

**TRANS NECROINTIMACIES:
AFFECT, RACE, AND THE CHALKY GEOPOLITICS OF TRANS
MEMORIALIZATION**

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This dissertation explores the centrality of racialized trans death in structuring whiteness as emblematic of contemporary trans(normative) life. Taking my point of departure from the chalk outlines of dead bodies that frequently appear during rituals of trans memorialization, I analyze how the circulation of necropolitical affects coheres a form of trans-homonationalism within the Trans Day of Remembrance (TDOR). Held annually, TDOR events are global vigils that publicly mourn the victims of anti-trans violence. By analyzing narratives about trans-identified people of colour who have been memorialized by TDOR, I place the affective circulations of racialized, necropolitical violence—a phenomenon I have termed *trans necrointimacies*—in conversation with TDOR to illustrate how racial decay is central to the securitization of both whiteness and trans-homonationalism within the nation-state.

Through participant observation at TDOR vigils in Toronto and New York, interviews with trans people of colour, and content-analysis of the *TDOR* website, this research highlights complex ways in which practices of trans memorialization circulate *trans necrointimacies* in the service of transnormative narratives of affective belonging within the nation-state. Tracing the affective worldings that occur through the spectacularization and consumption of ‘ordinary’ racialized trans death, this dissertation seeks to animate the seemingly disparate narratives of counter-terrorism and trans politics, the trans body and the terrorist body, and vigilant reactions and the vigil that re-acts ordinary violences.

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[INTRODUCTION]

Chalk Board: Tracing the Outline of Trans Necrointimacies

chalk board [chawk-bawrd] *n.* a smooth hard panel, usually green or black, for writing on with chalk; a blackboard.
-Oxford English Dictionary

[i] The Chalked Outlines of Trans Days of Remembrance

Between March 1970 and December 2017, over 2,742 trans people were murdered globally as a result of anti-trans violence. The brutality of their deaths serve as a stark reminder of the expendability of trans lives. Indeed, within the decade leading up to 2017, 983 trans people were shot, 517 stabbed, 272 beaten, 97 strangled or hanged, 63 stoned, 49 asphyxiated or suffocated, 40 decapitated or dismembered, 33 throats cut, 35 tortured, 35 burned, 34 run over by a vehicle, 33 other, and 418 not stated (*TGEU* 2017b). These figures represent the tip of the proverbial iceberg. Missing are those whose deaths were unreported, mis-categorized, or those who, by virtue of their expendability, simply went missing.

In 1999, following the death of Rita Hester, a black trans woman, Gwendolyn Ann Smith organized the first Trans Day of Remembrance (TDOR) vigil to honour the victims of anti-trans violence. Since then, each year, on November 20th, trans people gather at TDOR vigils to publicly mourn the victims of the annual toll of violence and to “express love and respect for [trans] people in the face of national indifference and hatred” (*Int’l TDOR* n.d.b). While the scope and nature of these vigils differ slightly depending on where you attend them, TDOR

vigils are now international commemorations that memorialize the lives of trans¹ people who have died as a result of violent, transphobic attacks.

The use of chalk outlines in TDOR vigils to indicate the loss of life has always been a source of ambivalence for me. On one hand, chalk animates the psychic pulse of life; its powdery residue invoking memories of fiercely-contended hopscotch games, the velvety echo of blackboard erasers, or the stained remnants of childhood dreams gradually fading on sun-bleached sidewalks. On the other hand, chalk often indexes the morbid abjection of anonymous bodies whose wretched outlines signal the violent territory of a crime scene. Used to mark the rough outline of a body's awkward position in death, chalk allows for a visual representation of anti-trans violence without the gruesomeness of its lived materiality. Thus, through its use in outlining the figure of abbreviated trans life, chalk animates the psychic pulse of death.

I became actively involved in organizing, and speaking at, TDOR vigils in Kingston and Toronto, Ontario between 2002 and 2010. In Kingston, Ontario, the usual practice was to organize volunteers to lie on the ground so that chalk outlines could be traced around their bodies. Once an outline has been traced upon the ground, the name of a deceased trans-identified person— and, occasionally, the means by which their life was brutally cut short— is usually written in the empty void contained within the lines. Although the number of outlines drawn varied from year to year², the victims of transphobic violence were overwhelmingly trans women of colour.

It was in Kingston that I started to feel the first stirrings of what I later came to recognize as a fraught ambivalence, not only to the tension between the narrativization of trans life and

¹ This dissertation understands 'trans' as the broad categorization of individuals whose gender identity and/or expression is incongruent with the gender assigned to them at birth.

² Anywhere from the 32 outlines we drew in 2002 to the 45 outlines needed in 2009.

trans death, but also to the ritualesque function of the TDOR vigil. As a trans person of colour at a predominantly white post-secondary institution, I was often called upon to either read the list of

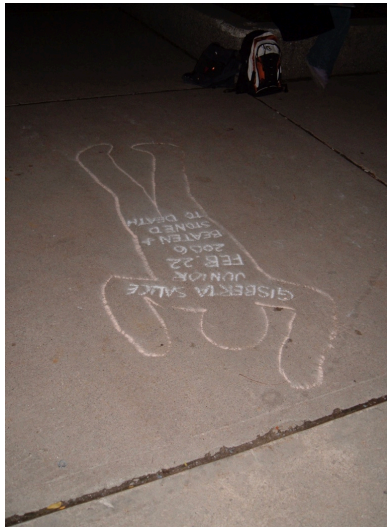


Figure 1: Chalk outline, Queen's University, 2006. (Figure 1).

names out or to help prepare for the event by drawing chalk outlines around the university campus. On one such occasion, as I lay on the ground, waiting patiently for a member of the campus queer society to trace the outline around my body, I found myself grappling with the implications of my own involvement with the politics of TDOR— particularly in terms of the narrative erasure of race in shaping anti-trans violence.

For, in the very act of offering my own body as a placeholder whose traced outline represented an ‘other’ body, I was also faced with the traces of a representation that could not be contained within the outlines of my own body contours. In that moment, the chalk outline was both a literal tracing *of* my body and an abstract sign whose traces exceed their intended utility—an instant where my body, to ‘transpose’ a Massumi-ism (2002), was as immediately actual as it was virtual and whilst that virtual body was simultaneously rendered actual. The gap between the symbolic body traced upon the cold concrete and my brown, privileged³, trans body was one that could not be bridged through this single act of commemoration. In that all-white space, of trans remembrance, the presence of my brown, post-colonial body was simultaneously excessive of, and inadequate for, the demands of trans remembrance. The ritual recitation of the names of the

³ Certainly, I was afforded a measure of privilege denied to the memories of those we now mourned for. My identity as a young trans man was navigated with a greater ease than a number of trans women I knew. Furthermore, what privilege I had was compounded by my normative ascriptions of future entry in to middle-class respectability by virtue of my status as an undergraduate student at an elite university in Canada.

dead made me wonder about the haunting presence of those we mourned in death and the systemic absence of those same lives in everyday trans organizing. And I began thinking critically about the centrality of trans death in this annual, and only, event organized by and for trans people.

What emerged from these early encounters with the (im)permanence of TDOR's chalk's outlines were a series of tentative questions about the necropolitical value of racialized trans death in structuring trans life. Extending Achille Mbembe's (2003) concept of necropolitics to bear upon centrality of racialized trans death in organizing contemporary trans life, this dissertation asks questions about the sorts of affective worldings that occur through the targeted disposal of racialized trans bodies. How do these narratives of racialized loss construct trans histories? How are these losses— and, by extension, the memories they engender— constitutive of identitarian politics? What bodies are conjured up at the same time as others are consumed? How may we further complicate contemporary manifestations of trans-homonationalism— the realignment of configurations of race, class, and (trans)sexual citizenship within contemporary forms of national (in)security— through this consideration of the affective circulation of expendable bodies? In short, what is the work of racialized trans death in structuring white trans life?

What was an already-intriguing area of research was further complicated a few years later while researching the Trans Day of Remembrance website (*TDOR website*⁴) in preparation for a vigil in the Greater Toronto Area. As I scanned the “About TDOR” section of the *TDOR* website, I came across the following information:

⁴ In the interest of clarity, this dissertation engages with the *TDOR* website as a cultural artifact that can be read as distinct from the event of the TDOR vigil.

We live in times more sensitive than ever to hatred based violence, especially since the events of *September 11th*. Yet even now, the deaths of those based on anti-transgender hatred or prejudice are largely ignored. Over the last decade, more than one person per month has died due to transgender-based hate or prejudice, regardless of any other factors in their lives. This trend shows no sign of abating. (2007; emphasis mine)

What is the relationship between counter-terrorism and trans activism, and between the ghostly trans body and the abstracted terrorist body? How do we trace this slide between the vigilant reactions borne from violence and the vigil that re-acts violence?

Focusing on the centrality of ordinary racialized violence within discourses of trans memorialization, this dissertation analyses how the circulation of necropolitical affects structures trans-homonationalism within the Trans Day of Remembrance. Placing the affective circulation of racialized, necropolitical violence—which I have termed *trans necrointimacies*—in conversation with TDOR, I illustrate how racial decay is central to the securitization of both whiteness and trans-homonationalism within the nation-state. Through participant observation at TDOR vigils in Toronto and New York, interviews with trans people of colour, and content-analysis of the *TDOR* website, this research highlights complex ways in which practices of trans memorialization circulate *trans necrointimacies* in the service of trans-homonational narratives of affective belonging within the nation-state. By analyzing the narratives that are written on trans-identified people of colour who have been memorialized by TDOR, this dissertation seeks to animate the seemingly disparate narratives of counter-terrorism and trans politics, the trans body and the terrorist body, and between vigilant reactions and the vigil that re-acts.

[ii] Necropolitical Narratives: Race and Grief in Queer and Trans Histories of Memorialization

I wish I looked like Matthew Shepard
I heard Rita Hester say
Because maybe then my neighbors would have helped me as I screamed
for my life,
As I called out for help,
From someone, anyone— as this man stabbed my life away...
-Yoseñio Lewis

Everyone knows the story of Matthew Shepard. A blond haired, blue-eyed, baby-faced, 21-year-old gay man, Shepard was murdered in Laramie, Wyoming in October 1998. Tied to a fence, tortured, and left to die, the horrific story of the university student's painful and prolonged assault was the subject of both national and international press. Amidst the gruesome, detailed media descriptions of Shepard's battered face— completely caked with dried blood save for the white, trail left by unwiped tears— and bashed-in skull, a picture emerged of the sensitive, young, university student whose bright future was so suddenly extinguished. The outrage and sadness in the wake of his death, led to an outpouring of political activism, spurred changes to hate-crime legislation, and bolstered funding for GLBT youth spaces.⁵

Less known, however, is the case of Rita Hester, an African-American trans woman who was murdered just five weeks later. In late November 1998, local police in Allston, Massachusetts responded to a call about some sort of disturbance in one of the units within a local apartment building. When they arrived at the apartment in question, they discovered that Hester had been stabbed at least twenty times by an unknown assailant and was in cardiac arrest.

⁵ Formed in 1998, the Matthew Shepard Foundation is a non-profit organization that engages in LGBT community outreach and activism. The Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Act (2009) makes it a federal crime to assault people based on their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Hester was rushed to a nearby hospital but was pronounced dead on arrival (Ryan 2008, 83). She was almost thirty-five years old.

What little media attention Hester's murder received was coloured by unflattering descriptions of Hester as a man who "led a double life" as a "transvestite" sex worker (Ryan 2008, 83). While the circumstances of her death were eclipsed by the tabloid-esque sensationalism resulting from the confluence of race, non-normative gender identity, and class, the figure of Matthew Shepard emerged in contrast as a humanized, but flattened, relatability. The Matthew Shepard story, as Ott and Aoki (2002) have described, was a melodrama that activated the gay community's survival instincts, reminding people of the relation of sexual bodies to "the landscape, and that cultural politics, discourse, and violence are intricately intertwined" (484).

Hester and Shepard were not the only hate-crime fatalities in 1998. That same year, James Byrd Jr., an African-American man, was dragged to his death by three white supremacists. Yet the coverage his racially-motivated death received, and the discourses of grievability indexed by his death, was in stark contrast to that received by Shepard. In her provocative analysis comparing the public reaction to Shepard's death with that of Byrd Jr., Jennifer Anne Petersen (2006) illustrates how the iconization of victims of violence is linked to social norms, ideologies, and hierarchies, inviting the public into the "performance of membership in a liberal-tolerant political community" (27) through the compulsion to care. But the compulsion to care is not just an emotional response to loss. Rather, the line between compulsion and obligation is a fine one. Framed within neoliberal discourses of tolerance, the compulsion to care is at once a deeply personal response to pain and a response obligated by performative demand for alignment with the values of the modern nation-state. While both murders occurred around the same time,

“the general reaction toward the two murders was quite different and deeply racialized” (Kohnen 2015, 143).

Located at the intersection of (threatened) whiteness, (vulnerable) masculinity, childlike cherubic innocence, and liberal, middle-class acceptability, the figure of Matthew Shepard circulated as a grievable subject; a homonormative martyr by virtue of his proximity to the national ideal. As Peterson (2006) illustrates in her analysis of news reports and interviews, “the *repeated* details of Shepard’s life and person that made him so compelling to so many people were linked to those that made him symbolic of the boy next door...” (80). Thus, the repetition of Shepard’s relatability in life— as young, male, white, middle-class, and American— served to reanimate him as a mournable subject in death, one worthy of public acts of remembrance.

Collective remembrance, writes Ann Rigney (2008), is not a static project, tied down to specific figures, icons, or monuments. Rather, it is a performative process that depends upon the plasticity of memory: “collective memory is constantly ‘in the works’ and, like a swimmer, has to keep moving even just to stay afloat” (Rigney 2008, 345). Lest we forget, the work of remembrance is an intimate political language of relatability or ‘likeness.’ Acts of remembrance invite us into identifying with “imagined communities” of loss, galvanizing claims for substantive rights through an appeal to emotionality on an individual level.

Certainly, Shepard’s death provoked outrage, fear, and sadness amongst the queer community. But the violence of his murder destabilized contemporary liberal American narratives of tolerance and freedom while bringing unresolved histories of prejudice into sharp relief. Interspersed with descriptions of Shepard’s battered body left tied to the fence, media references to Shepard’s death as a “lynching” or “crucifixion” aligned anti-gay violence with unresolved histories of both anti-black violence and the enduring appeal of Judeo-Christian

martyrdom. As a result, as Beth Loffreda (2000) describes in *Losing Matt Shepard*, upon his death, the young man “underwent a strange, American transubstantiation, seized, filtered, and fixed as an icon⁶ by the national news media dedicated to swift and consumable tragedy and by a national politics convulsed by gay rights” (x).

In contrast, while Byrd and Hester’s deaths provoked outrage and pity, their battered black bodies inspired no similar identificatory empathy. Rather, reports of Byrd’s racially-motivated death were reminders of the ongoing-presence of racism and the nation’s legacy of racial segregation and anti-black violence. By focusing all of their attention on the racist, Southern villains who dragged Byrd to his death, regional media outlets created a narrative that resurrected Byrd’s body, only to erase him again in the construction of white liberalism as virtuous, tolerant, and urban. As a result, argues Petersen (2006), Byrd’s murder was re-narrativized through “a framework of historical trauma, guilt, and redemption” (159).

In “Violence, Mourning, Politics,” Judith Butler (2003b) explores the possibility of vulnerability and loss as foundational to building communities. Anchoring both mourning and loss to the figure of the human, Butler famously asks of us “[w]hose lives count as lives” and

⁶ We can trace a similar pattern of positive identificatory-consumability in the infamous story of Brandon Teena, the young, female-bodied individual who was raped and then murdered in 1993 in Falls City, Nebraska. The sad tale of Brandon Teena is notable for several reasons. First, the criminal trial of the two men responsible for killing Teena garnered a fair amount public interest around the lack of congruence between assigned sex and gender roles and the confluence between homophobia, transphobia, and misogyny only fueled local and international media interest. Second, in death, Teena was granted posthumous celebrity status as his tragic story became the subject of several lucrative mass-media projects, including true-crime books, multiple documentaries, and of course, the award-winning movie *Boys Don’t Cry* (1999). In this sense, Brandon Teena represented “a martyr lost in the struggle for transgender rights to the brutal perpetrators of rural hetero-masculine violences” whilst simultaneously gesturing to “a particular set of late- twentieth century cultural anxieties about place, whiteness and rural existence” (Halberstam 2000, 79). Finally, in death, Brandon Teena’s Sioux ancestry was erased by queer and trans projects of memorialization (Driskill 2004).

“*what makes for a grievable life?*” (2003b, 10). What kinds of bodies count when they are victims of hate-crimes?

What the Shepard, Byrd and Hester murders illustrate is how, in an era of homonormative acceptability, discourses of race and racialization continue to prefigure, not just the discursive gap between ‘good victim’ and ‘bad victim,’ but also the ways in which the psychic space of memorialization is symbolically and affectively mediated by ideals of citizenship structured through whiteness. The mass mediation of remembrance provides an “inventory of who is mourned as a public, national death is telling of contemporaneous ideals of citizenship, and exclusions. This imaginary provides flesh and blood descriptions of who the strangers are who make up the national political community” (Petersen 2006, 73). While we may not know them personally, the relatability of each victim in life determines their grievability in death.

In my research analyzing the circulation of *trans necrointimacies* in practices of memorialization, I illustrate how the space signalled by the chalky delineation of lethal anti-trans violence produces narratives about the grievability of the subject. Through the enigmatic chalk outline of a life cut, TDOR vigils produce spatio-temporal narratives that literally re-member the corpse as a spectacle of both life and death.⁷ This practice of showing a body without actually showing *the* body has always had a dramatic effect in its deployment for the purpose of capturing the public’s imagination. A template for harnessing affect, the chalked outline marks the symbolic abdication of space once occupied by the now-deceased body. However, because the outline represents the void left by the corpse, the chalked outline imputes presence while simultaneously conjuring up absence. Chalk marks the liminality of ordinary violence and raises

⁷ Indeed, one could argue that the chalked grids of hopscotch have a similar strategy to the chalked lines of the dead body because both engage in acts of spatial delineation.

questions about the haunting visibility of “what modern history has rendered ghostly” (Gordon 2008, 18).

At once poignant and cartoonish, chalk outlines are sanitized spectacles that delineate zones of contamination and segregate spaces of containment. Of course, the question of the source of contamination is a little fuzzy: is it the specter of death contaminating the ordinary or that the ordinary may contaminate the interruptive effect of death? Whilst the shape of a chalky outline determines the narrativisable content of a re-membrance, it is also suggestive of an unavowable void, a “zone of occult instability” whose fertile emptiness always threatens to breach its chalky confines (Fanon 1963, 183). A paradox outlined upon the rough surface of the unforgiving concrete, the chalky body is simultaneously a representation made concrete—a retroflexive spectacle of a violent loss made tangible in the present— as well as the failure of the corporeal form to conform to the implied concreteness of its outlines. As this dissertation illustrates, it is through the liminality of invisible-visible racialized trans death that collective fellow feelings circulate during TDOR vigils.

If the narrativization of trans lives are already undergirded by homonational trajectories of normative sexual citizenship, how may we approach a study of the limits of acceptability in racialized trans death? How may we develop an understanding of the affective economies of violence as intimately linked to the specifically racialized deployment of these absent-present bodies as part of a public intimacy of the chalky politics of trans remembrance? While TDOR vigils and the *TDOR* website have been subjected to anti-racist critiques that focus on the universalization and decontextualization of trans women of colour from narratives of memorialization (Lamble 2008; Snorton and Haritaworn 2013; Snorton 2017), what remains unaddressed, as I argue, is a sustained analysis of how rituals of remembrance are undergirded

by a more insidious form of state-secured whiteness. In other words, there has yet to be any sustained critique that addresses the affective stakes of trans memorialization in the service of trans-homonationalism and state securitization.

In this dissertation, I argue that entrance into trans-normative belonging depends upon spectacularized, racialized violence. As such, racialized trans deaths are memorialized retroflexively as losses whose re-membrance or re-enaction mark the limits of trans futurity within state-sanctioned rights protections as that very point at which the materiality of race circulates as pure abstraction. Key to this dissertation is Jasbir Puar's formulation of homonationalism. First, in her seminal text, *Terrorist Assemblages*, Puar describes homonationalism as a form of "homonormative nationalism" (2007, 10) resulting from the alignment of normative homosexual subjects within US imperialist exceptionalism. Subsequently, in *The Right to Maim*, Puar further develops homonationalism to reflect upon the increasing incorporation of trans subjects within "national discourse and legal frames of recognition" (2017, 34).

Drawing upon Puar's work, I illustrate how trans remembrance relies upon both the anachronistic presence of racialized death and the absence of the racialized body, thus entrenching necropolitical forms of trans-homonationalism through the spectacularized, affective circulation of racialized trans deaths, terrorist threats, and national anxieties. Emerging as history's ghostly residues within neoliberal narratives of government intervention in the face of terrorism, what I have termed *necrointimacies* describes this circulation of cannibalistic affects as structuring trans-homonational narratives of belonging in post-9/11 North America.

While its design intends for impermanence, chalk-dust is contaminative and stubborn, always leaving us with the traces of its instructive labour. Being attentive to these chalky

encounters of vigil/ance requires an un-certain willingness to play with, what Todd Ramón Ochoa (2007) describes as, an unnameable “*something* that overflows, that cannot be captured, that saturates and consumes” (487; emphasis mine). Following a sense, or feeling, of identification in and through racialized scripts of trans-homonationalism within practices of trans memorialization, my affective reading of TDOR takes into account the ways in which different bodies may be predisposed to affects in different ways, even as those affects coalesce to suture something like a collective experience via proximity. Thus, throughout this dissertation, I turn to affect theory because it provides a framework for conceptualizing trans death as both a psychic and material event within contemporary socio-political manifestations of historical violence, racialization, and memorialization.

[iii] Methodology

In order to analyze the ways in which TDOR memorializes trans people of colour and produces trans-homonational subjects through racialized trans death, this dissertation turns to multiple methods that included: content analysis of the *TDOR* website, participant observation at TDOR vigils in Toronto and New York, participant observation at the National September 11 Memorial & Museum, and semi-structured interviews with vigil organizers and participants. In each of these case studies, I draw heavily upon feminist (eg: Buch and Staller 2007; Hesse-Biber 2004; Reinharz 1992), affective (eg: Åhåll 2018; Blackman 2016; Hemmings 2015; Gordon 2008; Sedgwick 2003), and critical race methodologies (eg: Anzaldúa 2009; Crenshaw 1991; Denzin, Lincoln, and Smith 2008).

Historically, the narratives of trans people of colour have all too often been doubly-invisibilized by the effects of cis-gender⁸ accounts of trans experience and systemic racism (Aizura 2006; de Vries 2012; Haritaworn 2008; Koyama 2006; Roen 2001). Foregrounding the “situated knowledges” (Collins 2000) of these erasures from the narratives of trans memorialization, this dissertation utilizes the kind of reflexive approach advocated by trans scholar Viviane Namaste (2000) who has argued for an approach that legitimates forms of knowing while simultaneously prioritizing consultation with those most affected by the research.

