The Queer Limit of Black Memory

Richardson, Matt

Published by The Ohio State University Press

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The Queer Limit of Black Memory: Black Lesbian Literature and Irresolution.
The Ohio State University Press, 2013.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/23956.
Introduction


6. Hirsch and Spitzer, in “Testimonial Objects,” define points of memory as “objects and images that have remained from the past, containing ‘points’ about the work of memory and transmission” (358).


16. According to the Smithsonian website, the National Museum of African American History and Culture is expected to be finished in 2015. Even though the physical site is not finished, the museum has content online, including its inaugural exhibit of photographs titled “Let Your Motto Be Resistance.” Resistance is embodied in each of the African Americans chosen for the exhibit. Although none of the biographies actually mention the gender variance or sexual orientation of the subject, the description of James Baldwin gives some subtle indication of the criteria for embodying resistance. The description juxtaposes Baldwin’s femininity with his presence as a writer and spokesperson for Black liberation in a way that suggests the combination is unexpected: “While physically slight and soft-spoken, Baldwin emerged at mid-century as one of the most passionate and eloquent writers about the problem of race in American society.” “Let Your Motto Be Resistance: African American Portraits,” *National Museum of African American History and Culture* website, accessed January 23, 2012. http://srv00000221.si.edu/section/programs/view/14. For more on Baldwin’s gender fluidity see Page and Richardson, “On the Fear of,” 57–81.


19. Ibid.

20. Ibid., 21.


24. Roderick A. Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004). Ferguson discusses the Moynihan Report as a document which suggests that African Americans are pathological because of our seeming inability to adhere to heteronormative standards of family formation and sex roles as a collective.


30. Sander L. Gilman, “Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature,” in “Race,”

31. Hazel V. Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). Carby argues that Black women remodeled the category “woman” to fit their condition as women for whom the “cult of true womanhood” was denied.


37. From Janice Raymond’s anti-trans book, *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1994), to the discussions by genderqueer and transgender authors Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998) and Patrick Califia, *Sex Changes: The Politics of Transgenderism*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 2003), a tremendous amount has been written on butch and trans border wars and on uneasy tensions between trans and lesbian communities. This is in line with the fact that lesbian communities in general have been continuously involved in open debates about transsexual inclusion of FTM and MTF participants.


40. Ibid.


43. I use the term “transmasculine” to describe someone who was labeled as female at birth and who is a masculine person (who may or may not identify as a man). A “transfeminine” person is labeled male at birth and is feminine (and may or may not identify as a woman). I deploy these terms in order to describe the complexities of gender nonconformity that cannot be understood through the term “transgender.” An example of a feminine transmasculine character is Sunshine/Kali from Cherry Muhanji’s novel *Her*, analyzed in chapter 2 of this book. Sunshine/Kali cross-dresses in men’s clothes and has a mixture of masculine and feminine attributes. Cherry Muhanji, *Her: A Novel* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1990).
46. Ibid., 6.
52. Ibid., 2.
57. Ibid., 2-3.
61. Ibid., 29. I do agree with Cohen that we have to consider the fact that not all acts of resistance end domination, but resistance is an irresolute process in itself. It can sometimes be the process by which Black people are more deeply ensnared in the processes of domination.
64. Ibid.
68. Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, defines “queer time” as the “specific models of temporality that emerge within postmodernism once one leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, safety/risk, and inheritance. . . . ‘Queer space’ refers to . . . new understandings of space enabled by the production of queer counterpublics” (6).

70. Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*.


73. A. Timothy Spaulding describes the postmodern neo-slave narrative as a mode of fiction that “undermine[s] conventions of linearity and distinctions between past and present” in order to critique an ongoing legacy of slavery in contemporary U.S. race relations. I add that the neo-slave narratives and other fiction that I analyze mix temporalities in order to anachronistically place contemporary queer gender and sexual identities in the past. A. Timothy Spaulding, *Re-Forming the Past: History, The Fantastic, and the Postmodern Slave Narrative* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2005), 25.


75. Both E. Patrick Johnson's *Sweet Tea* and Leon E. Pettway’s *Honey, Honey Miss Thang: Being Black, Gay, and on the Streets* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996) are rare examples of ethnographies that provide us with the voices of Black queer working-class and working-poor people.


