the need either to refashion these networks or develop some other way of supporting Black children. For far too many African-American children, assuming that a grandmother or "fictive kin" will care for them is no longer a reality.

In the broadest sense, what is at stake in the idea that Black Afterlives Matter is the practice of making kin, not only *beyond* biological relatives, but also *with* the materially dead/spiritually alive ancestors in our midst.

Black afterlives are animated by a stubborn refusal to forget and to *be forgotten*. Hartmann explains that one of the main gatherings for which the enslaved would "steal away" was the praise meeting where the evocation of the ancestors was central to imagining freedom. Here they would enact "ancestral landscapes." In "remembering things they have not witnessed or experienced 'like when they lived in Africa and done what they wanted,' an insurgent nostalgia that expressed a longing for home that most could only vaguely recall or that lived only in the imagination transformed the space of captivity into one inhabited by the revenants of a disremembered past."

Paulleatha V. White, director of the South Central office of the Los Angeles County Department of Adoptions, and the author's grandmother.

Materializing meta-kinship that exceeds biological relatedness continues to take many forms. It manifests in efforts to institutionalize kinfulness, in a literal sense, through foster parenting and adoption. My grandmother, for example, directed the Department of Adoptions in Compton, Los Angeles, the largest such agency in the nation at the time. She sought to dissolve the many bureaucratic and financial impediments that left so many black children stranded and kinless. Today this work is extended by organizations like the Children's Defense Fund (CDF). They developed a Kinship Care Resource Kit geared toward community and faith-based organizations to increase public understanding of the millions of households in which grandparents or extended family members are raising children. Running against the penchant towards social abandonment, black people have always had to construct their own afterlives through alternative family formations in the midst of crisis.

Born of necessity, perhaps, the cultivation of extended kinfulness is also a source of black pride. In a comedic take on the racial contours of kinship, writer Damon Young asks the million-dollar question: "Do White People Have Cousins?" Here he considers the "spiritual and metaphysical" dimensions of family formation by questioning whether race has anything to do with one's reverence for "cousin culture." This is a culture that dissolves the distinctions between first, second and third cousins and routinely includes those who "don't share any blood" into the fold of cousinhood. He adds that one plausible theory for the relative elasticity of black kinship and the "buffering" role of cousins is that groups navigating hostile social conditions "need all the family we can get." In the end, Young acknowledges that there are likely regional (and I would add, class) differences that challenge any easy Black-White distinction. Moreover, whether people imagine themselves connected based on a shared genetic code or as targets of a brutal legal code, bonds of relation may *bind* us even as they promise to—and do—buttress us.

However, when kin are the source of hurt or harm, it may in fact be wise to sever ties. Kinship, in other words, can be deadening when the obligations it entails are abused in and beyond the family. In a particularly disquieting example, Anne Pollock explains how the governor of Mississippi commuted the dual life sentences of the Scott sisters on the condition that "Gladys Scott donated a kidney to her ailing sister." Kinship, in this case, was enrolled in the larger project of mass incarceration and even though it was activated in the process of "release," the extraordinary condition imposed by the state exposes the coercive potential of familial obligations.

Kinship with the dead has its own demands and effects. Caring for the dead, even when not blood relatives, is a site where meta-kinship materializes in unexpected ways. Black Virginians, for example, are working to revitalize the neglected cemeteries of those who are not necessarily their biological relatives, but to whom they feel an extended kin obligation. They clear away foliage that hides long-forgotten graveyards and call for public support to memorialize the enslaved who are buried there. They point to the fact that the state has, for generations, earmarked funds to private organizations that maintain Confederate cemeteries, a practice that made *The New York Times* in an article by Brian Palmer. White Affirmative Action, it seems, knows no earthly bounds. But if material abandonment in death mirrors social abandonment in life, then maybe attending to "the needy dead," in Toni Morrison's words in *Beloved*, can disrupt "the order and quietude of everyday life," enlivening the memory and machinations for freedom of those restless underground.

While STS scholars like Haraway, Latour, Chen and others have done well in theorizing the different forms of agency exercised by living nonhumans, with increasing attention to the possibility of forging multispecies justice, for example in work by Kirksey and Haraway, there has been far less attention to immaterial actants such as those inhabiting the ancestral landscapes described above, with Kim TallBear as an

outstanding counter example. In conversation with Indigenous metaphysics, Black feminist STS approaches to race and epistemology, for example in work by Sylvia Wynter and also Alexander Weheliye, not only disrupt the human-machine distinction, but also reimagine and ultimately refashion forms of spiritual kinship in which Black Afterlives Matter. Kim TallBear explains that she doesn't feel the need to adopt more "secular" language in her analysis, as she feels "comfortable enfolding spirits or souls into the beingness of nonhumans." With TallBear, I encourage ethnographic attention to afterlives as a necessary part of deepening our knowledge more broadly, regarding kin making and reproduction specifically. Situating the idea of co-presence in a Black feminist approach to kinship draws attention to everyday spiritual technologies, which typically remain buried in secular theorizations of technoscience. Again, there is a lot that happens underground.

Life After Death

Imagining life after death, and what it might mean to craft kinship with the dead, requires experimenting with fiction. The novel *Kindred* by Octavia E. Butler gives voice to the possibility of black afterlives in an exchange between Dana, the modern protagonist and time-traveler, and Sarah, an enslaved woman. Here Sarah tries to warn Dana about the dangers of running away from the Maryland plantation on which they find themselves:

> She lowered her voice to a whisper. "You need to look at some of the niggers they catch and bring back," she said. "You need to see them—starving, 'bout naked, whipped, dragged, bit by dogs. . . . You need to see them."
> "I'd rather see the others."
> "What others?"
> "The ones who make it. The ones living in freedom now."
> "If any do."

“They do.”
“Some say they do. It’s like dying, though, and going to heaven. Nobody ever comes back to tell you about it.”

No *body* ever comes back, perhaps, but spirits and ancestors might. And here is where our stories of *what is* and *what is possible* matter. They produce meaning and material with which to build (and destroy) what we call “the real world.”

As I have argued elsewhere, one way of experimenting with alternatives to the racist status quo is by employing speculative methods. In this moment of social crisis, where even the most basic assertion that black lives matter is contested, we are drowning in “the facts” of inequality and injustice. Whether it is a new study on criminal justice disparities or another video of police brutality, demanding empirical evidence of systematic wrongdoing can have a perverse quality—as if subjugated people must petition again and again for admission into the category of “human,” for which empathy is rationed and applications are routinely denied. Consider the following stories of afterlife.

Life After Nuclear Fallout

When I was fifteen years old, my family moved from Conway, South Carolina to Majuro, the capital of the Marshall Islands, so my parents could begin working with the Marshallese Department of Education. The Marshall Islands are best known for the fact that they were the site of U.S. nuclear testing from 1946 to 1958, sixty-seven tests in all. By one calculation, if the combined explosive power were split evenly over that 12-year period, it would equal 1.6 Hiroshima-size explosions per day. Needless to say, this history of militarism and imperialism continues to wreak havoc on the health of the Marshallese: “burns that reached to the bone . . . cancers in the short and long term,” and congenital disabilities that cause babies to die hours after birth.” One report sums it up, “The Marshallese are convinced that there is sufficient evidence . . . of inter-generational harm caused by radiation fallout.”

Now add to this the widespread displacement Marshallese people have experienced, first for the purposes of nuclear testing and now as a function of U.S. military presence. When I had the chance to travel from Majuro to neighboring islands, I was struck by how crudely inequity was engineered: Kwajalein, a U.S. army installation was a manufactured suburbia, occupied almost entirely by military personnel and their families, enjoying golf courses, Baskin Robbins, and a yacht club among other amenities. The neighboring island of Ebeye is where islanders forced off Kwajalein to make room for the army base now reside in a crowded shantytown commonly known as "the slum of the Pacific." Ebeye residents require a special pass to travel to Kwajalein for work, while others barely subsist on the small checks the U.S. government dispenses.

Needless to say, people are suffering not only from the history of direct fallout of nuclear testing, but also because of the oppressive conditions of their present lives—evidenced most readily in the high rates of chronic and infectious diseases including a TB rate that's 23 times that of the U.S., and occasional outbreaks of cholera and dengue fever. In this way, military technologies are reproductive technologies—diminishing the capacity of those who are its victims to thrive, propagate, and imagine much less create their own futures.

Witness, for example, Marshallese children burying themselves in a make-believe cemetery—a reminder of how their lives have been biologically engineered—not in a lab, but in contaminated environments. In many ways, the Marshall Islands are a metaphor for modernity, in which the health and wellbeing of some are predicated on the immiseration, even slow extermination, of others.

Marshall Islands Sand Cemetery. Source: Vlad Sokhin. Published with permission.

Life After Sterilization

As a student at Spelman College in the late 1990s, I worked on a thesis project focused on how racism, sexism, and capitalism get under people's skin and impact women's childbearing experiences. About midway through the research process, I interviewed a classmate who told me about how when she was seventeen years old, she delivered her baby via C-section. As she explained it, sometime during the process, the doctor turned to her mother and asked, matter-of-factly, "While I have her open, should I just go ahead and tie her up?" The doctor, in short, proposed sterilizing my classmate without her consent, but my classmate vehemently objected. This was a full 40 years after famed civil rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer told her own story about checking in to Sunflower City Hospital to have a tumor removed, and walking out with what she later called a "Mississippi Appendectomy." In her words, "an unwanted, unrequested and unwarranted hysterectomy [was] routinely given to poor and unsuspecting Black women," usually performed postpartum. It was during this research process, especially talking with my classmate when I started to understand that, depending on one's social status, reproductive capacity may be celebrated and encouraged *or* disparaged and repressed, a rationing of agency that has been critically assessed by feminist scholars and activists.

This is not the stuff of dusty archives, put to rest with the passage of a few laws. Eugenic sensibilities and practices are alive and well. In the last few years, the coercive sterilization of prisoners has garnered greater attention and outrage. As late as 2010, an investigative report of California prisons revealed this trend; and in 2017, Derek Hawkins of *The Washington Post* reported that a Tennessee judge granted shorter sentences for prisoners who agreed to be sterilized. These "negative" eugenic practices that repress the reproduction of some are tied to seemingly more liberal, market-based, "positive" eugenic practices that encourage those deemed valuable to reproduce and even *select* the traits of their offspring. Two sides of the same reproductive coin.

In his classic text *The Souls of Black Folks*, W. E. B. DuBois queried, "How does it feel to be a problem?" In the context of our current discussion here, we might better ask, "How does it feel to be a . . . *population*?" To be a racialized population, after all, is to be a stubborn *problem* and an insistent *people*. To be subordinated, however, also entails inhabiting subterranean spaces where it is possible to forge new forms of kinship. Living life so close to death requires honing spiritual technologies to access the afterlife, calling upon ancestors, #SayHerName #FannieLouHamer, to vivify the movement for black lives. But first, some time travel. . . .

Life After Earth

In 200 years, overpopulation on Earth compels humanity to spread across the solar system, colonizing Mars and the Asteroid Belt, where several generations of humans have been born and raised as Martians and Belters, respectively. This fictional world is the premise of a book series adapted for television, called *The Expanse*. Unlike many speculative tales, the series presents a remarkably diverse cast that challenges contemporary racial and gender hierarchies, while also signaling how racial vision and division may be reconfigured in the future. Human descendants on Mars are a formidable threat, physically and militarily stronger

than others in the solar system, intent on engineering their new home to be more habitable.

The Belters, in contrast, are presented as weaker. Not only do Earthers and Martians dominate them politically and economically, but Belters are also physically more vulnerable. Due to the grueling conditions of life in low gravity ("low g"), they have begun to experience physiological changes like elongated limbs, bigger heads, and longer spines that set them apart from Earthers and Martians. Their language, too, has evolved into a Belter patois, which includes hand signs that allow them to communicate because they have to spend so much time in space suits. Due to the oppressive conditions on the Belt, where inhabitants are required to extract and export resources for Mars and Earth, Belters can barely afford the air they breathe, much less adequate food and water. This is a world of manufactured scarcity and precarity, not unlike our own.

In the future, as in the past and present, environmental exposures and social hierarchies are embodied. After several generations of living under such conditions, economic and political domination literally get under the Belters' skin. Not only are their bodies adapting to low gravity, but attempts to remedy the effects, like providing bone density juice to children, further exacerbate health disparities when people cannot access the medicine they need. In this world, "kinlessness" is a liability as when low quality serum is handed off to kids who are wards of the state—a future that echoes back into our present where black children are shuttled through the U.S. foster system at a disproportionate rate, a process well documented in Dorothy Roberts's 2002 book, *Shattered Bonds: The Color of Child Welfare*.

Thus, in a vicious feedback loop that should sound eerily familiar, unjust conditions that produce racialized physical and cultural differences further set Belters apart. Earthers and Martians point to these distinctions as "natural," evidence of Belters' inherent inferiority—justifying the continued subjugation

of those whose land and labor (but not whose lives) are valuable. The physical differences that distinguish the Belters are not so much figments of the imagination, but *materializations* of a dominating imagination. Systems of domination require powerful narratives to allow those who hoard resources to sleep at night. Rather than acknowledge how exploitation and ghettoization *produce* the weak physiology of Belters, those in power view such physical differences as proof that the subjugated are not strong enough to govern themselves. Through interlocking logics of racism and ableism, biological differences become indicators that oppressive social orders simply reflect the natural order. As M'charek states, "The factness of facts depends on their ability to disconnect themselves from the practices that helped produce them."

One of the main protagonists, a Belter named Joe Miller, for example, hides the "spurs on the top of his spine" with a hat—hinting at the racialized shame that attaches to disability. As analysts, we must attend to the materiality of spurs protruding from the backs of the oppressed *without* losing site of their sociopolitical determinants and cultural meaning. Domination burrows under the skin, converting structural inequalities into biological differences and mystifying the former in the process, so that, as M'charek insists, "the challenge in studying race is to denaturalize without dematerializing it, and to simultaneously attend to materiality without fixing race." In *The Expanse*, racism is not simply a carryover from humanity's past, but is reproduced and reimagined as a new yet no less destructive afterlife.

Fictions, in this sense, are not falsehoods but refashionings through which analysts experiment with different scenarios, trajectories, and reversals, elaborating new values and testing different possibilities for creating more livable worlds. And the work of peopling anti-racist feminist worlds abounds! In addition to Butler's stories, all of which remake reproduction and kinship in different ways, many other contemporary black, Latinx, and indigenous writers continue in this speculative tradition, from

collections such as *Dark Matter* in 2000 and 2004 and *Octavia's Brood* in 2015, to writers such as Tananarive Due, Jewelle Gomez, Nalo Hopkinson, Andrea Hairston, NK Jemison, Nnedi Okorafor, Nisi Shawl, and Joanne Barker, among many others. In Barker's "The Seeders," for example, a group of women plot to overthrow a militarized star ship headed to the red planet. In Barker's telling, conventional antagonisms between humans and aliens found in mainstream SF give way to worlds in which indigeneity and extraterrestriality are not at odds. The narrator's indigenous kin are "from the stars." And even more relevant for this discussion, throughout the journey the irreverent wisdom of ancestors is called forth in the tradition of "co-presence" to guide dissidents struggling to fashion a *life after* Earth. Indeed, speculative methods are a mode of envisioning afterlives, extending present configurations of power and difference into the future to see how they might materialize and morph into (and beyond) our wildest imaginations. Rewind, now, to the present. . . .

Engineering Afterlives

Terraforming planets gives way to engineering genomes. "Afterlife" in this situation concerns traits deemed desirable, worthy of extending their genetic life into future generations. Designer Genes, Couture Cells, Must-have Mitochondria. The newfound capacity to synthesize human biology raises fundamental questions of reproductive value. How we think about such genetic engineering has implications for all other arenas of social life and public policy, whether housing, education, employment, or incarceration. In deciding which afterlives to engineer, we select and reinforce criteria for what kinds of people to invest in, and who may be disposed of.

As reproductive justice advocates and analysts like Dorothy Roberts and Charis Thompson have long argued, water, food, education, and healthcare are *all* tools of reproduction, as they impact our life chances in profound and profoundly unequal ways. This more elastic notion of technology should lead us to

consider how engineering human genomes is always already entangled with the assembly of municipal water systems, which is also connected to the structuring of tax codes, which is linked to the construction of racially segregated neighborhoods, which are manufactured in direct relation to the U.S. prison apparatus in what Loïc Wacquant describes as a “deadly symbiosis.”

Engineering, in the more generic sense, means to work artfully to bring something about, and there is nothing intrinsically “good” about the outcomes of sociotechnical designs. In fact, as a species, we have proven very adept at engineering inequity. So the questions we must now ask are: Is it possible to channel our tool-making prowess to artfully engender more just and equitable futures? Can we decolonize our afterlives, and make black reproduction matter as part of ongoing futurist, feminist agendas? Ultimately, reproductive justice entails crafting and imagining the worlds we cannot live without just as we dismantle the ones we cannot live within, where crafting and dismantling have as much to do with imaginaries as they do social policies.

For those whose ancestors were enslaved, the assault on black kinship is ever-present and pernicious. This is not simply a *byproduct* but a central tenet of maintaining white social order. Moreover, such ongoing regimes of social control and containment have led to new forms of natal alienation; for example, Murphey and Cooper tell us that one in seven black children in the US has had a parent behind bars. For the targets of institutionalized kinlessness, reproductive justice requires working deliberately and creatively to engender institutions and environments that foster a *kinful* existence.

To that end, I concur with a growing body of work arguing that prison abolition is a central pillar of reproductive justice because one of the most violent threats against black families and communities is the carceral system. Building on these analyses, I suggest that a black feminist STS approach to prison abolition illuminates the many technological fixes peddled as futurist, even “family friendly,” solutions to the carceral status quo.

Leading this trend is the popularity of electronic monitoring (EM) technologies to address the unsustainable overcrowding of jails and prisons and the social consequences of mass incarceration that Molly Carney writes about. Proponents of e-monitoring argue that such devices not only cost less and promote public safety, but also allow those monitored to integrate into work and family life as they await trial or serve parole. In short, such fixes are offered up as technical *and* social innovations, helping to sustain the kinship ties of those monitored, when in fact they *extend* scrutiny to entire families and communities.

As people who have been subjected to surveillance and those who have researched the implications of mass monitorization argue, its depiction as an "alternative" to incarceration is based on a number of faulty assumptions, and it should more aptly be called "e-carceration," discussed by Malkia Cyril. In the first ever report to analyze the proliferation of electronic monitoring of youth in California, we learn that e-monitoring entails a combination of onerous and arbitrary rules that end up forcing youth back into custody because of "technical violations." Attractive fixes, it turns out, produce new grounds for subjugation. These purported solutions appropriate feminist concerns about the wellbeing of subjugated groups, even while threatening the ability of black families and communities to survive, much less flourish. In many ways, such newfangled regimes of surveillance colonize life *after* incarceration. Making Black Afterlives Matter as a reproductive justice priority requires not only abolishing prisons but also deactivating the many innovative e-offspring that are falsely presented as more humane.

In contrast, innovating kinship takes many forms and employs a variety of methods. For example, Mariame Kaba describes a "Holiday Family Reunification" event organized by prison abolitionists to give incarcerated women who are criminalized survivors of domestic violence and sexual abuse as an opportunity to "spend a day with their children and other

family members." Innovating kinship also materializes in the work of organizations like Mothers Reclaiming Our Children (Mothers ROC), mobilizing around the "symbolic power of motherhood" as a political identity to challenge the institutionalized kinlessness that locks away their children of all ages. Mothers ROC actively transforms mothers' "reproductive labor as primary caregivers into activism; the activism expands into the greater project to reclaim all children, regardless of race, age, residence, or alleged crime." In its early days, Mothers ROC organized cooperative radical self-help strategy sessions in the community room of a public housing project. Members soon began to extend their reach and reclaim space and power in the context of hyper-segregation and isolation—organizing a gang truce so family and community members could safely navigate turfs and participate in a public funeral procession for a young man killed by police. In the weeks to follow, they organized rallies and protests, and later developed a sustained effort that gives family members support and tools to demand justice for their children who are eaten alive by a ravenous carceral system. Cultivating kinfulness for Mothers ROC involved developing an analysis of and commitment to fight anti-black racism, while also welcoming Latina and white mothers of prisoners into their ranks. According to political geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore, activists who engage in "social mothering" in this way present us a "glimpse of utopia's work" by mobilizing *across* the many boundaries upon which oppressive carceral geographies depend:

> They come forward, in the first instance, because they will not let their children go.
>
> They stay forward, in the spaces created by intensified imprisonment of their loved ones, because they encounter many mothers and others in the same locations eager to join in the reclamation project. . . . In other words, techniques developed over generations, on behalf of Black children and families within terror-demarcated, racially defined enclaves, provide contemporary means to choreograph interracial political solidarity

among all kinds of “mothers” losing their loved ones into the prison system. . .