The silences and erasures engendered by contemporary and historical manifestations of systemic racism and transphobia require a willingness to be open to both the generative and divisive ways in which identification is structured affectively through the “body and embodied forms of sense-making in being and becoming” (Blackman 2016, 33). This interrogation of the life worlds made possible in-and-through racialized trans death has necessitated a sustained engagement with the affective and ghostly potentialities of the vigil (Blackman 2016; Gordon 2008).

While my research has always been shaped by feminist methodological commitment to valuing subjectivity and personal experience (Reinharz 1992) as central to the production of knowledge, I have also drawn heavily from critical race scholars who have resisted static conceptualizations of identity in favour of intersectional approaches (Crenshaw 1991). This attention to intersectionality thus conceptualizes difference as “a range of interlocking inequalities, where [trans] individuals experience categories or positionality differently depending upon their social locations within the social structures of their given society” (Hesse-

⁸ Derived from the Latin *cis*-, meaning “on the same side as,” and emerging from trans activist discourses, the term cisgender refers to individuals who identify with the gender assigned to them at birth. For more on the potentials and pitfalls of ‘cis,’ see Aultman (2014).

Biber and Leckenby 2004, 214). As this dissertation illustrates, it is impossible to think about how race shapes practices of trans memorialization without accounting for the complex intersections of class and gender identity. Central to this analysis is the role of affect, not just in structuring sexual, racial, and economic “grids” (Massumi 2002, 8) that determine domination but also in providing “the local investments necessary to counter those relations” (Hemmings 2005, 550).

Content Analysis: *TDOR* website

The centrality of technology to everyday life has necessitated new approaches to conducting research. This capacity of blogs, websites, e-mail correspondence, and video chat platforms to challenge dominant forms of knowledge production has led to increased attention to not just the politics of online representation, but also the scope for identity-building and social activism within minority communities. Created in 2007, the *TDOR* website is the primary source of information about anti-trans murders. Aside from a sizeable, publicly accessible spreadsheet that painstakingly details trans-related murders that took place between 1970 and 2012, the website also contains a valuable archive of annual memorial pages devoted to victims that were killed between 2007 to present day. Through discourse analysis of the victim photos and hyperlinks posted in these virtual obituaries on the *TDOR* website, I examine the virtualization of death as a cultural artifact reflecting the unique socio-political context of trans memorialization in a post-9/11 era (Reinharz and Kulick 2007; Weitz 1977).

In order to analyze how race is spectacularized within online narratives of trans memorialization, this dissertation approaches the qualitative analysis of the *TDOR* website through a sustained engagement with the virtual world at both its descriptive and inferential

level⁹: while the former describes the representation of trans death at its most basic level, the latter allows “researchers to go further and explore what media content says about a society and the potential effects [these] media representations may have on audiences” (Macnamara 2005, 3). At the descriptive level, the *TDOR* website is a virtual memorial dedicated to victims of anti-trans violence. However, as I will illustrate in Chapters Two and Three, the *TDOR* website also has an accessorial function as a centralized database for the collection of media reports on anti-trans deaths and serves as an organizational tool for those seeking to hold a vigil of their own. These media reports and educational resources for the global dissemination of a structured form of trans memorialization lend themselves to an engagement with the virtual world at an inferential level. Thus, my research examined the ways in which racialized victims of anti-trans violence were described in the *TDOR* spreadsheet and in the website’s annual memorial pages.

Throughout this dissertation, I state that approximately 2,742 trans people were killed globally¹⁰ between 1970 and 2017. In order to calculate the total number of reported trans deaths between 1970 and 2017, I utilized a publicly-accessible spreadsheet on the *TDOR* website for data on anti-trans murders between March 1970 and December 2007. While the *TDOR* website continues to share information on anti-trans murders via annual memorial pages— and one can easily count each individual memorial entry to arrive at an accurate numeric representation for the year in question— this detailed spreadsheet was no longer updated after 2007 because the

⁹ The process of making meaning is inherently “polysemic” (Macnamara 2005, 5). This attention to the multiplicity of interpretation accounts for the role of the audience, competing forms of trans representation, and contextual factors as simultaneously impacting the ways in which the messages on the website are received.

¹⁰ These figures represent only the *reported* murders of trans-identified people: this figure does not account for those whose deaths were not reported to local law enforcement or media outlets or the victims whose trans identity was overlooked as a contributing factor in their death.

introduction of Transgender Europe's "Trans Murder Monitoring Project" (*TMM*)¹¹ rendered the grassroots nature of *TDOR*'s data collection¹² methods obsolete.

At once a historical archive and a mirror of our present-day landscape, the *TDOR* website is as virtual as it is real. So too are the affects generated by the information it circulates. Through my analysis of this chaotic world of pictures gleaned from grieving community members and hastily-pasted media links, something comes into view: the tentative intimacy of imagined kinship with other trans bodies. Sometimes the media link meant for a particular victim of violence will redirect you to witness the brutal end of someone entirely different. At other times, this virtual misdirection masquerades in the form of a 'dead link.' But, as with sleights of hand, the misdirection of information *tells* us something about other stories in play. Misdirections are inextricable from the close-up magic of mourning. Thus, the representational gaps they engender, are simply extensions of the ordinary affective violences that this dissertation seeks to highlight.

Participation Observation: TDOR vigils

¹¹ Launched in 2009 by Transgender Europe's "Transrespect versus Transphobia Worldwide" campaign, *TMM* receives funding and support from the collaboration between Transgender Europe (*TGEU*) and the academic online journal *Limnalsis*. This web of support means that *TMM* is able to draw upon resources that Smith and the *TDOR* site do not have access to. Through its cooperation with "20 partner organizations and more than 80 activists in the global South and East, being guided by more than 25 experts and researchers from all world regions," *TMM* has a more streamlined approach to collecting data on anti-trans hate crimes (Balzer 2009). However, compared to the *TDOR* site's archive of anti-trans murders dating back to 1971, *TMM*'s database of anti-trans murders is much smaller since the organization is relatively new.

¹² While I may occasionally draw upon *TMM* for statistical information on trans violence globally, I have chosen to focus my dissertation specifically on the *TDOR* website for several reasons: first, my research explores the link between trans remembrance and counter-terrorism— a connection that came to my attention on the US-based *TDOR* site; second, the *TDOR* site offers a richer scope for analysis since it *is* part of the historical narrative of trans activism with roots in North America; third, unlike *TMM*, the *TDOR* site retains its autonomy since it is a community-run, independent project that is not beholden to the outside agendas that may be linked to the demands of funding; fourth, the palimpsestic and grassroots nature of the *TDOR* site allows us to treat it as a historic archive and a cultural object; finally, while the *TMM* site offers us raw data, the *TDOR* site tells us a story.

During the course of this project, I observed TDOR vigils as an academic and a community participant at four events in Toronto and New York. Both cities are home to a large trans-identified population in a major multicultural, metropolitan area. In Toronto, I attended the 2014 Trans Day of Remembrance vigil at The 519 Church Street Community Center. While in New York in 2015, I was able to compare three very distinct approaches to trans remembrance and community mourning. The first event was hosted by the Audre Lorde Project— a community organization focused on providing educational programming and resources for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Two-Spirit, Trans and Gender Non-Conforming (LGBTSTGNC) people of colour— and held a few days before the ‘official’ TDOR date, November 20th. A few days later, I attended the ‘official’ TDOR vigil hosted by New York City’s Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Community Center, a ‘hub’ for LGBT programming in New York not dissimilar to Toronto’s 519. Finally, I attended “Say Her Name,” a grassroots event organized by and for trans women of colour.

My observation of these events followed a feminist approach to participant observation because the flexibility of this method allowed for an open-ended analysis of discourses, processes, and practices (Clifford 1986; Valentine 2007) while exploring life worlds using the self as “the instrument of knowing” (Ortner 1995, 173). Aside from being attentive to the participatory demographics, key speakers, and the ritualization of the vigil itself, this affective interpretation required a willingness to be open to the uncertain fluxes of emotional immediacy, and the circulation of unqualified intensities (Massumi 2002). This interrogation of how “embodied processes move through zones of entanglement” (Culhane 2017, 4) meant exploring how, for instance, different bodies shifted, moved, and aligned differently during rituals of memorialization.

My own immersion into the atmosphere of the TDOR vigil allowed for comparisons across field sites in order to highlight the different approaches to memorialization and the unique negotiations of mourning and identity in each space. As Buch and Staller (2007) explain in “The Feminist Practice of Ethnography,” one of the main challenges to conducting research with traditionally marginalized communities is in gaining access to the field site. Since TDOR mostly memorializes trans women of colour, I was always mindful of my own positionality as a trans man of colour in these spaces and often tried to sit at the back of event-spaces. However, my insider status as a trans person of colour meant the blurring of my role as a detached or “complete observer” and an “observer-as-participant” (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006, 245). For instance, in the case of “Say Her Name,” it was because of my status as a trans person of colour that I was welcomed at alternative memorialization spaces. Thus, my observation of the vigils was undergirded by the impossibility of participation without bias or influence (Deutsch 2004).

As I discuss in Chapter Three, vigils are performative spaces that often re-enact, or ritualize, the violences they seek to memorialize. Through participant observation at these vigils, I was able to explore the affective circulation of racialized *necrointimacies* in the organization of the memorial itself, as well as through participant feedback in interviews. In particular, I observed the organization of the performances during each vigil and the ways in which differently racialized or classed trans bodies took up space in each event.

Semi-Structured Interviews

It was important that this dissertation refused the monolithic portrayal of racialized trans experience in TDOR vigils and the *TDOR* website, while also reflecting the lived realities of racialized trans lives as they unfold in the shadow of ordinary violence. Within feminist research, interviews have long been valued for their ability to “[offer] researchers access to people’s ideas,

thoughts, and memories in their own words...” (Reinharz 1992, 19). This is especially key when ethically writing about the experiences of marginalized communities who are often engaged with through the sort of representational essentialism that metonymically freezes subjects (Appadurai 1988) such that “one part or aspect of peoples’ lives come to epitomize them as a whole” (Clifford 1997, 24). Thus, I turned to semi-structured interviews because they allowed for active engagement and involvement of my research participants in the construction of narratives about their own experiences, while simultaneously honouring the weighty silences and inchoate expressions of frustration that are also valuable modes of knowing (Reinharz 1992, 18).

Between August 2015 and August 2016, I interviewed a total of twenty trans-identified¹³ people of colour in Toronto and New York City. All research participants were 18 years of age, or older and had responded to my call for participants (Appendix a) via informal networks and flyers that had been posted in community spaces. The twenty research participants included two genderqueer participants, nine trans women, eight trans men, and one person who identified as Two-Spirit. Out of the twenty participants, four had been actively involved in organizing a vigil I had just attended. With the exception of vigil organizers, all interview participants were asked to choose a pseudonym to protect their identity.

Since I was interested in my participants’ narratives of belonging/not belonging within the trans community, and their interpretations of remembering the dead through vigils, each interview began with a brief question about the person’s relationship to forms of community-making. Following this preliminary background, research participants were invited to tell me a bit about what they knew of the Trans Day of Remembrance, their experiences at previous/recent vigils, and their thoughts about practices of trans memorialization (Appendix b). In the case of

¹³ In my “call for participants” (See Appendix a), “trans-identified” referred to anyone who self-identified along the trans spectrum. This included MTF, FTM, genderqueer, gender fluid, two spirited.

the four TDOR vigil organizers, the scope of the interviews followed a similar format as that for attendees with the following exceptions: organizers were asked a series of questions about the organizational decisions made with respect to the vigil, their expectations for the event itself and their experience of the vigil in the aftermath (Appendix c).

[iv] Chalk Board: The Itinerary of Trans Necrointimacies

Chapter One lays a detailed theoretical framework for this project by bringing together the disparate fields of psychoanalysis, affect studies, trans studies, critical race theory, and homonationalism. First, in order to highlight the ways in which loss coheres collective belonging, this chapter begins with an overview of Freudian approaches to thinking through mourning and memorialization. Next, by turning to theories of affect, I illustrate how the trans body is both a psychic and material event within contemporary socio-political manifestations of historical violence and memorialization. Critical race theories provide a framework for understanding racialized expendability and bare life as structuring whiteness. Finally, arguing that the field of trans theory has been shaped by civilizational narratives that prefigure the racialized other as outside of trans subjectivity, I conclude by showing the links between trans-homonationalism and whiteness as it intersects with necropolitical impulses.

In Chapter Two, I engage with the representation of victims of transphobic violence on the *TDOR* website. Through an analysis of the narrative representation of victims on the *TDOR* website, I show how bare life and the limits of expendability cohere around the (trans)gendered and racialized worth of different bodies. Furthermore, through an analysis of the graphic media links that are included in the memorial sections for several trans women of colour, I illustrate how the *TDOR* website has shifted from the politics of a flattened universality to a consumptive

economy that legislates ‘becoming trans’ through witnessing spectacularized violence. This shift to *necrointimacy*, I argue, means that the task of remembrance becomes subsumed by the spectacular politics of ordinary racialized violence, which can then be consumed under the sign of trans resilience.

Chapter Three focuses on the organizational and performative structures of TDOR vigils. Drawing upon participant observation in Toronto and New York City, this chapter examines the ways in which affect circulates in, and through, the performance of memorialization in TDOR vigils. TDOR vigils, I argue, demand a form of alignment. By engaging in necropolitical memory work, TDOR vigils produce deathscapes of racialized bodies who, in their uncanny discursive resurrection, are akin to the living dead. As the necropolitics of TDOR is tied to a racialized politics of inclusion and exclusion, it produces an uneven trans citizenship undergirded by Eurocentric epistemologies. The productive flipside of this necropolitical exercise also traces how whiteness-as-living is celebrated through Trans Pride events, thus illustrating that trans bodies of colour can only circulate within the public imaginaries of death and decay.

Hypervigilance and trauma shape the contours of Chapter Four. In this chapter, I trace how the shared discursive modernity of counterterrorism and transsexuality colludes/collides via a narrative spectacularization that works on several registers: it re-members the dismembered corpse whilst tying these acts of violence and the memorialization of the trans body to that other body—the spectral, ever-present, and yet maddeningly elusive terrorist. Occupying the space between the past and present, modernity and archaism, and life and death, both uncanny figures are narratively re-presented via communal acts of politicized re-memory, recover, and national reconstruction. Whilst narratives of counter-terrorism tend to be US-centric, the terrorist ‘other’

who haunts TDOR vigils also has implications for Canada's multicultural approach to trans activism which draws heavily on its US histories.

Finally, I conclude with a brief reflection on the links between trans-futurity and freedom and how the vivacity of political life is dependent upon the absent-presence of racialized bodies. If the progressive narratives that undergird the dreams for trans futurity have an ambivalent dependence upon the strategic displacement of certain bodies through acts of remembrance, then being able to tolerate the negative space of loss offers potential for a catachrestic becoming *beyond* the intimacies offered by trans-homonationalism.

Chalk pit [chawk-pit] *n.* A quarry for chalk.
-Oxford English Dictionary

[i] Introduction: *Remembering Our Dead*

In 1998, following a sharp increase in the number of trans-identified people killed as a result of anti-trans violence, a small group of trans activists created the *Remembering Our Dead* website. A bare-bones affair, this was the first website dedicated to remembering, recording, and recirculating the names and details of trans victims.¹⁴ Inset, on the website's index page, a grainy greyscale image of the triangular transgender symbol, bears George Santayana's cautionary words: "Those who cannot remember the past are doomed to repeat it." Modified from its original form, the *Remembering Our Dead* website has replaced the word 'condemned' in Santayana's quote with 'doomed'. Whilst the agential, participatory quality of "condemnation" may be contrasted with the passive, destiny-oriented nature of being "doomed," we can trace both terms back to the etymological roots of their "ill-fated" ancestries. In either case, the outcome is the same: the cautionary tone of Santayana's excerpt functions as an appeal to melancholic retention as utopian futurity—a staged recognition of a past loss that *must* be repeated for the future to endure, lest it be "doomed."

¹⁴ Although the *ROD* webpage has now been resigned to the internet graveyard, we can still find these early traces of trans memorialization in online archives. In a moment of double haunting, the website that once archived the dead, now its own dead object in an online archive. Today, the website endures as its own dead object forever preserved in the archives of the internet's digital graveyard.

While the resignatory quality of Santayana's words point to the haunting nature of rituals of mourning and memorialization, we can also read the excerpt as evocative of a future-oriented endurance; one that promises triumph through perseverance and survival through never letting go.¹⁵ By staging the past as a common loss that *must* be repeated, the project of trans memorialization effectively mobilizes other trans bodies through a common denominator: an appeal to endurance as fellow-feeling rooted in both perseverance and loss. As a "structure of feeling" (Williams 1977, 133) rooted in loss, rituals of memorialization secure belonging, granting legitimacy not just to the stories we tell about collective pasts but also our wishes for collective futures.

Furthermore, this future-oriented capacity for endurance is intimately linked to the ways in which we can think about the circulation of affect as working on and through the imagined bodies of gender non-conforming sexual citizens within nationalist discourses of the nation-state. Certainly, as my introduction to this dissertation illustrated, the invocation of the terror and trauma of 9/11 within discourses of trans memorialization locates the mourning trans subject within broader discourses of homonationalism, individual freedom, and state-conferred rights. Lest we forget, grief *is* socially mediated. Rituals of commemoration function as "a social 'glue,' bringing people together within a shared narrative of heroism, virtue or...trauma and mourning" (Stone 2000, 53) and, in doing so, creates collective intimacies through the generation and repetition of past narratives. Indeed, one might ask whether it is only within the solemn embrace

¹⁵ A similar call for endurance was echoed in the aftermath of 9/11 through the enduring legacy: "9/11 We will never forget". Endurance is intimately linked with a refusal to let go. In the aftermath of 9/11, former US President George W. Bush said, "Time is passing. Yet, for the United States of America, there will be no forgetting September the 11th. We will remember every rescuer who died in honor. We will remember every family that lives in grief. We will remember the fire and ash, the last phone calls, the funerals of the children." (Cox 2015).

of the TDOR vigil that individual trans bodies begin to matter as ‘trans.’ In this sense, the vigils can be understood not just as a social obligation but as a performance of the intimacies of loss that then nourishes the domestic fantasies of collective belonging. Memorialization, as I argue, coheres the intimate publics of trans identification.

These nuanced connections between commemoration, belonging, and identification lend themselves to myriad interpretations of rituals of memorialization as reflective of cultural values and social ideologies (Assmann 2011; Browne 1999; Mandziuk 2003; Sturkin 1997), and national or political rhetoric (Biesecker 2002; Cohen and Willis 2004). Indeed, the multi-layered discourses that structure practices of memorialization require us to read TDOR vigils as a cultural text, an institution wherein “the meaning of the past is not limited to objects of commemoration alone, but includes the *act* of commemoration itself” (Browne 1999, 169). Recognizing that acts of memorialization often reflect critical sites of contestation or anxiety about the present, this dissertation interrogates the construction and deployment of race and gender within the event-space of the trans vigil.

Of particular importance is how rituals of memorialization produce whiteness as the property of the grieving trans subject who, in mourning the loss of the racialized other, enters into alignment with the neoliberal ideals afforded by trans-homonationalism. Returning briefly to the statement on the *TDOR* site about 9/11, several questions arise: How do narratives of loss construct community histories? How are racialized trans losses— and, by extension, the memories they may engender— constitutive of collective identity formation? What bodies are conjured up at the same time as the lives of others are consumed? If, as I will argue, racialized trans bodies are circumscribed by deployments of disciplinary power effectively relegating them to ‘bare life’ (Agamben 1998), how can we think through practices of building collective trans

identity on the basis of this anticipatory loss? In short, how do we grapple with the chalky remains whose outlines would seem to signify the necessary repetition of racialized trans expendability?

In order to trace a trajectory towards thinking through our chalky encounters with the ghosts of trans memorialization, this chapter approaches some of these questions through mining the disparate fields of psychoanalysis, affect studies, trans studies, critical race theory, and homonationalism. First, in order to address how the lost Other is incorporated into rituals of memorialization, this chapter provides an overview of psychoanalytic approaches to thinking through mourning. Arguing that rituals of mourning within trans communities are essentially melancholic in nature, this section explores the potentials and pitfalls of Freudian approaches to thinking through loss and memorialization. Second, in order to illustrate how the trans body is both a psychic and material event within contemporary socio-political manifestations of historical violence and memorialization, I turn to theories of affect. In order to parse out neoliberal discourses of tolerance and the erasure of racialized narratives within practices of memorialization, I turn to critical race theory for formulations of racialized expendability and bare life as structuring whiteness. Next, as my dissertation asks questions about the narratives that are written on the trans people of colour who have been memorialized by TDOR, I provide a historical overview of practices of remembrance and memorialization within queer and trans communities as they relate to neoliberal discourses of homonormativity and tolerance. I conclude by showing the links between trans-homonationalism and whiteness as it intersects with necropolitical impulses.

[ii] Interpretations of Loss and Mourning in Psychoanalysis

Whilst the myriad approaches to understanding the social, psychic, and political formulations of mourning are beyond the scope of this dissertation, it is nevertheless important to note some of the foundational interpretations: in psychoanalytical circles, as the prodigal pathological symptom of a trauma to be resolved (Freud 2006b); as part of a normative social function whose subjective expressions are socially constructed (Fowlkes 1990; Assmann 2006); as “individualized,” “bureaucratized,” and legislated into “invisibility” (Bergesen 1984; Blauner 1966; Ariès 1981); as a universal human experience that is contextually unique (Lofland 1985); as political (Hausen 1997; Mayo 1988; Stone 2000; Winter 2009). Which is all to say that there is no *singular* understanding of how loss and mourning structure our lives.

What is undeniable, however, is that the experience of “loss,” as Judith Butler (2003b) writes, makes a “tenuous ‘we’ of us all” (10). As both lived experience and anticipatory possibility, loss animates those fragile entanglements between self and other— simultaneously highlighting those nebulous differences in an unflattering light— giving rise to eventual expressions of grief. In turn, practices of mourning mediate grief’s intensity by offering a roadmap of sorts that allows us to deal with loss.

If, as Shakespeare tells us, “what’s past is prologue,” then it is easy to understand how “perhaps every generation has something that haunts it” (Frosh 2013, 1). From the beginning, the field of psychoanalysis has been particularly interested in the murky, troublingly repetitive, intersections between past and present, self and other, loss and grief, trauma and resolution. Chief amongst these formulations of the psyche’s sticky attachment to lost-objects is Sigmund Freud’s seminal exploration of loss in “Mourning and Melancholia.” Originally published in 1917, “Mourning and Melancholia” traces the processes through which the loss of a loved object

can be gradually decathexed from the psyche through mourning or fervently reinvested in the ego through stubborn, melancholic attachments.