77. Ibid., 240.


81. Merrill, “Performing History,” 68.


83. Ibid., 166.


86. I discuss the term “social death” in chapter 1 of this volume. For more on this, see Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

89. Ibid.
90. Halberstam, In a Queer Time and Place.
91. José Esteban Muñoz theorizes the potential of performance to destabilize the audience in Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

Chapter 1

3. There are two other pieces of fiction set in slavery and written by Black women that have woman-to-woman sexual relationships as their major concern: The Salt Roads by Nalo Hopkinson (New York: Warner Books, 2004); and “The Mistress and the Slave Girl” by Ann Allen Shockley, in The Leading Edge: An Anthology of Lesbian Sexual Fiction, ed. Lady Winston (Denver, CO: Lace Publishers, 1987). Both are intriguing pieces of fiction. The portion of The Salt Roads that is set partially on a slave plantation is most certainly about Black women’s relationships with each other and deserves its own extended critical
examination in relationship to the rest of the chronologies and spiritual cosmologies at work in the novel. Ann Allen Shockley's short story is not discussed in this chapter because it is written from the perspective of the white mistress. However, it fits in well with “Miss Hannah’s Lesson,” as Shockley creates a world in which the white mistress utilizes her privilege within whiteness to emancipate her slave and set her up as her “lover” in a private northern cottage.


9. Ibid., 54

10. Although *The Erotic Life of Racism* was published after this chapter was written, both texts share a concern about the interconnectedness between the entanglements of anti-Blackness and queer desire. Sharon Patricia Holland, *The Erotic Life of Racism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 59.


12. Ibid., 56.


14. “The Champagne Lady” was written ca. 1988. It is currently in the collection of the Adamz-Bogus papers at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in New York. According to conversations with Adamz-Bogus in 2001, she originally conceived of the collection to deal with a different period in Black history.

15. At the time of our informal interview in 2004, LaShonda Barnett was completing a doctorate in history at the College of William and Mary. She originally wanted to write about woman-to-woman sexual relationships in slavery but was discouraged by a mentor who suggested that the research into plantation mistresses’ diaries would take too long for a doctoral thesis project.


17. Gayl Jones, *Corregidora* (New York: Random House, 1975). Jones’s main character, Ursa, describes the story of the slave owner, Corregidora, passed down through her maternal line in terms of violence and sexual pleasure. Similarly, Kara Walker’s “Letter from a Black Girl” is irresolute in relation to the master: “Dear you duplicitious, idiot,


23. Keizer, Black Subjects, 8.

24. Ibid., 9.


27. Ibid., 136.

28. Ibid.


33. Ibid.

34. Hartman, Scenes of Subjection. Hartman points out that according to custom and property law, slavery is founded on an “economy of enjoyment” (26). She also is concerned with the “dimensions of [white observers’] investment in and fixation with Negro enjoyment” in order to “grant the observer access to an illusory plentitude of fun and feeling” (34).
35. I ask this question to distinguish pleasure from the erotic (which we will explore later). In this chapter, the moment, pursuit, and anticipation of orgasm are tied to questions of political solidarity and unanimity.


37. Ibid., 38.

38. Ibid. Patterson defines this liminal status as on the outskirts of society, as being “in a limbo” as an institutionalized presence of absence, a presence of powerlessness that embodies the master’s authority, will, and power (46).

39. Ibid., 52.

40. Ibid., 299–333.

41. Ibid., 303–4.

42. Ibid., 307.


47. However, as Ellen Brinks and Lee Talley have pointed out, Gomez complicates the desire for a “‘pure’ heritage or homeland,” preferring instead to portray the displacement, alienation, and violent separation of Black people from their African past. Even as fragments, “these words and images of her mother’s cultural tradition become the symbolic property that the slave owners cannot confiscate or control.” Lee Talley and Ellen Brinks, “Unfamiliar Ties: Lesbian Constructions of Home and Family in Jeanette Winterson’s *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* and Jewelle Gomez’s *The Gilda Stories*,” in *Homemaking: Women Writers and the Politics and Poetics of Home*, ed. Catherine Wiley and Fiona R. Barnes (New York: Garland, 1996), 159.