This “choreography,” in turn, does not only take shape in connection with the carceral state, but also among activists organizing around education, healthcare, work, and all the many life-affirming projects that are severed in oppressive regimes of social control. Solidarity across differences is not a pre-existing condition but an outgrowth generated in the day-to-day labor of building political movements. *Reorienting ourselves towards kinship not as a precursor but as an effect of social struggle denaturalizes what kinfulness means and how to enact it.*

All kinship, in the end, is imaginary. Not faux, false, or inferior, but, as Alondra Nelson shows us, a creative process of fashioning care and reciprocity. Is it any wonder that black people, whose meta-kinship threatens the biological myth of white supremacy, have had to innovate bonds that can withstand the many forms of bondage that attempt to suffocate black life? Cultivating kinfulness is cultivating life.

John Keene
POWER

When you said bread did you mean blood?
When you said desire did you mean desert?
When you said people did you mean punish?
When you said thought did you mean terror?
When you said read did you mean riot?
When you said friend did you mean fraud?
When you said connection did you mean kin?
When you said love did you mean leave?
When you said law did you mean lie?
When you said army did you mean Armageddon?
When you said health did you mean hell?
When you said together did you mean token?
When you said we did you mean war?
When you said fat did you mean fate?
When said soil did you mean oil?
When you said earth did you mean own?
When you said destiny did you mean decimate?
When you said honor did you mean hunger?
When you said mother did you mean murder?
When you said father did you mean fatal?
When you said couple did you mean capital?
When you said poetry did you mean passive?
When you said hope did you mean hype?
When you said freedom did you mean forget?
When you said last did you mean lost?
When you said fame did you mean game?
When you said name did you mean nobody?
When you said tomorrow did you mean never?
When you said meekness did you mean mockery?
When you said faith did you mean fanatic?
When you said politics did you mean power?
When you said wealth did you mean wall?
When you said poor did you mean prison?

When you said foist did you mean fast?
When you said fellow did you mean follow?
When you said feeling did you mean fallow?
When you said brother did you mean brutal?
When you said sister did you mean suffer?
When you said man did you mean master?
When you said woman did you mean wither?
When you said white did you mean welcome?
When you said black did you mean back?
When you said yellow did you mean yield?
When you said brown did you mean ground?
When you said I did you mean island?
When you said ideal did you mean idol?
When you said God did you mean greed?
When you said they did you mean threat?
When you said us did you mean use?
When you said succeed did you mean sucker?
When you said joy did you mean joke?
When you said end did you mean endure?
When you say art do you mean act?

Here, There, and Everywhere

I

The justification of the boycott of Israeli academic and cultural institutions is quite simple and quite clear: the victims of a sovereign brutality instantiated in racial-military domination have come to an overwhelming consensus—in the rubbled, concrete shadow of the state that has come to exemplify The State and its exception—that boycott is the most immediate form of international support they require. To be in solidarity with the Palestinian people is to enact and support the boycott. However, the significance of the boycott is a slightly more complicated matter. Some of the arguments against it that go beyond the rejection of whatever form either of criticism of Israel or Palestinian resistance, or beyond the sometimes open/sometimes veiled assumption of Israeli exception and exemption, focus on the negative impact the presumed isolation and withdrawal of support for Israeli dissidents will have, already a morally obtuse emphasis insofar as it serves to preclude the possibility of a primary and necessary political and ethical concern for the direct victims of racial-military domination. At the same time, one of the most crucial possibilities (the call for) the boycott instantiates is support for the supporters of the Palestinians not only in Israel but all over the world and particularly in the United States, Israel's outsized and enabling evil twin. Here, support of the Palestinians denotes whatever operates in conjunction with, but also and necessarily in excess of, criticism of Israel. The critique of Israel, however necessary and justified, is not the equivalent of solidarity with Palestine, which, in the United States, can only ever augment and be augmented by our recognition of and resistance to the ongoing counterinsurgency in which *we* live. It is, therefore, of great significance that the boycott can help to refresh (the idea of) the alternative, both in the

United States and in Israel, even amid reaction's constant intensification. Such refreshment takes the form of an antinational (and anti-institutional) internationalism—the renewal of insurgent thought, insurgent planning, and insurgent feeling as a radical solvent, borne in radical insolvency (in the radical sociality of our promised and unpayable debt to one another), exchanged between those who refuse to be held by the regulatory force of an already extant, calcified two-state (United States/Israel) solution. Standing with the Palestinians gives us something to stand upon precisely so that we can stand against the horrifically interinanimate remains of state sovereignty and exceptionalism in its biopolitical, "democratic" form. We share an already given indebtedness with one another that remains as the very resource that will allow our absolutely needful understanding of it since there is no (two- or one-)state solution.

The idea and reality of racial-military domination, whose most vulgar and vicious protocols are in a kind of eclipse that is properly understood as a kind of dissemination, but whose effects—the very order that it brings into a retroactively conferred sacred existence—remain as the afterlife of sovereignty in the regime of biopolitics, is emphatically and boisterously alive in the state of Israel and in the territories it occupies. Reference to this idea and its continuing necessity for already existing structures of power helps us understand why Israel is called almost everything but the settler colony that it is in official media and intellectual culture. This discursive exception turns out to be a reservoir for the sovereign exception. It is as if the essence of sovereignty remains available as long as it is manifest somewhere, as a kind of exemplary remainder. Because the bad object of biopolitical containment is social rearrangement, it's important to note how the assertion of the right of death and the power over life still must make its presence felt as the precondition of a liquidation of the very possibility of an alternative. One way to think about all this is to begin with the axiom that Israel has been thrust into, only partly by way of its own having volunteered for, the role of the exemplary remainder of sovereignty after having taken the form of racial-military domination. The exemplary remainder of sovereignty is constrained, among other things, constantly to claim a kind of exemption that accompanies its enactment of exception. The state that constantly asserts its right to exist, and its right to insist that its right to exist be constantly recognized by the very ones upon whom that right is built and brutally exercised, is the one that bears the standard for the right of every other state so to exist and to behave. Insofar as the United States is also a settler colonial regime whose very

essence and protocols are racial-military domination, it shares with Israel, in an extraordinarily visceral way, this tendency violently to insist on its right to exist and on the rightness of its existence no matter what forms that existence takes, no matter how much the everyday life of the state contradicts its stated principles. But this is also to say that the state form, in whatever materialization of its various stages of biopolitical development, always shares in this insistence. What's at stake, precisely, are the stakes any state shares in Israel's right to exist, in the residue of sovereignty in the biopolitical, and in the traces of sovereignty that will have been carried in any state, anywhere. In the most general sense, always already residual sovereignty must respond violently to what brings it into existence—the already given, constantly performed capacity for the alternative. The alternative is always under duress and must continually be refreshed and rediscovered.

I am speaking for the boycott, in solidarity with the Palestinians, because I am committed to the insurgent alternative, whose refreshment is (in) the antinational international. The terms of that commitment are nothing other than the terms of my commitment to the black radical tradition. In preparing myself not only to speak, but also to write and teach from that commitment, a particular question has become, for me, quite persistent: How might discourses of globalization and, more pointedly, of diaspora become more than just another mode of turning away from the very idea of the international? I've been dwelling—in a way that is possibly quite problematic—on this question, which is a particularly urgent question now for black studies and which is deeply and unavoidably concerned with what the boycott—which is to say solidarity with Palestine—might mean for black studies. There is a particular kind of subpolitical experience that emerges from having been the object of that mode of racial-military domination that is best described as incorporative exclusion that settler colonialism instantiates. It is not the experience of the conscious pariah, as Hannah Arendt would have it. Her misrecognition of this experience is at the root of her profound misunderstanding of black insurgency in the United States, which was not the unruly, sometimes beautiful, and ultimately unstable and pathological sociality of the ones who are not wanted, but was and is, rather, an unruly, always beautiful, sometimes beautifully ugly, destabilizing and autodestabilizing sociality-as-pathogen for the ones whose desire precisely for that pathogen and its life-forming, life-giving properties is obsessive and murderous. The more and less than political experience of the ones who are brutally and viciously wanted is something to which anyone who has any interest whatsoever in the very idea

of another way of being in the world must constantly renew their own ethical and intellectual relation. This experience, in its incalculable variousness, in the richness of its social, aesthetic, and theoretical resources, is the very aim of black studies and the source of its significance. As someone whose intellectual orientation is defined by the study of that experience, I am interested in the refreshment of that orientation, for which I sometimes feel despair, in a moment that is so often misunderstood as victorious. I believe this boycott, as a mode of international solidarity and exchange, can bring that refreshment. I think that anyone who shares this orientation (for peace, justice, freedom of movement and association, freedom from want and domination), under whatever of its local habitations and names, in Palestine, in Israel, and most certainly in the United States, simply must be attuned to the necessity, and to this specific possibility, of refreshment. Selfishly, I am interested in how this boycott might provide some experiential and theoretical resources for the renewal of a certain affective, extrapolitical sociality—the new international of insurgent feeling. This is to say, finally, that these remarks have been nothing other than a long-winded preface to a declaration of my indebtedness to Palestinians for the fact that, in the end, the boycott might very well do more for me than it does for you, precisely in its allowing me to be in solidarity, which is to say consciously in a mutual indebtedness, with you and with the richness, impossibly developed in dispossession and deprivation as payment of a debt (or being subject to the violent imposition of a kind of credit) that was never promised and never owed. The imposition of credit, and its having been exceeded by an already given debt that is insofar as it is to come, is what constitutes Palestinian social life, for and to which thanks are in order since what is given and remains is the chance to join that social life, to be, as it were, pre-occupied with it. This is what the call for solidarity, which is itself an act of solidarity, provides.

Most folks who refuse to answer the Palestinian call for solidarity don't dispute the facts. A few do, but one generally feels it necessary to respond to them in the same way that you would respond to anyone who denies conquest. When I say anyone I'm not thinking of any imperial nation or corporate entity; I'm thinking of any child who blatantly takes something from another child they think of as other, or as weaker, or, simply, as someone who has something they want and think they should have. You may or may not listen to their arguments about how their conquest and theft isn't really that; you may or may not be disgusted when they don't even feel the need to make an argument; either way, in the end, you just make them give it back. The

situation of Palestine, alas, isn't so easy. When things are more complicated, when the task of reversal and repair requires great intellectual and moral energy, rather than counter-coercion, you have to think a little bit. There is a general history of brutality and its various justifications to unravel and to begin that work requires the cessation of business as usual. Boycott divestment and sanctions, and the call for them, in the refusal to allow things to go on like this, provides the conditions and atmosphere for such thinking, which, in the end, is not about facts but about feeling.

II

I've been learning something recently about feeling and the lack and/or partition of it as the rhetorical energy surrounding the idea and actuality of BDS intensifies. Two ploys are of special import to antiboycott rhetoric: a radical refusal/inability to distinguish between individual and institution that emerges as essential to the defense of Israeli academic freedom; and a totalizing logic that suggests academic and cultural boycott of Israel is legitimate if and only if it is accompanied by similar action directed at every regime structured by the selective application of brutality upon populations under its control or, more specifically, at every settler colony including, and most specifically, the United States of America. These moves are revelatory precisely insofar as they say something about the relay within which fantasies of sovereignty operate. On the one hand, Israeli academic freedom, but more precisely, Israeli academic activity as such, is understood to be inseparable from those institutions that—admittedly, without debate—participate in and benefit from occupation, which is thus understood simply to be the condition of possibility of Israeli intellectuality. On the other hand, settler colonialism and racist brutality are implicitly acknowledged to be the structural foundations of Israeli and American sovereignty so that we are challenged with the necessity of a general critique of such authority lest, in singling out Israel for special notice and censure, we be unfair.

What if the vicious prevarication in which defenders of Israeli, and only Israeli, academic freedom are engaged inadvertently alerts us to something true? What if the charge of selective prosecution, brazen in its admission of the prosecution's factual basis, has the effect of exposing the general conditions and apparatuses of force and terror that must undergird the settler colonial state? Then perhaps we would do well to take note of what defenders of the terrible emergency that radiates beyond Israel's ever-expanding

borders (as incorporative exclusion and purportedly self-protective aggression) admit with the cavalier thoughtlessness and self absorption that characterizes sovereignty's half-assed, pseudointellectual comportment. Then perhaps we would do even better to attend to the local conceptual field in which the state-sanctioned, institutionalized individual intellectual, the state-sanctioned intellectual institution, and the settler colonial state animate and support one another. Surely such inquiry would allow and require us to disavow the kind of regulated, regulatory cogitation that always and only extends the material effects of sovereignty's horrible immateriality in favor of a vast range of fugitive assertion. At stake, finally, in the opportunity that the current rhetorical situation affords, is the question of an- or subautonomous knowledge. Another way to put that question is this: What's academic freedom got to do with us?

If, by academic freedom, we mean the unfettered exercise and exchange of speech, thought, and research by every member of the global academic community, including both Israelis *and* Palestinians, then endorsement of the call for boycott and sanctions of Israeli academic institutions complicit in the administration of the illegal occupation of Palestinian lands is a significant advance in our assertion and protection of it. The responsibility of intellectuals will have been affirmed not only in exercising academic freedom but also in working to enact the conditions that make it possible, meaningful, and universal. Thought is irreducibly social. When we callously accede to the exclusion of so many from the conditions that foster its flowering, enactment, and constant differentiation we violate our own commitment to fulfill its responsibilities. The global history of settler colonialism is the history of the administration of such exclusion. Those of us who study the history and culture of the United States of America know that it has played and continues to play a major part in this tragic and brutal history, both within its own borders and everywhere it seeks to extend, consolidate, and instrumentalize its power. In endorsing the call for boycott that first emanated from Palestinian civil society but is increasingly echoed by Israeli activists and intellectuals concerned with the moral and political sustainability of their collective life, we recognize that what it is to be a friend of the state of Israel—a polity whose status as an artifact of colonialism and racism is not in dispute either for those who refuse or those who assume colonialism's and racism's legitimacy—and what it is to insist upon the right of the Jewish people to live and thrive in justice are two entirely different things. Insistence upon this right, whether seen in its impossible particularity or

understood in its irreducible entanglement, especially, with the rights of Palestinians, requires resistance to the state and its idea, especially when that idea and its claim to right is imposed upon and embraced by those who were so recently, so consistently, and so brutally said to stand in for the stateless. Thinking demands suspicion of the condition in which Israel is required to lead the assertion of the state's right to exist in general in the constant renewal of its own right to exist, thereby undergoing the unsustainable process of rehabilitating the very idea of the state. Thinking can't exclude the consideration that the establishment of Israel—as effect and extension of the noxious history of exclusionary ideas and realities—and its subsequent and ongoing attachment to the moral burden of the state, its rights, and its claim to right is antisemitism's residue. Thinking must engage the notion that the rights of the Jewish people and the rights of the Jewish state are a geopolitical and politico-theological incompatibility whose terrible, and eventually uncontainable, effects Palestinians are now forced to endure.

States are effects of racism and colonialism. They have no right to exist and Israel is no exception. States have no rights, and ought not have rights, but if they did surely those rights would be contingent upon the state's capacity to do what liberal political theorists tell us states are supposed to do, namely protect the rights not only of all their citizens but of all the citizens of the world. The assertion of this simple but irreducible cosmopolitan imperative is supposed to justify the state's existence; but states have never been either capable or desirous of its execution. States don't have rights and the assertion that they do is almost always the discursive residue of apartheid, in which contingency is externalized and security internalized through acts of aggression and regulation designed to protect racial, religious, or national character and the regular renewal of modes of hostility most efficiently and duplicitously carried out under the cover of "peace process" or "cease-fire." Commitment to the administered world's inveterate statism, which is imposed upon and embraced by the state of Israel, is a commitment to the refusal of justice. At stake, here, is a kind of undercommon, counter-Kantian cosmopolitanism that seeks after justice against the grain of its administration in and by the state. The necessity of such theory and such sentiment becomes clear in the examination of what Ariella Azoulay and Adi Ophir call the "one-state condition."[1] We must be concerned with the fate of thinking, in and against its reduction to academic freedom, within and under that condition.

Consider that some of those who organize and agitate for BDS—whether within academic organizations such as the American Studies Association

and the Modern Language Association or outside of them—rightly remark that arguments against BDS in the name of Israeli academic freedom exhibit no concern whatsoever for the far more debilitating and absolute assault on Palestinian academic freedom that Israel has carried out, as a matter of policy, for six decades. (Even those who argue against the very idea of free speech speak in defense of [Israeli] academic freedom as if inhabiting such a contradiction required neither thought nor comment, perhaps in the recognition that none of the various reconciliations of these positions that one might imagine can be very comforting.) Supporters of the boycott note the immorality of this position even while taking pains to assure those who take it that, in any case, BDS in no way infringes upon Israeli academic freedom as it is narrowly and exclusionarily defined. But this raises the question of whether Israeli academic freedom—or, for that matter, any state-sanctioned, state-protected academic freedom but also the very idea of academic freedom insofar as it must be state-sanctioned and state-protected if it is to exist—should be subject not simply to the constraints that must accompany narrowly defined and selectively enjoyed freedom but to a radically liberatory critique of freedom so defined and so enjoyed. If academic freedom is defined precisely by the fact that it is a thing that can be enjoyed by peoples such as the Israelis and not by peoples such as the Palestinians why should we defend it? What is academic freedom that it can be exercised by Israelis and not by Palestinians and why would Palestinians, and those in solidarity with them, want it? What does Israeli academic freedom cost the Palestinians? Corollary, but absolutely subordinate, to that question is the question concerning the cost of academic freedom that Israelis themselves are asked to pay. Like the evil song says, freedom isn't free. This problematic of cost is, of course, inseparable from the question concerning benefit. We assume the benefits that accrue to academic freedom without considering the benefits that accrue to intellectual fugitivity. Academic freedom is an affair of state. It's unclear what business it is of those of us who are, and/or may choose to be, stateless.

Perhaps we should be moving and thinking against state-sanctioned, terror-defined academic freedom, intellectual normativity's oxymoronic mode of being, which is only instantiated by way of exclusion and honored always and only in its nonobservance, which liberal defenders of it administer constantly through any number of vicious and brutal forms of evaluative regulation. Consider the profound structures of unfreedom within which students everywhere, and of every age, must operate. Academic freedom is

the condition under which the intellectual submits herself to the normative model of the settler. Academic freedom is a form of violence perpetrated by academic bosses who operate under the protection and in the interest of racial state capitalism. Recognize that as a form of violence it is reactive and reactionary in its brutality. It responds to the anoriginary counterviolence of thought and of imagination. It seeks to regulate thought's capacity and imperative to (over)turn. It is left to us not only *not* to assert a right to this irreducible violence of thought and poiesis but also, and rather, *to* assert that its existence is before rights, before the state that constructs and guarantees rights by way of a range of modalities of exclusion that can only be ours to refuse.

III

It is, of course, entirely possible to understand the tactical necessity of asserting that BDS doesn't violate (Israeli) academic freedom; but such understanding doesn't negate the importance of pointing out what might be seen as the strategic legitimacy of recognizing the limits of academic freedom and of recognizing what might emerge from violating its pieties not only at the level of how we relate or don't relate to Israeli academic institutions but, more importantly, in how we relate to one another in our common struggle against settler colonialism. To be more emphatic: How do we relate to one another? Do we relate to one another? If we don't—or if those attenuated relations are the artifacts of an intransigent combination of misperceived tactical necessity and uncriticized ideological and metaphysical assumption—then how does that impact our struggles and aspirations? This is not a call for a suspension of the tactical; it does not come at the end of either ideology or metaphysics; it is, rather, a gesture toward a strategic discussion grounded in an already lived alternative. It is admittedly self-serving since I am more given to the strategic and, more pointedly, because I find myself sometimes at odds with initiatives that are made as a function of perceived tactical necessity—as, for instance, the shaming of black people who defy the call for boycott as if black people bear some special obligation to adhere to the boycott that others don't share; as if black (American) radicalism hasn't been emphatic in its solidarity with the Palestinians for many decades (so that we refer not just to a need to forge such solidarity but also to its historic presence and precedence); and as if, more fundamentally, shaming were an effective organizing tool, a more efficacious way of realizing the general

antagonism, which moves by way of insovereign consent as opposed to national character or, more problematic still, genetic predisposition. This example leads to the third rhetorical ploy I'd like to examine and, I hope, to an instantiation of the differences between shaming and criticism, predisposition and consent.