While the objects to which one may attach can take many forms, “mourning is commonly the reaction to the loss of a beloved person” (Freud 2006b, 310). But one may also mourn objects that represent a person or abstractions such as our investments in a “fatherland, freedom, an ideal and so on” (310). In mourning, one recognizes the loss of this beloved object and, through the process of grieving that loss, is able to come to terms with the object’s demise and move on. This ability to move on, as Freud explains, is the work that mourning performs as it gradually transforms the sharp sting of a memory, still proximate to the origin of loss, such that it eventually fades into a dull ache. The object that was once there is not banished. Rather, the object has been introjected or processed and this contributes to the psychic growth of the individual. A progressive, piecemeal affair, Freud’s formulation of mourning is one wherein libidinal cathexis is gradually withdrawn from the lost-object and invested in a new object such that “the ego is left free and uninhibited once again after the mourning-work is completed” (2006b, 312). Mourning, in other words, has an end-point marked by a return to ‘normalcy.’

But what happens when one cannot simply ‘get over’ the loss of that love-object? This, as Freud famously argues, tilts the balance of psychic health into the pathological province of melancholia. Characterized by an extreme degree of psychic impoverishment, Freud’s conceptualization of melancholia lent it a pathological character by virtue of its inhibitory nature. In melancholia, the disavowed attachment to a lost object leads to an object-cathexis that establishes “an identification of the ego with the abandoned object” (Freud 2006b, 316). Moreover, this identification— since it takes place within the ego— may be completely unconscious, such that the lost object takes on an unknown quality. As Freud explains, in

melancholia, it is sometimes difficult to ascertain what specifically was lost. Unlike mourning, in which all aspects of loss are dealt with consciously, melancholia is characterized by a peculiar state in which knowledge of the loss has been withdrawn from consciousness. This insidious indeterminacy of the lost-object contributes to a (un)certain slipperiness when trying to address the root of the problem. Since the unknown loss has now rebounded on the ego, it is the ego itself that becomes the target of the ambivalence that accompanies the lost object of love/hate. It is specifically this unavowed nature of melancholia that grants it an inhibitory quality. Usurped by this unavowed love for the lost object, in melancholia, the “shadow of the object” falls upon the cannibalistic ego, fortifying it whilst simultaneously impoverishing it (Freud 2006b, 313). Thus, Freud famously quips, “[i]n mourning, the world has become poor and empty, in melancholia it is the ego that has become so” (Freud 2006b, 313).

As Gabriele Schwab explains in her analysis of the inheritance of intergenerational trauma, Freudian melancholia describes a haunted psychic state characterized by “a refusal to bury the dead and let them rest in peace” (Schwab 2010, 142). Freudian psychoanalysis allows us to trace the psychic investments at work in distinguishing the borders of the self from the other and how repetitions of psychic conflicts between these murky, and often contradictory, boundaries form the precarious scaffolding of collective identification. But, by placing these demands for social recognition into the realm of the individual’s ego, Freud managed to circumvent the need for a sustained inquiry into the dominant essentialist discourses underpinning the intelligibility of race and sexuality— with its contextual baggage of heredity, eugenics, and biology— what Deborah Britzman calls “the European anchorage points or props for various modern racisms” (Britzman 1998, 101).

[iii] Interpretations of Loss and Mourning in Critical Race Theory

Several critical race scholars have critiqued Freudian psychoanalysis for its dependence on Manichean discourses of civilization and primitivity, particularly as it relates to sexuality (Gilman 1988; Khanna 2003), postcolonial subjectivities (Sheshadri-Crooks 1994), and the ongoing legacy of racism (Carr 1998; Cheng 2001). Although one may critique Freud's underlying frameworks of progress and decay for locating pathology and perversity within the realm of the racialized Other, there remains an undeniable utility in psychoanalytic theories. For all its shortcomings, psychoanalysis is neither ahistorical nor apolitical. Indeed, as Christopher Lane (1998) suggests in his introduction to *The Psychoanalysis of Race*, what could be more political than the fantasies we have about racialized Others? Psychoanalysis, Lane explains, adds a difficult truth to those seeking to argue that racism can be undone simply by raising a person's consciousness; rather, psychoanalytical perspectives would argue that those locked in conflict are *already* experiencing intangible gains (beyond their immediate interest in securing sovereignty over land or people). While Lane suggests that one example of these intangible gains would be the pleasure of depriving the Other of their liberty, we can also extend this observation to examine how national or racial fantasies coalesce through practices of memorialization. How do losses cohere national belonging? How are racial fantasies incorporated within practices of mourning? Are these rituals of memorialization performed in order to mourn and move on or are memorializations in fact melancholic formations? In short, to return to Freud, "...what is the *work* that mourning *performs*?" (2006b, 311; emphasis mine).

In response to this provocative question, critical race theorists such as Anne Anlin Cheng (2001) and David Eng and Shinhee Han (2000) use a cultural studies framework to explore how melancholia is constitutive of the shaping racial identity within contemporary configurations of

belonging within the nation-state. In *The Melancholy of Race*, Anne Anlin Cheng (2001) examines how contemporary racial identification is structured through melancholia. Wary of colourblind approaches to grief that tend toward sentimentalizing or neglecting the racial Other, Cheng turns to Freudian psychoanalysis in order to interrogate how the American ideal of freedom is dependent upon a melancholic attachment to its originary, and ongoing, racial exclusions. Melancholia, argues Cheng, less a “*condition* of grief” than it is a “*legislation* of grief” (2001, 8). Of particular importance to tracing the role of memorialization within trans communities is this interpretation of this legislation of melancholia as endemic to white neoliberalism. Indeed, in *The Melancholy of Race*, Cheng argues that “[d]ominant white identity in America operates melancholically— as an elaborate identificatory system based on psychical and social consumption-and-denial” (2001, 11). Drawing upon Toni Morrison’s *Playing in the Dark*, Cheng reminds us that “it requires hard work *not* to see” how national ideals are sustained by continually burying the racialized Other (Cheng 2001, 11). Similar sentiments have been expressed by Christina Sharpe who, in *In the Wake*, characterizes racism as “the engine that drives the ship of state’s national and imperial projects... [and] cuts through all of our lives and *deaths* inside and outside the nation, in the wake of its purposeful flow” (Sharpe 2016, 3; emphasis mine).

The socio-cultural processes of marginalization and exclusion within the nation-state are legitimized precisely because of the dependent ambivalence generated through incorporating the loved/hated Other. Tracing the trajectory of “loss-but-not-loss,” Cheng outlines the key stages in this elaborate psychic drama of unconscious cannibalism and haunting. First, the loss of the

racialized other must be denied¹⁶ in order to “sustain the fiction of possession” (Cheng 2001, 9). In other words, the racial Other, the foreigner within the nation, is assimilated or forgotten through a constitutive paradigm sustained by “the exclusion-yet-retention of racialized others” (Cheng 2001, 10). Second, this lost object must never return once this “digestive process has occurred,” since any return of the repressed object threatens the stability of the cannibalistic national ego (Cheng 2001, 9). To summon the dead from the abyss— to grant a voice to the disgusted other to whom visibility has been foreclosed— is to lay waste to the discrete myths that sustain the ego itself.

As Cheng explains, “white liberals need to keep burying the racial others in order to memorialize them” (2001, 11). The racialized Other *must* be maintained within existing structures as a “formative but denied ghost” (Cheng 2001, 12) to be conjured in times of crises. The necessity of these ghosts is echoed similarly in Judith Butler’s “Melancholy Gender,” when she writes that a loss that is refused is never actually “abolished” (1995, 167).

As these interpretations of mourning and melancholia illustrate, rituals of mourning *do something*; they have the power to generate new forces from old wounds, sustaining fantasies of omnipotence through the macabre spectacle of repeatedly banishing the Other who threatens, and thus revitalize “social, political, and aesthetic relations” (Butler 2003a, 467). Following Cheng, we can understand how it is not simply that the nation sustains itself through “the remnants of denigration and disgust created in the name of progress” (2001, 11) but that whiteness is secured, reproduced, and recirculated through this melancholic attachment to racism’s repudiations. Or, as bell hooks describes in “Eating the Other” (2006), whiteness, “imperialism, and sexist

¹⁶ A similar formulation of this prohibition against the avowal of loss is outlined in Judith Butler’s “never-never” structure of gender identity in which she describes how the ontological accomplishment of heteronormative subjectivity is dependent upon a “double negation” (Butler 1993a, 23).

domination prevail by courageous consumption. It is by eating the Other (in this case, death) that one asserts power and privilege” (378). To be clear, the argument that whiteness as structured through a consumptive melancholic attachment to the racialized Other is not about overt racism.¹⁷ Rather, as Cheng’s work illustrates, national values “tend to acquire their sharpest outline *through*, and not in spite of,” a fraught proximity to the very objects of “repulsion and sympathy, fear and desire, repudiation and identification” (2001, 12).

But where does this leave the ghostly/cannibalized Other? How, asks Cheng, should we think through the “subjectivity of the melancholic object?” (2001, 14). How do we give voice to racialized grief—to the invisibilized, intimate, objects to which whiteness so strongly clings—without reproducing the same historical structures of stereotyped negation?¹⁸ Drawing on Paul Gilroy’s *Black Atlantic*, Cheng suggests that marginalized, racialized subjectivities have always had a “dynamic rapport with death and suffering” that eschews dominant interpretations of death as a delimiting force (2001, 20). In “A Dialogue on Racial Melancholia,” David Eng and Shinhee Han (2000) describe how racialized subjects in North America are foreclosed from the acquisition of “dominant norms and ideals—whiteness, heterosexuality, middle-class family values” (670). As a result, the racialized body inhabits a space where whiteness is at once an unachievable yet reiterated ideal. Assimilation into the nation is always haunted by the inaugural “vexing condition of whiteness” (668). Therefore, we can reframe racial melancholia not as a pathological exception but rather as “a normal everyday group experience” (Eng 2010) within the ordinary affects of white imperial culture. Indeed, Eng and Han (2000) argue that the

¹⁷ What Cheng calls “a clear rejection of the other” (2001, 12).

¹⁸ I am thinking here of the model minority subject who, although he has assimilated successfully into the dominant paradigm, can only be “a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha 1984, 126). While claiming racial injury would ostensibly resolve the problem, Wendy Brown, in *States of Injury* (1995), cautions against speaking as a wounded subject, because centering attention on personal experience and subjective injury, rather than on formative violence, risks re-inscribing oppression.

inability to simply “get over” the “lost ideal of whiteness” (671) is less an individual problem than a social one. While psychoanalytic and cultural studies interpretations of mourning and melancholia are useful for thinking about race, they also hold relevance for thinking critically about queer sexualities in general and racialized queer sexuality in particular.

[iv] Queerer Interpretations of Melancholic Repetitions

What is the relationship between pride¹⁹ and remembrance? What is the function of this proscription against forgetting? What is the utility of remembrance and who benefits from acts of commemoration? If, as the adage goes, “time heals all wounds,” why must some wounds be maintained as open fissures in the skin of collective memory, to be picked at like newly-forming scabs that aren’t allowed to heal? Whose lives are deemed worthy of remembrance? And, relatedly, which bodies must be forgotten in their stead? Queer and trans communities have a potent relationship to loss. Narratives of loss pepper literary accounts²⁰ of queer and trans (un)becomings past, present, and future: the disintegration of normative familial ties and the fractured sense of belonging within the heteronormative sphere,²¹ social stigma and concomitant

¹⁹ The link between pride and remembrance is relevant to the dynamics of both homonationalism and patriotism as discussed in Chapter 4.

²⁰ In the scramble for articulating this crisis of the queer self, the literary realm has often provided a map to what Sue Golding (1993) has called “an impossible geography- impossible not because it does not exist, but because *it exists and does not exist exactly at the same time*” (Golding 166). This idea is echoed by Cathy Caruth (1996) who, in her introduction to *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, proposes that, “if Freud turns to literature to describe traumatic experience, it is because literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing. And it is at the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet” (3).

²¹ The disintegration of normative kinship ties is a major theme in GLBT fiction. Examples of familial disinheritance, guilt, shame, and isolation are major themes in seminal works such as Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness* and Gore Vidal’s *The City and the Pillar*.

experiences of violence,²² and the bitter-sweet journeys of queer individuation that are always characterized by both the aching sense of loss and then the tentative entry into queer identification.²³ And, as with most identity-based projects, the work of queer ‘arrival’ requires a constant negotiation with histories of sacrifice and injury.

Born into loss, queers enter the social world as failed subjects who are already in mourning. Certainly, much work has been done on the complex relationship between queer subjectivity, identity, and histories of loss. Heather Love (2009) describes the history of Western representation as “littered with the corpses of gender and sexual deviants,” (1) as well as with dark accounts of violence and stigmatization. Peggy Phelan (2013), for example, has characterized queers as *queer* “because we recognize that we have survived our own deaths. The Law of the Social has already repudiated us, spit us out, banished us, jailed us, and otherwise quarantined us from the cultural imagination it is so anxious to keep clean, pristine, well-guarded” (16). Freudian psychoanalytic interpretations of queer loss places queer desire squarely in the realm of an infantilism borne from the failure to thrive according to expected models of maturation or the inability to overcome primary cathexes. And, returning again to Butler’s oft-cited work on the melancholy of gender, we can trace the psychic workings of ‘loss’ in the repudiated identifications that sustain the fantasies of heterosexual identifications (Butler 1995, 170).

This inaugural repudiation of queer subjects from the social realm means that the resolution promised through this painful work of mourning is but a foreclosed fantasy. It is little

²² For instance, Leslie Feinberg’s oft-cited book *Stone Butch Blues* and Sandra Scoppettone’s *Happy Endings Are All Alike* address both the social stigma of queerness as well as the social realities of anti-gay violence.

²³ See, for example, Shyam Selvadurai’s *Funny Boy*, Allyson Bechdel’s *Fun Home*, and *Peter* by Kate Walker.

wonder then that we can locate the persistent siren-calls of mourning and melancholia within queer narratives, since they are so overlaid with overarching discourses of pathology and deviance which swirl around the figure of the failed subject. As with racialized subjects, for whom the terminable mourning promised by full assimilation into the nation-state is always *just* out-of-reach, queer subjectivity is sutured through an interminable identification with the ceaseless nature of melancholia.

Consider the pivotal role played by the AIDS activism in the 1980's as a response to the widespread disregard for the rising death-toll in the gay community. The rising death toll from the AIDS crisis meant that this "second-class citizenship" (Crimp 2004, 6) was also subject to problematic moralistic narratives that cast gay desire as the selfish—and thus fatal—escape from the grown-up obligations of self-respect and bodily integrity and into the realm of infantile regression. The AIDS epidemic, writes Douglas Crimp in his provocative text, *Melancholia and Moralism*, sapped the vitality of an entire generation and replaced it with an overwhelming sense of loss. Desire and freedom were suddenly cast under the pall of death and illness. For Crimp, the loss generated by AIDS was multifaceted: he mourned for not just "the loss of a loved person"—the many "friends and lovers [who] died, and...the acquaintances, public figures, and faces in the crowd that [he] had grown accustomed to"—but also for a more abstract loss, that of a "world, a way of life, [that] faded, then vanished" (Freud 2006b, 312; Crimp 2004, 14). Although more "notional in nature," this loss of community, of freedom, and of desire is, as Freud illustrates in *Mourning and Melancholia*, nevertheless constitutive of mourning (312).

In the wake of the AIDS crisis, as mourning for lost lovers and friends became the new norm, so too became the spectacular performance of these deathscapes as a call to politics. For those who saw their communities disintegrate, the work of bearing witness to the past-present of

AIDS was haunted by the present-future of their mortality. AIDS-time became marked by the rupture that separated those who had known pre-AIDS sexual possibility and those who came after. These performative acts of mourning, for the lost other as well as for the self, were at once personal and political. Mobilized in response to the relentless violence of “silence and omission” of queer bodies, queer desires, and queer deaths from the mainstream imaginary, the exhortatory call to “turn grief into anger” (Crimp 2004, 136) shows how mourning can indeed become melancholic militancy. The organization of AIDS vigils, art projects, and candlelight marches are just a few examples of how queer narratives of loss are intimately entwined with the private work of queer self-identification as well as the struggle for public recognition in the eyes of the state.

Yet this arrival into a queer futurity under the protectionist umbrella of rights-based privileges was also shaped by another sort of melancholic attachment. It is important to trace the generative quality of melancholia as it incorporates discourses of race, class, and gender within the emergence of the politicized gay identity. Indeed, as Crimp (2004) highlights in his exploration of the conservative moralism amongst gay men in the wake of the AIDS crisis, melancholia facilitates the creation of a universal gay subject²⁴ through mechanisms of disavowal. To be clear, I do not mean to deny the catastrophic impact of public denial around the AIDS crisis at the time. However, if public memories of queer figures have historically served as resources for generating counter-public resistance, then it is important to recognize the psychic

²⁴ We can draw parallels between the melancholic figure of the universal gay subject and that of the “model minority.”

grounds on which particular bodies were, and must continue to be, publicly mourned or displayed for generative consumption.²⁵

While it was gay men, as Crimp argues, who bore the unequal burden of AIDS in the United States, the burden was even more unequal for those occupying a lower socio-economic bracket in general, and gay men of colour in particular. Yet, as with TDOR memorialization, the face of public education campaigns, which tended to be overwhelmingly white in the past,²⁶ continues to sideline issues of race and class in the present while simultaneously drawing on their fetishistic appeal.²⁷ Similarly, Fung and McCaskell (2012) argue that queer claims for normative inclusion based on a formative exclusion is a pattern that persists today, albeit in a modified format: “[w]hile most people living with AIDS now reside in the third world, global political and economic disparity means that those who speak about and for them on the world stage are still based mainly in the first world...[i]f the face of AIDS is increasingly coloured, its global public voice is still largely white, and increasingly heterosexual and HIV negative” (193).

If the repudiation of certain subjects is required for queer identification, then, as Crimp (2004) so succinctly writes, any promise of full inclusion within state-sanctioned narratives of acceptable queer belonging is “a sociopolitical fetish, constituted through the psychic mechanism of disavowal” (10). For Castiglia and Reed (2012), this willful amnesia required by homonormativity enables a traumatic cycle of repetition “in which the violence of loss triggers a

²⁵ If, as Douglas Crimp, has illustrated, gay liberation from the dark closet of heteronormative ideals was a concessionary exchange for second-class citizenship, then how can we bring the forward march for “full citizenship”—which necessarily evoke histories of imperialism, discipline, and progress—to bear on practices of trans mourning? (Crimp 2004, 6). Or, to re-frame my question, what is the connection between the aesthetics of queer and trans mourning, homonationalism, and the ambivalent losses that sustain present histories of inequity?

²⁶ For a criticism of ACT-UP’s focus on challenging only “sexual prudery” and thus reinforcing racial segregation, see Nancy Stoler’s (1998) *Lessons From the Damned*.

²⁷ For a brilliant analysis of the circulation of “good gay” subjects within racialized discourses of blood donation and Canadian nationalism, see OmiSoore Dryden’s “Canadians Denied” (Dryden 2010, 82).

turning-away that, only half-accomplished, perpetuates trauma through near-forgettings of a past that was a site not only of trauma but of pleasure and aspiration as well” (11). As Andrew Weiner (2012) argues in his analysis of the enduring legacy of AIDS activism, the aesthetical objects borne from the movement still retain the transformative power of their intensity today:

The unedited and often raw testimonies of the Oral History Project suggest how extensively AIDS activism was invested with affect: not only the forms of feeling often opposed to politics, but sensations exceeding existing categories of emotion (Gould, 2009). Rather than reiterating the left cliché about the personal being political, the testimonies underscore the demands of a crisis that imposed loss and privation at levels that are difficult to imagine today. Under these conditions, resistance was forced to traverse seemingly incompatible states of outrage, care, ambivalence, mourning, and affirmation. (107)

Queer activism illustrates how medical and institutional discourses of ‘pathology’ and ‘sexual deviance’ can be mined for their transformative potential. Loaded with the burden of abjection, epithets such as “fag” and “queer”— with their attendant histories of stigmatization and victimization— were later re-deployed during the subsequent “confrontational, stigma-inflected activism” (Love 2009, 2) of AIDS movements in the late 1980s and early 1990s.²⁸ This form of “reverse discourse,” as Michael Foucault (1978) describes in *The History of Sexuality*, was a strategic cooption of the discursive power of dominant discourses by dominated groups (101). What we have come to appreciate as contemporary queer pride is indebted to, and continues to draw upon, not-too-distant history of gay abjection. Thus, as Love summarizes, the

²⁸ In 1992, ACTUP New York held a political funeral in Washington, D.C. Dubbed the “Ashes” action, protesters splattered the steps of the Capitol Building with red paint to symbolize HIV+ blood and deposited the actual ashes of loved ones on the White House Lawn (Gould 2009, 230).

history of queer identity is “indelibly marked by the effects of reverse discourse: on one hand, it continues to be understood as a form of damaged or compromised subjectivity; on the other hand, the characteristic forms of gay freedom are produced in response to this history” (Love 2009, 2).

If gay freedom depends upon the performative exile of these painful histories as a sacrifice for inclusion within rights-based frameworks, then “[o]ne may enter the mainstream on the condition that one breaks ties with all those who cannot make it— the nonwhite and the nonmonogamous, the poor and the *genderdeviant*, the fat, the disabled, the unemployed, the infected, and a host of unmentionable others” (Love 2009, 10). In other words, homonormativity— which is structured on the acceptance of the good gay and upholds and sustains dominant access to the heteronormative institutions of “domestic privacy, the ‘free’ market, and patriotism” (Duggan 2002, 179)— is predicated upon the simultaneous avowal and erasure of abject, “bad” gays. Furthermore, this is an erasure that must be repeated in order to secure the acceptable gay within dominant frameworks of respectability. Thus, we can understand homonormativity as an inherently melancholic phenomenon that has an ambivalent attachment to its repudiated ‘others.’

Emerging from this confluence of homonormativity, patriotism, and repudiation, queer formulations of homonationalism have been key to interrogating the realignment of configurations of race, class, and sexual citizenship with contemporary forms of national (in)security. Where homonormativity describes a depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption, homonationalism is characterized by the integration of exceptionalist gender and sexual rights discourses as central to contemporary forms of western hegemony (Duggan 2002; Kouri-Towe 2012; Puar 2007; Wahab 2015). Homonationalism (Puar

2007) thus describes the state-sanctioned recognition of acceptable LGBTQ subjects via the deployment of fear (against the racialized other) and the circulation of hypervigilance (as a defense of neoliberal formulations of acceptable forms of sexual citizenship). This neoliberal mobilization of sexual minorities as exceptional, assimilable subjects, who are thus deserving of state-protection, often stands in direct contrast to the unassimilability of queer deviants.

Key to my research is an integration of theories of homonormativity and homonationalism to examining the structures of trans memorialization. To date, several scholars have examined how Western LGBT liberatory politics— with its attendant domestication within the nation-state— has been achieved through the disavowal of those upon whose bodies the exploratory contestations of identity politics has played out (Agathangelou et al 2008). Certainly, we can trace these antecedents to homonormativity in the affirmation of the narrative palatability of Stonewall Riots vis-à-vis the earlier riots at the Compton Cafeteria.