57. Talley and Brinks, “Unfamiliar Ties,” 166.
59. Ibid., 11.
60. Ibid., 15.
61. Homi Bhabha discusses the colonized as being in a condition of aggression wherein they “want to take” the colonizer’s place. *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 44–45.
63. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*.
66. The term “useful fiction” comes from Gayatri Spivak’s “The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives,” *History and Theory* 24, no. 3 (October 1985): 251. Spivak talks about the “useful fiction” that “texts or phenomena to be interpreted may answer one back and even be convincing enough to lead one to change one’s mind” (251). In this example from neo-slave narratives, the stories present a deliberate fiction that Black women can be spared the destructive aspects of oppression through their liberating sexual choices. Spivak concludes that in fact a text cannot “answer one back” after the planned epistemic violence of the imperialist project” (251). In the retelling of slavery, the realities of violence overtake the romance plot, rendering it impotent in repairing institutional brutality and relations of power.
68. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 45.
69. Ibid., 41.
70. Ibid.
71. Ibid.
73. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 86.
75. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 60.
76. Ibid., 38.
77. Ibid., 68–69.
78. Ibid., 66, 69.
80. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 42.
81. Ibid., 45.
82. Ibid., 47.
84. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 46n5.
85. Ibid.
86. Ibid.
87. Ibid., 47
88. Ibid.
91. Lorde argues that “[t]he language by which we have been taught to dismiss ourselves and our feelings as suspect is the same language we use to dismiss and suspect each other . . . I must establish myself as not-you.” Audre Lorde, “Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred and Anger,” in Sister Outsider, 169.
95. Of course, this scene is resonant with Jacques Lacan’s description of the “mirror stage” of development wherein the child recognizes itself in the mirror and forms an identification with an “ideal-I” that Lacan asserts “will forever remain irreducible for any single individual or, rather, that will only asymptotically approach the subject’s becoming.” In this case, Sarah’s search for self in the visage of Miss Hannah is an act of misrecognition. Jacques Lacan, Ecrits: The First Complete Edition in English, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 2006), 76.
97. Hartman, Scenes of Subjection, 84.
98. Mutual pleasure between women is apparently outside the Black imagination. Sarah recalls that “[s]he’d heard many stories from Clara and the other women in the Big House. No story spoke of two women loving each other” (41). Barnett locates female–female desire and pleasure as external to Black experience, which helps explain why a white character is cast as the conveyor of sexual gratification.
100. For more on the refusal of Black maternity see Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe.”
102. Patterson, Slavery and Social Death, 304.
103. Ibid.
107. Ibid., 83.
109. According to Heidegger, “only in perceiving and acting on things do we constitute ourselves as humans, just as only thereby do the things become things.” Martin Heidegger, *What Is a Thing?* (Chicago: H. Regnery, 1967), 259. What is important here is the constitution of humanity through the distinction of the “thingness” of the other.

110. DuCille, *The Coupling Convention*. DuCille notes that women writers at the end of the nineteenth century reconfigure marriage as “utopian unions based on gender equality,” as opposed to an institution based on deference to male authority (47).

111. Tinsley, “Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic,” 211.

112. Lorde, “Eye to Eye,” 175.

113. Ibid., 160.

114. Ibid., 159, 174–75.

Chapter 2

1. Muñoz notes that counterpublic spaces are where Black queer subjects can emerge in connection, support, and creation of an entire community. José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).


3. The fact that this novel is set in the Midwest is an exciting departure in Black queer fiction. There is a lack of scholarship on the importance of the Midwest as a site of queer emergence. See Scott Herring, *Another Country: Queer Anti-Urbanism* (New York: New York University Press, 2010).


6. I use the names Sunshine, Kali, or Sunshine/Kali depending on the main character’s stage of development. This also requires some gender shifting throughout the chapter. When I discuss Sunshine before her transformation, I use female pronouns. When I refer to events that take place after the transformation to Kali, I use both male and female pronouns with a slash to indicate the character’s dual gender.


8. Muhanji received a PhD from the University of Iowa in 1997.

9. Cherry Muhanji, Egyirba High, and Kesho Scot, *Tight Spaces* (San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987). This collection won the Before Columbus Foundation’s American Book Award in 1988. I learned of Her’s autobiographical nature in a conversation with the author in April 2004. Her work is especially interested in the divisions created between Black women based on skin-color hierarchies. Throughout her published fiction, Muhanji’s protagonists tend to be light-skinned women looking for acceptance and camaraderie in working-class African American communities.