> Though highly unlikely, let's say my audience in Eilat would be comprised of nothing but Zionist oppressors: Has anyone thought that perhaps those who most need to hear love in action through music are the people who think it's cool to fuck over others? Why should all attendees of the festival be punished for the actions of a few assholes in power? Sometimes you've got to go into the belly of the beast to make progress. If you always boycott and refuse to use your art to heal those most in need, what's the point? Not only am I an artist, but I'm a cultural diplomat. It is my job to open people's hearts and minds all over the world through the power of art.
>
> By your way of thinking, I would never play another jazz festival or club again. Jazz itself is musical apartheid. It's the whitewashing of Black music. It was stolen from Black people who aren't still fully credited, and to this day, is not controlled by Blacks. White people make most of the money and the very existence of the White race—which enables White supremacy and privilege—is apartheid to all people of color. So any time I play a gig anywhere, I am serving The Colony. It's all dirty money. If I refused to play jazz venues or refused to teach at jazz schools, I would be doing the ancestors and the music a disservice. So whereas for you, "Eilat" may be a name that has an oppressive connotation, to me, the name "JAZZ" has the same effect.
>
> I refuse to boycott Eilat and I refuse to boycott jazz venues, for your reasons, so those of you who are trolling me online about my decision to play the Red Sea Jazz Festival are just wasting your time trying to call me out. How much do any of you know about who I am, anyways? How many of my recordings do you own? How many of my shows have you attended? You appear to only be interested in using Nicholas Payton for your own personal, political narrative. I write my own stories. I don't allow others to define me and will not be pressured into feeling guilty about using my life passion to instill more beauty in the world.[2]

Fortunately, in his self-important and self-obsessed defense of his decision to perform at the Red Sea Jazz Festival in Eilat, Israel, and hence not to

respond to the call for BDS, musician Nicholas Payton offers black artists and scholars who wish to think and live in solidarity with the Palestinian struggle against settler-colonialism an opportunity to clarify their own positions regarding not only the cultural and intellectual boycott of Israel but also black radicalism's displacement of, rather than place in, world affairs. He does so not by rejecting such solidarity but rather by declaring it, rendering solidarity a matter of assumption rather than enactment. To assume that one's solidarity is a given, that it exists as a function of an identity that is supposed to have been forged in past suffering rather than one that is continually reconfigured in present struggle, is to justify the conduct of business as usual, which is given in the drone-like combination of activity and inactivity. Payton seems to imagine himself part of a movement that exists only insofar as it does not move. In this respect his "music" and his "politics" can be said to share a certain narcotic quality characterized by the mixture of nervous stasis and dulled agitation. Pained self-assertion seems to be the proper idiom for this unfortunate and degraded interplay—it is as if he can't stop thinking about the way he's stopped thinking about music and politics. To be preoccupied with this condition of arrest is, quite literally, to have one's mind settled, colonized. The sound of this malady and the content of its expression are a mixture of self-aggrandizement and self-assertion. And if I return to the word "self" too much or too conspicuously it is because self is precisely what one is left to think about when a supposedly political musician stops actually thinking about music and politics; another way to put it is that self—its freedom, its discreteness, its sovereignty—is and must be the constant study of the settler as he engages that object at the intersection of the impossible personhood and the impossible nationhood whose establishment he is constrained to perform. What fascinates in Payton's screed, even to the point of outweighing what disgusts, is the intensity with which he also attempts to justify his position with a theory of sovereignty; moreover, his music sounds (like) his political theory, a phenomenon that might be worth some attention in another venue or in another life.

What also becomes clear as a function of Payton's eruption is that against the grain of whatever possible assertion of historical determination, black people in general, and Payton in particular, have neither some special talent for such solidarity (that he ought not betray) or some special obligation to show such solidarity (by which others are not burdened), a fact that requires us now to think the relationship between black struggle and Palestinian struggle. To my mind, solidarity with the Palestinians implies, first and fore-

most, an imperative to follow their lead and example in their own struggle. If they require us to disavow institutions that directly or indirectly support or benefit from their dispossession solidarity dictates that we boycott; but more than this, the way they live, the way they struggle, the way they intertwine living and struggle, bears some lessons for us regarding how we must live struggle in our own fight against the interplay of settler colonialism, racial capitalism, antiblackness, and ecocide that constitutes the modern world. Moreover, solidarity with the Palestinians demands but also makes possible a theoretically informed and principled stand against a range of national and personal maladies that can best be characterized as the structures and effects of sovereignty insofar as settler colonialism is, at once, the most simple and the most extreme form that sovereignty takes, now, in the era of its democratization, which is to say its imperial imposition on those who retain the resources to imagine and enact modes of life that aren't determined by the brutal fictions of self-determination, a term whose usefulness for anticolonial struggle turns out never to have arrived, as the current condition of what is call the "post-colonial" tragically confirms. If there is a stateless antinationalism that is the surreptitious essence of black radicalism then it bears lessons for Palestinian struggle, too.

This point, again, is given special clarity in the occasion Payton provides since the music he purports to play, and which is supposed by him to constitute his politics, is nothing other than a long, communal experiment in modes of life characterized by exchange in study. There's a special link between the two situations (exacerbated by U.S. funding of the practical/material manifestation of this ideological convergence) that requires and allows a redoubling of the very solidarity whose pantomime Payton claims and deploys as a justification for business as usual. But this is to say, again, that this solidarity must be enacted, not assumed, from every possible position on the spectrum that is defined by its declaration, including those who are organizing the boycott that Payton declines to join. If the struggle against Israeli apartheid not only joins but also helps to renew the struggle against American apartheid in both its international and intranational dimensions, it is also the case that recognizing and joining that struggle (at the level not only of its social but also of its theoretical demands and resources) is essential for those who wish to enact solidarity with the Palestinians.

What does the history and force of black radicalism allow and require of those who would deploy that history in the name of Palestinian struggle? Payton's assumptions are given in his attempt to mobilize the intertwined

histories of the oppression of black people and the making of black art to justify his assertion of the refusal of the boycott as an act of solidarity with oppressed people everywhere. Payton's argument is pseudo-ontological: I am a black man and therefore I must always already be in solidarity with the Palestinians insofar as I must always already be in solidarity with oppressed people everywhere. Consider, on the other hand, that black radicalism's diverse theorization of struggle actually requires something other than the assertion of an identity and the smooth carrying out of one's daily business (in his case, playing his horn in the retrograde and regressive manner that has marked his career). This is to say that what is so venal in his response, and what manifests itself so thoroughly in and as the convolution and arrogance of his "argument," is the depth of his commitment to his own putative sovereignty. Payton is going to do what he wants; he is not going to be put in anybody's box. Moreover, it appears that he believes that the necessary precursor to any dispute with his political reasoning is that we submit ourselves to the nausea and boredom of listening to his entire recorded output. To speak against his political reason, which is manifest so clearly in his decision to play in Israel, we must "know about him" or "know him." What's implied in Payton's personal categorical imperative is that to know him is automatically not only to accede to the logic of his political reason, not only to acknowledge that he is in fact in solidarity with the Palestinians precisely in refusing their request for solidarity, but also to recognize that he has discerned and is now acting out the only possible legitimate response to those contradictions of modern life that locate us in what he calls "the belly of the beast." In Payton's logic to play jazz is to live (in) and accede to apartheid and what's deep about this formulation is how neatly it follows from Ralph Ellison's (in)famous insinuation that jazz is the music of American democracy, a bit of dogma that is oft-repeated in the discourse of jazz reaction that is most often associated with the work of folks such as Ellison, Albert Murray, Stanley Crouch, and Wynton Marsalis, a group whose considerable talents have been sadly devoted to an ideology that the music constantly undermines and contests.

Again, we could ask some questions about how Payton's music is organized. How sovereignty is assumed, how its fiction is served, at the level of form in his music. But it's better to ask how sovereignty is assumed and served in the way we organize. In both instances, perhaps, a rejection of the fetishization of the soloist is needed. In Payton's case, that fetishization plays itself out at the level of the intensity of his own self-regard. Payton cries out his autonomy and independence, demands that these be recognized,

thereby revealing the weird relation between the assertion of the black man's humanity and the assertion of the Jewish state's right to exist, where historically, and continually, humanity is established by way of its exclusion of blackness and the state is established by way of the assertion and imposition of Jewish statelessness. What remains necessary are the ongoing imperatives of exodus from the genocidal construct of human sovereignty that ceaselessly consumes what it is meant to protect. Those imperatives are the antinational, international, antepolitical refuge of the refugee. They constitute the resistance to every state, the disavowal of every homeland, the destruction of every wall, the obliteration of every checkpoint, and the refusal of every exclusionary and merely artistic or academic freedom. And though it's unclear if Payton really cares or really means for this question to be asked, beyond expressions of support for struggles here that are made by people who are, in fact, *here*, how do we organize ourselves so that we are actually part of a revolutionary struggle against settler colonialism and antiblackness here, there, and everywhere. Maybe my justification for paying Payton a little bit of attention is the fantasy I keep having about the transition from boycott to general strike. I've thought or imagined or hoped for such insofar as the force of what we do for them over there is directly tied to what we do for ourselves here. Again, it's unclear if this is Payton's concern since he gestures toward it with such insidious and dishonest vulgarity; nevertheless, if we ask that question, taking its trace from his hands, we advance both specific struggles, in their interinanimation, as well as the general struggle to see the earth, as Ed Roberson says, before the end of the world.

Samira Negrouche, translated by Zoë Skoulding
Quay 2l1 (extract)

the white surface is not the void
nothing is not the void
what's not said about us
is not the void
I'm not afraid of what's not said
nor of the gap that disguises time
it's the din of the world that scares me
the din of the nothing that isn't nothing
the din of the swollen void
that inhabits the pavements
and then the streets
and then the parks
and then your room
and then your head
I'm not afraid of emptiness
the gap is a distant moment
a sun reborn
in the cool surface
of a silent winter morning
where I want to think of the nothing that opens
where I want to think of the space that remains
where I want to believe
that on a path of snow
a breath is stirring
that stirs fear
*
I reach the highest bank
by the narrowest track
a knotted rope
upside down
I reach the wave as it dies away
approximate posture
legs flexed

I reach a dream
an attraction
I teeter
I teeter
did we ever know how
to walk
in daylight?
*
I’m still moving
along an uncertain thread
along a certain rupture
and I offer my voice
as I’d offer my cheek
I take the plunge
as I’d brush past a threshold
*
I’m not afraid
of the day that passes
or the beings that
no longer pass
I’m not afraid of emptiness
emptiness isn’t nothing
emptiness is on the thread
the uncertain thread
the invisible thread
on which I suspend being
on which being suspends me
there where it happens
there where it hangs
there where you reach
the quay
*
I’m barely moving
steps hanging
over the oily surface
or it’s the quay

that moves
that breaks off
draws away
on leather skin
the indomitable skin
glinting silver
or it’s my glance
that slips
that draws closer
to the quay
that brings me closer
to the quay

4

WE, INDIGENOUS WOMEN

"How brave!"
A white woman admiring a *beurette* escaped from the familial gulag.[1]

"You will never shave off your father's moustache!" That's my mother speaking.

All my life has been spent obeying this order, fearing it, sanctifying it, avoiding it, defying it, mocking it, evading it…and then obeying it once again. And so on and so forth. My father passed. With his beautiful moustache. I am relieved. I even feel a certain degree of naïve pride.

My body does not belong to me.

No moral magisterium will make me endorse a law conceived by and for white feminists.

Recite! "Ana hit ou oueld ennass khitt."[2] On my left thigh, three marks made with a razor blade and

covered in kohl to dry up the blood. It's a patriarchal rite that overtakes your body, chains it to a lineage of ancestors. My paternal grandmother approves. I belong to her. My maternal grandmother approves. I belong to her. My grandfathers, fallen martyrs, approve. I belong to them. My father approves, I belong to him. As for my mother, let's not even go there; she's the one who put the cuffs around my wrists. I belong to her. The blood has dried. The scar will be indelible. I belong to my family, my clan, my neighborhood, my race; I belong to Algeria, to Islam. I belong to my history and God willing, I will belong to my descendants. "When you are married, in cha Allah, you will say: Ana khitt ou oueld ennass hitt.[3] Then, you will belong to your husband."

The voice: It's awful.

France is very strong. It has declared war on my parents. The battle is arduous. France wants to tear my body away from them, colonize it. France is voracious. It wants me all to itself. "They are barbarians!" France yells and yells. I hear this everywhere. "They are barbarians!" But the scar doesn't wear off. My ancestors won the game.

I have nothing to hide of what takes place at home. From the best to the most rotten. In this scar are all my impasses as a woman. The world is

cruel toward us. The family honor rests on my dead father's moustache, my father whom I love and whom France destroyed. I am going to have to take care of it and look after him. We alone know the price of the beaten down colonized's moustache. My brother is ashamed of his father. My father is ashamed of his son. Neither of them is still standing. I pick up their fallen virility, their scorned dignity, their exile. Through them, I pick up my mother. No, my body does not belong to me. My mother continues to exercise sovereignty over it. But I am a conscious accomplice. I share the reins to my life with her, with my entire tribe. In any case, even if I had removed them, it would have been to hand them over to white people. I'd rather die. I would rather deal with it… And play it by ear. Racism is perverse. It is a devil. See how, in its presence, everything becomes paradoxical and hazy. Quick, a flash light! The white morgue. Swollen with itself, it underestimated our men. Is racism that dumb? It holds its opponent in such contempt that it imagines him to be harmless. It imagines that our men are but inert and disabled bodies. You arrive, you steal their wives and they reward you with a "thank you bwana."[4] Damn! In reality, they exist, they breathe, they form a group, a social body with interests to defend. An active body that defends its privileges. So, let's take it from the top. When, for example, the white

patriarch exclaims, "Oh, indigenous man, I am handsome, strong, intelligent, far more so than you will ever be, and I am going to take your wife away from you," he pictures a defeatist man, who will answer: "Please, go ahead, do as you wish." He doesn't know that he is speaking to an adversary, a fearsome enemy who will protect what belongs to him. And that is what the indigenous male will do. He will defend his male interests. His resistance will be relentless: "We are not fags!" This is how we will become a battle field. We will be battered and quartered. Submissive to some, treacherous to others.

And yet, "Georgette's" father had warned us:

> Let the sea swallow you all! You're not listening to me! You think what your teacher tells you is true, is that right! No good can come from them, none! And if you don't believe me, you'll see…. Remember what your father told you. When I'm gone, you'll see for yourself! You'll say: my father, he was right! But it's too late…. And you, you've come to sabotage my children's education. You're the poison in this house. This poison, I feed it, dress it, care for it when it's sick. I slog around all day for nothing. But me, I'm not Si Slimane! His wife and his children shat on his white beard. He worked his whole

> life for them…. At work like a dog, like a rat…. In the end, she rose the children against him. I'd told 'em: if you marry a woman from here, it's gonna be a disaster. I married a woman from my village, and it's the biggest disaster. Madame la Biquette, she wants to act like a Westerner. She's even worse than the mini-skirt fashion! But me, I'm not Si Slimane! I'll kill you all! One by one. I'm not afraid of the justice of men. I don't give a damn about justice here, about the justice of dogs…. I'm calmly writing the words of God in my daughter's notebook and look at what happens: your mother, she let the atomic bomb loose on my ass. When I brought her here, she didn't even know how to say hello-goodbye, now she breathes down my neck. The boss does it every day; and when I come home, it's your mother! She's messing with your minds…. But I'd prefer to kill you all. Or else, I'll take everyone to Marseille. You'll eat a dry pancake and an onion. That way, you'll understand that I'm the father![5]

Sisters, do you remember the television film *Pierre et Djemila*? Him, handsome, in love, considerate. White. Her, beautiful, in love, terrorized by her family. Arab. That film was intended for us, the daughters of immigrants. It spoke to us. It told us how detestable our families were and how desirable

French society was. A film that turned us away from our kind, from our fathers, those exploited *zoufris*[6] who painstakingly kept us alive, and our mothers, wives of immigrants, who painstakingly raised us. The film explained to us, their daughters, that they treated us badly and that we had only one way out: to tear ourselves away from them. In the beginning, I'll be honest with you, I believed in this old tune which accompanied us everywhere, insinuating itself into every pore, incrusting itself into your skin. You too, perhaps? And then I doubted, and in the end, I didn't go for it. But I could have, like so many of us did. There's no doubt that the teenager that I was had already benefitted from the experience of our older sisters who (often) broke their teeth on the mirage of the white prince charming. A spell which cost them almost nothing: tearing their families apart, the stigmatization of their mother who was guilty of having "badly raised" them, the shame that reflected on everyone but also the guilt, and the bad reputation…. How many of our sisters committed suicide, caught in the cross fire of these two patriarchies? The white patriarchy, conquering and self-assured, and the other, the indigenous patriarchy, dominated and desperate. A spell that proposed to turn all of us into accomplices, auxiliaries to the racist system that would wield the deathblow to this much-hated family from North Africa. All this barely two

or three decades after the African independence movements. That old recipe hasn't aged a day. In fact, didn't it reach its climax with the blazing success of Ni Putes Ni Soumises?[7] The French elite are unique. Consider their relationship to the sexism of those who are at the top, the sexism of those who are at the bottom, and the sexism of those who are beneath those who are at the bottom. The high-powered France that did not hesitate to publish a photo of Simone de Beauvoir, naked, in the headlines of a major magazine to celebrate the centennial of her birth. Can you image Sartre, naked, on the cover of a serious magazine? Undoubtedly, this must be read as the expression of an altogether French sensibility. Artistic. Aesthetic. Who better than the French elite to see and discern that which, behind feminism, defines "the woman"? A self-satisfied, know-it-all elite, walking five inches above ground and obstinately indifferent to reality. A reality that is mistreated and despised in favor of a self-satisfaction that has no limits. From our standpoint, the spectacle is edifying. What do we see? First off, the near-total indifference of this elite to white patriarchy, which structures French society and determines the lives of millions of women. And yet, all evidence demonstrates that the condition of French women is deteriorating (rape, domestic violence, wage disparity, exploitation of female bodies for commercial

ends…). Next, these elites form tight ranks to irrevocably denounce violence done to women in the suburbs, when the perpetrator is black or Arab. The sexism of guys in these neighborhoods is a barbarism without cause or origin. See, all these white male chauvinists who become feminists when the guy from the suburb[8] appears? There is no word harsh enough to crucify him, no compassion strong enough to sympathize with him. All of the white world has time and time again united with quavering voices against the bad guy from the projects. *Last but not least*, they demonstrate a near-unanimous class solidarity to support DSK and co.[9] and come up with the most outrageous extenuating circumstances for them. An elite that becomes one with its male chauvinism: it euphemizes white rape, voluntarily confuses rape and licentiousness, and ignores any kind of compassion vis-à-vis victims when the perpetrator is white and high-ranking. On the other hand, against our brothers, it's a real corrida: the matadors are let loose.

Under pressure, certain of our men slip on a white mask. They don't wear it well. It disfigures them for life. Do they question themselves about their violence against us? Yeah, sure. They are ugly because they abdicate their power only to please white people. Because we are subjected to their violence. They abdicate in the face of power. When they court a white woman, they are

chivalrous, considerate, romantic. Qualities that are unimaginable within the privacy of our housing projects. I've come to prefer big fat machos who own up to it. I'm telling you sisters, we must take drastic action. It's not good for us when our men reform themselves at the behest of white people. Because in fact, they do not reform themselves. They pretend to. They are actors, playing their roles with more or less talent. If you chase away what is natural, it comes running right back. And we're the ones to suffer the consequences. As I am swimming in my own contradictions, I'll admit, I prefer the original to the copy. Because it's less the reality of masculine domination that poses a problem than its dehumanization. What's worse is that none of this is new. These black people bearing white masks have illustrious predecessors. It's funny but feminist pioneers in the Islamic world were… men: Qasim Amine, Mohammed Abduh, Tahar Haddad, Taha Hussein, Mohammed Rachid Rida….[10] Most female Muslim commentators are pleased with this phenomenon and see in it an exceptional humanism, a God-given philanthropy. This naiveté leaves me speechless. Why would men voluntarily abdicate their privileges? Why on earth would they encourage a struggle that threatens their power over women? In Europe, the first feminists were, quite naturally, women. Why has the Islamic world given birth to such incongruity?

It's no big mystery to me. The elite in these societies were already crushed by the thought of their civilizational "backwardness." Women's liberation, when it is extolled by men, can in no way be explained by a pro-women tropism, but more conclusively by the complex of indigeneity, shamed by colonial power and seeking to hoist itself up to the level of the so-called norms of the colonized. These guys exhaust me. Speaking of virility, have you noticed, sisters, the emotion that overtakes a white democrat when a guy from the suburbs declares his homosexuality in front of a camera and mic? To hear a shyster make his coming out: what a joy for the white civilizer, an endpoint for the backward, indigenous people. Because for a *khoroto*,[11] to make of one's sexuality a social and political identity is to enter modernity through the front door. The white man is on the edge of ecstasy. All of these words jostling each other at the threshold of the indigenous person's still archaic consciousness—which, though it is still archaic, is destined to a Man's fate—besiege him: "to take responsibility for oneself," "to be accomplished," "to realize oneself," "to tear off one's chains," and "to shatter all taboos." The indigenous person is surrounded but hypnotized. Sometimes, because his people are suffocating, he gives in. Immediately, he is carried to the pinnacle. I'm sick and tired of these worthless heroes. But the white democrat goes into a trance.

When he meets that unlikely character, his body shakes all over, he has an irrepressible desire to kiss him, to hold him in his arms and commune with him. Thanks to this unexpected conversion, he has accomplished his civilizing mission. He has just won a miraculous victory against an enemy, who petrifies and taunts him: the great and insolent Islamic virility. The one that is maddening. The one that has male chauvinists drooling. "They veil their wives. They can have four of them. The bastards!" We must stop lying to ourselves. When white people rejoice at an indigenous man's coming out, it's both out of homophobia and out of racism. As we all know, "the faggot" is not quite a "man," thus, the Arab who loses his virile power is not quite a man. *And that's good*. It's *really good*. And it's so reassuring. It goes without saying that the message is understood loud and clear on the other side of the highway as well. The virile and homophobic competition that takes place in the opposite camp will come as no surprise, and it will take great pleasure in overplaying sexuality, which is fabricated by the colonial gaze in the devious war between antagonistic and irreducible forces. But aside from this, apparently, within philanthropic circles, they are worried about our lot, us chicks. No kidding!