The queer entry into contemporary regimes of acceptability would not have taken place without the pivotal tipping points around violence and loss: those definitive flash points of intimate violence followed by the dawning of cultural change and the gradual awakening of a liberated public consciousness. The events that occurred during the Stonewall riots have taken on a mythic, all-encompassing discourse that has served to reinforce the American dominance of all things queer. For theorists such as Jon Binnie and John D’Emilio, the Stonewall riots of 1969 have become a symbol of American queer nationalism and occupy a central space in the “mythmaking of a queer nation” (Binnie 2002, 26). As an icon for a movement where ordinary people, who were brutally oppressed and had limited resources, created social change, Stonewall provides an origin story for homonational attachments between acceptable gays and the benevolent nation-state. But while the main achievements of the Stonewall Rebellion included

the creation of “a new language and style of homosexuality”— with its attendant emphasis on “pride and affirmation” (D’Emilio 1992, 243)— this mobilization around a universal identity served to further relegate the experiences of people of colour towards the margins (Grewal and Kaplan 2001).

Stonewall also provided an origin story for trans activism. Trans-liberators, such as Leslie Feinberg, followed suit by adopting the Stonewall effect as means of mobilizing the transgender community alongside gays, lesbians, and bisexuals: “Picture the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and the trans communities as two huge overlapping circles. Like the drag queens who rebelled at Stonewall, I stand in that overlap, and we can serve as bridges. Let us combine the power of our communities. Stonewall was not just a lesbian and gay rebellion. Stonewall is your historic landmark too” (Feinberg 1998, 35). However, this adoption of Stonewall as part of the trans movement’s origin story overlooks how the very group responsible for spearheading the infamous riot that would eventually pave the way for queer rights, would then be excluded from those organizations. As Aaron H. Devor and Nicholas Matte (2006) explain, the female and male trans people of colour who stood up to police intimidation and violence were subsequently “marginalized by the leadership of early lesbian and gay organizations” (368).

Although Stonewall endures as the “official” memory of the queer and trans activist movement, it does so on the back of a riot that happened three years prior: in 1965, a riot broke out in the Compton Cafeteria in San Francisco’s impoverished Tenderloin District after police assaulted a drag queen. Yet the ensuing protest— the first instance of trans-resistance— received little attention from the media as did the neighbourhood’s prior mobilization around poverty and

economic disparity.²⁹ Part of this was because the Tenderloin was “the turf of prostitutes and transsexuals” and Compton’s Cafeteria was frequented by “young people who had no homes, families, or legal employment, [or] who were marginalized by their gender or sexuality” (Stryker 2008, 72). In contrast, the homophile activists in the Stonewall era were mostly “white, middle-class, gender-normative older men with more resources than the patrons of Compton’s” (Armstrong and Cragie 2006, 733) and thus enjoyed some measure of police accommodation.

Asking *why* some events are remembered and others not, Elizabeth A. Armstrong and Suzanna M. Cragie (2006) illustrate that the making of the Stonewall myth was possible because of its “mnemonic capacity” (733). Unlike the riot at Compton’s Cafeteria, the Stonewall rebellion took place in the heart of New York city’s bustling gay scene which included “more privileged elements of the homosexual community” (ibid.). Although the riots at Stonewall were said to have been initiated by a trans woman of colour, Marsha P. Johnson, the subsequent formation of the Gay Liberation Front consisted of primarily white, young people of middle-class origin (Stryker 2008, 85). Coupled with the invisibility of the Compton’s Cafeteria riot, post-Stonewall erasure of trans women of colour from the spaces that had purportedly mobilized around inclusion can be read as a “technology of governance and domination, enclosing radical spaces and dreams into the fold of the state, while failing to address the needs of the communities out from which those acts of resistance and desires emerged” (Gossett 2010, 1). As a result, “sites of queer resistance [were] sanitized (cleansed of undesirables – queers of color, trans and gender-non-conforming people, sex workers) and folded into the state as a means of including certain types of bodies and politics” (Gossett 2010, 4). At the same time, these

²⁹ San Francisco’s Tenderloin district was home to “Vanguard,” the earliest known queer youth organization in the United States. Made up of mostly “young gay hustlers and transgender people,” the organization worked on building community relations, addressing poverty issues, and the mistreatment of queers by establishments in the area. See Stryker 2008 and Hillman 2011.

narratives about racialized figures are resurrected from the crypts of memory as a testament to the indefatigable spirit of, specifically white, middle-class, queer life in modernity.³⁰

If the hope-tinged horizon of queer arrival into liberation is predicated upon this inaugural experience of multi-faceted loss, then queer subjectivation is perversely indebted to remembering and repeating histories of abjection and violence against those who did not make it. In this formulation, rituals of remembrance are akin to the collective acting-out of the Freudian prescription of “remembering and repeating,” albeit suspending the final stage of the difficult work of “working through” unavowed loss.³¹ In its stead, the perverse ritual of remembering violence (through acts of narrative remembrance) and the repetition of racialized death (through the ‘acting out’ of commemorative vigils) shapes whiteness as political life.

This ceaseless banishment of an exiled object in the service of subject formation and inter-personal attachment is a phenomenon Freud explores in his analysis of the repetition-compulsion. In “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” Freud describes the economic pleasures of repetition in a young child’s game of *fort-da*. Writing about his grandson’s habit of repeatedly banishing toys from his immediate field of vision, Freud observes that the child reacts to the loss of his love-objects with both “interest and gratification” (Freud 2006a, 140). The game, reasoned Freud, was played with the express purpose of disappearing these love-objects (*fort*) only to have them joyfully ‘reappear again’ (*Da!*). Although there was pleasure attached to the first act of disappearance, the “greater pleasure undoubtedly attached to the second” (Freud 2006a, 140).

³⁰ For instance, in his analysis of the cultural erasure of working-class, and of-colour, queer and trans populations from narratives about gay liberation, Cael M. Keegan (2016) illustrates how the “aesthetic gentrification” (50) of these stories effectively reinscribes white, middle-class, cisgender, gay men as the heroes of Stonewall.

³¹ In “Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through,” Freud (2006c) explores how repressed symptoms surface in the present through the repetitional force of the past. Working through happens through engagement with the resistances that surface through remembering.

What does the game tell us about the ambivalent dynamics about queer loss and how do these painful losses fit into Freud's formulation of the pleasure principle?

Re-enaction, Freud explains, is the precondition for a happy return. Through repetition, the subject is able to experience the passivity of that painful initial loss by asserting some measure of control through an *active* role: "The experience affected him, but his own role in it was passive, and he therefore gave himself an active one by repeating it as a game, even though it had been unpleasurable" (Freud 2006a, 141). But, aside from establishing control, Freud reasons that the re-enacted repudiation of the love-object also provides the child with gratification through repetition of maternal separation as an act of defiant revenge: "Alright, go away! I don't need you; I'm sending you away myself!" (Freud 2006a, 142). This ambivalent dynamic between dependence and disavowal is similarly enacted in memory work.

Although they have been erased from queer narratives of present survival and hopeful futurity, the unmentionable "bad" gay others still persist in the collective psyche as present-absences that cannot be banished altogether since they are constitutive of rituals of remembrance. Instead, the repudiated "love-objects"—so indispensable to the stories told of queer world-making—find themselves perpetually at odds with an identificatory structure that can neither tolerate their haunting presence nor let them disappear forever. If this melancholic attachment to the repudiated 'other' structures belonging, how does any ethical identification follow from such painful histories? Or, as Judith Butler has asked, is this "constitutive history of injury" something that must be engaged with in a limited fashion as we work towards queerer political futures? (Butler 1993b, 223)

If death and loss are the inaugural signposts marking the path to queer communality, then we can appreciate how the rhetorical shift to queer pride and visibility are seductive in their offer

of hope-tinged respites from the legacy of shame and abjection. Yet this is a visibility that requires the sacrifice of speaking about race. As with the critiques offered by critical race scholars, queer formulations of mourning and melancholia illustrate how, despite the public dynamics of communal loss, Freudian interpretations of the work of mourning retains something of an isolated, private, character. While psychoanalysis may tell us that the “experience of loss is one of the central repetitions of subjectivity,” (Phelan 2013, 5) it is through affect that we can trace these repetitions of unavowed loss as symptomatic of the central repetitions of homonormative politicality— a politicality which disavows the difficult stuff of racialization on its persistent march ever-forward. While Freudian psychoanalytic theory certainly offers powerful approaches to understanding the “symptom” of mourning and melancholia, psychoanalysis alone cannot account for the generative impulses created through circulation of racialized, trans death (Muñoz 2009). To return to Freud’s inquiry about the work that mourning performs, if rituals of mourning are *performative*, then it is through melancholia that we may be able to trace the *generative* intimate affects born in the consumptive afterlife of racial loss. In order to explore the intimate publics generated from the narrativization and memorialization of trans death, my turn to theories of affect gestures to the “bodily intensities; emotions, feelings, and passions; and toward uprising” (Gould 2009, 3) that psychoanalysis alone cannot account for. This is where many scholars have turned to the study of affect.

[v] The Turn to Affect

The field of affect studies focuses on how unqualified, or intangible, ‘gut’ feelings and emotions play powerful roles in shaping collective life and social struggles. Indeed, for scholars such as Teresa Brennan (2004), affect studies offers an alternative to psychoanalytic

formulations of identity as constructed rather than given and, in doing so, destabilizes the Freudian assertion that “the individual psyche is the [sole] origin of the drives and affects” (12). Arguing that the reduction of affect to drives can be impoverishing, contemporary scholars conceptualize of affects as “structures of feeling” that are independent of the individual experiencing them. These affects come from the other, but we deny them. Or they come from us, but we pretend (habitually) that they come from the other” (Williams 1977; Brennan 2004, 13). Thus, affect scholars problematize the traditionally individualizing and psychologizing reductions of “this science of human contact without a social unconscious” (Gordon 2008, 197) that effectively depoliticizes affects by misinterpreting them as manifestations of the underlying libidinal drive.

The vibrancy of affect’s politicality is of particular importance to my research because, in the course of conducting interviews for this dissertation, I was often struck by the dissonance between language, sensed embodiment, and feelings. Fumbling for words, my respondents and I would find ourselves scrambling for purchase in the familiar yet inarticulable territory of trying to explain racialized, trans lived experience in vigils attuned to racialized, trans death. Animated by whiteness and populated by the racialized ghosts of systemic violence, the vigil furnishes itself with an impoverishment of language; an inability to express that which is inexpressible but palpably felt; visceral yet invisible; indeterminate but sensed. The TDOR vigil is animated by affect.

Although the study of affect addresses myriad topics, contemporary affect scholars often use feelings and emotions to discuss how they play powerful roles in shaping collective life and social struggles. However, the recognition that emotions such as anger, fear, grief, or joy can move publics does not mean that emotion is synonymous with affect. The key difference

between affect and emotion occurs at the level of signification. Whereas we can understand emotion as narrativized feeling, given shape and structure through discourse, affect resists this easy narrativization. While emotions form a vital part of the body's anticipation of a moment, the turn to affect pays attention to "the stuff that goes on beneath, beyond, even parallel to signification" (O'Sullivan 2001, 126). Affect thus describes those unqualified, "pre-subjective forces and intensities" (Thrift 2004, 58) that offer us "a different kind of intelligence about the world" (Thrift 2004, 60).

To be clear, in mapping out these differences in affect and emotion, I do not mean to imply that emotions are unimportant. To overlook the variety of feelings that my interviewees describe experiencing in response to practices of trans memorialization would be doing this dissertation a disservice. Drawing upon Mel Y. Chen's (2012) approach to thinking through affect in *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect*, my research turns to affect as "something not necessarily corporeal and that...potentially engages many bodies at once, rather than (only) being contained as an emotion within a single body" (11). In other words, paying attention to the multiplicity of "open-endedly social" (Massumi 2002, 9) intensities and entanglements as a field of emergence adds depth to, and complicates, those messy trajectories of affect as it moves.

So how do we define affect? Is there any way to properly account for the unaccountable? In his thorough overview of the field of affect studies, Nigel Thrift (2004) leads with the provocative statement that "there is no stable definition of affect" (59). Indeed, at a glance, affect seems to detest being restricted by the dictates of theoretical certainty, having been described variously as unqualified, unassimilable, uncivilizable, autonomous, and therefore unpredictable (Massumi 2002; Thrift 2004; Buck-Morss 1992; Hemmings 2005). Affect is thought of as: a

non-conscious and immanent “moving forces” (Stewart 2007, 128), as “a structure of feeling” (Williams 1977, 133), and as the unfolding of “movement” (Massumi 2002, 5). For others, affect has an inherently messy, agglutinative, or “sticky” quality by virtue of its contagious or contaminative malleability (Massumi 2002; Ahmed 2010; Hemmings 2005; Tomkins 2005). Affect is the “residue or excess” that “constitutes the very fabric of our being” (Hemmings 2005, 550). In its most basic meaning though, affect “is an impingement or extrusion of a momentary or sometimes more sustained state of relation *as well as* the passage (and the duration of passage) of forces or intensities” (Seigworth and Gregg 2010, 1).

Although these multiple approaches to thinking through the idiosyncrasies of what public feelings lends affect theory a certain boxing-with-shadows quality, the field of affect studies allows for attention to the ordinary as an unfolding-event shimmering with charged potentiality.³² This legitimization of the role of affect in structuring our daily lives is a key component of my work, which follows a sense, or feeling, of identification in and through racialized scripts of inclusion within the field of trans theory. As Nigel Thrift (2004) suggests, “issues such as identity and belonging...quiver with affective energy” (57). It should be of little surprise, then, that the study of affect has been of particular interest to queer and feminist scholars who approach affect through a phenomenological framework in order to emphasize the “importance of lived experience, the intentionality of consciousness, the significance of nearness or what is ready-to-hand, and the role of repeated and habitual actions in shaping bodies and worlds” (Ahmed 2006, 2). In particular, theories of affect have proved fruitful in analyzing the social dynamics of trauma, shame, and loss in collective identity formation (Cvetkovich 2003;

³² We can understand any moment as always-already there as potential; “a *something* waiting to happen in disparate and incommensurable objects, registers, circulations, and publics” (Stewart 2008, 72).

Berlant 2011; Dean 2009; Love 2009; Edelman 2004; Muñoz 2006; Chen 2012) but also in the animation of circuits of intimacy and desire (McGlotten 2013; Stewart 2007).

It is important to remember, however, that affects are not universal but “structure encounters so that bodies are disposed for action in a particular way” (Thrift 2004, 62). This recognition of the pitfalls of thinking through affect as a universal phenomenon requires that we pay attention to the *composition* of affective relationality. In other words, while we may possess an infinite capacity to affect and to be affected by other individuals and the environment around us, affects do not present themselves uniformly to everyone: “...only for certain subjects can affect be thought of as attaching in an open way; others are so over-associated with affect that they themselves are the object of affective transfer” (Hemmings 2005, 561; Highmore 2011). Or, as Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (2010) explain in their introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader*, “[a]ffect marks a body’s *belonging* to a world of encounters or a world’s *belonging* to a body of encounters but also, in *non-belonging*, through all those far sadder (de)compositions of mutual in-compossibilities” (2). Thus, an affective reading of a cultural text, such as the memorializing event that is the Trans Day of Remembrance, takes into account the subtractive ways in which different bodies may be predisposed to affects in different ways even as those affects coalesce to suture something like a collective experience via proximity. I use affect theory because it provides a framework for conceptualizing *TDOR* as both a psychic and material event within contemporary socio-political manifestations of historical violence, racialization, and memorialization.

This attention to the circulation of affect at the level of the body as it apprehends, or is apprehended, by the disciplinary nature of “societies of control” (Deleuze 1991) has been productively used in both phenomenological and cultural studies framings of the political life of

affect. In particular, the work of theorists such as Brian Massumi (2002), Gilbert Simondon (1992), Erin Manning (2010) and Patricia T. Clough (2008) allows for the formulation of affect as autonomous intensities that, though they are outside of social signification, constitute processes of becoming. A phenomenological turn to affect does not conceptualize of affect as “pre-social” but, rather, as “open-endedly social” (Massumi 2002, 9). This therefore means that the body, too, has an open-ended, virtual dimension: “The body is as immediately virtual as it is actual. The virtual, the pressing crowd of incipencies and tendencies, is a realm of *potential*...where futurity combines, unmediated, with pastness” (Massumi 2002, 30).

For cultural studies theorists, this attention to the moving body as “real but abstract incorporeality” (Massumi 2002, 21) offers a fruitful province through which to explore the imaginary, symbolic body as it coincides with the fragility of its material reality in political life. On one hand, the promise of attending to the affective resonances within cultural theory is codified in terms of the autonomy and immeasurability of affect itself (Massumi 2002; Hardt and Negri 2004). And, on the other hand, the excess of affect can also be targeted, manipulated and intensified to serve political ends. Affect is paradoxically the object to be manipulated as well as that which escapes qualification. While power may circulate affect, the results are improvisational and unpredictable. Thus, as Massumi explains, power *informs* affect such that affect limits the efficacy of power’s ability to command, capture and limit (Massumi 2002, 223).

Notably, the work of Sara Ahmed has drawn upon, and complicated, the circulation of affect and emotion as working on and through the imagined bodies of gender non-conforming sexual citizens within nationalist discourses of the nation-state (Ahmed 2000; Ahmed 2006). By connecting affect and emotion to the work of identity formation, cultural studies scholars illustrate how practices of racialization emerge through the unfolding of affective intensities and

messy emotions between bodies, places, and practices (Anderson and Harrison 2010; Ngo 2016; Saldanha 2007). Through paying attention to the racialization of affect—or the affect of racialization—it becomes possible to discern how “some bodies are captured and held by affect’s structured precision” (Hemmings 2005, 562). Ultimately, what this allows for is an analysis of the material effects of racialization in terms of its affective economies (Ahmed 2004a; Eng 2010; Kim 2016), the atmospheric charge of racialized emotion (Ngai 2005; Gordon 2008; Sharpe 2016), the erotic life of racism (Holland 2012; Musser 2014) and, finally, the grim convergence between affect, biopolitics, and political economy (Anderson 2012; Chen 2012; Clough and Willse 2011; Hardt and Negri 1999; Puar 2017).

[vi] The Necropolitics of Affect

In attending to the affective circulations engendered by both the space of the vigil and the call for vigilance, this dissertation leans upon what Anne Cvetkovich (2003) calls an archive of feelings. To animate this archive is to recognize the complex relationships between the living and the dead (Ochoa 2007) between haunting presences and absences (Gordon 2008), and between the deaths that are grievable and those that are overlooked (Butler 2016). Seeking to explore the affective utility of racialized trans death, this dissertation engages with the haunting concept of human expendability. In order to trace the affective circulation of trans “bare life” (Agamben 1998) and the enlivened circulation of the racialized trans figure as a consumable object via the spectacularization of death, I draw heavily on biopolitical and necropolitical theory.

Indelibly overlaid by the axes of sexuality, race, and gender, biopolitics has long been understood as a constitutive element of sovereign power and Eurocentric modernity. Emerging

from the individualizing strain of “anatomo-politics” (Foucault 2003, 240), Michel Foucault’s oft-cited treatise on the disciplinary power of biopolitics describes an era characterized by a veritable “explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations” (ibid.). The expendability of life at the hands of the “massifying” (Foucault 2003, 241) technologies of control directed at “man-as-a-species” (ibid.) has implications within the field of affect studies. In particular, attention to the biopolitical economy of affect allows for an appreciation of the “political branding” (Clough and Willse 2010, 49) of expendable populations within neoliberal forms of governance. Likewise, Foucault’s formulation of biopolitics has been used by critical race theorists in their explorations of projects of colonial and imperial expansion that specifically targeted racialized sexuality through the imposition of Eurocentric ideals (Morgensen 2010; Somerville 1994; Stoler 1995).

Within the field of queer theory, biopolitics has been examined in relation to sexual citizenship and the deployment of heterosexual and gendered norms within the medico-judicial realm (Puar 2007; Somerville 1994; Willse and Spade 2004). Queer scholars of colour have examined how neoliberal investments in a white gay and lesbian politic unevenly claims a white queer politics that is then assumed to mirror its liberal rights claim framework (Agamben 1998; Agathangelou et al 2008; Ahmed 2004b; Eng 2010; Manalansan 2005; Muñoz 2009; Puar 2007). Jasbir Puar (2007), in particular, illustrates how homonational discourses of race and sexuality merge with those of nationalism and security in order to produce narratives of acceptable (homo)sexuality versus undesirable sexual ‘others’.

Trans theorists, too, have exemplified how trans and gender-non-conforming bodies have historically been vulnerable to disparate modes of biopolitical regulation: through the pathologization of trans subjectivities as deviant (Meyerowitz 2002; Stone 2006); the

medicalization of ‘unruly’ bodies whose disorders must be regulated via prescribed scripts of normative gender performance (Chase 2006; Rubin 2006; Spade 2006); and the juridicial discourses that have legislated and policed trans bodies within the nation-state (Namaste 2000; Puar 2017).

While the work of Michel Foucault is foundational for an appreciation of the deployment of mechanisms of disciplinary-biopower, Giorgio Agamben’s (1998) formulation of “bare life” in *Homo Sacer* enriches our understanding of how the expendability of trans life is symptomatic of power’s capacity to “penetrate subjects’ very bodies and forms of life” (10). A central paradigm of contemporary governmentality that draws upon Foucault’s formulation of biopower, the term “state of exception” (Agamben 1998, 12) indexes the exclusion of the *homo sacer* from legal and political rights accorded to normal citizens. Stripped of their humanity, “bare life” therefore describes how these wretched lives can be taken with impunity. While the mechanisms of social and legal exclusion that define bare life would ostensibly seem to situate them outside the margins of political order, the paradox is that these states of exception are actually “the hidden foundation” (Agamben 1998, 12) without which political life becomes impossible. As Agamben explains, it is through “the ‘politicization’ of bare life— the *metaphysical task par excellence*— [that] the humanity of living man is decided” (13). In other words, this highest political task of ensuring the “freedom and happiness” (Agamben 1998, 12) of citizens (*bios*) is dependent upon defining whose lives count as livable, and by extension, grievable. Thus, Agamben’s work allows us to make connections between the health of the national body politic, its formative dependence upon defining whose lives count, and the “political branding” (Clough and Willse 2010, 49) of racialized trans life.

Emerging from these conversations of bare life, and underscoring the specificity of histories of colonization in the deployment of biopower, Achille Mbembe's (2003) formulation of "necropolitics" describes the foundational legitimization of discourses of death and disposability in practices of state sovereignty. In "Necropolitics," Mbembe (2003) suggests that "becoming subject...supposes upholding the work of death" (14). So inextricable is the politics of race from the politics of death, argues Mbembe (2003), that one truly becomes a subject through confrontation with the death of an Other. To date, Mbembe's formulation of necropolitics has been of great interest to critical race theorists in examining how dead or dying marginalized bodies have fetishistically been inscribed into the order of power within state narratives to justify the geopolitical landscape of torture (Alves 2013; Dillon 2012; Puar 2017; Smith 2013).