13. Ibid., 9.

14. Ibid.


19. Passing women are people who were born female but pass as men in their daily lives. See Martin B. Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey, eds. *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past* (New York: New American Library, 1989).

20. According to Charles Marsh, the term “beloved community” was popularized in the U.S. South during the 1960s civil rights movement as “the realization of the divine love in lived social relation.” Charles Marsh, *The Beloved Community: How Faith Shapes Social Justice, from the Civil Rights Movement to Today* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 2. Commonly, the term continues to be associated with a reified, nostalgic memory of poor and working-class African American southern communities of bygone eras.


23. This arrangement to have children in order to preserve the farm is reminiscent of the imperative to “make generations” from Gayle Jones’s classic novel *Corregidora.* The generations of offspring are a living, breathing archive of Black suffering and the physical and psychological pain of Black women.


25. Ibid.

26. Ibid. Also see hooks, *Ain’t I a Woman.*


29. Lizzie and Laphonya’s tale of excessive childbirth is a reference to the early migration story by Jessie Redmon Fauset, Plum Bun: A Novel without a Moral (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1929). Similarly, Plum Bun suggests that Black women must reject motherhood to save themselves from endless toil and domestic labor.

30. Woods, Development Arrested; and Jones, Blues People.

31. Tolnay, “The Great Migration,” 1216. There is also some speculation about the drop in number of Black births after the wave of migration to the urban centers. This phenomenon is speculated to be associated with many factors related to housing, workload, and male eligibility. No one has suggested that Black women and men may have enjoyed more same-sex relationships in the North, thereby decreasing procreative sexual activity.


33. Theoharis and Woodard, Freedom North, 7.

34. The term “New Negro” is used most often in reference to Alain Locke’s pivotal anthology of essays and creative work by the same name. Alain Locke, The New Negro (New York: Atheneum, 1925).


36. British filmmaker Inge Blackman and British writer Jackie Kay have created works that portray Harlem queer life while looking at their own connection to Black lesbian and gender-variant history diasporically. B.D. Women, directed by Inge Blackman (England, 1994; New York: Women Make Movies), DVD. Jackie Kay, Bessie Smith (New York: Absolute, 1997).


39. The song’s unabashed lyrics proclaim “Went out last night with a crowd of my friends / They must’ve been women ‘cause I don’t like no men / It’s true I wear a collar and a tie / Make the wind blow all the while” (qtd. in Davis, Blues Legacies, 39). Rainey herself pushed the limits in her advertisement for the record which includes a drawing of a crossed-dressed woman in the act of seducing another woman (ibid.).


suggests that there needs to be a more nuanced reading of poor Black people functioning through the alternative economy of illicit and illegal activity.


45. Ibid., 156.

46. For Wintergreen a similar gender expedition begins in Paris in 1924 when she becomes a highly paid blues performer and ends in Berlin in 1939 when she is caught by Nazis and brutally beaten until she no longer has full control of her feet and legs. Wintergreen “sings the blues” for the lost connection between light- and dark-skinned Black women, for her lost career, and for the loss of her sexual relationship with Charlotte, Kali’s mother-in-law.


48. Feminine masculinity is often associated with effeminate gay men, but it is not exclusive to them.


50. An example of this diasporic connection is found in the film *B.D. Women* (1994) by Caribbean-born British filmmaker Inge Blackman. Blackman uses the visual representation of a Harlem speakeasy and the Ma Rainey song “B.D. Women” (bulldagger women) as reference points for her documentary on British Black lesbian history.

51. Transmasculine is a way to distinguish the transformation of female-bodied people to a male gender presentation. It refers to an individual who has been assigned female at birth but maintains masculine characteristics later in life. This includes a person who identifies as male but does not associate exclusively with transmen.


53. *Her* was published in the same year as *Gender Trouble* and pushed the boundaries of the racial dialogue with and in queer theory. Butler, *Gender Trouble*.


55. Ibid., 96–97.

56. Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Boston: Unwin Hyman Press, 1990). Collins has defined the “safe space” as a social space wherein Black women can speak freely (95). These Black queer safe spaces appear in the novel as realms that allow for gender and racial signification to happen in the counterpublic bar culture. *Her* refigures the city as a place of both misery/industrial labor and play, highlighting the role of urban aesthetics to give language to the pleasure of the city.

57. Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 146.


59. As I suggest in the introduction, the Black focus on propriety and regulating the public image stems from a desire to protect and defend the names of Black women in order to establish claims for citizenship.
60. Houston A. Baker, *Modernism in the Harlem Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 33. Using Washington's example, Baker partially defines the “mastery of form” through his use of minstrel theater techniques in his Atlanta Exposition address. Baker quotes Booker T. Washington in *Up from Slavery*, which includes the Atlanta address. Washington’s talent for employing stereotypical “darky” tropes enabled him to escape a “tight place” of impossible expectations and please his diverse audience. Baker contends that Washington demonstrated “in his manipulations of form that there are rhetorical possibilities for crafting a voice out of tight places” (33). However, what Washington said sacrificed African American political goals to a racist agenda. Charlotte’s speech suggests that such sacrifices are necessary for African American survival. Baker discusses this in some detail in pages 25–36.


**Chapter 3**

1. During the talk back of *Ring/Shout* at the University of Texas at Austin, February 20, 2011, Sharon Bridgforth described her previously published books—*the bull-jean stories* and *love conjure/blues*—as “performance novels,” or texts that are written both to have a life on the page and to be read aloud or performed onstage.


3. Sharon Bridgforth, personal interview, February 2009. These concepts were reiterated in her performance of *Ring/Shout* at the University of Texas at Austin on February 20, 2011.

4. Omi Osun Joni L. Jones, Lisa L. Moore, and Sharon Bridgforth, eds., *Experiments in a Jazz Aesthetic: Art, Activism, Academia, and the Austin Project* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 6; and Bridgforth, interview. Bridgforth gains a tremendous amount of new information about the piece from the performance and the actors themselves. She then incorporates the information into subsequent revisions. She uses the art of improvisation or “spontaneous creation” in each performance. The script (or published book) does not contain stage directions, and through minimal rehearsal the actors and the director (conductor) find the music and movement. However, each participant is expected to bring his/her unique perspective to the embodiment of the work. Therefore, each performance is unpredictable and kinetic. Publication is not the end of the life of these texts, either. They have been performed, reinterpreted, and reworked in multiple ways after publication.

5. The Austin Project is a group of predominantly women of color (although there are a small number of white women and transmen of color who participate as well) who come together for eleven weeks to share in a writing workshop that is focused on the writing process.


13. An essential part of West African spiritual practice is spirit possession. According to Phyllis Galembo, “Through possession, both the *lwa* and the community are affirmed. The people transcend their materiality by becoming spirits . . . the *lwa* communicate in a tangible way with the people, who during such times receive the best possible answers to pressing questions.” Phyllis Galembo, *Vodou: Visions and Voices of Haiti* (Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 1998), xxvii.


19. Some critics have made the connection between the blues and West African religious practice in African American literature, for example, Thomas F. Marvin, “‘Preachin’ the Blues’: Bessie Smith’s Secular Religion and Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*,” *African American Review* 28, no. 3 (Autumn 1994): 411–21. Marvin argues that “certain blues songs may be better understood in the context of West African belief” (412). He also goes as far as to suggest that the blues functions as a deity, stating that “the blues is a supernatural force that can take on human characteristics and possess its victims, just like a West African *orisha*” (413).

20. According to James Cone, “The blues are ‘secular spirituals.’ They are *secular* in the sense that they confine their attention solely to the immediate and affirm the bodily expression of black soul, including its sexual manifestations. They are *spirituals* because they are impelled by the same search for the truth of black experience.” James H. Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues: An Interpretation* (1972; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 100. Also see LeRoi Jones, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (New York: Morrow, 1963), 65.

21. Conjuration is an African American religious practice that brings together the West African religious characteristics of “the utility of sacred charms and the diversity of skills embodied by religious specialists.” These specialists are used for purposes of divi-

22. An analysis of the formal connections between the blues and West African music is beyond the scope of this project. For more on the relationship between the blues and African music see Gerhard Kubik, *Africa and the Blues* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999).


31. The femme is also the spiritual leader of the love conjure/blues Text Installation performance piece.

32. For a discussion of queer mambos and houngan see Conner, with Sparks, *Queering Creole Spiritual Traditions*, 89–95.

33. Several of the words in the quoted text are spelled phonetically since Bridgforth writes in a Black southern dialect. Also, in accordance with conventions for quoting poetry, I use slashes to indicate line breaks when not quoting extensively.