My sisters, we are entitled to ask ourselves questions, are we not? Why have white women and

especially feminists, who have refined knowledge of the patriarchy, let themselves be recruited in this sacred union against guys from the suburbs? Were they bewitched? I will not have the weakness to believe that. The truth is that, caught in a conflict of interest, they privileged racial solidarity. Like Le Pen, they prefer their family to their neighbor…. As indigenous people, we have known, since *Pierre et Djemila*, that there are very few people who want our well-being. We are nothing but foils, instruments of white vanity. This hypocrites' dance nevertheless has a virtue. It forces us to return to the real, to resituate ourselves. It compels us to remain lucid. We chase away the myths; we dissipate the fog. Let's look at our parents, let's look at our brothers, let's look at the women from our neighborhoods. And let's observe the white elite. And then, let's rediscover our mothers, our fathers, and our brothers. Them, enemies? There is no simple answer to this question. I would be lying if I answered with a candid and irrevocable no. But I make the conscious choice to say no because my liberation will not be attained without theirs. Like Assata Shakur, I say: "We can never be free while our men are oppressed."[12] No, my body does not belong to me. I know today that my place is among my own people. More than an instinct, it is a political approach. But before becoming conscious knowledge, this return was accomplished

through a collective will for survival and resistance. My consciousness comes from this. Our collective self reacted by creating its own immune system. What becomes of Djemila—what becomes of us—when the time of romance has passed and Pierre dumps her for other horizons? What becomes of her financial autonomy? What becomes of the indigenous woman, isolated and vulnerable in a hostile society that discriminates against her, exoticizes her, and instrumentalizes her? Will she find a refuge among her own people after her "treason"? Sometimes, yes, and sometimes, it will be difficult. Whatever happens, she will have been disgraced. Why then take this risk? This is the question we must answer, especially those of us coming from the lower classes. In other words, most of us. A friend was telling me: "I have never been a feminist. I never even thought about it. For me, feminism is like chocolate." Isn't that right! Reproaching us for not being feminists is like reproaching a poor person for not eating caviar. For, what leeway do we have between the white patriarchy and "our own," indigenous and dominated patriarchy? How should we act when the latter's survival strategy consists in exposing his pecs, making a display of his virility? This is the equation that the collective self has had to resolve. An I that has easily achieved the difficult compromise between integrity, the safety of the group, and the liberation of the

individual. A compromise between indigenous men and women, which some African sisters have called "nego-feminism." In this struggle, we have not been passive. We have played our part, making do as best we could. Some of us distanced themselves from white men, some drew closer to them, not without imposing their own conditions, others demanded a conversion to Islam, others wore the hijab. All this for a number of reasons, which range for the search for spirituality to political resistance, by way of a strong self-awareness and awareness of one's dignity. After all, we are not merely bodies available for white male consumption. And we refuse for our bodies to be exploited by the society of the spectacle. At the same time, we are rebuilding ties to ourselves. We belong to the "community" and we ensure it of our loyalty. Is it a paradox to undergo a collective benediction? A knife in the back of women's struggle? No. This is the precondition for a concrete emancipation, because it's either that or the perpetual divide, the "no-man's land" of the *beurette* or the disembodied black girl. From now on, this margin of freedom we negotiated will allow us to have a bit more control over our lives. It's significant and better than nothing. Within this framework, the "chocolate" dimension of feminism finds its fullest expression: the indigenous man is not our main enemy. The radical critique of indigenous patriarchy is a luxury. If a

responsible form of feminism were ever to see the light of day, it would have to take the sinuous and craggy routes of a paradoxical movement, which will necessarily have to pass through a communitarian allegiance. At least, so long as racism exists.

Sisters, let's begin with an act of liberation. A simple thought. That of allowing ourselves to ask this question: must we necessarily subscribe to feminism? And why is this question, in and of itself, already an intolerable transgression? If so, does a new feminism need to be invented? For my part, I prefer to remain prudent and examine the matter more closely. We live in a complicated time, and this complexity makes our self-definition more difficult. Be that as it may, there is a need to clarify and to analyze in order to lead struggles that are adapted to our condition as non-white women of the East. For the purposes of our cause, I'm willing to use the concept of "decolonial feminism." Though it does not entirely satisfy me, it's a compromise between a certain resistance to feminism at home and throughout the Third World, and the massive, disturbing reality of the multidimensional violence that is inflicted on us, a violence that is produced by states and by neoliberalism.[13] Let's consider this compromise as an agreement between the resistance to feminism, to its Western-centric forms,[14] and its successful penetration into non-white worlds, its adoption and subsequent

re-appropriation by some of us. It's a real mess. Let's start by clearing out a path.

Is feminism universal and a-temporal, a necessary passage to aspire to liberation, dignity, and well-being? I don't think so. As is the case with all social phenomena, feminism is situated in space and time. One has only to determine its conditions of emergence. First, I must confess, I have a reproach to make against us: too often, feminists from the South see the feminist movement through Chimène's eyes. From the outset then, it's accepted as a superior phenomenon. This subjugation is such that Muslim feminists, for instance, do not hesitate to inscribe feminism within the genesis of Islamic history. All of Islam's dignity is thereby contained in the capacity of these militant women to prove that Islam's writings are feminist but its interpretations by the local patriarchy have been sexist. Muslim feminists are condemned to demonstrate this, and remain prisoners to the terms of a debate imposed by others. They sin through their blind adherence to the paradigm of modernity, through the idea that gender conflicts today are first and foremost determined by the nature of Islamic societies, rather than by global economic and political structures and North/South relationships. In this way, societies in which the feminist movement is nonexistent or marginal

are seen as bearing a civilizational backwardness. One would have to make up this delay and operate grafts in different space/times, by ignoring the sociohistorical or even geopolitical realities of the countries in question, the impact of modernity in gender relations and their transformation, as well as the historical condition of the emergence of feminism, which have made feminism into a specifically European phenomenon, a phenomenon that emerges out of the geopolitical space called the West.

Sisters, let's be methodical and ask ourselves the right questions. Do white women really have an instinctive, feminist consciousness? What are the historical conditions that have *enabled* feminism? It's impossible not to relocate the basis of the *possibility* of feminism within a specific geopolitical moment: that of capitalist and colonial expansion, made possible by the "discovery of America" and by another foundational moment: the French Revolution, itself a condition of the emergence of the rule of law and of the individual citizen. The French Revolution became a promise—the promise of the recognition of complete and total universal citizenship—which was obviously not kept since this citizenship was at first reserved to men. It later became a possible horizon for women because, from then on, thanks to the principles of the revolution,

they would be able to solve the equation: if the individual is a citizen, and woman is an individual, then woman is a citizen in full right…. Feminism would take a long time to develop (it reached its apogee in the 1970s) but would always be contained within the framework of liberal democracies, founded on the idea of the equality of citizens, and in which white women obtained rights, because of their own struggle, of course, but *also* thanks to imperial domination.

"The History of the West," writes Domenico Losurdo,

> faces a paradox […]. The neat line distinguishing white people on the one hand, from black people and Native Americans, on the other, favors the development of relationships of equality within the white community.[15]

Interesting, no? Let's not forget that at the time of the revolution, the black slave trade already existed and France was a stakeholder in this commerce. The "racial" conflicts of interest between the North and the South weren't fixed then. The peoples of the North who were not yet completely "white" could conceive of dangerous convergences with the colonized. The French Revolution coincides with the Haitian Revolution and interacts with it. The *sans-culottes* protested to demand the

abolition of slavery against the "aristocracy of the epidermis." But the colonial states, in the process of being established, have always skillfully known how to integrate certain layers of the proletariat and of women throughout their social or political wings. This is also how the white race was invented. What I mean, sisters, is that European societies were horribly unjust toward women (several thousand "witches" were immolated there), but also that women, thanks to capitalist and colonial expansion, largely improved their condition on the backs of the colonized. So, let's stop dumbly admiring a world that birthed political phenomena only to resolve its own contradictions, be they justified or not, but which had nothing to do with an avant-garde enlightening of the world. Isn't this what James Baldwin and Audre Lorde invite us to do?

To Baldwin, who reproaches Lorde of overloading black men, the African American feminist replies:

> "I do not blame Black men; what I'm saying is, we have to take a new look at the ways in which we fight our joint oppression because if we don't, we're gonna be blowing each other up. We have to begin to redefine the terms of what woman is, what man is, how we relate to each other." Baldwin replies: "But that demands redefining the terms of the western world…."[16]

"But demands redefining the terms of the *western world*." Sisters, may I propose that we extend Baldwin's remark? The expansion of capitalism across the world exported political systems and conflicts that structure the white world into Left and Right, progressives and conservatives, nation states, languages, modes of life, dress codes, epistemologies, structure of thought…. There is no reason to believe that feminism escaped this. For me, feminism is indeed one of those exported European phenomena. The power of imperialism is such that all the phenomena that structure the Western political, economic, and cultural field impose themselves across the world more or less contentedly: sometimes they come up against the resistance of the people, sometimes they penetrate, slide in like butter. They become reality. They inform and shape the everyday. However, all these countries have specific histories, and they especially have specific economic and political systems that determine and shape, among other things, the relations between men and women. You might already know this, but before the "great encounter" with the West, there were places where relations of gender domination did not exist; there were even regions of the world in which the female gender did not exist.[17] There are regions where, on the contrary, there was a specifically local patriarchy, which is to say, not Christian-centric and not

necessarily hetero-sexist. In fact, before the great colonial night, there was an extreme diversity of human relations that I do not want to romanticize, but that we cannot ignore. As Paola Bacchetta reminds us:

> The colonizers did not only impose their own notions of gender and sexuality onto colonized subjects: the effect of this imposition has been to worsen the situation of women […] and sexual minorities.[18]

With fifty years of hindsight, and thanks to Latin American decolonizing intellectuals in particular, we know that while formal independence movements have indeed taken place, the "colonialism of power" has not disappeared. Indeed, the young liberated nations have walked in the footsteps of their old masters, copied their political systems without any critical distance, adopted the forms of European nation states, the French in particular, whose limits were painfully felt during the two so-called "world" wars, the forms of jurisdiction, of democracy, of relation to citizenship, to freedom, to emancipation…. The diversity of social forms thus gave way to a progressive homogenization. Diversity either disappeared or transformed itself. Often it resisted and reconstructed itself. This is what has happened in most cases. Feminism, as an

idea, but also as a form of struggle, therefore sometimes becomes a reality that we must accept when women take hold of it and redefine it, whether it is secular, Islamic, or articulated through the local cultures, but that we should refuse, if women reject it.

This is what Baldwin suggests when he bases the redefinition of femininity and masculinity on a reconsideration of the West. He's completely right. We cannot rethink social relations, the family, gender relations, or sexuality without rethinking the nature of the state, North/South relations, neoliberalism, and its metamorphoses. Moreover, we must question the notions of equality, emancipation, freedom, and progress, and even refuse to conform to the liberal model of the individual.

Sisters, we need a global thinking that conceives of an alternative to Western civilization, which is in decline and has reached its limits. In other words, thinking about gender and the types of relations between men and women cannot be done without a radical calling into question of Modernity and a reflection on its civilizational alternative. It is not by targeting symptoms of masculine violence against us that we will transform our reality, but by attacking structures. In this struggle, our mobilization as non-white women will be decisive. But you will say, this is all well and good, and yet in the meantime, we are suffocating.

Yes.

To the question "why didn't you press charges," the black rape victim answers the interviewer, who is himself black:

> I never pressed charges because I wanted to protect you. I couldn't bear to see another black man in jail.[19]

This is what provokes Audre Lorde's rage.

> It's vital that we deal constantly with racism, and with white racism among black people—that we recognize this as a legitimate area of inquiry. We must also examine the ways that we have absorbed sexism and heterosexism. These are the norms in this dragon we have been born into—and we need to examine these distortions with the same kind of openness and dedication that we examine racism.

Our communities cannot do without this introspection. Men must learn to respect us and understand our sacrifice, just as we understand the necessity of protecting them.[20] This debate amongst ourselves is a priority. Will we see to it?

James Baldwin continues: "A woman does know much more than a man." Audre Lorde: "And why? For the same reason Black people know what

white people are thinking: because we had to do it for our survival."

Yes, we know much more, and it is for this reason that we are more strategic…or sly, as others would say. We especially know that our men are just as oppressed as us in different ways.

"Do you know what happens to a man when he's ashamed of himself when he can't find a job? When his socks stink? When he can't protect anybody? When he can't do anything? Do you know what happens to a man when he can't face his children because he's ashamed of himself? It's not like being a woman…," says James Baldwin. And he continues:

> A Black man has a prick, they hack it off. A Black man is a ****** when he tries to be a model for his children and he tries to protect his women. That is a principle crime in this republic. And every Black man knows it. And every Black woman pays for it. And every Black child.

In Europe, prisons are brimming with black people and Arabs. Racial profiling almost only concerns men, who are the police's main target. It is to our eyes that they are diminished. And yet they try desperately to reconquer us, often through violence. In a society that is castrating, patriarchal, and racist

(or subjected to imperialism), *to live is to live with virility*. "The cops are killing the men and the men are killing the women. I'm talking about rape. I'm talking about murder," says Audre Lorde. A decolonial feminism must take into account this masculine, indigenous "gender trouble" because the oppression of men reflects directly on us. Yes, we are subjected with full force to the humiliation that is done to them. Male castration, a consequence of racism, is a humiliation for which men make us pay a steep price. In other words, the more hegemonic thought tells us that our men are barbaric, the more frustrated they become, and the more they will oppress us. The effects of white, racist patriarchy exacerbate gender relations in the indigenous milieu. This is why a decolonial feminism must have as its imperative to radically refuse the discourses and practices that stigmatize our brothers and that, in the same move, exonerate white patriarchy. I think I can see that Lorde is conscious of this when she tells Baldwin:

> It's vital for me to be able to listen to you, to hear what it is that defined you and for you to listen to me, to hear what it is that defines me—because so long as we are operating in that old pattern, it doesn't serve anybody, and it certainly hasn't served us.

This has political and strategic implications. It means that we must engage with men in a conversation on masculinity, as the very lucid Baldwin invites us to do when he tells Lorde: "There's certainly not [a] standard of masculinity in this country which anybody can respect. Part of the horror of being a Black American is being trapped into being an imitation of an imitation."

The trap of imitation. Isn't this one of the many dimensions of the jihadist, Daesh phenomenon, that acts like a counter-revolutionary force? Isn't it into this trap that its promoters and fighters fall pray? The trap of grotesque imitation? The colonial West thought it had decimated the virile power of our men. Instead, the West proliferated it in its own image. Today, this power explodes in our faces, not without the active complicity of certain of our younger sisters, who were programmed to become *beurettes* but responded to the call of "jihad" with a resounding: yes! When their brothers go off to save their lost honor, they follow them, go with them, reinvent a mythological family model wherein the roles are naturalized but reassuring: men make war, women make children. The men are heroes and the women, loyal Penelopes who accept the downfall of a progressivism that was never shared, a falsely universal but truly white progressivism, which continues to try to domesticate

them and hide their future from them: "No, our men aren't fags!" they tell us. We've come full circle.

In the face of this need for security, it will not suffice to implore or oppose great principles. If we had to have a mission, it would be to destroy imitation. This is a goldsmith's job. We will have to guess which part, in the testosterone-laden virility of the indigenous male, resists white domination. Then we will channel it, neutralize its violence against us, and orient it toward a project of common liberation. This fundamentally white masculinity will require something to offset it that is at least as gratifying. That is called respect. It's not complicated, but it's costly.

> I think the Black sense of male and female is much more sophisticated that the western idea.

Dear sisters, what do you think of this quote from brother Baldwin? I find it enigmatic because it seems misleading, given that our lived experiences contradict this affirmation. But I feel that it contains a knowledge that is hidden in our depths. It is full of a powerful potential, and even of a promise. I want to believe in it, but they will be quick to accuse me of giving in to an indigenous patriarchy. But after all, I don't care, because I'm decided on optimism and the triumph of revolutionary love.

5. Bertold Brecht, *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, trans. Ralph Mannheim (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1981).

6. Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 14.

7. Ibid., 17.

8. See Enzo Traverso, "Memory: The Civil Religion of the Holocaust," *The End of Jewish Modernity*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Pluto Press, 2016), 113–127.

9. Claude Lanzmann, preface to Carles Torner, *Shoah, une pédagogie de la mémoire* (Paris: Éditions de l'Atelier, 2001), 130. Translation mine.

10. Rosa Luxembourg, *The Letters of Rosa Luxembourg*, eds. Georg Adler, Peter Hudis, and Annelies Laschitza, trans. George Shriver (London: Verso, 2011), 376. Quoted in Traverso, *The End of Jewish Modernity*, 32.

11. Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Vomito Blanco: le sionisme et la conscience malheureuse* (Paris: Union générale d'édition, 1974), 7, 23, 47. Translation mine.

12. Mahmoud Darwich, *Pourquoi as-tu laissé le cheval à sa solitude?* (Paris: Actes Sud, 1996), 27–8. Translation mine.

13. A Jewish socialist movement created at the end of the 19th century in Poland and which opposes Zionism.

14. See Youssef Boussoumah's "Le sionisme expliqué à nos frères et à nos sœurs," Jun 2, 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xn2DFVj9Xc0.

15. Dieudonné, *Foxtrot*, 2012.

4. We, Indigenous Women

1. Translator's note: *beurette* is French slang for French woman whose family is originally North African (female version of the term "beur," which is verlan—ie: an inversion of syllables—for Arab)

2. I am a wall and the son of the people is a string.

3. I am a string and the son of the people is a wall.

4. Translator's note: *bwana* Arabic slang for boss (often used pejoratively).

5. Farida Belghoul, *Georgette!: Roman* (Paris: Éditions Bernard Barrault, 1986), 45–47. Translation mine.

6. Translator's note: Arabic term derived from the French word for workers, "les ouvriers" (which became "zouvriers"). Often used to refer to bachelors who came to work in Europe.

7. Translator's note: Ni Putes Ni Soumises is a French feminist movement and organization founded in 2003. See http://www.npns.fr/

8. Translator's note: *banlieusard* used to refer to someone living in the suburbs of a major city, especially Paris.

9. Translator's note: Dominique Strauss-Kahn.

10. Figures of reformism in Islam.

11. North African dialect used to refer to an Arab in a self-deprecating and humorous register.

12. Assata Shakur and Joanne Chesimard, "Women in Prison: How We Are," *The Black Scholar* (1978): 14.

13. See Tithi Bhattacharya, "Explaining gender violence in the neoliberal era," trans. Félix Boggio Éwanjé-Épée and Stella Magliani-Belkacem, *International Socialist Review* 91 (2013–2014). http://isreview.org/issue/91/explaining-gender-violence-neoliberal-era. Originally published as "Comprendre la violence sexiste à l'ère du néolibéralisme," *Revue Période*, http://revueperiode.net/comprendre-la-violence-sexiste-a-lere-du-neoliberalisme.

14. European feminism is of course plural. There are statist, liberal, neoliberal, imperialist or, on the contrary, radically, anti-liberal, anti-imperialist, and antiracist feminisms. Here, its dominant version is discussed.

15. Domenico Losurdo, *Le Péché originel du XXe siècle* (Brussels: Aden, 2007), 19, 21. Translation mine.

16. James Baldwin and Audre Lorde, "Revolutionary Hope: A Conversation Between James Baldwin and Audre Lorde," *Essence Magazine*, 1984, http://sonofbaldwin.tumblr.com/post/72976016835/triggerwarning-ableist-speech-sexismrevolutionary. All subsequent citations from Baldwin and Lorde are from this conversation.

17. See Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

18. Paola Bacchetta, "Réflexions sur les alliances feministes transnationales," in *Le Sexe de la mondialisation. Genre, class, race et nouvelle division du travail*, eds. Jules Falquet et al. (Paris: Les Presses de Sciences Po, 2010), 264–265.

19. Gordon Braxton, "This Sexual Assault Victim Didn't Report Her Rape Because She Wanted to Protect Me," *Huffington Post*, June 10, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/gordon-braxton/this-sexual-assault-victi_b_5125310.html?comm_ref=false&src=sp&utm_hp_ref=fb.

20. On the notion of sacrifice, see Houria Bouteldja, "Universalisme gay, homoracialisme, et 'mariage pour tous'" ["Gay Universalism, Homoracialism, and 'Marriage for All'"], *Parti des indigènes de la Républiques*, February 12, 2013, http://indigenes-republique.fr/universalisme-gay-homoracialisme-et-mariage-pour-tous-2/

5. We, Indigenous people

1. Translator's note: a *fellah* is a farmer or agricultural laborer in the Middle East and North Africa.

2. Translator's note: a *douar* is an Arabian village consisting typically of a group of tents or huts that encircle an open space.