Several trans scholars, too, have explored the place of the racialized trans body using a necropolitical critique. Within these critiques, necropolitics converges with trans bodies via civilizational discourses inscribed upon the Iranian refugee trans body whose death "is sanctioned in the state of exception as a refugee (outside of the nation-state) and as transgender (outside of the naturalized binaries of sex)" (Shakhsari 2013, 340). For others, necropolitics and homonationalism can be brought to bear on the geospatial distribution and regulation of erotic labour; the resulting "homo(necro)nationalism" (Edelman 2014) reflective of the exclusionary practices that neoliberal citizenship demands. Finally, necropolitics has recently been linked to the rehabilitation of trans women of colour in death as "good victims" that, in their death, ignite political activity under the umbrella of trans universality (Snorton and Haritaworn 2013).

These convergences illustrate that there is a pressing need to theorize trans politicality through an intersectional framework that goes beyond static formulations of "gridlocked"

(Massumi 2002) identity and takes into account the affective intensities that circulate around, through, and within the trans body. As this dissertation illustrates, although trans lives are expendable, trans deaths are not. The afterlife of trans death is a time of politicality: memorializations and vigils are at once performed enactments of mourning and formative elements of melancholic worldings (Stewart 2007). Yet these unfolding worlds depend on a trans-normative whiteness that is predicated upon the mobilization of spectacularized, racialized trans death. The following chapter traces the violent “*trans necrointimacies*” that undergird communal belonging through practices of online trans memorialization.

Chalked Up: Expendability and the Limits of (Ac)countability

Chalked up [chawked up] *n. Brit.* A score, tally, or record.
- Oxford English Dictionary

[i] Introduction

Imagine the single, vertical stroke of a piece of white chalk against a blackboard. As a signifier for a single count, chalk marks are typically grouped in sets of five, such that each cluster is a simple representation of a number of related objects. Each chalked line indicates an ongoing count that need not be considered a final score; rather, these counts are cumulative, shifting, and open to subjective interpretation and human interference. A tally, then, is an additive record or an archive of gains. Paradoxically, each tally mark can also represent a loss. For instance, each vertical notch on the wall of a prison cell simultaneously signifies another day of freedom lost whilst gesturing to a gain in time as one moves closer to eventual release. Death tolls, tracked in times of war or conflict, also constitute tallies of loss. Therefore, the tally is a non-static (ac)count where a positive accumulation may be read in conjunction with a negative loss.

The work of tallying lives lost, in particular, illustrates how the aggregate representation of death—the positive numerical sum of each life added to a running score—is simultaneously a negative assemblage of individual losses. Typically, death tallies have been used to represent the number of lives lost within a specific location and timeframe, often due to natural causes or deliberate acts of violence. Importantly, in the latter case, numerical data on pre-meditated violence allow for an extrapolation of patterns of mortality from the chaos of each individual death. In doing so, they offer an explanation not just of the ‘why’/‘how’ of the deaths but also of

the ‘whom’. Tracing these lives lost, draws attention to certain lives that were (in theory) devalued. Conversely, it is precisely through the valuation of loss that we come to understand registers of expendability. In this sense, the death tally becomes a symptom of our times, an indicator of expendability. For what is it if not the sum of those human lives that are worth remembering?

Not many people remember the life or death of Chanelle Pickett. In 1995, twenty-three-year-old Pickett, a black woman living in Boston, was savagely attacked when a man she had met in a bar discovered that she had a penis.³³ He beat and throttled her for almost eight minutes before she died. Her attacker, a thirty-five-year-old white man, was eventually acquitted. Upon hearing of the lesser assault charge of two-and-a-half years, Toni Black, a transgender activist, expressed dismay, stating, “I’ve seen people get more jail time for abusing animals...we’ve been judged expendable” (Steinberg 2005, 522).

Black’s quote about the ways in which trans lives have been “judged expendable” suggests that trans liveability is always already foreclosed by the predestined fate of a necessary sacrifice.³⁴ The disposability of Pickett’s life allows for an appreciation of the multiple arcs of expendability that characterize the narratives of trans women of colour as marked by a banal disposability that Giorgio Agamben has previously called the “state of exception” (1998, 12). What is especially peculiar about the privilege of these “states of exception” is their indispensability to the project of communal meaning-making. To this end, I argue it is only in premature death that these disposable (trans) lives have surplus value and that this is the case

³³ For more on the murder of Chanelle Pickett and the subsequent trial, see Latour 1997.

³⁴ My use of “necessary” here is deliberate as I seek to highlight the ways in which racialized trans deaths are positioned as always already constitutive of trans political life.

precisely because of their affective capacity to produce political effects within the trans community.

Globally, between March 1970 and December 2017, over 2,742 trans-identified individuals were rendered “expendable” as a result of anti-trans violence, yet only a handful of these people have been remembered by name. While the sheer number of trans murders is disquieting, my interest ultimately lies neither in a detailed account of the policies that foreclose trans lives as liveable nor in the increasingly sophisticated community-led methods of data collection for tallying their deaths. Rather, it is the haunting concept of human expendability that I find myself drawn to: What is an expendable life? How does a community (ac)count for its own expendability? What of the marginalia of these expendable communities? Can we reduce life even further within the margins of expendability? And, finally, does this quality of expendability, or valuelessness, endure even after death?

The introduction of the internet-era and subsequent ease of online accessibility have had profound effects on processes of memorialization. These emerging contexts, paired with technological advancements and competitive electronic markets, have given rise to electronically mediated practices of mourning and facilitated the birth of virtual crypts. Certainly, the presence of memorial pages on Facebook,³⁵ blogs, and websites show this new turn to the uninhibited “broadcasting” (Margry and Sánchez-Carretero 2011, 10) of grief. Today’s virtual graveyards are the twenty-first century’s response to older forms of collective mourning, effectively shifting experiences of grief from private spaces and into the public realm. As Margaret Gibson explains,

³⁵ The popular networking platform, Facebook, for example, allows its users to request “Memorialized Accounts” in order to commemorate the passing of a loved one. Through the transformation of an active account into a memorial account, Facebook provides a common, albeit virtual, space for friends and acquaintances to share information about the funeral, as well as memories, photographs, or even videos. Often, people will maintain relational continuity with the deceased by writing messages directly to them or sending them birthday wishes (DeGroot 2014, 79).

“the modern experience of ‘sequestered death’ has passed” (Gibson 2007, 415). No longer a private affair, the specter of death has become one of a public intimacy.

The recent hypervisibility of the violated corpse of the trans person of colour signals a profoundly political project wherein spectacularized violence has come to characterize the brutal poetics through which trans-normative intimacy is founded. Following Agamben, we can read each additional chalk mark on the TDOR tally of violent anti-trans murders as representing the negative loss of a life that has a perversely positive post-mortem value and which, in turn, carries important affective currency. To this end, I ask questions that are necessarily uncomfortable: If a tally is a kept score or a number to be accounted for, how do we reckon with the stories of loss that are likewise marked by its ongoing calculation? What bodily remains (are) accounted for in the painful work of classifying, labeling, isolating, and aggregating loss? For each count, there is an account—likewise, every death has an attending narrative.

Just three years after Pickett’s death, the murder of another black trans woman, Rita Hester, inspired the birth of the *TDOR* website and inaugurated the macabre tradition of holding TDOR vigils. A ritual commemoration of the dead, the annual TDOR vigil remains one of the main events that draws trans individuals together as a community.³⁶ Likewise, the earliest iteration of the *TDOR* website functioned as a virtual space that symbolized something akin to place-making. Expendability, in this case, thus describes that sudden point at which the stubborn potentiality of trans life edges into the realm of objectification and commodification. As I will illustrate in this chapter, it was only in death that Pickett and Hester—bodies that once occupied

³⁶ I expand on this assertion as I discuss the event-space of the vigil in greater detail in the following chapter.

“state[s] of exception” (Agamben 1998, 12)— were fleetingly folded into the narrative of trans communality.³⁷

In this chapter, I analyze the intimate politicality of the affective circulation of an expendability whose macabre workings may be espied between the data on murdered trans people and the subsequent circulation of their narratives. First, I provide a brief overview of the history of the current *Trans Day of Remembrance* website, as well as its antecedent, *Remembering Our Dead*. Operated by trans activist Gwendolyn Ann Smith, the *TDOR* website continues to be the primary platform³⁸ for sharing information about the victims of anti-trans violence as well as the dates and locations of TDOR vigils globally. A cultural and historical artifact, and the product of years of grass-roots organizing, the *TDOR* website provides a rich source of data on the names, deaths, and locations of victims since 1970, alongside carefully curated media links to each death.

Second, turning to the political ramifications of contemporary representational practices in/of trans memorialization in virtual spaces, I analyze how the collection of data about the deaths of racialized trans bodies sutures whiteness through the solidification of racialized trans existence as a form of “bare life” (Agamben 1998). In particular, I illustrate how the reduction of certain categories of people to “bare life” is inseparable from the production of virtual landscapes of ordinary violence so constitutive of contemporary political life. This formulation of bare life and the limits of expendability as cohering around the (trans)gendered and racialized worth of different bodies allows us to understand the morbid dynamic that has come to characterize the

³⁷ As my interview participants explained, trans-specific community support groups are often spaces where bodies of colour feel further marginalized through the lack of attention to how systemic racism or classism contributes to their “life chances” (Spade 2011).

³⁸ Although the “Trans Murder Monitoring Project” has a much more systemic approach to data collection, its utility is limited by its focus on policy and institutional research versus community outreach.

dyadic domestic drama emerging in the haunted spaces between the flat representation of the numeric tally of “bare lives” lost and the enlivened circulation of the racialized trans figure as a consumable object via the spectacularization of an all-too-certain death.

Third, through an analysis of the graphic media links that are included in the memorial sections for several trans women of colour, I trace how the *TDOR* website has shifted from the politics of a flattened universality—that ghostly deterritorialized presentability of de-racialized anti-trans violence—to a consumptive economy that legislates or territorializes ‘becoming trans’ through witnessing spectacularized violence. In particular, I analyze how discourses of race and class render some trans figures ghostly, such that their haunting presence resists the cathartic closure promised by trans days of remembrance (Lamble 2008). In doing so, I reveal the repudiations that sustain the banal trans *necrointimacies* of racialized anti-trans violence, thereby allowing affective value to be extracted from racialized bare life in death. Finally, I illustrate how the virtual memorialization of victims of anti-trans violence relies on the circulation of whiteness³⁹ within affective economies of belonging.

Tracing the connections between intimacy, violence, life, and death in a consideration of what I term *trans necrointimacy*, I illustrate how the emergence of a spectacular affective economy of trans-normativity is predicated upon the cannibalization of racialized decay. Through my analysis of representational and representative tallies, I argue that the circulation of brutalized figures of colour are necessarily constitutive of trans community, which simultaneously relies on a strategic relatability that functions in service of a neoliberal trans-normativity and racialized erasure. Thus, this shift to *trans necrointimacy* subsequently means

³⁹ As both ‘being’ and ‘becoming.’

that the task of remembrance becomes subsumed by the spectacular politics of ordinary racialized violence, which can then be consumed under the sign of white, trans resilience.

[ii] Accounting For Remains: A Background to the Digitization of Trans Memorialization

It is fair to say that the *TDOR* website and online practices of mediation have been central to shaping practices of trans memorialization today. In an increasingly mediatized and mediated world, the individual is paradoxically more alienated from others whilst also being technologically linked in a fashion previously unimagined. In the case of minority groups, the internet provides a lifeline through which communities may be forged and sustained, while bypassing the clunky complexities of geographical constraints or social opprobrium. For many trans-identified individuals, the disembodied nature of cyberspace can be a welcome haven from, for instance, the very embodied reality of a dysphoric body as it negotiates the performative demands of everyday life or the isolation of a trans body living ‘stealth’ in an anti-trans setting (Raun 2015). Trans-identified people often turn to chatrooms and blog posts for advice on how to advocate for their health needs with medical professionals and/or to create gender-affirming prosthetics. Thus, as a virtual space, the internet is a resource through which to forge alliances, challenge the historical pathologization and medicalization of trans identities, and create new forms of belonging (Bakardjieva 2003; Shapiro 2004).

The internet was still in its infancy at the time of Chanelle Pickett’s murder in 1995, and news of the horrific crime was thus limited to the boundaries afforded by word-of-mouth or the occasional regional newspaper story. But when Rita Hester was murdered in the Boston area just three years later, in 1998, there were several online platforms in operation and they provided a virtual lifeline for members of the trans community. These online groups and chatrooms

empowered individuals by mitigating the isolating effects of geographic distance through digital proximity, thus generating the tentative tendrils of virtual intimacy. One of the more well-known internet resources was an America Online forum called the “Transgender Community Forum.” Managed by Gwendolyn Ann Smith, an American trans activist located in the US, the chatroom served as a virtual hub for trans people, creating tendrils of virtual intimacy that linked people through shared news and transitional advice. Although the group chatter would occasionally result in small, localized vigils in response to individual deaths, there was, at the time, no ‘official’ day of remembrance for lives lost to anti-trans violence.

But it was on this “Transgender Community Forum” that Smith learned that, while the news of Hester’s murder had made it into some of San Francisco’s newspapers, trans-identified people in the Boston area were completely unaware of Hester’s death. Smith’s anger at the erasure of Hester’s story by the mainstream media inspired the creation of the first website dedicated to the memorialization of trans people. In an interview with me, she explained, “I got really angry. I was very upset because I felt that, you know, how can you not know that somebody died very similarly three years before. You just had a big case, there were protests...” (G. Smith 2016).⁴⁰

Further complicating matters was the mainstream media’s reluctance to cover the deaths of so many trans people. For Smith, the lack of reliable and unbiased information about the sheer scale of anti-trans violence was a systemic issue that limited the community’s options for self-advocacy:

⁴⁰ Smith was referring to Chanelle Pickett’s murder in 1995. The protests organized in the wake of previous deaths of trans victims were often limited to the physical area in which the homicide had occurred. In the case of Pickett, for example, outraged trans activists and allies in the Boston area held protests at the courthouse during the perpetrator’s trial and at the subsequent sentencing hearing where he was acquitted of the murder charges.

And it's like...we don't have a clue, um, and at the time, quite frankly, neither did I. I didn't know how many murders there were. But I saw that there was a problem here if we didn't even know this. So I set out to try to research it. To try to find information. Um, I created the—it's not currently online—but I imagine internet archives might have some of it—the Remembering Our Dead project, which was a webpage which chronicles, um, all the cases I could find. (G. Smith 2016)

Thus, in 1999, shortly after Rita Hester's death, Gwendolyn Ann Smith launched the first iteration of the *TDOR* website. Titled *Remembering Our Dead*, this virtual memorial was created in part to “fight back” against the physical violence of anti-trans hatred, as well as the erasure of trans lives through systemic prejudice (*Remembering Our Dead* n.d).

At that time, it was almost impossible to find reliable, honest media reports on anti-trans violence that would honour the gender identities of the deceased: “It either does not exist (which is how one can cover thirty years of cases and still only have as many as I have to present), or it uses names that the deceased did not own, and pronouns that did not fit their reality”

(*Remembering Our Dead* n.d). By cataloguing the names of the dead, this website provided a unique space that affirmed the existence of those lives rendered disposable by systemic oppression. Smith recounts that the initial work of mining the news archives for reports about anti-trans violence was challenging.

Supplemented by “word-of-mouth” cases—informal oral testimonies that made differentiating fact from rumour difficult—Smith was able to cobble together an initial representation of the toll of anti-trans violence from previous posts she had shared on the “Trans Community Forum,” the few trans-specific websites that would share articles about the death of a trans person in a specific community, and from paid databases:

I paid for a Lexis-Nexis account so that I could go into news archives. Um, I was going into the SF Library and going into their papers. I was going to, what's now the GLBT Historical Society in San Francisco...and had access to their vaults. So I could go in and look at, like, magazines from the sixties and seventies and the materials they had. And, of course, also as the project got known, people would let me know either they'd lost someone in their lives or they, um, heard about a case. Um, and when cases would happen, I'd be contacted pretty regularly. Um, and that's really how that got going. (G. Smith 2016)

In 2007, Smith migrated the project from the *Remembering Our Dead* website to a new domain. Titled the *Transgender Day of Remembrance*, and paid for out-of-pocket by Smith herself or occasionally through donations at TDOR vigils, the *TDOR* website became, and remains, the primary source of information about anti-trans murders for several reasons. First, the website contains a sizeable, publicly accessible spreadsheet that painstakingly details 716 trans-related murders that took place between 1970 and 2012. For each victim on this spreadsheet, information is provided about their name(s), location, date of death, and cause of death. The majority of the victims on this spreadsheet are from the US, though this is in no way indicative of the severity of anti-trans violence in North America. Rather, as Smith herself noted in an interview with me, despite her efforts to include global cases of anti-trans violence, "it was the issue of being able to get the information" (G. Smith 2016). Indeed, a surge in the spreadsheet's distribution of hate crimes in areas *outside* the continental US in the early-2000s is likely due to the corresponding increase in improved access to internet services globally, especially amongst non-white, non-male, non-urban users (DiMaggio and Hargittai 2001). Relatedly, this increased access to reasonably priced, home-based internet service also facilitated

a shift from the internet's "technical origins" towards more accessible social networking via blogging and live-streaming (Allen 2013). Although the *TDOR* spreadsheet only contains information until 2012, the methodical documentation of the particulars around each individual death continues to be shared on the *TDOR* website's central archival pages for each year.⁴¹

Second, the *TDOR* website serves as a virtual hub for organizations and individuals seeking information about global TDOR vigils. In 2016, an interactive Google Map was added to the website, allowing visitors to zoom into specific geographical locations to find details about TDOR vigils in those areas. This "Event Locations" section of the *TDOR* website also contains a loosely organized virtual wall where visitors can leave short, three-to-four sentence descriptions about the times and locations of TDOR vigils in their area. For those seeking to organize their own TDOR vigil, the *TDOR* website also contains a link to a printable factsheet of "Tips for hosting a successful Day of Remembrance Event."⁴²

Third, in a section called "FAQ," the website provides answers to frequently asked questions about TDOR. Several issues are addressed: the decisions behind those who are included in, or excluded from, the annual list of victims; discrepancies that may arise in statistics collected on the cumulative number of victims each year; and a brief explanation about the challenges of constantly updating statistics on the website due to, what are admittedly realistic, time constraints. Although I address the first of these frequently asked questions in the next

⁴¹ Administered by the European advocacy group *Transgender Europe (TGEU)*, the 2009 establishment of the *Trans Murder Monitoring (TMM)* project transformed the landscape of data collection on anti-trans homicides. Their ability to acquire funding, which facilitated collaboration with local activists and partner organizations globally, meant that the project was able to acquire a breadth of data that Gwendolyn Smith had no access to. Thus, after 2012, Smith began to draw on *TMM* for statistical information while continuing the tradition of collecting community-sourced information and media clips on *individual* deaths.

⁴² The complexities and controversies around the organization of TDOR vigils will be addressed in the following chapter.

section of this chapter, briefly, the TDOR list “is specific to those who died from anti-trans violence” (*Int’l TDOR* n.d.c). Excluded are those who have chosen to end their lives or whose lives have been ended by domestic violence.⁴³ As for statistical discrepancies in the number of anti-trans murders each year, Smith relies on “media confirmation,” as opposed to “rumours, hearsay, [or] word of mouth” in order to add a name to the annual list of victims (*Int’l TDOR* n.d.c). For the most part, the *TDOR* website has been moderated by Smith with the help of two volunteers, Marty Abernathy and Ethan St. Pierre. As the website calculates its statistics by calendar year—January 1 to December 31—the most up-to-date information will usually be found in the three months leading up to the Trans Day of Remembrance, held annually on November 20.⁴⁴

Finally, and most importantly, at least for the purposes of the rest of this chapter, the *TDOR* website contains a valuable database of annual memorial pages devoted to victims that were killed between 2007 to present day. Akin to a mass obituary, the memorial page for each year contains biographical information, along with blogs posts or media links, for each victim. Regardless of where the victims were located, the *TDOR* website entry follows the same format for each victim of anti-trans violence and is structured much like a government-issued ID card:

⁴³ Smith’s decision to exclude these victims from the annual TDOR lists has always been a source of contention within the trans community. As Smith explained, her focus is not on “trans murders” but, rather, on “anti-trans murders”—distinct from the former in that it is specifically the person’s perceived identity as ‘trans’ that serves as a motivating factor for violence (Smith 2016). However, anti-trans violence is not solely based on perceived trans-ness but intersects with race and class oppression as well. As Binaohan, one of my research participants argued, “the fact that she considers it ‘unrelated’ that many transwomen of colour are murdered by their, like, boyfriends or intimate partners..it’s ‘unrelated’ to transphobia or transmisogyny..like, the fact that she actually considers those two distinct things” (Binaohan 2016) is in stark contrast to how trans women of colour, such as Binaohan, perceive the issue.

⁴⁴ The gap between the official anniversary for TDOR remembrance events and the actual end of the calendar year means that there is always a discrepancy between the number of victims remembered during the vigils and the cumulative figure for each year.

For each individual memorial entry, we are shown a photograph of the victim,⁴⁵ their name,⁴⁶ their location, the cause of death, the date on which they were murdered, their age, and, in some cases, hyperlinks to online media reports.⁴⁷

The grass-roots nature of the *TDOR* website means that it is at once an organizational tool and a simulated space through which the trans community may reckon with collective grief that resists easy categorization as purely individual or societal. Through the painstaking task of recording and recirculating the names of trans-identified people who have been killed, the *Remembering Our Dead* and *Transgender Day of Remembrance* websites have created the virtual semblance of a community affiliation that circumvented the limits of the real world.

I am particularly interested in this ability of the *TDOR* website to foster those feelings of belonging. It is all too easy to imagine the infinitude of cyberspace through an intoxicating lens of limitlessness that the real world simply cannot match: the high-speed buzz of instantaneous intimacy, the quasi-omnipotence of communicative simultaneity, and the invisible assurances offered by online anonymity. Yet the internet is not a frictionless realm that eschews the borders

⁴⁵ In cases where Smith was unable to source a photograph either through media reports, or through contributions from friends or family, a generic stock photograph of a silhouetted female form, is used. For further critiques of the genericization of the trans victim, please see Section (iv).

⁴⁶ Of course, there is the occasional entry where the victim's legal name has been provided along with their chosen name in brackets, or vice-versa. However, there are a few exceptions to this rule— between 2007 and 2015 the majority of victims from South America were simply classified as “unknown.” In 2009, a death in Turkey was identified as “unknown transsexual” and two deaths in India were identified by first names only with the word “hijra” in brackets after their names (*Int'l TDOR* 2009). Other variations include an “unidentified person dressed in women's clothes” and “unidentified eunuch,” both from Sheikhpura, Pakistan (*Int'l TDOR* 2010).