34. *Lackawana Blues*, directed by George C. Wolfe (Los Angeles: HBO, 2005), DVD.


36. Conner, with Sparks, *Queering Creole Spiritual Traditions*, 70.


38. In Vodun, spiritual practices and the dialogue between drummers and dancers create the conditions to establish contact with ancestors and with deities called lwa. For more information see Gerdès Fleurant, *Dancing Spirits: Rhythms and Rituals of Haitian Vodun, the Rada Rite* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996).

39. Bridgforth, interview.


41. Previous performances of *delta dandi* included all-female casts.


43. Ibid., 6.


47. Farah Jasmine Griffin and Salim Washington, *Clawing at the Limits of Cool: Miles
Chapter 4


4. *B.D. Women*, directed by Inge Blackman (England, 1994; New York: Women Make Movies), DVD. The statement that “sometimes you have to make your own history” is also a quote from Cheryl Dunye’s 1996 film *The Watermelon Woman* (New York: First Run Features, 2000), DVD. Blackman indicates in her interview that she considers African American lesbian filmmakers to be in dialogue with her work.


9. This term is from Sigmund Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams* wherein he describes the psychosexual dynamics of the patriarchal nuclear family in order to map the development of neurosis. Freud’s description of the relationship between fathers, mothers, and sons has become the Western model of the “family.” Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. A. A. Brill (New York: Macmillan, 1913).


12. See Minnie Bruce Pratt, Si/He (Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books, 1995). See also Loree Cook-Daniels, “Trans-Positioned,” first published in Circles Magazine, June 1998 (TransPartners Project website, http://www.elspethbrown.org/sites/default/files/imce/cook-daniels_trans-positioned1998_0.pdf). This brief essay takes the reader through the female-to-male transition process from the perspective of lesbian partners and also gives insight into the difference between being with a transman and being with a butch (masculine female) lover. Cook-Daniels says that most lesbians’ partners appreciate their lover’s butch-ness but are often unprepared for their partners’ transition to being male: “what they prize is masculinity wrapped in a woman’s body, masculinity as displayed by a man often feels totally different” (2).


14. Michel Foucault et al., Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1975–76 (New York: Picador, 2003). In her book Terrorist Assemblages, Jasbir Puar discusses how the relationships of queer people of color to biopolitics are just beginning to be explored. Puar engages both Foucauldian biopolitics and Mbembe’s necropolitics in order to articulate the position of South Asian and Middle Eastern queers caught between unexpected biopolitical and necropolitical impulses toward life and death, respectively. Trumpet (and other texts analyzed in this volume) gives some indication of where further examination is needed in how the Black queer body is uniquely positioned in relation to these state impulses. Jasbir K. Puar, Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” Public Culture 15, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 11-40.

15. Homi Bhabha, The Location of Culture (London: Routledge, 1994), 35.


17. Binding is the act of using ace bandages or other material to flatten or “bind” breasts into a flat chest.

18. Home Office, Report, 5. The report is issued by the British Home Secretary and was submitted to the Scottish Parliament, the Northern Ireland Assembly, and the National Assembly for Wales for review and consideration.

19. Ibid., 3. Transpeople are carefully tracked through the reporting of psychiatric care and medical procedures. According to the statistics of the British Home Office and the National Health Service, there were only “250 to 400 female to male transsexual people” in all of the United Kingdom in 2000 (3). However, this number does not include people whom the state cannot “see,” which includes those who do not seek psychiatric treatment specifically for Gender Identity Disorder and those who do not have reassignment surgeries. For more on Gender Identity Disorder see American Psychiatric Association, Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-IV-TR, 4th ed., text revision (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2000).
20. Home Office, Report, 3. The phrase “opposite biological sex” is crucial to the state’s definition of a transsexual as one who is “really” one sex but has a medical condition that drives him/her to live as another. In this view, there are only two legitimate immutable sexes, and surgery and hormone treatment change only the social gender category of an individual, which is also bifurcated and fixed. People who identify as both male and female, or neither, or who do not change themselves through hormones or surgery, are not considered for recognition by the state at all.