3. El Ghalia, "Ya tayyra tiri biya," translation mine.

I Cut My Black Black Hair

Taboo

law

custom turn

Inside

outside

beside me I'm not

Inside me shame

Outside me work

My left side love

. . . . . .

I'm day

light

loony

breeze-borne

Good morning wind swaying the apricot tree

Good morning reborn one set free

Now I wonder at a pin's round head

That some weigh out as a lifetime

Forth and back from my black black hair I cut myself free

5. All slavery is based on housewifisation

Ever since the hierarchical order's enormous leap forward, sexism has been the basic ideology of power. It is closely linked to class division and the wielding of power. Woman's authority is not based on surplus product; on the contrary, it stems from fertility and productivity, and strengthens social existence. Strongly influenced by emotional intelligence, she is tightly bound to communal existence. The fact that woman does not have a visible place in the power wars based on surplus product is due to this position of hers in social existence.

We need to point out a characteristic that has become institutionalised within civilisational societies, namely society's being prone to power relations. Just as housewifisation was needed to recreate woman, society needed to be prepared in order for power to secure its own existence. Housewifisation is the oldest form of slavery. The strong man and his entourage defeated the mother-woman and all aspects of her cult through long and comprehensive struggles. Housewifisation became institutionalised when the sexist society became dominant. Gender discrimination is not a notion restricted to the power relations between woman and man. It defines the power relations that have been spread to all social levels. It is indicative of the state power that has reached its maximum capacity with modernity.

Gender discrimination has had a twofold destructive effect on society. Firstly, it has opened society to slavery; secondly, all other forms of enslavement have been implemented on the

basis of housewifisation. Housewifisation does not only aim to recreate an individual as a sex object; it is not a result of a biological characteristic. Housewifisation is an intrinsically social process and targets the whole of society. Slavery, subjugation, subjection to insults, weeping, habitual lying, unassertiveness and flaunting oneself are all recognised aspects of housewifisation and must be rejected by the freedom-morality. It is the foundation of a degraded society and the true foundation of slavery. It is the institutional foundation upon which the oldest and all subsequent types of slavery and immorality were implemented. Civilisational society reflects this foundation in all social categories. If the system is to function, society in its entirety must be subjected to housewifisation. Power is synonymous to masculinity. Thus, society's subjection to housewifisation is inevitable, because power does not recognise the principles of freedom and equality. If it did, it could not exist. Power and sexism in society share the same essence.

Another important point we have to mention is dependence and oppression of the youth established by the experienced elderly man in a hierarchical society. While experience strengthens the elderly man, age renders him weak and powerless. This compels the elderly to enlist the youth, which is done by winning their minds. Patriarchy is strengthened tremendously by these means. The physical power of the youth enables them to do whatever they please. This dependency of the youth has been continuously perpetuated and deepened. Superiority of experience and ideology cannot easily be broken. The youth (and even the children) are subjugated to the same strategies and tactics, ideological and political propaganda, and oppressive systems as the woman – adolescence, like femininity, is not a physical but a social fact.

This must be well understood: It is not coincidence that the

first powerful authority that was established was authority over woman. Woman represents the power of the organic, natural and egalitarian society which has not experienced oppressive and exploitative relations. Patriarchy could not have been victorious if she was not defeated; moreover, the transition to the institution of the state could not have been made. Breaking the power of the mother-woman thus was of strategic significance. No wonder that it was such an arduous process.

Without analysing the process through which woman was socially overcome, one cannot properly understand the fundamental characteristics of the consequent male-dominant social culture. Even awareness of the societal establishment of masculinity will be impossible. Without understanding how masculinity was socially formed, one cannot analyse the institution of state and therefore will not be able to accurately define the war and power culture related to statehood. I stress this issue because we need to truly expose the macabre godlike personalities, which developed as a result of all later class divisions, and all the different types of exploitation and murder they have done. The social subjugation of woman was the vilest counter-revolution ever carried out.

Power has reached its full capacity in the form of the nation-state. It derives its strength mainly from the sexism it spreads and intensifies by the integration of women into the labour force as well as through nationalism and militarism. Sexism, just as nationalism, is an ideology through which power is generated and nation-states are built. Sexism is not a function of biological differences. To the dominant male, the female is an object to be used for the realisation of his ambitions. In the same vein, when the housewifisation of woman was done, he started the process of turning males into slaves; subsequently the two forms of slavery have become intertwined.

In short, the campaigns for excluding women and for manu-

facturing reverence for the conquering, warrior male authority structure were tightly interwoven. The state as an institution was invented by males and wars of plunder and pillages were almost its sole mode of production. Woman's societal influence based on production was replaced by man's societal influence based on war and pillage. There is a close link between woman's captivity and the warrior societal culture. War does not produce, it seizes and plunders. Although force can be decisive for social progress under certain unique conditions (e.g., through resistance to occupation, invasion and colonialism the way to freedom is paved), but more often than not it is destructive and negative.

The culture of violence that has become internalised within society is fed by war. The sword of war wielded in state warfare and the hand of the man within the family, are symbols of hegemony. The entire classed society, from its upper layers to its lower layers, is clamped between the sword and the hand.

This is something that I have always tried to understand: How is it possible that the power held by the woman fell into the hands of the man, who is really not very productive and creative. The answer lies of course in the role force played. When the economy too was taken from the woman, atrocious captivity was inevitable.

5

A Women's Revolution

> "This may be the first time in history that women have played such an active role in organizing a revolution. They fight on the fronts, they serve as commanders, and they participate in production. There's no place in Rojava where women are not to be seen. They're everywhere and part of everything."[1]

In the latter half of 2014, the battles for Şengal [*see* 8.9] and Kobanî [*see* 14.2] shined a spotlight on something the West had thought impossible: a Middle Eastern society with women at its center. The region is otherwise universally considered to be patriarchal and regressive, but the resistance in Kobanî in particular has radically transformed the image of Kurdish women.

Now Kurdish women—like Meysa Abdo, the commander of the Kobanî front, and Asya Abdullah, the PYD co-chief—are lauded for behaving with determination and self-confidence. Even the bourgeois newspaper *Die Welt* observed that "the Kurds, men and women equally, have become an earnest secular actor in the Middle East, and as a result, enormous progress in civil society has become possible."[2] Women's magazines like *Elle* and *Marie Claire* run multi-page reports on the YPJ,[3] while a well-known Australian TV network broadcasts a documentary called *Female State*;[4] chain stores like H&M and the fashion magazine *Madame* display models in clothing adapted from the uniforms of armed fighters in the PKK and the YPJ. A 40-year-long conflict has all at once become conspicuous on the world stage and even appears to be chic. But what lies behind those images?

Women participated in the social uprisings of the recent Arab Spring, but in most of the countries that achieved a regime or government change, women did not go on to have a share in the new order: indeed, as Islamist organizations gained partial or full political power, women were plunged into situations even more hopeless than before. A 2013 study of the role of women in the Arab Spring in Egypt, Morocco, Yemen, and the Palestinian areas found that the political groups that held power after the uprisings surpassed the previous ones in conservatism and patriarchalism.[5] Only Tunisia had a development that varied from this pattern.

5.1 Rojava Women

Kurdish women in Rojava were and still are oppressed in multifarious ways. As Kurds, they were denied basic rights, in many cases even citizenship; and as women they were trapped in patriarchal domination. In traditional society, a man's "honor" in relation to his family manifested itself in the "purity" of his wife. As in much of the Middle East, Kurdish women and girls were usually not permitted to learn a trade or become economically independent. Since jobs were few in the Kurdish north of Syria, the men often went to work in Arab cities, but for women that was out of the question. Marriage was the only life open to them, and they married young, even becoming the second or third wives of much older men. Even girls who attended university usually grew up to be economically dependent on husbands or fathers; only a few found work in health or education. Domestic violence was and still is widespread. And women were excluded from public life.

A 49-year-old representative of TEV-DEM told us that her parents had coerced her into marriage because they were afraid she would join the PKK guerrilla force. In 2007, she was one of the first women in Syrian-occupied Kurdistan to obtain a divorce. "Of course patriarchy prevailed here as well," Evîn, a Kurdish woman fighter, recalled to an interviewer, "and gender equality was something that could not even be whispered about."

In the Middle East, women who have been raped are commonly abandoned by their families, sometimes even murdered in "honor" killings. Men who experience economic, political, and sexual oppression soon learn to compensate for it psychologically by committing acts of violence on their family members. Taking out one's resentments on one's family is less risky than challenging oppressors. Additionally, society reinforces men's assumption that their "honor" depends on their ability to control women and children. This phenomenon is widespread, not only in the Islamic world.[6]

Even though Syrian Kurdish women were socially disadvantaged in relation to men, however, thousands of them participated in grass-roots organizing in the 1980s and 1990s. PKK ideology holds that the liberation of society is impossible without the liberation of women, so the movement offered them a valued place and an education. "You mustn't forget, the head of the PKK lived here for twenty years," we were often told on our May 2014 visit. "His work shaped the way we think." In retrospect, 15 years after the departure of Abdullah Öcalan, his philosophy and methods, and especially his efforts to empower women, seem foundational for the new society and the mainspring of the revolution. Öcalan's influence "was immense," said Evîn. "In Rojava at that time, it was mainly the women who supported the movement."[7]

The Kurdish women's movement seeks to overcome the alienation of Kurdish women—that is, the colonialist disparagement of their own culture. It seeks to ensure that they take responsibility for their own lives and become capable of making their own decisions. They discuss ways the patriarchal system of domination maintains its power by dividing and isolating women from one another. These women become determined to carry out a struggle for their liberation and that of all women. A further principle is to create a new aesthetic, to define ideal values that contrast with the materialistic culture of patriarchy, to find women's own forms of expression, and to reconfigure art and culture from a women's perspective.[8]

In the 1990s, the PKK encouraged and educated thousands of women in this way, creating spaces where women could participate. Women went from house to house, knocking on doors, to try to convince the women at home to join the movement. They did regular educational work and held women's assemblies. And many women from Rojava, like Evîn, went to North Kurdistan to join the PKK women's army, the YAJK [*see* 3.1].

5.2 Women in the Revolution

In Rojava, the idea gained acceptance that women would be the spearhead of the revolution. They played a prominent role in the preliminary organizing. Between 2004 and 2012, as Hanife Hisên explains, "only women could function politically … They organized at the grass-roots, did educational work, and held congresses. The men who organized would get arrested, so the organizing work fell to the women."

"There were 60-year-old women who had been active in the freedom struggle for 30 years," says Ilham Ahmed. "Even if they couldn't read or write, they knew the philosophy of the movement and could share it as well as their own knowledge." But most *could* read and write. In Syria, as of 2011, more than 90 percent of children attended elementary school, and more than two-thirds continued their education further.

And the fact that women's organizing was considered strategic was also decisive. According to PKK ideology, patriarchy, a system that justifies the exploitation of nature and society, can be overthrown only by creating a new society that rests on non-patriarchal principles of communality, ecological economy, and grass-roots democracy.

Once the revolution began, women arrived from other parts of Kurdistan to support it, including many who had spent decades fighting with YJA Star. They brought their fighting and organizing skills, as well as their theoretical and practical experience with Democratic Autonomy. Öcalan "described the organizing model in detail, and we were very familiar with the books," said Amara, a women's movement

activist in Dêrîk. “Now we just had to implement it.”

5.3 Kongreya Star—Kongreya Star a Rojavaye Kurdistanê

Yekîtiya Star (the Star Union), Rojava’s umbrella women’s movement, was founded in 2005. *Star* refers to the ancient Mesopotamian goddess Ishtar, and nowadays the name also refers to celestial stars. In February 2016 at its Sixth Congress, it was renamed Kongreya (Congress) Star, in accordance with the Kurdish women’s movement as a whole, which changed its name in February 2015 to Kongreya Jinen Azad (Congress of Free Women).

Under the Ba’ath regime, Yekîtiya Star activists were arrested and tortured. Today, all women in West Kurdistan who are involved in TEV-DEM’s social, political, and military work are also members of Kongreya Star. It’s basic to the Kurdish women’s movement to build women’s institutions in every area, so that women can disengage intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually from the authority and violence of patriarchal domination.

Kongreya Star in the Communes

Hilelî is a relatively poor neighborhood in Qamişlo, but support for the council system is very strong there. Şirîn Ibrahim Ömer, a 45-year-old woman in Hilelî, told us about the women’s work. “We are sixty active women in the commune. Once a week we do educational work, we read books together and discuss them.”

Figure 5.1 A Kongreya Star assembly, Dêrîk

In building Yekîtiya Star, explains Şirîn, the primary goal was to educate the whole society politically.

Political education is still the core of their work: “Twice a month we visit women in the neighborhood and explain the agenda of the revolution.” Their goal is to visit every woman in Hilelî at home, regardless of whether she is part of the Kurdish movement. “We even go to [women of] the KDP,” she says. “Many women still have the mentality of the state—they don’t see themselves as people who can function politically. They have lots of kids, and they have conflicts at home.

“Before the revolution,” Şirîn says, “many women married young, in girlhood. Now they see that education can give them a better life.” And “once it was normal here for people to have the television on 24 hours a day,” she told us, “with lots of Turkish programs in Arabic. But then the electricity was shut off, and that left people’s minds free to think about something else.” As a result of the grass-roots work, she says, “we know everyone in the neighborhood.”

They offer the women a ten-day training on the subject of communes and councils. Once women are connected, they take part in a weekly two-hour educational session. One of the authors had a chance to participate in educational work when Zelal Ceger, of the Yekîtiya Star board, spoke to representatives of the women’s councils in Dêrîk. She made a comprehensive assessment of the current situation, then emphasized the necessity of visiting every family in a commune, not just the families that TEV-DEM had already recruited. That way perhaps the family could be brought into the commune system. “If you aren’t knowledgeable, you can’t work,” says Zelal Ceger. “Women have to educate themselves in order to participate.”

“We want women to become self-reliant,” says Adile, of the Dêrîk women’s center. “We go to the villages too and talk to women there. Many of them don’t dare to speak to us, but afterward, secretly, they make their way to us. We collect a little money, but it’s symbolic, a token amount. And we distribute a newspaper”—*Ronahî*—“which appears once a week, in both Arabic and Kurdish. It’s cheap, so everyone can get a copy. When we get together now, we don’t gossip and chitchat the way we used to. Instead we talk about the political developments and women’s organizing.”

The women’s movement also publishes a newspaper called *Dengê Jiyan*, which carries articles on women’s history and analyses of, say, “the democratic family”; it also publishes news about, for instance, the family law recently passed by the council. Women proposed that law to the Supreme Constitutional Committee; after it was passed, it became binding on everyone in Rojava. As a result, childhood marriage and forced marriage are now forbidden, as is *berdel* and polygamy.[9]

The women’s movement’s values have had a great impact on the new society, as people try to live by them.[10] Legislation and the administration of justice represent only a transitional phase—the goal is an ethical society in which a justice system is superfluous.

For now, the peace committees [*see* 9.2] solve family problems. “If a man hits a woman,” says Adile, “he gets at least a month in jail. Previously women had no rights. But now we even have women’s courts. The *mala jinan* [women’s houses], the Asayîşa Jin [*see* 9.4], and the courts all mutually assist one another. When there are problems between men and women, we document the problems, and we talk to the men. Many times they’ve left their wives. If we can’t solve the problem, such as when a man pays no alimony or child support, then we go to court. And we investigate underage marriages. There is a real marriage market in Turkey. Girls are sold over the Internet.”

The Sara women’s center in Qamişlo investigates and documents cases of domestic violence.[11] Asayîşa Jin can be called in to help the women. And in Hilelî, any man who beats his wife is now socially ostracized, says Şirîn, so wife beating has all but vanished.

Almost every day the media in Rojava report on the creation of new women’s communes, not only in the Kurdish neighborhoods but also in the Arab neighborhoods and villages.[12] These communes send representatives to the assembly of the women’s councils (Meclîs). Remziye Mihemed, the co-chair of the Qamişlo People’s Council, explains that “a society that can’t maximize women’s potential has a great

weakness. We're struggling to make people aware of this fact. Because like it or not, over the years, the regime and the Arab mentality have strongly shaped the thinking of our men. We now have to use everything we've got to try to shake that mentality off. We're trying to ensure that women play a leading role in Qamişlo. Our work is already bearing fruit in the cities. Many families are already encouraging their daughters to get socially involved."[13]

In addition to the communes, the Rojava Revolution has created a system of councils, in villages and districts and neighborhoods [*see* 6.3]. And alongside the mixed councils are women-only councils, established first in Kurdish cities, then in Damascus, Aleppo, Raqqa, and Hesekê, and other cities and villages: "Yekîtiya Star established a women's council in every district in the cantons and also in the Syrian cities with large Kurdish populations, in order to advance the interests of women and to promote a democratic, ecological, gender-liberated society. They are the interconnecting decision-making bodies for all women."[14] Nûha Mahmud, a 35-year-old activist in Qamişlo, explains that innumerable victims of sexual violence have made contact with the women's councils.

5.4 Women in the Three Cantons

Because of Turkey's embargo against Rojava [*see* 12.3], we could not travel to Afrîn or Kobanî. But women's organizing differs among the three cantons, we were told.

In Afrîn, the westernmost canton, women are very self-aware, Ilham Ahmed told us, and "men's influence within the society is very weak. Both within the family and in the society, women have organized a coexistence with men. Children flock to the women. The idea that women should stay home and run the household is very rarely heard in Afrîn." Afrîn women perform heavy agricultural work alongside men and are equally represented in the institutions. They have laid a good foundation for educating and organizing themselves. Many take part in Democratic Autonomy organizations and in the women's councils. One reason for Afrîn's gender equality is the fact that "the clan structures play no special role" there, the fighter Evîn told us, "and society has more petit-bourgeois features."

As a result of the Syrian war, Ahmed told us, people have fled the embattled areas and poured into Afrîn. Among them were organized crime groups, people with no personal connection to Afrîn, who committed attacks on women. Violence against women and prostitution, said Ahmed, "became serious problems. The leadership in Afrîn's democratic self-government tried to raise awareness through education, seminars, projects, and workshops, and do something about these problems."

In Kobanî canton, the influence of the tribes is more persistent, along with their feudal clan structures. As a result, Ilham Ahmed told us, the movement in Kobanî was weak before the revolution. "The tribes are more important than the political parties," she said. "They hold the society together. But unlike other political parties, they were not against the revolution." During the revolution, Kobanî's tribes became more open. Most people sympathized with the liberation. The PYD is popular here—other parties are present, but they have little influence and insignificant support. "The revolution had the biggest influence" in Kobanî, Ahmed told us in May 2014.

Before the revolution, she told us, "it was impossible for women and girls to walk alone in the city. State-employed teachers and officials would sexually assault girls, and the regime tolerated these attacks, so women and girls couldn't move around freely, or organize, or go to work. But the revolution put an end to the sexual attacks, and those responsible were punished, which allowed a positive social climate to emerge. Women in Kobanî could then participate more freely in revolutionary work. And because of their formerly acute oppression, they had enormous revolutionary potential."

Kobanî canton has "communal values that have not been destroyed as in capitalist society," the fighter Evîn pointed out. But the movement's pre-revolutionary weakness in Kobanî meant that it encountered many problems in building Democratic Autonomy. The women, however, brought all their energy to it. At

first, the women were active only in the nine mixed councils in the Kobanî neighborhoods. Then a women's house (*mala jinan*) in Kobanî created the women's council, so that women would be able to make decisions autonomously. In the spring of 2013, 135 women participated in the Kobanî women's council to address local women's issues. All councils observe the 40 percent gender quota and the dual leadership principle [*see* 5.5].[15]

The 2014–15 attack by IS destroyed much that was built in Kobanî. But on October 27, 2015, Kobanî passed a set of women's laws that are binding on everyone in the canton, banning childhood marriage among other things.[16]

5.5 Dual Leadership and the 40 Percent Quota

The principle of dual leadership (*hevserok*) applies everywhere in Rojava. Whether it's in a commune or in a court, everywhere leadership is vested in two people, and one of them must be a woman. As Asya Abdullah, one of the two co-chairs of the PYD, states, "Look at the purported opposition in Syria. You won't find a single woman among them. Ask yourself, what kind of a revolution do they want, in which some parts of society aren't represented? How can they talk about freedom and democracy yet overlook the equality of men and women? How can a society be free when its women aren't free?"[17]

For all mixed-gender institutions, a gender quota applies. That is, in every council, every commission, every leadership position, every court, women must make up at least 40 percent. A hefty proportion of women are participating in Rojava's revolutionary work: in Afrîn, 65 percent of the civil society, political, and military institutions now consist of selforganized women. That includes communal administration, councils, and commissions. In the 44 municipal institutions, 55 percent of the workers are women. In the agricultural sector, it's 56 percent, and in the Kurdish-language institutes and the teachers' union, the proportion of women is 70 percent.[18] In the education sector, the proportion of women among the teachers is even larger: in Kobanî, it's about 80 percent, and in Tirbespî almost 90 percent.[19] Women are founding their own radio stations to address women's issues—in Kobanî ten young women are running such a station.[20]

"We're still a long way from achieving our goals," says Asya Abdullah, co-chair of the PYD. "But we've learned from the failed revolutions in the past. They always said, 'Let's carry the revolution to success, and then we'll give women their rights.' But after the revolution, of course, it didn't happen. We're not repeating that old story in our revolution."[21]

Figure 5.2 Dual leadership: The co-mayors of Serêkaniyê

5.6 Women's Organizations

Women's Education and Research Centers—Navenda Perwerde û Zanist Jinê

In Rojava women have established Women's Education and Research Centers not only in Kurdish cities and villages but also in Arab cities with large Kurdish populations. Since 2011, two women's academies have opened, as well as 26 educational centers.[22] Women bring their family and social dilemmas to these centers and find solutions by talking with other women. The centers also offer courses on computer use, language, sewing, first aid, and on children's health, and culture and art. The women decide for themselves what they need. "We are laying the foundation so that in the future women can decide about women's subjects," says Ilham Ahmed. "A new consciousness and self-awareness is emerging."