⁴⁷ For all of this information, Smith typically turns to social networking sites, such as Twitter or Facebook, where trans people “post and re-post information” (G. Smith 2016) about community members who have been lost to anti-trans violence. As a result, these memorial pages have a patchwork feel that is often characteristic of the unpaid labour of activists dedicated to “just hunting the web” (G. Smith 2016) for any information about the underreported and systemic nature of anti-trans violence.

and boundaries of the ‘real.’ If that were indeed the case, how would we account for the very real, material and embodied, intimacies that proliferate within the virtual?⁴⁸

Within the private-public online space of the internet, virtual intimacies proliferate with the heady immediacy afforded by the deliciously high-speed sensorium that real-time cannot match (Kuntsman 2012; McGlotten 2013). While cyberspace is itself virtual, and while many would be tempted to dismiss it as ‘not-real,’ the effects that these technologically mediated connections engender *are* indeed very real and infinitely open-ended (McGlotten 2013). The embryonic nature of the internet incubates new forms of belonging and affiliation that would otherwise be impossible in real-time. In other words, the intimacies offered by these virtual spaces create a sense of belonging and kinship⁴⁹— a connection at an embodied level that stands in contrast to what it commonly considered the disembodied world of hi-tech aesthetics. Indeed, as Shapiro suggests in her analysis of the role of the internet in the growth of the trans movement, “[t]he Internet is not removed from the race and class divisions within the trans community and may indeed reinforce them” (Shapiro 2004, 175).

⁴⁸ Consider, for example, the very embodied, erotic intimate spaces precipitated by gay cruising apps such as *Grindr* or *Scruff*. For more, see Shaka McGlotten’s *Virtual Intimacies* (2013).

⁴⁹ We cannot ignore that the notion of ‘space’ is intrinsically linked with both ideas of national identity as well as with the hierarchy of nations. Critiquing the assumed aspatiality of the internet, critical geographers and policy studies scholars argue that, “appearances aside, the topography of world institutions continues to emerge dramatically and powerfully through the seemingly seamless web of cyberspace” (Wilson 2003, 140). This geographic perspective accounts for not just the physical components of electronic interaction but the financial infrastructures that support it. Then, too, we must account for the economical flows of invisible commodities along cyberspace. The trade in invisible commodities— such as data, software, entertainment, and information— all of which are consumed. If the virtual world is one of real-time, proliferating capital, it follows that the economic infrastructures of this virtual geography mimic the spatial variations and disparity of class divides in the real world. As with access to gender-affirming surgical interventions, access to the virtual world of the internet is mitigated by social class and race, especially in North America. Cyberspace, too, captures the social disparities of existing cultural geographies “through the development, languages, design, and form of website content, representing the interests and preferred modes of interaction of different societies” (Wilson 2003, 140).

Likewise, how would we account for the political world of cyberspace if we assumed it were inherently apolitical? As I outlined in the beginning of this section, it was through online chatrooms such as the “Transgender Community Forum” that trans people in the late 1990s were able to bridge the divide between rural and urban and also facilitate discussions with those residing outside of the US. If the space created by the “Transgender Community Forum” gave a voice to those who had previously been silenced, then the creation of the *Remembering Our Dead* and *Transgender Day of Remembrance* websites solidified those voices under a common cause. Through the appeal to a singular ‘trans’ identity, the *TDOR* website collapsed the distinctions between race, class, and sexuality, thus cohering trans subjectivity through universal discourses of loss and violence. If the virtual is real then so too are the political affects and intimacies it generates. These intimacies take shape in the reporting on and tallying of trans deaths, which often reduce the lives of trans individuals to their final moments.

[iii] Keeping Score: Bare Life and the Limits of Expendability

The trans memorial websites that sprung up in the wake of anti-trans violence are cultural objects that literally re-member the dead, enfleshing brutalized corpses through narrativization and compelling the audience to witness acts of brutality. This is especially the case when the deaths in question are unexpected or untimely. But what is an ‘untimely’ death? A common understanding of an untimely death is an unexpected temporal irregularity of a single life’s trajectory—the prefix *un* marking a sudden rupture in the assumed linearity of a person’s path. It refers to the deaths that have taken on the psychosocial lament that characterizes the ‘could have,’ ‘would have,’ and ‘should have’ quality of post-mortem foresight. These are the deaths whose victims have been claimed before their proper time.

This, however, assumes that there are those whose deaths may be considered ‘timely.’ As this chapter illustrates, the apparent staggering increase in violent trans deaths every year means that deaths that were once characterized as ‘untimely’ have now taken on the paradoxical quality of a foregone conclusion. Over time, and particularly when applied to racialized trans bodies outside North America, trans death has become a form of normative violence; it is unexceptional in the sense that it has become routine and expected. Because these deaths that were once unjust are now just expected, they point to the states of exception that characterize them. They are (un)timely in their political instrumentation as they illustrate that not all deaths are equal in their symbolic value.

Between 2008 and 2017, the Trans Murder Monitoring Project recorded a total of 2,609 trans people as having been murdered as a result of anti-trans violence: 983 shot, 517 stabbed, 272 beaten, 97 strangled or hanged, 63 stoned, 49 asphyxiated or suffocated, 40 decapitated or dismembered, 33 throats cut, 35 tortured, 35 burned, 34 run-over by a vehicle, 33 other, and 418 not stated (*TGEU* 2017b). These figures represent only the *reported* murders of trans-identified people. Missing from the list of figures are those whose deaths were unremarkable: the deaths that were not found on the internet by independent community activists, such as Gwendolyn Ann Smith⁵⁰ or the *TMM* research teams working under the auspices of *TGEU*, the deaths that were not reported to local law enforcement or media outlets, the deaths of individuals who were mis-categorized, and those who, by virtue of their expendability, simply went missing.

Calculating Expendability: A Brief Review of Anti-Trans Violence

Research has shown that trans-identified people are at risk for multiple types of violence and that the threat of repeated victimization lasts throughout their lives (Stotzer 2009; Witten and

⁵⁰ If we were to include Gwendolyn Ann Smith’s data from 1971 until the inception of *TMM*, the total figure would jump to 3,008 anti-trans deaths reported between 1971 and 2017.

Eyler 1999). This cycle of violence is further compounded by the socioeconomic challenges of “staggering unemployment of trans populations emerging from conditions of homelessness, lack of family support, violence-related trauma, discrimination by potential employers, effects of unmet health needs,” (Spade 2011, 83) amongst other factors. But while both trans men and trans women are targets of the transphobic perception of ‘gender deception,’ it is overwhelmingly trans women who bear the brunt of this violence (Bettcher 2007).

Trans women are often doubly targeted because of the complicated intersection between “misogyny and hatred of persons whose existence undermines the perceived male supremacy and that gender dichotomy that is its necessary underpinning” (Witten and Eyler 1999, 466). Trans women concurrently experience victimization as women (due to anti-female hatred) and also as “(perceived), effeminate, homosexual male[s], or as... ‘gender-deviant’ person[s],” thus precipitating additional violence due to the perceived transgression of social norms (ibid.). Further, while the dual nature of gender-based oppression is reflected in the prevalence of trans women on the annual lists posted on the *TDOR* website, it is trans women *of colour* in particular who represent the vast majority of those deaths (de Vries 2014; Edelman 2014; Giovaniello 2013; Lavers 2011). On average, trans women of colour are “victimized four times as often as any other category of transgender person” (MacKenzie and Marcel 2009, 80).

In her conversation with me in the fall of 2016, Smith explained that, when the collection of TDOR statistics was still in its infancy, participants in the Transgender Community Forum “didn’t really understand that part of the story” (G. Smith 2016). It was a couple of years into the project when Smith began to see that the deaths reflected a grim pattern of expendability:

Now, I *did* begin to understand it personally, I mean a couple of years into it. Even though the first cases were people of colour, it should have been obvious. But that’s my

own blindness on that. Um, but you begin to see the pattern. You begin to see the train and you saw that it was people of colour, predominantly black, young, trans women, um, that were being targeted, um, you know? And that's, I mean, it's become a larger focus of the project because, you know, we *can't* just say that it's, you know, anti-trans murders. There are other factors: there's race, and that's a big one, you know, more than anything, and sex, you know, as part of the male-female binary. It's predominantly trans women. (G. Smith 2016)

It is an indisputable fact that trans women of colour are disproportionately affected by anti-trans violence. In their 2016 report, the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (NCAVP) estimates that 68% of hate-related homicides in the US were those of trans and gender non-conforming people and, of these homicides, 61% of the victims were trans women of colour (Waters 2016).⁵¹ Indeed, a 2008 study conducted by Rebecca L. Stotzer (2008)—in which five years' worth of data from hate crime reports filed at the Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations were analyzed—found that the reasons for violence against trans people are far more complex than just possessing non-binary characteristics. Rather, there was evidence of intersections of gender-expression, gender identity, race, class, and education as contributing factors in violent crimes against trans people. Although worldwide estimates are harder to come by, Transgender Europe's "Trans Murder Monitoring Project" reports that sex workers and migrants represent a significant share of the victims outside of North America (Balzer et al.

⁵¹ This is an alarming pattern that has remained unchanged since the NCAVP first started disaggregating their data on anti-trans murders by gender identity and race in 2012.

2012).⁵² According to *TMM*, “the significance of societal exclusion, as well as the intersection of transphobia with racism and other power relations” (Blazer et al. 2012, 23) indicates that trans people experience multiple, and nuanced, forms of systemic marginalization and oppression.

Trans women of colour suffer from the effects of compounded institutional barriers, including not only systemic transphobia and racism but also socioeconomic barriers caused by poverty, homelessness, and precarious employment, as well as over-policing and disproportionate rates of incarceration (Grant et al. 2007). With regards to systemic transphobia, the fact that the majority of trans people exist in a “legal limbo” (Greenberg 2012, 201) has already been well documented. Any incongruence between the gender marker listed on state-issued identification—so indispensable to the process of finding and securing gainful employment, housing, or even a driver’s license—and one’s gender presentation substantially diminishes the chances of escaping cycles of poverty (Spade 2008). For bodies of colour living in North America and Europe, this situation is further complicated by regimes of state-surveillance that have exacerbated the disparities between supposedly worthy and supposedly un-worthy trans and gender non-conforming bodies through linking state-security with nationalism and embodiment (Beauchamp 2009).

Transphobia within the healthcare system itself means that trans people are often under-insured. Trans people face significant hurdles to healthcare including harassment or violence in medical settings, refusal of care, and lack of provider knowledge (Grant et al. 2010). When access to healthcare *is* possible, trans bodies are subject to medical models of surveillance that

⁵² Although *TMM* releases yearly press reports on anti-trans hate crimes, its most comprehensive report was written in 2012. It is noteworthy that, while their focus is on homicide rates in specific countries, their data sets do not disaggregate anti-trans violence by race or ethnicity. Thus, although *TMM*’s data on trans murders is more reliable than any other source, it is impossible to tell how many of the victims of anti-trans violence were people of colour.

judge the legitimacy, credibility, or potential for success of ‘trans-ness.’ Yet these barriers are further heightened for trans women of colour who must contend with the medicalization of the trans body as something to be corrected as well as the nature of the medical model itself, which is underpinned by whiteness and heteronormativity (Bettcher 2013). Trans people who are unable to conform or assimilate to stereotypical traits associated with cis-normative masculinity or femininity—which are themselves modeled upon Eurocentric notions of ideal embodiment⁵³—can be denied access to treatment. Further complicating the “life chances” (Spade 2011) of trans women is the exorbitant cost of gender confirmation surgery, which is essentially unfeasible for a demographic that is already under-insured, under-housed, and under-employed.⁵⁴ Thus, the effects of these multiple forms of oppression mean that trans women of colour are more likely to participate in “illegal economies” (Vitulli 2010) for their survival.

Perhaps the most notably relevant criminalized economy in this context is the sex industry. For instance, in the US, sex working trans women⁵⁵ of color report higher levels of poverty and mistreatment than white trans sex workers (Fitzgerald et al. 2015). They are also frequently targeted by law enforcement and detained on charges of solicitation (Daum 2015;

⁵³ Feminist and critical race scholars have explored how Eurocentric discourses have contributed to the scientific pathologization of racialized bodies as excessive, anachronistic, and primitive (Gilman 1985; McClintock 1995; Somerville 2000). Above all, this construction of the ideal body, as Radhika Mohanram (1999) explains, can only be achieved by “placing ‘the body’ outside of history, by ignoring historical events such as colonialism and slavery, and facts such as racism and sexism; in short, by ignoring the cultural and historical constructions of the body” (32).

⁵⁴ Although definitive statistics on the rates of unemployment in trans populations are difficult to come by, the Trans PULSE Project report released in 2011 showed that only 37% of trans people living in Ontario had full-time employment (Bauer et al. 2011). In the US, a 2015 survey conducted by the National Center for Transgender Equality found that the unemployment rate for trans people was twice the rate for the population as a whole, with the rate for trans people of colour reaching as high as four times the national unemployment rate (James et al. 2016, 6).

⁵⁵ Before I go on, and to clarify the argument that will follow, trans men, too, participate in sex work economies. However, I am focusing particularly on trans women because first, compared to trans men, trans women are almost twice as likely to participate in sex work and, second, trans women who were known to participate in sex work are overrepresented in the annual list of anti-trans homicides (Fitzgerald et al. 2015; Grant 2011).

Human Rights Watch 2012; Sausa et al. 2007).⁵⁶ Globally, it is estimated that “64% of all murdered trans and gender-diverse people whose profession was known were sex workers” (TGEU 2017c). Yet, when compared to cis women who work in the sex industry, trans sex workers are simultaneously under-researched due to their marginalized positions and over-mentioned as “titillating” (Rev and Geist 2017) curiosities.

What scant media coverage *is* available on anti-trans violence has often portrayed trans people as “sexualized deceivers” or “pathetic transsexuals,” thus exacerbating the divide between the innocent “good victim”⁵⁷ who is worthy of public empathy and the “bad victim” against whom the violence was justified (Serano 2007, 36). In cases where the perpetrator of anti-trans violence is caught, such victim-blaming coverage typically serves to strengthen defendant’s claims, validating the “trans panic defense,”⁵⁸ while minimizing the impact of the actual murder (Wodda and Panfil 2014).

In their comprehensive analysis of three high-profile murders of trans women, including those of Chanelle Pickett and Rita Hester, Gordene MacKenzie and Mary Marcel (2009) argue that media coverage of “economically marginalized transwomen of colour [paradoxically] allows journalists to more easily re-inscribe the dominance of the white, privileged, putatively heterosexual men who murder them” (82). Like many victims of anti-trans violence, both Hester and Pickett were simultaneously dehumanized, mischaracterized, or spectacularized in the

⁵⁶ In a thought-provoking analysis of the role of policing as a “tool” with which to control trans populations, Courtenay W. Daum writes that the practice of charging trans women of colour with solicitation is “so commonplace that it is referred to as ‘walking while trans,’ an analogy to ‘driving while black’” (Daum 2015, 562).

⁵⁷ As I illustrated in the introduction, the “good victim” is often characterized by a positive identificatory-consumability undergirded by whiteness.

⁵⁸ The “trans panic” defense refers to the legal strategy historically employed by heterosexual men who have been charged with the murder of a trans woman with whom they have been sexually intimate. As a defensive ploy, this appeal to “trans panic” is troubling because “it appeals to stereotypes about transgender individuals as sexually deviant and abnormal” (Lee and Kwan 2014, 77).

mainstream media's coverage (Barker-Plummer 2013; Wodda and Panfil 2014; MacKenzie and Marcel 2009). Highlighting the dual nature of racist and misogynistic media coverage, MacKenzie and Marcel suggest that in cases where the victims of anti-trans violence are trans sex workers of colour, they "are depicted as more exotic, wild, desirable, and out of control than their white counterparts" (2009, 84). Thus, the double erasure of women like Hester and Pickett—first through their exclusion from economies of opportunity and subsequently through the narrations of them in death—gestures to discourses of expendability that arise from the reinforcement of the intersections between historical discourses of racial and sexual deviance.

Biopolitics, Life Chances, Race

As Michel Foucault has famously suggested in his March 1976 lecture at the Collège de France, "the right of life and death is a strange right" (2003, 240). Returning to Black's comment, to say that a life has been 'judged expendable' is to gesture to its biopolitical use-value, which is its estimated capacity to function productively. Signaled by individualizing disciplinary techniques for the subjugation of bodies (alternately named anatomo-politics) to an era marked by a "massifying" (Foucault 2003, 241) mode of power that operates at the level of the population, *biopolitics* describes the power to make live and let die. Biopolitics are, undeniably, heavily at play in structuring trans lives and inaugurating trans deaths.

Indelibly overlaid by the axes of sexuality, race, and gender, biopolitics has long been understood as a constitutive element of sovereign power and Eurocentric modernity. Critical race theorists understand the role of biopolitical interventions in projects of colonial and imperial expansion that specifically targeted racialized sexuality through the imposition of Eurocentric ideals (Morgensen 2010; Somerville 1994; Stoler 1995). Within the field of queer theory, biopolitics is a term that has been examined in relation to sexual citizenship and the deployment

of heterosexual and gendered norms within the medico-judicial realm (Berlant 1997; Puar 2007; Somerville 1994; Wilse and Spade 2004). Trans theorists, too, have exemplified how trans and gender-non-conforming bodies have historically been vulnerable to disparate modes of biopolitical regulation: through the pathologization of trans subjectivities as deviant (Meyerowitz 2002; Stone 2006); the medicalization of ‘unruly’ bodies whose disorders must be regulated via prescribed scripts of normative gender performance (Chase 2006; Rubin 2006; Spade 2006); and the juridical discourses that have legislated and policed trans bodies within the nation-state (Namaste 2000). In short, this turn to biopolitics allows us to understand the expendability of trans life as symptomatic of the deployment of mechanisms of disciplinary-biopower that “penetrate subjects’ very bodies and forms of life”⁵⁹ (Agamben 1998, 10).

As I have already illustrated, at present these modes of disciplinary power still make themselves felt in nuanced but equally systemic ways: through the medical and legal regulation of pathways to transitional self-determination (Irving 2008; Lee 2008); through barriers to housing and employment (Whittle et al. 2005); through conflicting or variable policies with regard to the use of bathrooms and change-rooms (Cavanagh 2010); through state-surveillance and the over-incarceration of trans women of colour (Beauchamp 2009; Spade 2011); and, finally, through the over-representation of trans women of colour in each year’s tally of anti-trans violence (Grant et al. 2011). Indeed, the overwhelming odds that characterize the reduction in “life chances” for any trans person—but especially so for trans women of colour—calls for a sustained re-engagement with Giorgio Agamben’s formulation of “bare life” to describe those existences so devalued that they are devoid of political significance (Spade 2011; Agamben 1998).

⁵⁹ See also Stryker 2014, 39.

Homo Sacer and Expendability

In their expendability, the lives of trans women of colour can be conceived of as *homo sacer*; that is, as lives without value. The *homo sacer*, as theorized by Giorgio Agamben, occupies the no-man's land outside both divine and juridical law and is closely dependent on the "state of exception." As a central paradigm of contemporary governmentality that draws upon Michel Foucault's formulation of biopower, the term "state of exception" indexes the exclusion of the *homo sacer* from legal and political rights accorded to citizens at large. Stripped of their humanity, these wretched lives become "bare life," which can be taken with impunity.

While the mechanisms of social and legal exclusion that define bare life would ostensibly situate them outside of the margins of political order, the paradox is that these states of exception are actually "the hidden foundation" (Agamben 1998, 12) upon which political life relies. As Agamben explains in *Homo Sacer*, it is through "the 'politicization' of bare life—the *metaphysical task par excellence*—[that] the humanity of living man is decided" (Agamben 1998, 13). In other words, the "highest political task" of ensuring the happiness and freedom of citizens is dependent upon defining whose lives count as "livable" in the first place, and by extension, as grievable. Extending Agamben's work, we can understand that if the health of the national body politic depends on defining whose lives count, then this struggle must necessarily be—at least in part—about the gendered and racialized worth of different bodies.

In a recent roundtable on "Decolonizing Transgender" studies, Micha Cárdenas suggests that the continuing trend of anti-trans violence against women of colour is "tied to different countries' histories of colonialism," and that "while black transgender women are commonly targeted for violence in the United States, indigenous women are more frequently murdered or missing in Canada" (Boellstorff et al. 2014, 426). Cárdenas's observation is an important one as

it synthesizes how violence against trans women of colour is intimately linked to the same shifting “states of exception” that characterize the exercise of sovereign power over the “bare lives”—and by extension, the invisible deaths—of missing and murdered Aboriginal women in Canada.

It is important to recognize the ongoing conditions of settler colonialism in Canada, as it is through colonization and whiteness that certain bodies are devalued, and made available for violence by the state.⁶⁰ As Sherene Razack (1998) explains in *Looking White People in the Eye*, “[w]hen the terrain is sexual violence, racism and sexism interlock in particularly nasty ways” (59). Over the past thirty years, over a hundred Aboriginal women have gone missing in British Columbia, yet little attention has been paid to the phenomenon (Jiwani and Young 2006, 896). For feminist and anti-racist scholars, the disregard for the lives of Aboriginal women is linked to hegemonic discourses about sex work and female sexuality in general and the lingering presence of settler-colonial violence against Aboriginal bodies in particular.⁶¹ The work of Geraldine Pratt (2005), for example, examines both the racialized and gendered aspects of these “states of exception” that characterizes the legal abandonment of sex workers in Vancouver. Stereotyped by the intersections between class, race, and gender oppression, the disappearance of Aboriginal sex workers points to casual violence meted out to the “bare lives” that occupy spaces of exception.

In her examination of the missing and murdered Aboriginal women in Canada, Pratt (2005) argues that the reduction of categories of people to “bare life” is also linked to the production of landscapes of ordinary violence from “aberrations” in normal practice (1053). Furthermore, Pratt differentiates the ordinary violence of exclusion from that of abandonment,

⁶⁰ If trans theory does not actively integrate anti-racism and decolonial approaches, it risks being complicit with ongoing colonial violence.

⁶¹ See Jiwani and Young (2006), Pratt (2005).

arguing that “[t]he difference between exclusion and abandonment turns on the fact that abandonment is an *active, relational* process. The one who is abandoned remains in a relationship with sovereign power: included through exclusion” (2005, 1054; emphasis mine). Certainly, we can link these deviations from normal practice in the historical and contemporary legislation of trans life to the “death worlds” (Haritaworn, Kuntsman, and Posocco 2014, 2) marked by “inhumanity” (Hayward and Weinstein 2015), disposability (Shakhsari 2013), and legal abandonment (Gossett 2014).

But it is specifically the “active” and “relational” qualities of abandonment that we must concern ourselves with here. Abandonment is not an unconscious act but requires a sustained, or active, withdrawal from the object that must be excluded. As such, abandonment can never be fully accomplished. Rather, the process of abandonment is perpetually haunted by the ghostly presence of the repudiated object.

Sovereignty, as I have previously discussed, is not merely an exercise of control over territory; it also exerts its might through the biopolitical control of expendability. Still, the relationship between biopower, states of exception, and sovereignty extend beyond the politics of the living. If biopower concerns itself with “that domain of life over which power has taken control,” then what place is given to “death, and the human body (in particular the wounded or slain body)?” (Mbembe 2003, 12). And, as Mbembe (2003) asks, where do these fallen bodies lay in the order of power?