22. Ibid.

23. Ibid., 5. The law is detailed in its insistence that surgical gender re-assignment is a precondition for recognition of gender identification “opposite” from that assigned at birth in each of these instances, including the registration or re-registration of individual sex at birth, marriage, incarceration, and parental responsibilities.

24. Ibid., 9-10. In matters relating to children and parents, “if a person undergoes gender reassignment their position as ‘father’ or ‘mother’ would continue to depend on their birth sex” and on the fact that the child has some biological tie to the parent (10). Curiously, adoption of a child where neither parent is a biological parent (as in the case of Joss and Millie) is not specified in the report.

25. For more information see Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1990), and Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex” (New York: Routledge, 1993).


27. Bhabha, The Location of Culture, 35.

28. See Foucault, The History of Sexuality.

29. I take my definition of the state from Wendy Brown, who says that it is the prerogative dimension of “legitimate arbitrary power in policy making and legitimate monopolies of internal and external violence in the police and the military” which “marks the state as a state.” Wendy Brown, States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 176. For a discussion of biopower and the biopolitical state as having the power to legitimize authority over the regulation and control of given populations, see Foucault, The History of Sexuality.


32. Ibid., 154.

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid., 141.


or Black women’s encounter with premature death, or what happens when someone wit-
nesses their denigration. However, their work here is valuable in understanding Colman’s
profound loss of self when he encounters his father’s female physicality.

38. Ibid., 9.
39. Ibid., 15.
40. Ibid.

41. “Imago” is a term that refers to the images perpetuated through someone else’s
desires. In Black Skin, White Masks, Fanon describes the imago of Black masculinity in the
white imagination. See Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, 61, 161n25, 169. Gilroy discusses
the predominant framing of Blacks as inherently criminal through the image of the Black
male mugger in Britain. Paul Gilroy, “There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack”; The Cultural

42. Of course, although this fact is rarely acknowledged, Black women also are crimi-
nalized in the eyes of a racist society, and they face the possibility of racialized and sexual-
ized brutality every day from within and outside their homes and families.

43. Mercer argues that Black men do not have access to the role of patriarchal bread-
winner, and thus the only avenue of identification is their penises. Kobena Mercer, Wel-

44. T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, Frantz Fanon: Conflicts and Feminisms (Lanham,
woman is denigrated as a presumed desire. . . . [B]lacks desire to be desired by whites.”
101.

45. Gordon’s chapter titled “Effeminacy: The Quality of Black Beings” is very much
about the quality of the Black male’s closeness to femininity. He says, “From the stand-
point of an antiblack world, black men are nonmen–nonwomen, and black women are
nonwomen–nonmen. This conclusion is based on our premise of whites—white men and
white women—being both human, being both Presence, and our premise of blacks, both
black men and women, being situated in the condition of the ‘hole,’ being both Absence.
This dichotomy poses a gender question concerning black men and a metaphysical one
concerning black women” (124). Why would this not pose a gender question for Black
women? There is a tacit acceptance that “women are holes” in a misogynist world, leaving
Black women outside of consideration. He asks, “If blackness is a hole, and women are
holes, what are white women, and what are black men in an antiblack world” (124)? He
concludes that “antiblack racism is therefore intimately connected to misogyny” (125).
It seems more the case that misogyny and anti-Black racism coform each other, and that
Black masculinity is predicated on the separation between the two, such that Black man-
hood can be paired with white womanhood in an effort to ascertain a racialized philosophy

46. Ibid., 127.
47. Ibid., 124.
48. Ibid., 127.
49. Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, 165.
50. I would like to thank Zakiyyah Jackson for pointing out to me that the mother is
a phobic object in psychoanalytic terms.
51. Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, 170.
52. Ibid.
53. Ibid., 151.
57. Ibid., 98.
58. Ibid., 96–97.
61. Ibid.
63. Ibid.
64. Ibid., xiv.
67. Ibid., 240.
70. Marriott, *On Black Men,* 44.
71. Ibid., 55.
72. Joss is a combination of masculine and feminine that is underscored in jazz history through the artistic collaboration of Miles Davis and John Coltrane. Farah Jasmine Griffin and Salim Washington describe Davis as cool, hip, “self-assured, sexy and stylish” (145), and Coltrane as “humble and gentle” (146). Griffin and Washington argue that Davis and Coltrane had “conflicting styles of masculinity” (147) that worked in cooperation with each other. Like a beautiful composition, these conflicting styles also come together in the character of Joss. Farah Jasmine Griffin and Salim Washington, *Clawing at the Limits of Cool: Miles Davis, John Coltrane and The Greatest Jazz Collaboration Ever* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2008).
74. These terms, originally applied to “the repetition of heterosexual constructs within sexual cultures both gay and straight,” come from Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 31. Or we could say that Black cultural expression is not restricted to the born-Black individual, as white men and a variety of other races have copied Black masculinity to a varying degree of success, from the days of Blackface to the present.
Chapter 5