The Women's Education and Research Centers double as meeting places for other women's organizations. A representative of the center in Serêkaniyê told us that "through the commune system we get to know every family. We know their economic situations, we know who beats his wife and children." While we were visiting the women's center in Serêkaniyê, we witnessed such an inquiry. Two older Arab women came and asked for help. After marital separations, they were demanding compensation.

The primary task of the Women's Centers is to educate women politically, to encourage them "to investigate reality, then to change reality with new knowledge and new learning, to reconfigure it to achieve a more beautiful life and a free society," says CENÎ, the Kurdish women's office for peace.[23]

Since 2011, Yekîtiya Star has been building academies whose purpose is to strengthen women ideologically. Women in the PKK guerrilla army have developed Jineolojî, or "women's science." (The

Kurdish word *jin* means "woman" and *ologî* derives from the Greek for "knowledge." The word *jin* is also related to the Kurdish concept *jiyan*, which means "life.") According to Jineolojî, knowledge and science are disconnected from society—they are a monopoly controlled by dominant groups, used as a foundation for their power. The goal of Jineolojî is to give women and society access to science and knowledge and to strengthen the connections of science and knowledge to society. Jineolojî also wants to develop the vision of a good life, and the councils are putting it into practice; theory and practice are always in communication.

Dorşîn Akîf, the head of a women's academy in Rimelan, reports that Kurdish women regard Jineolojî as "the culmination of that decades-long experience" of fighting in the guerrilla army. It represents "the kind of knowledge that was stolen from women" and that can be recovered. At the women's academy in Rimelan, she says, students of Jineolojî "are trying to overcome women's nonexistence in history. We try to understand how concepts are produced and reproduced within existing social relations, then we come up with our own understanding. We want to establish a true interpretation of history by looking at the role of women and making women visible in history."[24]

The women's question is no longer limited to legal and political issues—it is empowering women to consider all social problems as their own and as part of their struggle. For example, some women in the Kurdish movement want to find a new aesthetic, to reinvent art and culture from women's perspective, using their own forms of expression.

Young Women's Movement—Tevgera Jinên Ciwan

Doz Kobanî, of the Youth Confederation, says that "the most important part of our work is the women's work. Our chief [Abdullah Öcalan] says correctly that without the freedom of women, society cannot be free. So we especially address young women and do educational work. First we explore the history of civilization and the 5,000-year history of patriarchy. We explain the position of woman in society before patriarchy and what man has done to her in all the eras since. These discussions are very important for us."

On May 16, 2014, one of the authors attended the third conference of Young Revolutionary Women in Cizîrê, held in Rimelan. Around 230 young women from all parts of the canton converged here to assess the work of the previous year and to set new goals for the coming year. They analyzed the role of women in the Middle East in general and rejected traditional role models. They discussed Capitalist Modernity, rejecting its commodification of women's bodies. "As Kurdish women in the Middle East," declared Hanife Hisên in her opening speech, "we oppose these images. If we want to build a democratic, egalitarian society, we have to solve the woman question first. The basis of all oppression is women's subordination, which as a system is tied to Capitalist Modernity."

One of the principal themes of the conference was youth: "We started [the revolution] with young people, and with young people we will achieve success." The women all spoke with great determination and composure. They evaluated the obstacles to their organizing work, such as the persistent attempts of families to prevent young women from political engagement. The attendees resolved to do more work within families. They valued educational work highly. A few pointed to the underage marriages that many girls are still forced to enter. The discussions were frank and animated. The young women elected a 15-member board and resolved to strengthen their ideological and political struggle for women's liberation.

Figure 5.3 Conference of Young Revolutionary Women, May 2014 in Rimelan

Syrian Women's Association—Însyatîfa Jinên Sûriyeyê

Yekîtiya Star laid the foundation in Rojava for collaborations among women of different ethnic groups. In March 2013, the Syrian Women's Association was founded, by women who were Kurds, Arabs, Ezidis, and Syriacs. The association is not part of the council system, but Kurdish, Arab, and Syriac women are working together to write a new democratic constitution for Syria, one that will guarantee the rights of all women and all the peoples.[25] The association has crafted laws and conducted numerous forums on the subject of women's liberation.

At the Dêrîk women's center, Zîhan Davut, head of the Syrian Women's Association, explained that "when the revolution began, we didn't want to have the same negative experiences as in the Arab Spring. We wanted the rights of women to be established legally. Up to that point, individual women here had no rights here at all. We wanted to change that not only in Rojava but in all of Syria. Here it's mostly the women who work and organize … Here in Rojava it's difficult to reach the Arab women, because they don't know their rights. Just to go to a meeting, they have to get permission from their husbands. But we're gradually building contacts with them. Meanwhile we already have lots of Arab women in our organization."

Syriac Women's Association—Huyodo da Nesge Suryoye b'Suria

Later, Zîhan Davut accompanied us to the Syriac Women's Association. "We're beginning to organize," a young Syriac woman there told us, "and our social position has already improved. Some of us were

inspired by Yekîtiya Star and decided to organize an association. Since then more women have joined, especially in Qamişlo."

Domestic violence has long existed in Syriac families just as in Kurdish ones, although it was more taboo. In Syriac society, Zîhan Davut explained to us, a few women worked as doctors and lawyers and led economically independent lives. And once upon a time, another woman explained, Syriac women thought of themselves as more progressive than Kurdish women. Now they realize that Kurdish women, through organizing and discussions, have attained more freedom. Syriac women have been inspired by their example to adopt entirely new roles, such as by joining the Asayîşa Jin.

The revolution, a Syriac woman explained, has led women to exchange ideas and mutually expand each other's understanding. Many Syriacs live in Hesekê, so on October 13, 2013, the first Syriac women's center was opened there. Still, "our society is unfortunately very fragmented, and there are many parties and organizations that compete with one another," lamented one of the women.

Kurdish Women's Press Association (RAJIN)

"To overcome patriarchal hegemony"

"Women should become visible and write their own history": the Rojava's women's movement takes this principle very seriously. In the cantons, women have above-average representation in all media, from radio and TV to news agencies. But they consider it important to also be organized into a union of journalists.

The Kurdish Women's Press Association (RAJIN) was founded in the Qandil Mountains in 2013. In May 2014, the Kurdish women journalists of Rojava held their first conference in Qamişlo, where they founded the Kurdish Women's Press Association of Rojava (RAJIN Rojava). The conference was organized as part of the YJA campaign "Free Woman for the Democratic Nation" and organized around the slogan "A free women's press and a free society, in honor of Gurbetelli Ersöz."

(Ersöz was editor-in-chief of the Kurdish newspaper *Özgür Gündem* in Turkey in the early 1990s. She was arrested on December 10, 1993, and the paper was banned. After six months, she was released, but the proceedings against her continued, and she could no longer find work as a journalist. In 1995, she joined the PKK guerrilla army. On October 7, 1997, she lost her life in an ambush by the KDP.)[26]

At RAJIN Rojava's founding conference in Qamişlo, 70 delegates participated, as well as Yekîtiya Star board members Ilham Ahmed, Zelal Ceger, and Medya Mihemed, not to mention the YPJ press office. The conference agreed that October 7 would be the annual day commemorating women journalists in Kurdistan.

"We're fighting to recover our identity," Medya Mihemed said in the opening speech, "which was historically free but was stolen from us. Kurdish women in the PKK have chosen to struggle for freedom, for a free way of life. We have now taken decisive steps toward creating a free society. Today the press is tied to a patriarchal mentality, because masculine hegemony dominates in all media. But the struggle is slowly breaking that down … The struggle waged by women of the press will become the basis for the free press."

The conference resolved that RAJIN members would take part in a political and organizational educational effort to enlighten the male members of the press union (Azad-YRA) about gender consciousness and everyday use of language. It further resolved that women should be integrated into the technical and professional aspects of the media, that a women's radio station in Rojava would be set up to broadcast, and that a women's media academy should be opened.

Foundation of Free Women in Rojava—Weqfa Jina Azad a Rojava

In 2014, the Foundation of Free Women was founded in Qamişlo, with the goal of improving women's lives and supporting women's organizing. As a first step, they circulated a questionnaire among women in Qamişlo. Their findings: 73 percent of those surveyed live in small families. Ninety-two percent said they needed education to improve their economic situation. Sixty percent wished they had childcare. The results made it clear that even before the war and the embargo, institutional violence against women was widespread in Qamişlo.

The foundation develops projects like women's health centers and pre-schools, and it supports the creation of women's cooperatives [*see* 12.5] and women's parks. A women's village is even planned. "Because of the preexisting violence and its increase due to the ongoing war," says the foundation, "women and children in Syria experience traumatic events every day. Such deep-seated social problems require long-term and broad solutions. For all our important projects, money is urgently needed."[27]

5.7 Gender Equality is Also a Men's Issue

Women who attempt to emancipate themselves face considerable difficulties. "A woman who wants to play a part in the revolution," observes Ilham Ahmed, "has to overcome obstacles. Her family will give her trouble, especially the men. When a man comes home from work, he expects to see everything ready for him. His wife is considered his property, so she is to be there for him, to see to his comfort. She's not supposed to leave the house. All the social rules and conventions support a husband in this privileged position, by which he exploits his wife. And many men beat their wives. In many cases, when women tried to become politically active, their husbands gave them a choice: political work, or me.

"Many women, faced with the choice, decide against their husbands. They leave home to become politically active. Once they get to know freedom, they never want to give it up. Many women who reach this point are rethinking their relationships with their husbands, because of their newfound economic independence." In December 2015, a women's delegation from Hamburg was told that 30 of 58 women in the Asayîşa Jin in Dêrîk were divorced in one year: "That forces the men to accept reality, to face the facts, and change themselves. They see that women are getting recognition for their work in the society, and they recognize that they should support them instead of subjugating them."

Osman Kobanî, a member of the people's court of Kobanî, emphasizes the role of the new justice system: "Some men have several wives. Often these men value the wives who bear sons more than those who bear daughters, and they treat [the latter] like second-class people. But the people's court is breaking up that mentality. Most of the cases in which women are involved are divorce suits."[28]

Their many long years of struggle have given Kurdish women self-awareness. They reject women's traditional patriarchal role and adapt to the new role of freedom fighter because they have so much to win and so little to lose. Women by the thousands have become active in urban and village councils.

The rapid transformation of women's role has come to many men almost as a shock. We often heard, "The women here have taken over everything!" But much educational work has also taken place in the mixed institutions, which helps the men come to grips with changing gender roles. Young men too are experiencing new roles: in their military units, they have to perform the same tasks as women, they have to learn to cook, to bake bread and do laundry. Fighting sexism and creating gender equality will be a long and protracted process.

5.8 Radical Islam Versus Women's Emancipation

"These women are defending not only themselves but all Syrian women."

Asya Abdullah

When radical Islamic forces attack in Rojava and South Kurdistan, they are also attacking women—it is

femicide. When jihadists take over cities, they announce it over loudspeakers from the mosques, reports Axîn Amed, a human rights worker.[29] Women abducted by IS are either "given" to IS members or "sold" in markets like commodities. Eyewitnesses have reported cases of women who refused to submit whose breasts were cut off and their bodies mutilated.[30]

IS considers it *halal*, permitted, to rape women who don't share their ideology, even girls. On June 18, 2014, in Mosul, the ISIS mufti decreed: "Wives and daughters of soldiers and politicians who work on behalf of Maliki are *halal* for members."[31] Rape and sexual violence are a deliberate, long-standing tool of warfare that expresses absolute contempt for women and disdain for their physical and personal integrity. A rape purports to demonstrate that the woman's male family members have not fulfilled their patriarchal duty to protect her, since in most Middle Eastern societies, a rape destroys the family's "honor" (*namûs*) and a raped woman is considered shameful. The threat of rape is a conscious instrument of war with the goal of provoking revenge and forcing emigration.

According to Asya Abdullah, in the summer of 2013 in Hesekê province, IS "abducted, raped, and murdered a large number of Armenian women. In this region Kurds, Arabs, Christians, Druze, Sunnis, and Alawites had all lived amicably with one another. Peaceful coexistence is itself an object of attack by the [radical Islamic] groups. Today they attack Kurds, but their goal is to eradicate the coexistence of peoples. They have set their sights especially on Kurdish women, because Kurdish women are playing such an active part in the fighting, defending not only themselves but all Syrian women."[32]

In August 2014, IS attacked Ezidi and Christian villages and cities and captured more than 7,000 women. They repeatedly raped them, then sold them at slave markets as chattels; they gave them over to jihadists as war booty or forced them to marry. They sold the children as sex slaves. They pressed cell phones into the hands of enslaved women, so they could call their families and tell them about the atrocities. Some women implored their families to tell the armies to bomb the places where they were being held, because they preferred death to the repeated rapes. "I've been raped thirty times today and it's not even lunchtime," said one woman. "I can't go to the toilet. Please bomb us," she said. "I'm going to kill myself anyway."[33]

The Kurdish women's movement characterizes capitalist patriarchy as "rape culture."[34] The IS is one of the most extreme forms of this supremely exploitative culture. As author Dilar Dirik writes, "Many of the methods and mechanisms of the IS are copies of the dominant nation state-oriented, capitalist, patriarchal world order which reigns everywhere in 2014 in the world. In many ways, the IS is a more extreme version of violence against women all over the world, the world that is considered progressive."[35]

Here are a few of the laws that ISIS decreed on June 26, 2014, in Turkmen villages:

> Women must veil their faces completely.
> Women may not leave their homes without a male escort.
> Women may not go to the markets at all, not even with a male escort.
> If a family has two daughters, one must be given over to IS. A woman whose "husband" dies at the front is "given" to another IS fighter.
> If a woman lives at home for longer than three months without a husband, she must marry a man chosen by IS fighters.

Rojava's woman-centered society is thus the antithesis of IS. Many politically active women in Rojava told us that they wished women would organize everywhere and defend themselves against the horrors committed by the Islamists and struggle for a new role for women.[36]

5.9 Outlook

Not all women participate in Rojava's women's organizations. Women in many places remain economically dependent on their husbands and families. Many have not yet achieved the ability and mentality to determine their own fate. Female students, initially eager to get involved, withdrew in disappointment since they couldn't fulfill their individual dreams; due to the war situation, many aspirations have had to be renounced. Women and men who were privileged under the regime yearn to return to prerevolutionary times. The system of self-government requires a great deal of work, and it is unpaid. After sixty years of dictatorship and Ba'athism, many people expected that a new state would eventually reemerge and that they would be able to withdraw into private life. But Democratic Autonomy demands much engagement.

Figure 5.4 A women's demonstration in Qamişlo

Still, women have taken many steps forward in the liberation of women. The most important has been to organize. When women create strong organizations, they clarify for themselves and each other how to imagine another life, and when they use the organization's force to put their imaginings into practice, they have a lever to wield against any future structural oppression. And as Ilham Ahmed points out, now that they have made such considerable sacrifices, they are not going to back down.

The revolution in Rojava has rendered Abdullah Öcalan's paradigm of a women-liberated society—beyond state, power, and violence—more tangible for the Kurdish community. An activist on the women's

council in Cologne explains, “For thirty years I’ve been in the PKK movement, and I’ve read all of Öcalan’s books, but deep inside I always thought, ‘We should struggle for a Kurdish state.’ Only with the Rojava Revolution, with the women’s communes with Arabs and Syriacs, have I really understood what it means to create a woman-centered society without the state.”

The Rojava Revolution, with its vanguard of women activists, could catalyze a new image of woman in the entire Middle East. Ezidi women in Şengal and Arab women are already starting to organize according to this model. In Europe, too, these developments have unleashed great enthusiasm. Emulating the academy system in Rojava, feminists in Germany are beginning to discover this educational work.[37]

The Kurdish women’s movement in Rojava is not organizationally part of the Komalên Jinên Kurdistan (KJK) system, but it’s ideologically related—that is, it shares the KJK’s goals.[38] Among those goals are “to fulfill the women’s revolution that began in Kurdistan and to extend it into the Middle East as a whole, and to strive for a worldwide women’s revolution.” These are no small goals. Back in 1993, when Kurdish women decided to establish a women’s army, only a few really believed such a thing was possible. Today, as a regular army, they are successfully doing battle with IS.

Notes

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2. “Der kurdische Widerstand verkörpert das Gute,” *Die Welt*, October 18, 2014.
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4. “Women of the YPJ/Female State,” *60 Minutes Australia*, September 28, 2014, http://bit.ly/1IsUpvK.
5. Care Deutschland-Luxemburg E.V., *Arabischer Frühling oder arabischer Herbst für Frauen? CARE-Bericht zur Rolle von Frauen nach den Aufständen im Mittleren Osten und Nordafrika*, September 12, 2013, http://bit.ly/1MSa4k5.
6. Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society* (Cambridge, MA, 1975).
7. Evîn was interviewed by a German internationalist in the summer of 2013 in South Kurdistan. Her interview is unpublished.
8. Ceni Fokus Nr. 1, *Der Hohe Frauenrat Koma Jinên Bilind* (Düsseldorf, 2011).
9. *Berdel* is a traditional marriage practice in which a family gives a woman to another family either in exchange for another woman or as a settlement for a family feud. The patriarchal family and feudal institutions of property and tribe facilitate *berdel*.
10. “Malbata Demokratik û hevratiya azad” [The Democratic Family and the Free Life Together], in *Xweseriyademokratik a jin*[Democratic Autonomy of Women] (Dengê Jiyan, 2013).
11. “Li Rojava civak bi rengê jinan të avakirin,” Azadiya Welat, n.d., http://bit.ly/1OZq6fl.
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14. Rosa Zilan, “Frauen als treibende Kraft,” *Civaka Azad*, n.d., http://bit.ly/1Fs5ER8.
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17. Asya Abdullah, interview by Pinar Öğünç, “Ohne die Freiheit der Frau keine Demokratie,” *Radikal*, August 22, 2013, http://bit.ly/1QovIQD.
18. “Women in Efrin,” *Ajansa Nûçeyan a Firatê* (hereafter *ANF*), September 25, 2013, http://bit.ly/1KjMLzi.
19. *Hawar News*, October 3 and 26, 2013.
20. *Hawar News*, September 21, 2013.
21. Asya Abdullah, interview by Pinar Öğünç, “Ohne die Freiheit der Frau keine Demokratie,” *Radikal*, August 22, 2013, http://bit.ly/1QovIQD.
22. “Die Revolution in Westkurdistan—Teil 8,” *Civaka Azad*, n.d., http://bit.ly/1PpKLr3.
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25. “Information Dossier: Zu den Massakern in Westkurdistan (Rojava),” CENÎ, ca. 2013, http://bit.ly/1Ajhooy.
26. “Gurbetelli Ersöz—Ein Leben für Gerechtigkeit,” http://bit.ly/1EiQclf.
27. Jina Azad Bingeha Civaka Azade, http://bit.ly/28Rp9co.
28. “Revolution in Westkurdistan—Teil 5,” *Civaka Azad*, n.d., http://bit.ly/1JslHhp.
29. Axîn Amed, of Komela Mafen Mirovan (Human Rights Association), conversation with Michael Knapp, October 11, 2013.
30. CENÎ, Informationsdossier zum IS.
31. *Halal* (Arabic) in the sense of “permitted” by Islamic law.
32. Abdullah, interview by Öğünç.
33. “‘I’ve been raped 30 times and it’s not even lunchtime’: Desperate Plight of Yazidi Woman Who Begged West to Bomb Her Brothel

After ISIS Miltiants Sold Her into Slavery," *Daily Mail Online*, October 21, 2014, http://dailym.ai/1RKHMhx.