[iv] No Photo: The Presentable Unrepresentability of Bare Life

Chalk [chawk] *vb.* (tr) To mark, rub, or whiten with or as if with chalk.
- Oxford English Dictionary

Let us return briefly to the tally. Tallies are non-static archives meant to offer a representation or account of a plurality, the neatness and orderliness of which is haunted by the ineffable quality of casual and repetitive violence. The process of summation, however, can also circulate a detached relatability, or a flattened (re)presentability through anonymizing and universalizing the unrepresentability of racialized and gendered bare life. The 2017 *TMM* tally from the previous section summarizes 983 shot, 517 stabbed, 272 beaten, 97 strangled or hanged, 63 stoned, 49 asphyxiated or suffocated, 40 decapitated or dismembered, 33 throats cut, 35 tortured, 35 burned, 34 run-over by a vehicle, 33 other, and 418 not stated— figures that collapse each individual life into an anonymized collective.

As mute testimonies to the horrific violence that characterizes bare life, these numbers tell us *how* 2,609 trans people were murdered; however, with the exception of the obvious connection to the primacy of trans identification, the numbers tell us nothing about the other factors whose confluence mark certain *kinds* of bodies as targets for violence more generally. By April of 2017, eight trans women had been murdered so far that year in the United States alone. All of them were trans women of colour (Rulli 2017). Later that year, *TMM* released a poster-style infographic summarizing the year's death toll (*TGEU* 2017a). Set against a cheerful orange background, a simple map of the world demonstrates the total number of anti-trans murders by continent. Below this global summary, and illustrated in a bubbly, cartoonish style, are three jarringly cheerful icons—a handgun, a knife, and a clenched fist (Figure 2).

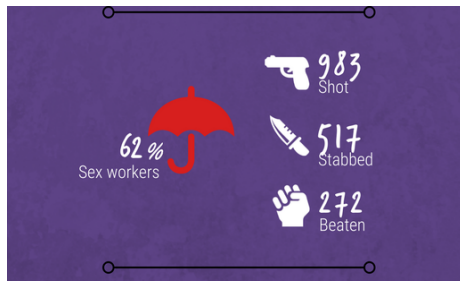


Figure 2: Detail from TMM infographic

These images act as caricatured representations of the most prevalent causes of death in anti-trans murder that year, and each is accompanied by the cold truth of its numerical tally.

The childlike simplicity of the illustration is not only at odds with the violence it represents, but the almost-cheerful

banality of the poster is also symptomatic of the erasure of what is the specifically racialized nature of anti-trans violence. Indeed, in a separate press release issued by *TMM* in 2017 indicates that 86% of those killed in the US were people of colour, while, globally, 69% of the reported victims were migrants (*TGEU* 2017b). Yet this racialized violence is made palatable via universal presentability; the data produces a universal, white trans victim by erasing the material realities of racialized (trans)gender violence.

Necropolitics

As Giorgio Agamben (1998) explains, bare life indexes a “peculiar privilege of being that whose exclusion founds the city of men” (12). The fact that the disposability of the *homo sacer* functions as the necessary corollary of political life leaves us with something of a paradox, for it would follow that the expendability of those wretched lives would likewise serve some political purpose, thus contradicting our initial understanding of “bare life” as devoid of any value. In this sense, if exclusion underwrites politicality, then bare life is essential to the machinery of citizenship. The work of accounting for the expendability of trans people of colour—through the visceral narratives created about anti-trans violence—would therefore highlight the unexpendability of the excessive racialized trans body to the trans community itself. If “bare life” indexes the ordinary expendabilities that are the necessary corollary of biopolitical governmentality, how do we account for the deaths of these bare lives? Or, put another way, if

the expendable lives that occupy “states of exception” are unexpendable to political life, then what political labour do memorialized trans bodies of colour perform *within* and for trans communities?

In *Necropolitics*, Achille Mbembe (2003) suggests that “becoming subject...supposes upholding the work of death” (14), or, put another way, that one truly becomes a subject through confrontation with the death of an other. The concept of necropolitics allows us to understand how the politicality of death cannot be considered separately from histories of race and the forward march of imperial expansion. Drawing on the work of Hannah Arendt, Mbembe reminds us that the “politics of race is ultimately linked to the politics of death” (2003, 17). Indeed, critical race scholars have previously explored how dead or dying bodies of colour have fetishistically been inscribed into the order of power (hooks 2006; Snorton and Haritaworn 2013). Several trans studies scholars, too, have explored the place of the racialized trans body using a necropolitical critique (Snorton and Haritaworn 2013; Puar 2017). For example, in “Transnational governmentality and the politics of life and death,” Sima Shakhshari analyzes how necropolitics converge with trans bodies via civilizational discourses inscribed upon the Iranian refugee trans body whose death “is sanctioned in the state of exception as a refugee (outside of the nation-state) and as trans (outside of the naturalized binaries of sex)” (Shakhshari 2013, 340). For others, necropolitics and homonationalism can be brought to bear on the geospatial distribution and regulation of erotic labour; the resulting “homo(necro)nationalism” is reflective of the exclusionary practices that neoliberal citizenship demands (Edelman 2014). Finally, necropolitics has recently been linked to the rehabilitation of trans women of colour in death as being “good victims” (Snorton and Haritaworn 2013). Through the erasure of the complexities of

race and class, the sanitization of these deaths ignites political activity under the umbrella of trans universality.

***TDOR* and the Deracialization of Anti-Trans Violence**

Notably, the work of Sarah Lamble (2008) explores directly how the de-racialized images of the victims on the *TDOR* website allow for whiteness to stand in for trans-ness. Often sourced through existing news reports or through reports from family and friends, the individual entries on the *TDOR* website's annual memorial pages are usually accompanied by obituary-style headshots of the deceased. However, in those instances where Smith is unable to find a photograph of the victim, a greyscale silhouette of a woman is always used in its place with the caption "No Photo" beneath it (Figure 3).



Figure 3: No Photo, TDOR

First, by virtue of its genericization, the ghostly silhouette used on the *TDOR* website obscures the ways in which the bodies affected by anti-trans violence are also marked by interlocking oppressions of race, class, ability, and sexuality. Second, transphobia is privileged as the singular cause of anti-trans violence.

Similar arguments have been made by Vivian Namaste in her reflection on Judith Butler's hypothesis that "when considering transsexual and transgender people, the question of violence

is central” because it “brings into sharp relief the limits of the very category *human*” (Namaste 2009, 15). Namaste argues that while Butler acknowledges the “inordinate amount of violence” (2009, 16) directed against trans bodies of colour, the emphasis on the violation of normative gender/sex binaries as being the primary cause of anti-trans violence results in an exclusion of interrogating race and class in considering what constitutes the limits of the human.

Echoing Lamble’s anti-racist critique of the erasure of interlocking systems of oppression, Mirha-Soleil Ross (2005) argues that the prevalence of sex workers on the *TDOR* website exposes how transphobia cannot accurately be considered the singular cause of violence. Even in cases where trans sex workers have been the targets of anti-trans violence, they are often also the targets of anti-sex worker violence. In her interview with Vivian Namaste in *Sex Change, Social Change*, Ross says,

I invite people to take a minute to look at the Web site for the Transgender Day of Remembrance. You’ll find four people from Toronto: Grayce Baxter, Shawn Keegan, Deanna Wilkinson, and Cassandra Do. They were all trans prostitutes who were murdered while working. According to the web site, they were killed because of “anti-transgender hate or prejudice.” But Grayce Baxter—who was a completely passable, post-operative transsexual woman—was working as a genetic woman and was killed by a client who didn’t even know she was a transsexual. He learnt it from the newspapers’ headlines—“Transsexual Hooker Disappears”—before his surrender. Marcello de Palmo, the man who shot Shawn Keegan and Deanna Wilkinson, also shot a non transsexual prostitute, Brenda Ludgate, that same night. He was out on a killing spree and was targeting prostitutes. He didn’t say anything, during his trial that showed evidence of “anti-transgender hatred.” He said, however, that he considered “street people and

prostitutes to be the scum of the earth.” For Cassandra Do, we still don’t know why she was murdered and in exactly what circumstances. All we know is that she was strangled and that some DNA was found on her body and was linked to the sexual assault and attempted murder of another sex worker, a non transsexual woman, in 1997. So linking, at this point, Cassandra’s murder to “transphobia” is ridiculous. But that didn’t prevent the organizers of the Transgender Day of Remembrance to use her picture on their 2003 posters, turning her into a martyr for their cause. (Namaste 2005, 92)

As this excerpt illustrates, if discourses of criminality territorialize the bodies of trans women in life—wherein participation in erotic labour serves to further demonize the living trans body while justifying its exclusion from participation in the public realm—then death brings with it a stark reminder of the consumptive economy of trans necropolitics.

The afterlife of racialized trans death is the time of politicality, casting the subject “into the incessant movement of history” (Mbembe 2003, 14). The universal trans victim produced through this genericization mobilizes the brutalized bodies of colour in the entrenchment of whiteness within teleological narratives of inclusion. The virtual memorialization of trans bodies effectively recirculates whiteness through decontextualization and universalization, such that “each individual death can stand in and be substituted for another; difference is subsumed within sameness” (Lamble 2008, 28). Thus, Namaste has argued, as both the grounds for and objects of discourse, these corpses are re-animated “theatrically and politically” in order “to benefit a privileged subsection of the trans community” (Namaste 2005, 93).

Lamble’s text is notable for its critique of the rehabilitation of the unrepresentability of racialized anti-trans violence through universalized whiteness. However, as I will illustrate in the next section, the politics of trans remembrance have been transformed from one of the

(re)presented and decontextualized unrepresentability of violence—via Lamble’s notion of genericization—to a consumptive spectacle that now reterritorializes the trans body of colour via repetitions of virtualized violent intimacy.

[v] Necrointimacies: Affect and the Virtual Reverberations of Violent Intimacy

Trans people are never killed from fifty yards away with a high-powered rifle...we are killed up close and personal...people want to *see* us die. (Riki Wilchins 1998; emphasis mine)

The face on my laptop screen is frozen in a mute scream of pain. Her matted hair and her t-shirt are almost the same shade of yellow, splattered with shocking blooms of bright red blood. Her brown body, contorted with the exhausting agony of trying to protect itself from the blows being rained on it by the man looming over her, is covered in dust and streaks of blood. Captured with his arm mid-swing, the threatening trajectory of the man’s body signals the certainty of further violence that will be directed at the pleading woman lying in the pockmarked rubble of a deteriorating street. A man in a blue shirt walks towards them, his indifference to the brutality betrayed by the casual trajectory of his stride. Nearby, with his arms hanging loosely by his side and his hands tensed in the universal gesture of readiness, another man stands, watching the scene unfold with an eerie expression of calmness on his face. There is no help for the woman being beaten in this screenshot: the men are at once casual observers and willing participants to this spectacle of violence.

In the second picture, the woman has clearly already been beaten for some time. The ground beneath the sky-blue of her denim shorts is wet with the errant droplets of the blood that completely obscures her swollen face. In the foreground, the bodies of the men have been frozen

in a moment of malevolent deliberation. The third picture in this frame remains the hardest to look at. Because I now know what will happen next. In this final screenshot, there are five men in the process of lifting the woman's limp body and dumping it into a wheelbarrow. As two men wrestle her legs into the wheelbarrow that is being steadied by a third, a fourth man clutches the drenched collar of the woman's t-shirt in order to gain better leverage over her body. Partially obscured by the others, the last man in this frame carries a large plank of wood.

Her name was Dandara dos Santos. On February 15th 2017, the 42-year-old trans woman was dragged from her home in Fortaleza, Brazil by eight men. In front of a group of cheering neighbours, Santos was kicked, punched, and hit with shoes and a large plank of wood. Still conscious and bleeding profusely, she was then dumped into a wheelbarrow and wheeled into a back alley where she was beaten further before being shot to death. Every painful minute of the savage attack—the laughter, the taunts, the sounds of an unyielding plank of wood on vulnerable skin, and those horrifying last minutes where a terrified, bare-breasted Santos pleads for her life—was captured on video, shared on the internet, and circulated on Facebook.

Within a month of her death, these images of Santos' battered body appeared on my Facebook newsfeed. The most commonly shared link was to an article published by the Daily Mail. Titled "Transsexual woman is dragged from her home and beaten to death," this article included both video stills of Santos' murder as well as the streamable, uncensored video of her final moments. Shared publicly by trans-identified and gender-nonconforming friends and acquaintances, the real-time spectacle of Santos' death became an instantaneous anchoring point for reactions that ranged from the immediacy of communal outrage to disclosures of individual anger. Shaken, trans people in Canada reached out publicly through their Facebook newsfeeds

and re-affirmed the need to keep fighting for the passage of Bill C-16.⁶² Meanwhile, peppered amongst reflections on the precarious nature of trans rights under the Trump regime, many comments from American allies also alluded to the barbarism of the cultural heritage of the Brazilian men responsible for Santos' murder.⁶³

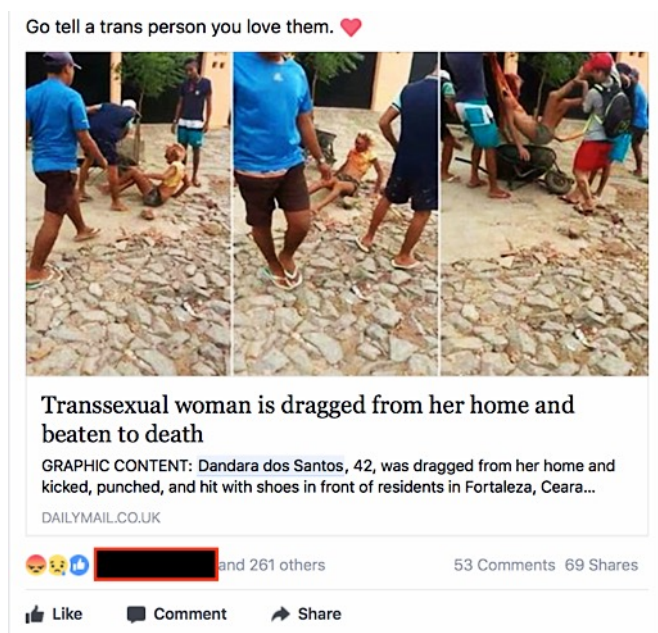


Figure 4: Facebook screenshot, March 7, 2017

clearer than in a Facebook post that encouraged everyone to watch the video and “tell a trans person you love them” (Figure 4).

Posted by a white trans man living in Canada, this status update subsequently appeared on my Facebook's newsfeed because it had garnered over 261 reactions, including expressions of anger or sadness. What was immediately startling was how many times this post had been

Sifting through these comments and reactions, many of which cemented the brutality of anti-trans violence as characteristic of life ‘over there,’ another pattern emerged: an intimacy, or sense of belonging; a “shock or relief at being ‘in’ something with others” (Stewart 2007, 27) that can only be wrought from the unassimilable nature of proximity to a spectacle of violence. Nowhere was this

⁶² Colloquially known as the “Transgender Bill,” Bill C-16 was passed in June 2017 and added gender identity and gender expression to the prohibited grounds of discrimination enshrined under the *Canadian Human Rights Act*.

⁶³ In particular, some of these responses insisted that the Santos murder was evidence of a generalized sense of depravity and uncivilizability of those living outside North America. Among other responses were those that compared the “uncommon” occurrence of anti-trans violence in North America compared to the Middle East, parts of Asia, Africa and parts of South America.

shared. Together with the embedded video, the screenshots of Santos' final moments in this call to "[g]o tell a trans person you love them" was circulated 69 more times within the span of a few days (Figure 3).

TW: Violence, Murder

Please, folks, stop sharing the video of Dandara dos Santos being killed. Stop. There are articles online that don't have this video if what folks are doing is trying to share this news. Yes, we need to bare witness to the fact that trans folks of color are being killed. We also need to bare witness to the fact that trans women of color are also living and thriving. Be careful about which stories are circulated and which aren't, who circulates them, and why. Be careful about why you want to see these images. Ask why this video is going viral. There's a terrible history here of images of folks of color being brutalized used as a commodity. Companies are getting clicks based on this--it doesn't feel that different to me than postcards of lynchings. Just don't.

In Struggle, Qwo-Li

Figure 5: Facebook screenshot, March 9, 2017

In the midst of all of the political debates and emotional reactions, a handful of trans-identified people of colour posted their own responses to the Santos video, asking others to stop sharing this video of a trans woman of colour being killed. Qwo-Li

Driskill, a prominent Two-spirit scholar, issued a public Facebook post critiquing the commodification of Santos' death in the service of trans remembrance (Figure 5). For Driskill, the circulation of Santos' death was akin to "postcards of lynchings," a reminder of the ambivalence with which the racialized and gendered subject has historically been objectified and then disappeared in the service of whiteness, capitalism, and empire.

Driskill's reference to "postcards of lynchings" is particularly salient as it points to the complex ways through which individual freedom has historically been predicated on making visible intimate spectacles of racialized violence. To date, several critical race scholars have explored how the images of racial corporeal decay undergird the structure of historical white supremacy in the United States (Carby 2004; hooks 2006). Likewise, these images of racialized trans death continue to bear the "strange fruit" of the state-sanctioned spectacularization of states of exception so integral to maintaining "landscapes of inequality" (C. Smith 2013). As a technique of discipline, the photographs of bloodied, unrecognizable brown and black "unruly" (Snorton and Haritaworn 2013, 68) bodies that litter the landscape of American memory find

their genealogical parallel in contemporary displays of sovereign domination producing “macabre spatialities” (Alves 2013, 2). These topographies of racial abjection justify exercises of sovereign power over those who must always be excluded from society.

The work of Hazel Carby (2004), for instance, highlights how the “enslavement and dispossession of the not-fully-human” has been integral to building “the land of the free” (np). Pointing to the images of tortured Iraqi civilians in the American-run Abu Ghraib prison, she explains,

The combination of brutal violence and desire that characterised lynching was developed and refined on the landscape of colonialism, has been taught by the US military to death squads in Latin America, and is to be found today in the prisons and precinct houses of the homeland. From lynching to Abu Ghraib, the continuous aim is the transformation of peoples from subjects into objects, what Frantz Fanon called ‘decerebralisation.’ In the shadow of the flag, of the Pentagon, and of an imperial democracy, lies the other’s tortured body. (Carby 2004)

Macabre spatialities point to the mundane work of racialized death in producing imagined political communities. They are likewise central to the organization of social relations, forming the “basis on which white life and citizenship [becomes] knowable” (Bassichis and Spade 2014, 195) through a consumptive racial economy that yokes whiteness to the futurity and victimhood while relegating the racialized body to death and pathology. Still, while “the work of death” (Mbembe 2003, 16) is central to the reproduction of state sovereignty and the continuing assertion of power over racialized and gendered topographies of inclusion and exclusion, the corpse itself is not always the end of the story. Rather, it continues to hold the power to stir up more death. An object in perpetual motion, the corpse animates the stuff of life.

Viral Necrointimacies and Spectacularized Violence

In the aftermath of her death, the viral intimacy of Santos' dying body became a consumable event, generating affective responses that galvanized politicality or inspired public intimacy among white trans activists. But by the end of the week, the novel immediacy of the reverberations of that initial shock wore off and Santos disappeared into the archives of remembrance, her brown body forever frozen in the three screenshots that can still (always) be called upon to offer the viewing public a morbid panorama of yet another brutal end.

While it is important to bear witness to the undeniable fact that trans women of colour are being killed in record numbers, what does it mean that the trans community often coalesces in feelings of belonging and communality via the virtual 'shareability' of the spectacularized, dismembered racialized corpse? How can we think through these intimacies of belonging that can only ever be affirmed from the safe distance that is granted by the banality of ordinary trans violences that are emblematic of a place that is "over there"? How do we make sense of the violent intimacies that are evoked in the re-membrance, or reverberative ritual, of witnessing bare life at its barest end? What then becomes of the possibility of racialized trans life when its value is produced always and only through death?

As this section illustrates, the re-animation of the death throes of Santos's racialized body in the service of what, I argue, is a specifically homonational, trans-affirmation, is not a singular phenomenon. In the time that has elapsed since Lamble (2008) published their critique of the generic "No Photo" photos on the *TDOR* website, there has been one major change: The annual memorial pages created between 2009 and 2017 are now peppered with media links and blog posts, and these often spectacularize the murders of specifically trans women of colour via graphic descriptions and uncensored pictures.

With the help of volunteers, the hyperlinks posted under an individual's memorial entry are mostly found by "just hunting the web" (G. Smith 2016) for any information on the victim whose name has been forwarded to the *TDOR* website. Because of this piecemeal approach, sometimes the media link meant for a particular victim of violence will redirect you to witness the brutal end of someone else entirely. At other times, this virtual misdirection masquerades in the form of a 'dead link.' Still, as with all sleights of hand, the misdirection of information *tells* us something about the other stories that are in play. Misdirections are inextricable from the close-up magic of mourning. The representational gaps they engender are simply extensions of ordinary violences that have historically marked the racialized body as fungible and expendable.

When examining the media links for over 600 victims of transphobic violence that were memorialized on the *TDOR* website between 2009 and 2017, I found that when a trans woman of colour was murdered, the accompanying media link beneath her name invariably spectacularized her death, thus objectifying her body in service of the broader politics of remembrance.⁶⁴ Racialized trans bodies are no longer erased through genericization but, instead, are graphically brutalized post-mortem. Replacing the staccatoed efficiency of descriptive nouns that are easily boiled down to the singular, bare-boned truth of a brutal end, this memorial website, populated with almost entirely racialized bodies, has become increasingly enfleshed with the raw viscosity of visual representation. On the *TDOR* website, these descriptions of the "causes of death" for trans women of colour are frequently as bare as the "bare lives" they seek to represent: trans women of colour have been variously described as dying from blunt force trauma to the

⁶⁴ The *TDOR* website first started including media links to individual murders in 2009. Thus, for the purposes of comparison with Lamble's 2008 critique of the de-racialized "No Photo" photos used by the website, I chose to analyze the portrayal of racialized bodies using website data after 2008. The number of memorialized deaths on the *TDOR* site for the years between 2009 and 2017 is far lower than the actual number of reported victims of anti-trans violence because biographical information is not readily available for everyone.

head, from being shot multiple times in the face or head, and/or from being burned beyond recognition. In extreme cases, the attacker may, indeed, choose to get close and personal: limbs are dismembered, heads are decapitated and tossed in dumpsters, and genitals are hacked off.⁶⁵

The first media link to feature the uncensored corpse of a murdered trans person of colour was posted on the *TDOR* website in 2010, when the body of an unidentified trans woman was discovered in Chihuahua, Mexico (*Int'l TDOR* 2010). Although the cause of death on her individual memorial entry for 2010 states that she was simply beheaded, the *TDOR* spreadsheet tells us that she was “beheaded while still alive” and that “her head was found a mile away from her body” (*Int'l TDOR* n.d.a). On her individual memorial entry, a hyperlink to a Spanish-language blog shows a very graphic picture of a bruised and bloodied decapitated torso lying on the ground. The image is haunting because it re-animates the duality of her erasure: first, in literal death—as a body stripped of the identifying characteristics that would have been granted to it by the presence of a head—and then in the subsequent narration of that death. In lieu of a name or a picture—for we are provided with only the generic “No Photo” photo for this “unidentified transgender woman”—this virtual injunction to behold the corpse highlights the disjunction between the hypervisible banality of post-mortem racial abjection and the convivial racial erasures that sustain the curatorial project of contemporary trans memorialization.