5. I am careful not to suggest that the novel takes up the identity “lesbian” to define Elizete and Verlia’s relationship. As Greg A. Mullins notes, Brand “de-links the logic that
would associate same-sex desire with sexual identity” and instead gives us a relationship that is not co-opted by the terms of Western politics. Greg A. Mullins, “Dionne Brand’s Poetics of Recognition: Reframing Sexual Rights,” *Callaloo* 30, no. 4 (Fall 2007): 1100–1109, 1104.

12. Paul Huebener, “‘No moon to speak of’: Identity and Place in Dionne Brand’s *In Another Place, Not Here*,” *Callaloo* 30, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 623, 624.
14. Brand gives us an opportunity to extend some of Mbembe’s work to consider suicide as a consequence of state control of life and the threat of physical death with regard to gender that is undertheorized by critical race theorists; see also Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*.
16. Ibid.
21. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 47.
22. Ibid., 52.
23. Ibid., 53.
Epilogue


6. Ibid.

7. The bill states, “For generations, the institutions of slavery and involuntary servitude were defined by the race, color, and ancestry of those held in bondage. Slavery and involuntary servitude were enforced, both prior to and after the adoption of the 13th amendment to the Constitution of the United States, through widespread public and private violence directed at persons because of their race, color, or ancestry, or perceived race, color, or ancestry. Accordingly, eliminating racially motivated violence is an important means of eliminating, to the extent possible, the badges, incidents, and relics of slavery and involuntary servitude.” Ibid.


10. In June 2009 the prosecutor claimed that there was not enough evidence to pursue murder charges against the two men accused of McClelland’s death. A truck driver came forward and said that he may have hit McClelland. Charges were subsequently dropped and investigations are ongoing. See “Texas: Call For a Federal Inquiry Into a Dragging Death.” The New York Times, June 9, 2009, LexisNexis; and The New York Times, July 21, 2009, p. A16, New York Edition.


18. “Memphis Police Beat Transsexual.”


20. Gordon expounds on Fanon’s thought in the following: “Fanon has unmasked the reasoning. The world has a duality of good and evil that eventually situates itself as powerful and weak, oppressor and oppressed. It defies ‘nature’ to place power in the hands of evil; therefore those with power, those who oppress, must not really be evil. Those who are oppressed must be evil; on some level, they must deserve their oppression.” Gordon, Bad Faith and Antiblack Racism, 107


23. M. Jacqui Alexander describes this struggle with colonialism as a “psychic residue” created by the “racialized psychic impasse of colonization.” Namely, the colonizer has determined that the “natives” are incapable of governing themselves partially because of an innate hyper- and aberrant sexuality, and then the neocolonial state managers struggle to prove them wrong by policing sexuality. Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 45.


scent, directed by Tiona McCollodden (Philadelphia: 2010), DVD; Badass Supermama, directed by Etang Inyang (San Francisco: Frameline, 1996), DVD; Butch Mystique, directed by Debra A. Wilson (Oakland, CA: Moyo Entertainment, 2003), DVD; Living with Pride: Ruth Ellis @ 100, directed by Yvonne Welbon (Chicago: Our Film Works, 1999), DVD; A Litany for Survival: The Life and Work of Audre Lorde, directed by Michelle Parkerson and Ada Gay Griffin (New York: Third World Newsreel, 1995), DVD; U People: LGBT Rockumentary, directed by HanifahWalidah and Olive Demetrius (2008), DVD; Chasing the Moon, directed by Dawn Suggs (1990), short film; The Watermelon Woman, directed by Cheryl Dunye (1996; New York: First Run Features, 2000), DVD; Mississippi Damned, directed by Tina Mabry (2009; Los Angeles, CA: Morgan’s Mark, 2010), DVD.