34. The Kurdish women's movement considers land grabs, the deployment of armies, and the exploitation of soil and people to be part of rape culture. See Anja Flach, "Jineolojî—Radikales Denken aus Frauensicht: Bericht von der ersten europäischen Jineolojî-Konferenz in Köln," *Kurdistan Report*, no. 173 (May–June 2014): 43–50, http://bit.ly/1URHYfJ.
35. Dilar Dirik, "Die kurdische Frauenbewegung und der Islamische Staat: Zwei gegensätzliche System in Kobanê," *Kurdistan Report*, no. 176 (November– December 2014): 20–21, http://bit.ly/1M4ES5d.
36. "How Refugees Resist and Why They Don't Need Your Help," *Karawane*, June 22, 2016, http://bit.ly/28TCSeR.
37. Anja Flach, "Ansätze für eine feministische Neuorganisierung in der BRD, Feministische Akademien," *Kurdistan Report*, no. 182 (December 2015), http://bit.ly/1NN6r37.
38. "About Us," Komalên Jinên Kurdistan, http://bit.ly/1lWFI9y. The KJK is the umbrella organization of all women's organizations that support the Democratic Confederalism and women's liberation ideology. The KJK was founded in 2014 as the successor organization of the KJB (Koma Jinên Bilind, or Supreme Women's Council). On ideological, organizational, and political questions and question of the legitimate self-defense of the women's movement that are of strategic importance, the KJK makes decisions and implements them collectively. Each component organization works directly with its statutory identity and in coordination with the other component organizations. See Gönül Kaya, "Eine neue Etappe in der Kurdistan-Frauenfreiheitsbewegung," *Kurdistan Report*, no. 179 (May-June 2015), http://bit.ly/1NP7nTt.

Alone

Lying, thinking
Last night
How to find my soul a home
Where water is not thirsty
And bread loaf is not stone
I came up with one thing
And I don't believe I'm wrong
That nobody,
But nobody
Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.

There are some millionaires
With money they can't use
Their wives run round like banshees
Their children sing the blues
They've got expensive doctors
To cure their hearts of stone.
But nobody
No, nobody
Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.

Now if you listen closely
I'll tell you what I know
Storm clouds are gathering
The wind is gonna blow
The race of man is suffering
And I can hear the moan,
'Cause nobody,
But nobody
Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.

ONE

Lecture One
The Body, Capitalism, and the Reproduction of Labor Power

There is no doubt that the body is today at the center of political, disciplinary, and scientific discourse, with the attempt in every field to redefine its main qualities and possibilities. It is the sphinx to be interrogated and acted upon on the path toward social and individual change. Nevertheless, it is nearly impossible to articulate a coherent view of the body on the basis of the theories most accredited in the intellectual and political arena. On the one hand, we have the most extreme forms of biological determinism, with the assumption of the DNA as the *deus absconditus* (hidden god) presumably determining, behind our backs, our physiological and psychological life. On the other, we have (feminist, trans) theories encouraging us to discard all "biological" factors in favor of performative or textual representations of the body and to embrace, as constitutive of our being, our growing assimilation with the world of machines.

A common trend, however, is the absence of a standpoint from which to identify the social forces that are affecting our bodies. With an almost religious obsession, biologists circumscribe the area of significant activity to a microscopic world of molecules, whose constitution is as mysterious as that of the original sin. As far as biologists are concerned, we come into this world already tainted by, predisposed to, predestined to, or spared from disease, for all is in the DNA an unknown god has

allotted to us. As for the discursive/performative theories of the body, they too are silent concerning the social ground from which ideas about the body and body practices are generated. There is perhaps the fear that searching for a unitary cause may blind us to the diverse ways in which our bodies articulate our identities and relations to power. There is also a tendency, recuperated from Foucault, to investigate the "effects" of the powers acting on our bodies rather than their sources. Yet without a reconstruction of the field of forces in which they move, our bodies must remain unintelligible or elicit mystifying views of their operations. How, for instance, can we envisage "going beyond the binary" without an understanding of its economic, political, and social utility within particular systems of exploitation, and, on the other hand, an understanding of the struggles by which gender identities are continuously transformed? How to speak of our "performance" of gender, race, and age without a recognition of the compulsion generated by specific forms of exploitation and punishment?

We must identify the world of antagonistic policies and power relations by which our bodies are constituted and rethink the struggles that have taken place in opposition to the "norm" if we are to devise strategies for change.

This is the work I have undertaken in *Caliban and the Witch* (2004), where I have examined how the transition to capitalism changed the concept and treatment of "the body,"[1] arguing that one of capitalism's main projects has been the *transformation of our bodies into work-machines.* This means that the need to maximize the exploitation of living labor, also through the creation of differentiated forms of work and coercion, has been the factor that more than any other has shaped our bodies in capitalist society. This approach has consciously contrasted with Foucault's,[2] which roots the disciplinary regimes to which the body was subjected at the beginning of the "modern era" in the workings of a metaphysical "Power" not better identified in its purposes and objectives.[3]

In contrast to Foucault, I have also argued that we do not have one but multiple histories of the body, that is, multiple histories of how the mechanization of the body was articulated, for the racial, sexual, and generational hierarchies that capitalism has constructed from its inception rule out the possibility of a universal standpoint. Thus the history of "the body" must be told by weaving together the histories of those who were enslaved, colonized, or turned into waged workers or unpaid housewives and the histories of the children, keeping in mind that these classifications are not mutually exclusive and that our subjection to "interlocking systems of domination" always produces a new reality.[4] I would add that we also need a history of capitalism written from the viewpoint of the animal world and of course the lands, the seas, and the forests.

We need to look at "the body" from all these viewpoints to grasp the depth of the war that capitalism has waged against human beings and "nature" and to devise strategies capable of ending such destruction. To speak of a war is not to assume an original wholeness or propose an idealized view of "nature." It is to highlight the state of emergency in which we currently live and to question, in an age that promotes remaking our bodies as a path to social empowerment and self-determination, the benefits that we may derive from policies and technologies that are not controlled from below. Indeed, before we celebrate our becoming cyborgs, we should reflect on the social consequences of the mechanization process that we have already undergone.[5] It is naive, in fact, to imagine that our symbiosis with machines necessarily results in an extension of our powers and ignore the constraints that technologies place on our lives and their increasing use as a means of social control as well as the ecological cost of their production.[6]

Capitalism has treated our bodies as work-machines because it is the social system that most systematically has made of human labor the essence of the accumulation of wealth and has most needed to maximize its exploitation. It

has accomplished this in different ways: with the imposition of more intense and uniform forms of labor as well as multiple disciplinary regimes and institutions and with terror and rituals of degradation. Exemplary were those that in the seventeenth century were imposed on the inmates of the Dutch workhouses, who were forced to pulverize blocks of wood with the most backward and backbreaking method, for no useful purpose but to be taught to obey external orders and to experience in every fiber of their bodies their impotence and subjection.[7]

Another example of the debasement rituals employed to break people's will to resistance were those imposed, since the turn of the twentieth century, by doctors in South Africa, on Africans destined to work in the gold mines (Butchart 1998, 92–110). Under the guise of "heat tolerance tests" or "selection procedures," African workers were ordered to strip naked, line up, and shovel rocks and then submit to radiographic examinations or to measurements by tape and weighing scales, all under the gaze of medical examiners, who often remained invisible to those thus tested (94, 97, 100). The goal of the exercise was supposedly to demonstrate to future workers the sovereign power of the mining industry and to initiate Africans to a life in which they would be "deprived of any human dignity" (94).

In the same time period, in Europe and the US, Taylorism's time and motion studies—later incorporated into the construction of the assembly line—turned the mechanization of the workers' bodies into a scientific project, through the fragmentation and atomization of tasks, the elimination of any decisional element from the work process, and, above all, the stripping of the work itself from any knowledge and motivational factor.[8] Automatism, however, has also been the product of a work life of infinite repetition, a life of "No Exit,"[9] like the nine-to-five in a factory or office, where even the holiday breaks become mechanized and routine, due to their time constraints and predictability.

Foucault was right, however: the "repressive hypothesis" is not sufficient to explain the history of the body in capitalism.[10] As important as what was repressed have been the "capacities" that were developed. In *Principles of Economics* (1890), the British economist Alfred Marshall celebrated the capacities that capitalist discipline has produced in the industrial workforce, declaring that few populations in the world were capable of what European workers at the time could do. He praised industrial workers' "general ability" to keep working continuously, for hours, on the same task, to remember everything, to remember, while doing a task, what the next one should be, to work with instruments without breaking them, without wasting time, to be careful in handling expensive machinery and steady even doing the most monotonous tasks. These, he argued, were unique skills that few people worldwide possessed, demonstrating, in his view, that even work that appears unskilled is actually highly skilled (Marshall [1890] 1990, 172).

Marshall would not say how such wonderful, machine-like workers were created. He did not say that people had to be separated from the land and terrorized with exemplary tortures and executions. Vagabonds had their ears cut. Prostitutes were subjected to "waterboarding," the same type of torture to which the CIA and US Special Forces subject those they accuse of "terrorism." Tied to a chair, women suspected of improper behavior were plunged into ponds and rivers to the point of near suffocation. Slaves were whipped until the flesh was torn from their bones and were burned, mutilated, left under a blazing sun until their bodies putrefied.

As I have argued in *Caliban and the Witch*, with the development of capitalism not only were communal fields "enclosed," so was the body. But this process has differed for men and women, in the same way as it has differed for those who were destined to be enslaved and those who were subjected to other forms of coerced labor, waged work included.

Women, in capitalist development, have suffered a double process of mechanization. Besides being subjected to the discipline of work, paid and unpaid, in plantations, factories, and homes, they have been expropriated from their bodies and turned into sexual objects and breeding machines.

Capitalist accumulation (as Marx recognized) is the accumulation of workers.[11] This was the motivation driving the slave trade, the development of the plantation system and—I have argued—the witch hunts that took place in Europe and the "New World."[12] Through the persecution of "witches," women wishing to control their reproductive capacity were denounced as enemies of children and, in different ways, subjected to a demonization that has continued into the present. In the nineteenth century, for instance, advocates of "free love," like Victoria Woodhull, were branded in the American press as satanic, pictured with devil's wings and all (Poole 2009). Today as well, in several US states, women who go to a clinic to abort have to make their ways through masses of "right-to-lifers" screaming "baby killers" and chasing them, thanks to a ruling by the Supreme Court,[13] as far as the clinic's door.

In no place has the attempt to reduce women's bodies to machines been more systematic, brutal and normalized than in slavery. While exposed to constant sexual assaults and the searing pain of seeing their children sold as slaves, after England banned the slave trade in 1807, enslaved women in the US were forced to procreate to fuel a breeding industry with its center in Virginia.[14] "As the power looms of Lancashire sucked up all the cotton that the South could grow," Ned and Constance Sublette have written, "women's wombs "were not merely the source of local enrichment, but were also suppliers in a global system of agricultural input, enslaved industrial input, and financial expansion" (Sublette and Sublette 2016, 414). Thomas Jefferson approved, going to great lengths to have the US Congress limit the importation of slaves from Africa in order to protect the prices of the slaves that women

on the Virginian plantations would procreate. "I consider," he wrote, "a woman who brings a child every two years more profitable than the best man on the farm. What she produces is an addition to the capital, while his labors disappear in mere consumption" (416).

Although in the history of the US no group of women, outside of slavery, has been directly compelled to have children, with the criminalization of abortion, involuntary procreation and state control of the female body have been institutionalized. The advent of the birth control pill has not decisively altered this situation. Even in countries where abortion has been legalized, restrictions have been introduced that make access difficult for many women.[15] This is because procreation has an economic value that in no way is diminished on account of capital's increased technological power. It is a mistake, in fact, to assume that the interest of the capitalist class in the control over women's reproductive capacity may be diminishing on account of its ability to replace workers with machines. Despite its tendency to make workers redundant and create "surplus populations," capital accumulation still requires human labor. Only labor creates value, machines do not. The very growth of technological production, as Danna (2019, 208ff) has recently argued, is made possible by the existence of social inequalities and the intense exploitation of workers in the "Third World." What is vanishing today is the compensation for work that in the past was waged, not the work itself. Capitalism needs workers, it also needs consumers and soldiers. Thus, the actual size of the population is still a matter of great political importance. This is why—as Jenny Brown has shown in her *Birth Strike* (2018)—restrictions are placed on abortion. So important is for the capitalist class to control women's bodies that, as we have seen, even in the US, where in the 1970s abortion was legalized, attempts to reverse this decision continue to this day. In other countries, Italy for instance, the loophole is conceding to doctors the possibility of

becoming "conscientious objectors," with the result that many women cannot abort in the localities where they live.

However, control over women's bodies has never been a purely quantitative matter. Always, state and capital have tried to determine who is allowed to reproduce and who is not. This is why we simultaneously have restrictions on the right to abort and the criminalization of pregnancy,[16] in the case of women who are expected to generate "troublemakers." It is no accident, for instance, if from the 1970s to the 1990s, as new generations of Africans, Indians, and other decolonized subjects were coming to political age, demanding a restitution of the wealth that Europeans had robbed from their countries, a massive campaign to contain what was defined as a "population explosion" was mounted throughout the former colonial world (Hartmann 1995, 189–91), with the promotion of sterilization and contraceptives, like Depo Provera, Norplant, IUDs that, once implanted, women could not control.[17] Through the sterilization of women in the former colonial world, international capital has attempted to contain a worldwide struggle for reparations; in the same way that, in the US, successive governments have tried to block black people's liberation struggle through the mass incarceration of millions of young black men and women.

Like every other form of reproduction, procreation too has a clear class character and is racialized. Relatively few women worldwide can today decide whether to have children and the conditions in which to have them. As Dorothy Roberts has so powerfully shown in *Killing the Black Body* ([1997] 2017), while white, affluent women's desire to procreate is now elevated to the rank of an unconditional right, to be guaranteed at all costs, black women, for whom it is more difficult to have some economic security, are ostracized and penalized if they have a child. Yet the discrimination that so many black, migrant, proletarian women encounter on the way to maternity should not be read as a sign that capitalism is no longer interested

in demographic growth. As I previously argued, capitalism cannot dispense with workers. The workerless factory is an ideological sham intended to scare workers into subjection. Were labor to be eliminated from the production process capitalism would probably collapse. Population expansion is by itself a stimulus to growth; thus, no sector of capital can be indifferent to whether women decide to procreate.

This point is forcibly made by the already-quoted *Birth Strike*, where Jenny Brown thoroughly analyses the relation of procreation to every aspect of economic and social life, convincingly demonstrating that politicians today are concerned about the worldwide decline of the birth rate, which she reads as a silent strike. Brown suggests that women should consciously take advantage of this concern to bargain better conditions of living and work. In other words, she suggests that we use our capacity to reproduce *as a tool of political power*.[18] This is a tempting proposition. It is tempting to imagine women openly going on a birth strike, declaring, for instance, that "we won't bring any more children into this world until the conditions that await them are drastically changed." I say "openly" because, as Brown documents it, a broad-based though silent refusal of procreation is already taking place. The worldwide decline of the birth rate, that has peaked in countries like Italy and Germany since the post–World War II period, has been the sign of such a reproduction strike. The birth rate has been declining for some time in the US as well. Women today have fewer children because it means less housework, less dependence on men or a job, because they refuse to see their lives consumed by maternal duties, or have no desire to reproduce themselves and, especially in the US, because they have no access to contraceptive and abortion.[19] It is hard, however, to see how an open strike could be organized. Many of the children born are not planned or wanted. Moreover, in many countries, having a child is for women an insurance policy toward the future. In countries where there is no social security or

pension system, having a child may be the only possibility of survival and the only way that a woman can have access to land or can gain social recognition. Children can also be a source of joy, often the only wealth a woman has. Our task, then, is not to tell women that they should not have children, but to make sure that women can decide whether to have them and to ensure that mothering is not costing us our lives.

The social power that mothering potentially gives women is plausibly the reason why under the guise of fighting infertility and giving women more options, doctors are striving to reproduce life outside the uterus. This is no easy task. Despite much talk of "test-tube babies," "ectogenesis" remains a medical utopia. But in vitro fertilization (IVF), genetic screening, and other reproductive technologies are paving the way to the creation of artificial wombs. Some feminists may approve. In the 1970s feminists like Shulamith Firestone hailed the day when women would be liberated from procreation, which she considered the cause of a history of oppression.[20] But this is a dangerous stand. If capitalism is an unjust, exploitative social system, it is worrisome to think that in the future capitalist planners might be able to produce the kind of human beings that they need. We should not underestimate this danger. Even without gene editing we are already mutants, capable, for instance, of carrying out our daily lives while aware that catastrophic events are occurring all around us, including the destruction of our ecological environment and the slow death of the many people now living on our streets, whom we daily pass by without much of a thought or an emotion. What threatens us are not only that the machines are taking over, but also that we are becoming like machines. Thus, we do not need any more robot-like individuals produced by a new breeding industry, this time located in medical labs.

As the generation of feminists to which I belong has struggled to establish, maternity is not a destiny. But it is also not something to be programmatically avoided, as if it were the

cause of women's misery and exploitation. No more than possessing a uterus or a breast is the capacity to give birth a curse—one from which a medical profession (that has sterilized us, lobotomized us, ridiculed us when we cried in pain giving birth) must liberate us. Nor is maternity a gender-performing act. Rather it should be understood as a political, value-positing decision. In a self-governing, autonomous society such decisions would be taken in consideration of our collective well-being, the available resources, and the preservation of the natural wealth. Today as well, such considerations cannot be ignored, but the decision to have a child must also be seen as a refusal to allow capital's planners to decide who is allowed to live and who instead must die or cannot even be born.

Notes

1 I place the "the body" in quotation marks to indicate the fictional character of the concept, as an abstraction from different, unique social histories and realities.

2 See Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1979).

3 It is worth mentioning here the critique of Foucault's analysis of the "political economy of the body" made by Dario Melossi in *The Prison and the Factory* (1981), 44–45. He writes:

> This bourgeois *construction* of the body in the school, the barracks, the prison and the family remains completely incomprehensible . . . unless we start from the capitalistic management of the labour process (and *at this moment* in the history of capitalism). This had to set itself the task of structuring the body as a machine inside the productive machine as a whole, that is, we must understand that the organisation of work does not treat the body as something extraneous, it *steps through* the body into the muscles and into the head, reorganising simultaneously with the productive process that fundamental part of itself constituted by the labour-power of the body. In sum, in this age the *machine* constitutes a compound invention in which there resides a dead, inorganic, fixed element and a live, organic variable one. (italics in original)

4 I take the concept of interlocking systems of domination—central to intersectionality theory—from bell hooks (1990), 59. Also hooks (1989), 175.

5 My reference here is to Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto" (1991), which I find theoretically and politically very problematic.

6 On the carceral and surveillance use of technology, see R. Benjamin ed., *Captivating Technologies* (2019).

7 See Melossi and Pavarini (1981).

8 On this topic see H. Braverman (1974), above all chap. 4, "Scientific Management," and chap. 5, "The Scientific-Technical Revolution and the Worker."

9 The reference is to the 1944 play by Jean-Paul Sartre, in which hell is described as the self-imprisonment to which we are condemned when we cannot free ourselves from the constraints placed on our lives by our past actions.

10 By the "repressive hypothesis" Foucault refers to the tendency among historians to describe the effects of capitalism on social life and discipline only in terms of repression. He has argued, instead, that a major development in the capitalist treatment of sexuality has been a "veritable discursive explosion" about sex, indeed the transformation of sex into discourse, by means of which "legal sanctions against minor perversions were multiplied." *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, 17, 36–37. While I consider Foucault's emphasis on the "discursive turn," by means of which sex was transformed into an immaterial good, brilliant but reductive, I agree with his insistence on the productive character of social discipline and even social repression. Psychic dynamism seems to be governed by a law similar to that of the conservation of energy, whereby the prohibition of particular forms of behavior does not produce a vacuum, but substitutive, compensatory responses of which the translation of repressed desire into "discourse" is one.

11 See, e.g., *Capital*, vol. 1, pt. 7, chap. 25, p. 764: "The reproduction of labour-power which must incessantly be re-incorporated into capital as its means of valorization . . . forms in fact a factor in the reproduction of capital itself. *Accumulation of capital is therefore the multiplication of the proletariat.* (italics mine)

12 Federici (2004), especially chap. 4.

13 In June 2014, the Supreme Court unanimously struck down a Massachusetts law forbidding protesters from standing within thirty-five feet of the entrance to a reproductive health care facility. As a consequence of this decision, now women who go to a clinic for an abortion must be escorted, as protesters have the right to follow them up to the entrance door, creating an extremely tense and threatening situation.

14 See Sublette and Sublette (2016) and Beckles (1989), especially chap. 5, "Breeding Wenches and Labor Supply Policies." While in the US the center of the slave breeding industry was Virginia, in the Caribbean

Islands it was Barbados, "the only sugar plantation colony that by 1807 succeeded in eliminating an economic need for African slave imports as a result of a positive natural growth in the slave stock" (Beckles 1989, 91). Beckles adds that by the eighteenth century, slave "breeding" "emerged as a popular policy, and the term became commonplace in managerial language concerning labor supply" (92).

15 In the US restrictions have been introduced over the years, in several states, that reduce the time period in which abortions can be allowed and make the procedure conditional on parental consent. There is currently a drive to ban abortion altogether. The measure passed on May 14, 2019, by the Alabama Senate that prohibits abortion at every stage is but one example.

16 This is the term Lynn Paltrow, the founder and executive director of National Advocates for Pregnant Women, and Jeanne Flavin have used, in a 2013 study, to describe policies introduced in the US to regulate pregnancy, which affect especially indigent black women (Paltrow and Flavin 2013, 299–343). Such is the present legal situation—they wrote—that by deciding to have a child, poor black women place themselves outside the boundary of the constitution, becoming vulnerable to charges that would never be consider crimes under different circumstances. Women, for instance, have been arrested and jailed for being in a car accident when pregnant and for using legal drugs possibly affecting the fetuses. A turning point in this process has been the conviction for homicide and child abuse, by the South Carolina Supreme Court, in 2003, of a woman who had a still birth, presumably after having used drugs during her pregnancy. Following that decision, scores of women have been charged with child abuse for having used illegal drugs while pregnant, as fetuses in several have been legally defined as persons. On this subject, see also the website Feminist Research on Violence / Plataforma Feminista sobre Violencias https://feministresearchonviolence.org.

17 See again on this subject Hartmann (1995) especially chap. 3, "Contraceptive Controversies," and Connelly (2008).

18 Jenny Brown (2018), 153, and on the same subject see chap. 11: "Controlling the Means of Reproduction" (143–60).

19 Jenny Brown (2018), 144. Brown argues that difficult access to birth control and abortion is the true reason for the fact that until recently women in the United States had a higher fertility rate, adding that, in 2011, 45 percent of birth in the United States were unplanned, in the sense of unwanted or mistimed.

20 In *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970), Firestone advocated the "freeing of women from the tyranny of their reproductive biology by every means," as a project however to be realized in a postrevolutionary society. (206) For a discussion of "Feminist Concerns about

Ectogenesis," see Murphy (1995), 113–33. Murphy argues that ectogenesis is the medical practice that poses the most direct threat to women's reproductive rights and most devalue women's contribution to reproduction. She also mentions the fear that the construction of artificial wombs could lead to "femicides" (125).

TWO

Lecture Two "Body Politics" in the Feminist Revolt

In my previous essay, I have argued that capitalism, as a system based on the exploitation of human labor, has defined women as bodies—that is, as beings dominated by their biology, insofar as it has appropriated our reproductive capacity and put it at the service of the reproduction of the workforce and the labor market. This is not to say that in the history of capitalism women have not been subjected to other forms of exploitation. Enslaved women in the American plantations have worked in the fields, cut canes, and picked cotton. Under the Jim Crow system, black women built roads as part of chain gangs. In Britain, France, and the US, working-class women and children were the backbone of the industrial revolution and, even after they were excluded from the factories, they always integrated the family budget with some part-time work. This has been particularly true in the case of black women who could never rely on a steady male wage. The point, however, is that regardless of what other labors we had to perform, *procreation and sexual service to men have always been expected of us and often forced upon us.* While legally denied the possibility of maternity, under slavery black women raised the children of their masters, suffered their sexual assaults, and were forced to procreate for the slave-breeding industry that developed especially after the abolition of the slave trade in 1806.

Women have always fought against this appropriation of our bodies and the violence that has come with it. Enslaved women used their knowledge of contraceptive herbs to prevent conception and even killed their children at birth to ensure that they would not be enslaved. At the risk of losing their lives and suffering terrible tortures they resisted their masters' sexual assaults. As Dorothy Roberts ([1997] 2017, 45) writes: "They escaped from the plantations, feigned illness, endured severe punishments. . . . A common recollection of former slaves was the sight of a woman . . . being beaten for defying her master's sexual advances. . . . No doubt there were, as well, many cases of slave women poisoning their masters in retaliation for sexual molestation."

Nothing—short of incarceration—can match the violence of enslavement. Yet the word comes to mind when we think of the desperation that many women have felt when discovering being pregnant against their will, which often cost their lives. *Women's struggle to avoid pregnancy and to avoid sex, inside and outside of marriage, is one of the most common and unrecognized on earth.* But it was not until the 1970s that feminists began to organize, openly and on a mass level, to fight under the banner of "body politics" for control over our sexuality and for the right to decide whether to procreate. Body politics expressed the realization that our most intimate, presumably "private" experiences are in reality highly political matters of great of concern to the nation-state, as demonstrated by the extensive legislation that governments have historically adopted to regulate them. Body politics also recognized that our capacity to produce new lives has subjected us to forms of exploitation far more extensive, invasive, and degrading than those that men have suffered, and more difficult to resist. While men have confronted capitalist exploitation collectively and "on the job," women have confronted it individually, in their relations with men, in the home, in hospitals while giving birth, in the streets, and as target of abusive comments and assaults.

Feminism was a revolt against our being defined as "bodies," only valued for our imagined readiness for self-sacrifice and servicing other people. It was a revolt against the assumption that the best that we can expect from life is to be the domestic and sexual servants of men and the producers of workers and soldiers for the state. By fighting for the right to abortion and against the barbarous ways in which most of us are forced to give birth, against rape in and out of the family, against sexual objectification and the myth of the vaginal orgasm, we began to unravel the ways in which our bodies have been shaped by the capitalist division of labor.[1]

Much of the feminist movement's politics centered on the struggle for abortion, but the revolt against the prescribed feminine norm was more profound. Not only the duty to become mothers but the very conception of "femininity" was questioned and rejected. *It was the feminist movement that denaturalized femininity.* The critique of the normative construction of womanhood began long before Judith Butler argued that gender is a "performance." The critique of heteronormativity, of the sexual binary and "womanhood" as a biological concept and, above all, the rejection of "biology as destiny" predate by many years *Gender Trouble* (1990) and Butler's subsequent theoretical production as well as the development of the queer, intersex, and trans rights movements. Feminists did not only write about the end of "womanhood," they acted to bring it about. Symbolically, on the first day of the opening of Congress, in Washington, DC, on January 15, 1968, radical feminists led by Shulamith Firestone organized a torchlit funeral procession, calling it the "The Burial of Traditional Womanhood," "who passed," as the flyer read, "after 3000 years of bolstering the egos of warmakers and aiding the cause of war."[2] They also protested bridal fairs, denounced the duty and compulsion to be "beautiful," called themselves "witches."

Feminists rejected the repressive sexuality that passed as sexual liberation. They also "sparked off a self-help movement

that by 1975 had built thirty women-controlled clinics across the United States, educating women about their bodies and placing health as a central issue in feminist politics at home and abroad. It is thanks to this movement that thousands of women began to practice 'self-examination.'"[3] In this way, the women's liberation movement helped us to overcome the shame that we had always felt about our bodies, especially our genital organs, and taught us to discuss issues, like menstruation and menopause previously considered taboo. It was through the feminist movement that many women of the postwar generation were exposed to "sexual education" and came to understand the political implications of sexuality in all its dimensions. Our interactions with men were also put under scrutiny, revealing their violence as well as men's insistence on infantilizing and degrading us—calling us "baby," "chicks," "broads," and expecting sexual quid pro quos for every favor, like paying for our dinner on a date.

The demand for safe contraceptives and the possibility to refuse unwanted pregnancies was our declaration of independence from men and from the state and capital, which for centuries have terrorized us with punitive laws and practices. Our struggle, however, has shown that we cannot reclaim our bodies without changing the material conditions of our lives. The limit of the struggle for abortion was that it did not seek to enable all women to have the children we wanted. This was a political mistake, as so many women, in the United States, have been denied the right to be mothers, during slavery by the law and subsequently through lack of resources and forced sterilizations. Thousands of black women and men in the US were sterilized in the 1920s and 1930s, and for many more years afterward, as part of a eugenics campaign aimed to prevent the reproduction of "feebleminded races," a category that also included many immigrant people.

Working-class white women were also sterilized, during the Depression, when they were considered "feebleminded,"

the category that social workers and doctors used to label women deemed promiscuous and likely to have children out of marriage (Le Sueur 1984). In the 1930s, authorities, across the US, welcomed the eugenic programs that the Nazis were carrying out. US government officials saw Nazi Germany as the fulfillment of their own eugenic plans, praising sterilization as the road to a better society. Crucially, the support for such programs would have continued except that, after the US entered World War II, Nazism became discredited (Nourse 2008, 127–33). But though the government's plan to sterilize all "unfit" people was officially brought to an end for men in 1947, sterilization for women has continued. As recently as the 1960s and even the 1970s, many women on welfare were forced to accept sterilization if they wished to continue to receive their payments. The documentary *No Más Bebés* (Tajima-Pena 2015) documented the plight of hundreds of immigrant women who, in the 1960s and early 1970s, were sterilized at a University of Southern California medical center in Los Angeles County without their consent, many not discovering what had happened to them until years later when they realized they could not become pregnant again.

It was a mistake, then, for the feminist movement not to connect the struggle for abortion to the struggle to change the material conditions of women's lives and (for instance) not mobilize against the political attack that in the late '60s the government moved against Aid to Families with Dependent Children, the welfare program that since the 1930s had enabled women without a job and a husband to have money of their own from the state. The absence of the feminist movement from the welfare struggle was especially problematic because in the official discourse welfare was always racialized, even though the majority of women on the rolls were white women. Black women, however, were more visible because they were more combative and organized, drawing strength from the legacy of the civil rights and Black Power movements. It was

black women who led the struggle to expand the resources that the welfare program provided and to change its public image. But their message that "every mother is a working woman" and that raising children is a service to society should have spoken to all women.[4]

The welfare mothers' struggle, however, never gained the support it would have needed to prevent the state from waging a vicious war on the program and the women themselves, a war that had disastrous consequences for the black community. For as Dorothy Roberts ([1997] 2017, 202–22) writes, it was the war on welfare that created the image of the black single mother, "parasitically" depending on welfare, hooked on crack, and producing dysfunctional families, which served to justify the politics of mass incarceration.

The inability of the feminist movement to fight to guarantee that no woman should be denied the right to have children because of the material conditions of her life and the feminist representation of abortion as "choice" have created divisions between white and black women that we must not reproduce. It is one reason why many women of color have distanced themselves from feminism and organized a movement for reproductive justice that stresses precisely the need to connect the struggle over procreation with the one for economic justice.[5]

We see a similar dynamic emerging in the #metoo movement, as again many women fail to recognize that sexual violence is a structural problem and not an abuse of power by perverse men. To say that it is a structural problem means that women *are set up to be sexually abused by the economic conditions in which the majority of us are forced to live.* Clearly, if women earned higher wages, if waitresses did not depend on tips to pay the rent, if film directors and producers couldn't decide the future of young women who turn to them for jobs, if we could leave abusive relationships or jobs in which we are sexually harassed—then we would see a change. But this is not

the reality for most women. It is also true that women stay in abusive situations, even if they are not economically dependent, because we are used to valuing ourselves depending on whether we please men. We have not been trained to value ourselves on the basis of what we do, of our accomplishments. This is part of a long process of conditioning that has not yet lost its grip on us. The feminist movement has been a turning point. It has changed and valorized what it means to be a woman. But that valorization has not translated into economic security. On the contrary, our poverty has grown along with our autonomy, which is why we see today women working at two or three jobs and even working as surrogate mothers.

In this context, the campaign that some feminists have undertaken to ban prostitution, as a uniquely degrading, violent activity, is self-defeating. Singling out sex work as especially degrading contributes to devaluing and blaming the women who practice it, without at the same time providing any clue about what options women really have. It obscures the fact that, in the absence of adequate means of subsistence, women have always had to sell their bodies and not only in brothels and the streets. We have sold our bodies in marriage. We have sold ourselves on the job—whether it was to keep a job, to gain one, to obtain a promotion or not be harassed by a supervisor. We have sold ourselves in universities and other cultural institutions and, as we have seen, in the movie industry. Women have also engaged in prostitution in support of their husbands. For years, in West Virginia, in the coal-mining areas, an informal system of prostitution existed whereby wives paid with their bodies for any problem their husbands had with the company, to ensure that they would not be laid off, to keep feeding their children when their husbands got sick and could no longer mine coal, or to maintain credit at the company store when the family's debts accumulated. In all these cases, a wife would be invited to a room upstairs to try on shoes displayed in the shoe department, where a cot was

provided. Older women would warn the newcomers not to go upstairs, but need always prevailed.[6]

We should also acknowledge that there are ways of earning an income that are more degrading than prostitution. Selling our brains may be more dangerous and degrading than selling access to our vaginas. Calling for the criminalization of prostitution or more severe punishments for the clients further victimizes the most vulnerable in our communities and gives local immigration authorities a justification for deporting immigrants. This is not to say that we should not fight to improve the conditions of sex work and, above all, struggle to build a society where we do not have to sell our bodies. All over the world, sex workers are fighting for that.[7] Furthermore, as women gain more social power, the experience of being a sex worker and the conditions of sex work are changing. Sex workers are not just playthings in male hands, victims of their sadistic desires, controlled by pimps robbing them of their earnings. Many are women who use the money from sex work to pay for children's schooling, live and organize with other women, form cooperatives, set work conditions and prices, and provide each other with safety and protection. Sex work is a means of rounding up wages, paying for educational or health costs. For many women it is a part-time complement to housework or waged work. Interactive sex, performed through the internet as "webcamming," can be inserted in the interstices of domestic work. To be sure, *let's be abolitionists, but not only with respect to sex work. All forms of exploitation should be abolished, not just sex work.* Again, our task as feminists is not to tell other women what forms of exploitation are acceptable, but to expand our possibilities, so that we will not be compelled to sell ourselves in any way. We do so by reclaiming the means of our reproduction—the lands, the waters, the production of goods and knowledge, and our decision-making power, our capacity to decide what kind of lives we want and what kind of human beings we want to be.

This also applies to the question of gender identity. We cannot change our social identity without a struggle to change the economic/social conditions of our existence. Social identities are neither essences, fixed, frozen, determined once for all, nor groundless, infinitely shifting realities. And they are not defined purely by the norms that the capitalist system imposes on us. Social identities, including gender identities, are shaped by class, gender relations, and the struggles of the communities we come from. What being "woman" means to me, for instance, is very different from what it meant to my mother, because so many of us have fought to change our relation to marriage, to work, and to men.[8]

We must reject the idea that our social identities are completely defined by the capitalist system. The history of the feminist movement is exemplary in this context. Feminism has been a long battle against the norms, rules, and behavioral codes that have been imposed on us, which has significantly changed over time what it means to be a woman. As I have already stressed, feminists were the first to subvert the myth of an eternal, natural "femininity." Women's liberation was a commitment to create a more open-ended and fluid identity for women, one that would be constantly open to redefinition and reconstructions. The trans movement continues a process that has been underway since the 1970s and even earlier. What Butler has popularized is not new. Marxism and most twentieth-century philosophies—especially existentialism, an influence on Butler—have attacked the idea of a fixed, essential subject. Our bodies are shaped by class relations, as well as ethnic factors and the decisions we make in our lives.

Thus, the struggle to destabilize our assigned identities cannot be separated from the struggle to change the social/historical conditions of our lives and above all undermine social hierarchies and inequalities. I hope the trans and intersex movements learn from the lessons and the mistakes of the past—to grasp that we cannot fight for self-determination

without changing how we work, how the wealth that we produce is used, and what access we have to it. These objectives cannot be achieved only by changing our names or bodily appearance. They require that we unite with other people to reclaim our collective power, to decide how we want to live, what kind of health and education we need to have, what kind of society we want to create.

It is also important to stress that we already live in a transitional world in which meanings and definitions are in flux, ambiguous, and contested. None is more ambiguous than "woman," an identity that is at the center of multiple assaults carrying opposite normative prescriptions. While an unequal sexual division of labor persists, women's entrance in once-masculine occupations and the increasing technologization of work have required an underdevelopment of feminine traits, a flight, so to speak, from the female body, also visible in the new models of female aesthetics, that emphasize a boyish look, the opposite of the all-curves body that until the 1960s was the pinnacle of male desire.[9] Already, in many occupations, conformity to a "feminine" gender model amounts to a self-devaluation, as—from academia to the art gallery and the computer lab—capitalism needs a genderless workforce.[10] This is not a universal rule. But what is certain is that the areas of work where the model of femininity celebrated (for instance) in the 1950s is still in demand are rapidly disappearing. From the viewpoint of work, we are already living in a gender-fluid world, in which we are expected to be feminine and masculine at the same time. Certainly, marriage, motherhood, and housework—once the identifying practices—are not enough, even from capital's viewpoint. We are expected to be independent, efficient, and work outside the home. More and more we are expected to be like men.

At the same time, women's presence in almost every aspect of social and political life is having an impact on the public image of work, and institutional decision making. It serves to

eroticize work, it creates the illusion that what we do is useful, constructive. It humanizes policies otherwise very destructive. Even the organization of war appears more benign when the head of the military is a woman, as is the case currently in Germany. As women, we are particularly vulnerable to this manipulation, since we are not used to being appreciated and to seeing our work acknowledged and rewarded. In sum, both the identities of workers and women, as social/political subjects, are undergoing a significant change that we must take into account when discussing "identity politics." In the hands of government and other institutions, "identity politics" is a problem because it separates us into different groups, each with a set of rights—women's rights, gay rights, indigenous peoples' rights, trans rights—without acknowledging what stands in the way of our being treated with justice. We must be critical of any concept of identity that is not historical and transformative, that does not allow us to see our different and common forms of exploitation. But we need to address differently social identities that are rooted in particular forms of exploitation and are reshaped by a history of struggle still continuing in our time, for tracing our identities back to a history of exploitation and struggle allows us to find a common ground and collectively shape a more equitable vision of the future.

Notes

1 On the meaning and significance of "body politics," see Robin Morgan, ed., *Sisterhood Is Powerful* (1970) and Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981).

2 For the oration at the event, read by Kathie Amatniek, see Chicago Women's Liberation Union Herstory Project, "Funeral Oration for the Burial of Traditional Womanhood," https://www.cwluherstory.org/classic-feminist-writings-articles/funeral-oration-for-the-burial-of-traditional-womanhood. A fuller account of the event is found in the Herstory Project from the Women's Studies Resources, Duke Special Collections Library https://repository.duke.edu/dc/wlmpc.

3 I quote from a letter sent to me, on January 21, 2015, by Carol Downer, one of the main founders of the self-help movement, to correct my criticism of the politics of the feminist movement with regard to the struggle for abortion. Downer reminded me that in the 1970s feminism was not a single-issue movement. Only in the late 1970s, with the development of the "pro-choice" strategy, did its horizon narrow to concentrate on upholding the right to abort. On this subject, see also the Boston Women's Health Book Collective, *Our Bodies, Ourselves: A Book by and for Women* (1976).

4 On the struggle of women on welfare and the institutional and media campaign against them see Milwaukee County Welfare Rights Center, *Welfare Mothers Speak Out* (1972) and Ellen Reese, *Backlash against Welfare Mothers* (2005).

5 As described in the website of SisterSong (https://www.sistersong.net/reproductive-justice), the reproductive justice movement was born in 1994, when in preparation for the International Conference on Population and Development to be held in Cairo that year, a group of black women gathering in Chicago decided that the women's rights movement could not represent the interests of women of color and other marginalized people.

6 See Michael Kline and Carrie Kline, "Esau in the Coalfields: Owing Our Souls to the Company Store," and Michael Kline, "Behind the Coal Curtain: Efforts to Publish the Esau Story in West Virginia" and "The Rented Girl: A Closer Look at Women in the Coalfields," in Harris (2017, 5–25, 27–30, 38–45).

7 On this subject, see Mac and Smith (2018). As they write in their opening pages: "Sex workers are everywhere. We are your neighbours. We brush past you on the street. Our kids go to the same school as yours . . ." "This book," they say, "is not about enjoying sex work. [It] will not argue that sex work is 'empowerment.' . . . "We are not interested in forming a movement with men who buy sex." "Our concern is for the safety and the survival of people who sell sex" (2–3).

8 On the question of "identity" and identity politics, see bell hooks: "The Politics of Radical Black Subjectivity" and "Postmodern Blackness." In *Yearning* (1990) 15–32. "There is a radical difference," she writes "between a repudiation of the idea that there is a black 'essence' and recognition of the way black identity has been specifically constituted in the experience of exile and struggle" (29).

9 For a powerful analysis of the new models of feminine beauty, see Bordo's *Unbearable Weight* (1993).

10 In *Mothernism* (2014, 142–43), the Danish artist Lise Haller Baggesen speaks of "coming out" as a mother, of refusing (as she put it) to "check motherhood at the door," in an art world where the mother is viewed as persona non grata.

Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí
Visualizing the Body (1997)

Ruha Benjamin
Black AfterLives Matter: Cultivating Kinfulness as Reproductive Justice (2018)

Fred Moten
Here, There, and Everywhere (2018)

Houria Bouteldja
We, Indigenous Women (2017)

Abdullah Ocalan
All Slavery Is Based on Housewifisation (2013)

Michael Knapp, Anja Flach, and Ercan Ayboğa
A Women's Revolution (2016)

Silvia Federici
The Body, Capitalism, and the Reproduction of Labor Power & "Body Politics" in the Feminist Revolt (2020)

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Rosmarie Waldrop
Doing (2016)

M. NourbeSe Philip
Zong! #26 (2006)

John Keene
Power (2016)

Samira Negrouche
Quay 2I1 (2019)

Gülten Akın
I Cut My Black Black Hair (1960)

Maya Angelou
Alone (1975)