Curating Death

It is important to note that the vast majority of the graphic photos used on the *TDOR* website have been culled from both tabloid and mainstream South American press who, as Gwendolyn Smith remarked, “[do] not hold back on those photos” (G. Smith 2016). To give you

⁶⁵ For example, the causes of death listed in 2009 include victims that were “stabbed 12 times and found half naked in the street,” “raped and thrown out of a moving vehicle,” “decapitated,” “dismembered and beaten to death,” “throat was slit,” “partially burned, decapitated, and dismembered, both arms, both legs, and the torso” (*Int'l TDOR* 2009).

a sense of the scale of these images, in 2012, graphic pictures of the brutalized bodies of Carla White, Leandro Eduardo Campos Ferreira, and Paulo Robert Campos, all from Brazil, were available through hyperlinks on the *TDOR* website. This trend persisted in 2013. Among other pictures linked to the website, perhaps the most haunting hyperlink was that of an “unidentified child,” a thirteen-year-old who had been hanged to death in Macaíba, Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil (*TDOR* 2013). In the five screenshots linked to this page on the *TDOR* website, a child’s body lies in a dense thicket of bright green foliage. Close-up pictures show the black rope still tied cruelly against the delicate skin of their neck. Above the burst of white foam running down one side of their open mouth, their eyes have been left blankly open (Flintstone 2013).

The task of collecting and curating stories about the dead is a political one. The images and articles culled from the World Wide Web shape narratives of remembrance. As such, the *TDOR* website is a curated repository of mediated public memory. When I spoke to Smith about her choice to include these graphic pictures on the *TDOR* website, Smith said, “I don’t think that we, that is to say, *TDOR*, the project site, posts them. We’re posting a link to a story. The stories have those photos” (G. Smith 2016). As Smith explained, often these links to graphic representations of violence are “the only media links for information linked on the cases” (G. Smith 2016), though she also acknowledged that there might be another way to go about the task of recording anti-trans violence: “You know, if that’s what’s there...um...and I’d rather they weren’t. And maybe we should look at that and maybe we should change that” (G. Smith 2016).

Although these images of brutalized bodies are almost always available through the South American press, there is no obligation to use them, since many memorial pages remain without. The links featuring such images have thus been chosen to supplement what were already sufficiently graphic descriptions of the “causes of death” for each victim. Regardless of

Smith's intent, the spectacularized, graphic descriptions of brutalized bodies of colour have become central to a kind of ordinary violent intimacy that has also become necessary for cohering the trans-cultural imaginary.

In her interview with me, Smith described this obligation to witness the death of another while sitting through court cases and looking at forensic photos. In particular, the trial of Gwen Araujo—a young trans Latina who was murdered in California in 2002—left her struggling with both the need to see and to *unsee* the brutalized body. Smith explains, “I can’t unsee the things that I saw at the Gwen Araujo trial. It was very personally damaging to sit there and look at the forensic photos of Gwen and look at the murder weapons...I felt like I had to. But, in a lot of ways, I wish I didn’t” (G. Smith 2016). As my opening example of the circulation of Santos’ death illustrates, Smith’s compulsion to witness trans death— especially a racialized trans death—is not unique. The self-professed obligation to behold the abject spectacle of the racialized corpse is often what structures practices of trans memorialization. In fact, it is my argument that spectacularizing dead trans bodies of colour through tropes of belonging and intimacy is indicative of the centrality of race in the affective economy of necropolitics.

At once hyperlinked and hypervisible, the previously invisible racialized bodies populate the *TDOR* website with the reverberative force of banal abjection. The memorial archives between 2009 and 2016 are replete with images of unidentified trans bodies lying on dusty roads and of skeletons lying in shallow ditches (Vilela 2012). There are photos of bodies in bruised repose on sterile autopsy tables and bodies in various states of decomposition (Marcial 2013; Carlos 2013). There are photos of bloodied corpses left in alleys, sugarcane fields, and shallow graves (Alves 2014; Oliveira 2014; Monteiro 2012). Abandoned in rubble dumpsters or roadside

dumps,⁶⁶ the graphic details that enliven these discarded bodies can often, paradoxically, further disembody the dispossessed. As with other discarded objects, these bodies bear the mark of racialized and gendered abjection that suture the temporal narrative of trans citizenship through the necessary caesura of (in)difference. The invitation to witness death through *TDOR*'s memorial pages has transformed the politics of trans remembrance from a deterritorialized, or flattened, unrepresentability of racialized anti-trans violence (via the generic "No Photo" photos) to a consumptive spectacle that now reterritorializes the racialized body via repetitions of virtualized violence that are emblematic of "another place not here" (Brand 1996).

As one of my interviewees, Rosalyn Forrester, reflected, the continued narration of South America as "a bad place to go" erases the reality of structural transphobia in North American contexts while displacing violence onto an elsewhere: "[S]o...it's like, okay, well so, are you saying that there isn't violence here in North America? Cuz we sure as hell know there is...violence is violence" (Forrester2015). Forrester's observations echo Lamble's argument that narratives about the victims of anti-trans violence have "material effects on the social ordering of relations of power and the ways in which we come to know ourselves in relation to the dead" (2008, 25). By providing a frame of reference for how the living come to understand their position relative to states of exception, the graphic nature of the South American media links provides a counterpoint to the sanitized nature of North American media coverage. This was

⁶⁶ Luna, 42, from Portugal was beaten to death and tossed in a dumpster in 2008. Although it is not clear where this excerpt is from, the *TDOR* site explains that she "was left in a dumpster, hidden by rubble and dust, as if it was garbage, as if her life had not been worth living" (*Int'l TDOR* 2008).

highlighted in Smith's observation: "I'm kind of glad the US media doesn't tend to do that."⁶⁷

You know, they're not immune. But they don't tend to. They just mis-gender us..." (G. Smith 2016).

Necrointimacies

In *The Affective Fabrics of Digital Culture*, Adi Kuntsman (2012) traces the virtual banality of everyday violence in digitized spaces. Pointing to "the ways in which feelings and affective states can *reverberate* in and out of cyberspace, intensified (or muffled) and transformed through digital circulation and repetition" (1, emphasis mine), Kuntsman's thought-provoking ethnographic exploration of reverberation signals the importance of attending to the affective and political work of violence while remaining 'attuned' to the potentiality of movement. Kuntsman writes,

Reverberation is a concept that makes us attentive to the simultaneous presence of speed and stillness in online sites; to distortions and resonance, intensification and dissolution in the process of moving through various digital terrains. For example, it allows us to see how the movement of violent words in online domains can intensify hatred and hostility through what Sarah Ahmed describes as "affective economies" (2004a), where the power of emotions accumulates through circulation of texts. But reverberation also enables us to see how the injurious effects of online violent speech can be muffled. For example, it can momentarily dissolve into 'smileys', 'winks' and laughter (although not disappear entirely!). Or, met with some Internet users' *refusal* to engage in dialogue, it can fall out

⁶⁷ While media coverage of anti-trans murders in the US certainly is less graphic overall, it is not always the case: The *TDOR* website's memorial entry for Aniya Parker, a black trans woman who was murdered in 2014, contains a hyperlink to an *ABC7 News* article that features grainy surveillance video showing Parker being approached by a group of youth who punch her before shooting her in the head as she runs away. The video shows how, after being shot in the head, Parker crosses the street and slowly sits down on the sidewalk before suddenly slumping over, her head hitting the street's asphalt surface.

of circulation, become frozen in an online archive—ready to re-emerge again, but immobilized for the time being. The concept of reverberation, in other words, allows us not only to follow the circulation of texts and feelings, but also to trace and open up processes of change, resistance or reconciliation, in the face of affective economies of mediated violence. (Kuntsman 2012, 2)

Spectacles of violence, as Kuntsman illustrates, leave traces of themselves not unlike the gradually fading vibrations left by an echo's reverberations. This linkage between 'reverberation' as a prolongation of sound and the affective economies of violence allows for an appreciation of the reflective continuity of effect, of those ripples and vibrations left in the wake of violent encounters that can be felt or sensed despite their remove.

The reverberating quality of violence lends it a lingering effect, allowing spectacles of violence to 'bounce' around such that they transfer the watered-down traces of violence's origin stories through disparate moments of absorptive reflection or unpredictable refraction. For a brief moment, within the abstract and fragmented space of the internet, the feelings of loss, trauma, and fear that circulated as a response to Santos' death were given some semblance of substance, coalescing into something more than just emotion. Shared through the 'feeds' of trans-identified people and their allies, the close-up magic of Santos' re-animated death opened worlds by inviting intimacy ("hug a trans person") while also drawing the world's boundaries ever closer by positioning violence as a problem that is always already located 'elsewhere'.

Reverberation, as Kuntsman has illustrated, allows for an appreciation of the links between ordinary violence and intimacy, but it does not fully account for the way in which the intimate proximity with brutalized racialized bodies prefigure the "affective charge of investment" (Cvetkovich 2003, 49) that mobilizes trans communities within discourses of

whiteness. Reverberation is an emergent expression of belonging prefigured through visual economies of a violent intimacy with racialized abjection. In other words, the desire to ‘reach out’ in trans-personal affirmation is a re-active response to the displacement of yet another form of intimacy—one where the racialized other is consumed for the purposes of community building (hooks 2006). In consuming the Other, the material realities that structure bare life are effectively effaced while structuring a de-racialized intimacy forged through proximity with racialized violence.

The task of defining the consumptive quality of an intimacy borne from spectacularized death is a difficult one because intimacy has an enigmatic boxing-with-shadows quality. At a basic level, intimacy describes not just the feeling of connection to something, but it is evocative of an immediacy or sense of belonging. “Intimacy,” as Shaka McGlotten explains in *Virtual Intimacies* (2013), gestures to “proximity, connection—a necessary precondition for certain affective states to bloom, especially those that have to do with other people. Affect happens in and through intimacy” (8). In this sense, intimacy is a form of identification or shared attunement; intimacy is both reverberation and resonance.

Following Kuntsman’s formulations, resonance is a phenomenon that occurs when the physical properties of a particular material allows it to emphasize or reinforce sound. Thus, if the reverb is the gradual “dying out” of sound, then resonance describes the buzzing/rattling sustenance of a particular frequency. What is important for my argument here is that resonance is object-based and an object that ‘resonates’ is one that supplements the original vibration because of its ‘likeness.’ Expanding Kuntsman’s metaphor, we can say that the virtual proximity to the *event* of Santos’ re-animated death reverberated, or echoed, through the community as a sign of intimacy because her identity as a trans person “resonated,” or provided a point of likeness, for

those who identify as trans or gender-nonconforming. In death, the figure of Santos resonated because “likeness” traversed along the figure of her imperiled body, coalescing into the immediacy of intimacy through which a “weirdly floating ‘we’ snaps into a blurry focus...[taking] on a life of its own, even reflecting its own presence” (Stewart 2003, 27-28). However, this reductive approach to an imperiled trans identity as the singular basis of victimized affiliation fails to account for how the specifically *racialized* figure of the dying Santos—marked by the state of exception in life—became a shareable object in death that one is *obligated* to first behold and then share.

Likeness, or resonance, gestures to the vibrational caesura borne of a forced proximity—a space where the borders between self and other struggle for articulation. As a form of intimate alignment, resonance points to the proximity to “a set of normative ideals and aspirations...tied to capital and corporeal” (McGlotten 2013, 59) achievement. The link between intimacy and the social distributions of life and death has also been explored by Elizabeth Povinelli (2005) and Lisa Lowe (2015). Povinelli argues that the “imaginary of the intimate event is always disrupted and secured by the logic of [racial] exception” (2005, 173-175), while Lowe adds that this allows for the emergence of “modern liberal subjects and modern spheres of social life” (2015, 18). Similarly, Snorton and Haritaworn (2013) have drawn parallels between the spectacularly violated body of colour as “degenerate and killable” and the safeguarding of neoliberal transnormativity within the “realm of life” (67).

As fungible commodities, racialized corpses have historically been relegated to the status of spectacular objects, “permanently available for the ‘full enjoyment’ of white people” and “incapable of being violated” (Bassichis and Spade 2014, 195). The political economy of memorialization must be understood in terms of the colonial histories that govern the production,

distribution, and possession of intimacy (Lowe 2015). “Sealed into crushing objecthood” (Fanon 1967, 109), trans women of colour featured in the graphic pictures on the *TDOR* website mirror historical discourses that objectify bodies of colour as both excessive and necessary for social life. This hyper-spectacularization of banal violence—where identification is formed through the ambivalent oscillations between categories of the human and the inhuman—finds its parallel in other situations: As Kuntsman offers, “the imprisoned orphan, the prepubescent sex worker, the refugee, and the innocent toddler dying of AIDS are such figures, figures of an appeal, a sex appeal that is racial, that is meant to humanize and naturalize what otherwise functions merely as a calculation of risk” (2012, 28).

Any object that resonates does so in a pleasure-driven, possessive economy.⁶⁸ Only in death do trans women of colour emerge as larger-than-life subjects, accruing in macabre value in proportion to their violent ends. Bare lives and abject deaths highlight the excess of race, the safe remove from racialized space allowing the Other to “be eaten, consumed, and forgotten” (hooks 2006, 380). Conspicuously absented from the theatre of trans politicality in life,⁶⁹ the violent intimacy of death enlivens trans subjects of colour through graphic descriptions of racialized

⁶⁸ Indeed, we can also extend this analysis to explore how images of brutalized bodies of colour have historically circulated as fetishistic commodities (Farley 1997; Rushdy 2000; Wood 2013; Yancy 2005; Young 2005). For instance, in his exploration of lynching postcards, Marcus Wood (2013) has argued that the memorialization of these abject bodies through their aesthetic circulation can be read as a testament not just to the unique value of each body that is destroyed but also to the collective “white obsession with its inability to destroy this value” (207). Framed by economies of ritual and spectacle, photographs of naked and almost-naked bodies in “extreme states of physical abuse” (Wood 2013, 217) are, argues Wood, almost pornographic in nature. Extending his analysis to the “trauma postcard[s]” (Wood 2013, 216) recording the systematic abuse of prisoners in the notorious Abu Ghraib Prison, Wood illustrates how these records of brutality create a casual social network of shared experience, shared national values, and shared pride in whiteness. These arguments are paralleled in Jenna Brager’s analysis of the viral-consumption of racialized tragedy on social media as underscoring larger narratives of the West’s “fascinating cannibalism” (2015, 1665) of the “always-already violence” (ibid.) of vulnerable bodies in non-Western countries. Whiteness can thus be understood within this framework of pleasurable, ritualized returns to scenes of racialized destruction.

⁶⁹ In the following chapter, this will be explored through an analysis of the organization of *TDOR* vigils as well as in-depth interviews with trans people of colour.

corporeal obliteration sanitized by the façade of a re-narrativized post-mortem subjectivity. Since the act of witnessing death bypasses real-time individual presence, there is no risk in this version of proximity to the racialized object. Instead, death can be summoned up from the rubble, its value extracted and reconstructed for mass consumption, and then vanquished once again. And vanquished it must be, because the intensity that intimacy demands requires a sustained engagement through the repeated spectacularization of racialized loss.

Extending Mbembe's focus on the disposability of bodies via the right to kill and reflecting upon the spectacle of the dying/dead trans body in the order of power, I use the term "*trans necrointimacies*" to describe this spectacular affective economy of trans-homonationalism and the cannibalization of racialized decay upon which the former is dependent.⁷⁰ As an object *par excellence*, the brutalized corpse of the racialized Other contains a resonant quality that is predicated on economies of fantasy and pleasure. By virtue of violence's distance from the immediacy of real-time proximity, the racialized figure that is Santos is at once excessive and erased, allowing it to effectively be first claimed as an object for trans memorialization, then consumed, and then further utilized as evidence of a distant barbarism. Thus, we see that together with the embedded video, the screenshots of Santos's racialized body reverberated at an intensity through which the circulation of the consumable intimacy of her death tentatively resonated in the form of appeals to belonging within neoliberal frameworks of (trans)sexual citizenship (via recourse to Canadian or American nationalism, necessarily positioned as safely removed from the barbarism of 'elsewhere').

As the provisional end-product of an affective circulation of the violent intimacies so necessary to the political project of remembrance, "resonance" extends Kuntsman's acoustic

⁷⁰ This attachment to the dead actually gives the corpse power over the living, an ironic instance where we see the "subjugation of life to the power of death" (Mbembe 2003, 39)

metaphor to describe a turn to a kind of trans-normativity that is dependent upon the spectacularized violent intimacy of racialized, trans(gender) bodies as the living-dead.⁷¹ The intimate spectacle of the dead or dying racialized body invites the witnessing white body into an affective citizenship that requires that the Other be simultaneously possessed and repudiated. To behold the corpse of the Other is to flirt with the exotic—with the possibility of being ‘changed’ by *trans necrointimacy*—while remaining securely attached to the tether of trans-normative positionality. What resonates is not trans identity as a point of affiliation but, rather, whiteness and trans-normativity as emergent forms of belonging through the scopophilic consumption of the racialized body. Resonance is the retrospective reproduction of reverberation.⁷² Thus, ‘likeness,’ or trans-normativity, is formed retroactively through the *necrointimacies* of racialized trans memorialization.

⁷¹ As with Duggan’s concept of homonormativity, what I refer to as *trans-normativity* is an orientation towards a neoliberal trans acceptability that is predicated upon the simultaneous avowal and erasure of the ‘bad’ trans victim.

⁷² Forgive the alliteration.

Chalk: Performative Grief, Necrointimacies, and Ghostly Encounters

Chalk [chawk] *n.* a white soft earthly limestone (calcium carbonate) formed from the skeletal remains of sea creatures.
- Oxford English Dictionary

[i] Introduction: For Whom the Bell Tolls

Let us return to that paradoxical figure captured within the haunting chalk outlines described in the Introduction of this dissertation. As I recounted, it was during my first TDOR vigil, many years ago, that I became painfully aware of the disjunctive simultaneity between the hyper-visibility that was the excessive spectacle of racialized anti-trans violence and the discursive and material erasure of those same bodies in rituals of memorialization. Whilst the ghostly figure conjured by the chalky outline comprises a remembrance, it is also suggestive of an unavowable void, a “zone of occult instability” (Fanon 1967, 183) whose fertile emptiness always threatens to breach its chalky confines. The vigil then, is always haunted by what it cannot contain. Indeed, as Erin Manning reminds us, “bodies are always stranger (*unheimlich*) than they first appear” (2007, xvii). No one can predict what a body can do.

The use of chalk outlines to impute a presence in the stead of a palpable absence is not a new political strategy. Queer communities have historically leaned upon spectral topographies, not just to interrogate structures of exclusion, but also to envision political futures (Amin 2016; Freccero 2011; Gill-Peterson 2013). In particular, the AIDS activist movements of the late-1980s staged die-ins to make public the state-sponsored privatization of a social crisis (Gamson 1989). But aside from shifting the burden of responsibility onto society in general, these “common

deaths” also provided a measure of “control over defining a cause of death” (Gamson 1989, 361). As I illustrated in my literature review in Chapter One, the reclamation of death from the individual to the social has also had effects on identity formation within queer communities. Thus, we can read the vigil as both a site of performative protest and of formative worlding (Stewart 2007, 66).

Nevertheless, in the context of trans communities and TDOR vigils, the racialized trans body is one that is/n’t. Provisionally signified through the chalky practices of memorialization at my first TDOR vigil, the racialized trans body was a paradox outlined on the rough surface of the unforgiving concrete. The chalky figure was simultaneously a representation made concrete—a retroflexive spectacle of a violent loss that was made tangible in the present—as well as the failure of the corporeal form to conform to the implied concreteness of its outlines.

While previously I addressed how entrance into trans-normative belonging depends on spectacularized *necrointimacies* that circulate and form around the dead trans body of colour, this chapter illustrates how trans-normative whiteness only begins to fully *matter* at the exact point where the living trans-of-colour subject is effaced. The performative ritual of the vigil, as I argue, requires that racialized trans subjects be included in order to make rights-based claims. However, it is only through discourses of death and violence that this inclusion can occur. As this chapter explains, the inclusion of racialized trans life within the domain of TDOR events is but a provisional one, since the narrative of trans-homonationalism becomes untenable in the presence of its necessary racialized sacrifices.

Using data gathered through interviews and participant observation, this chapter traces how the re-enactment of this retroflexive trans loss marks the limits of trans belonging as a form of futurity that is secured at the very point at which the lived realities of material bodies circulate

as pure abstraction. The common dream of a hopeful trans-futurity, in other words, depends on a colour-blind politic that harnesses both the anachronistic presence of racialized death and the absence of the living racialized body, now made ghostly through the vigil's focus on outlines without substance.

Sometimes referred to as a 'wake', the common understanding of a vigil is as a period of wakefulness or watchfulness, in contrast to the soporific embrace of rest. Vigils gesture to the ghostly, liminal nature of memorialization: the ambivalent precipices between the hard-won lessons of the past and the dawn of hope-tinged presents, between hallowed eves and festive celebrations, and between life and death. Through rituals of lamentation, practices of mourning, and eulogies of remembrance, vigils function as a means of communicating grief and sedimenting feelings of communal belonging wrought through shared experiences of loss. They sustain social memory through a narrativization of loss—a repetition that is central to the interpellation of individual subjects as belonging to a collective. However, as this chapter argues, the performative nature of TDOR vigils is not confined to grief about the lost racialized other. Rather, the racialized losses that are ritualized through TDOR events animate the afterlife of politicality precisely because they sustain the “hierarchies of leadership, authority, and credibility” (Vidal-Ortiz 2014, 264) so endemic to white privilege. With this paradox in mind, this chapter explores TDOR vigils as spaces that host ritualized performances undergirding the stakes of inclusion and exclusion.

In order to explore how TDOR vigils are the stage upon which the dramas of racialized trans (un)belonging unfold, I first draw on the *TDOR* website's instructions for planning a vigil. As I will explain, these instructions create highly stylized and scripted performances that engender belonging within trans-normative spaces. While the scope and nature of each TDOR

vigil differs, the vigil effectively becomes a ritualized performance that occurs through repetitive scripts of exclusion and inclusion, which are thus enacted through racialized trans loss. Often organized through LGBT centers around the world, TDOR vigils circulate narratives of trans life through trans death. Likewise, the global appeal of TDOR vigils is in part due to the proliferative discourse of trans rights that can only be accessed through the appeal to spectacularized, yet removed, racialized victimhood.

Next, I describe the TDOR vigils that I attended in 2014 and 2015. I participated as an academic and as a community member at four events that were spread across two field sites: Toronto, Ontario, and Manhattan, New York. Both cities are urban metropolitan areas with large and diverse trans populations. Two of these four events—the TDOR at Toronto’s The 519 in 2014 and the TDOR at New York’s The Center in 2015—were more established TDOR vigils, undertaken by long-standing community organizations that provide the most visible and widespread LGBTQ resources in their respective cities. The other two events—the 2015 TDOR event hosted by the Audre Lorde Project and the 2015 event organized under the title “Say Her Name”—were newer initiatives planned by grassroots collectives seeking social change for multiply-marginalized LGBTQ groups. My analysis of each vigil follows a feminist approach to participant observation that allows for an open-ended analysis of the discourses, processes, and practices that circulated in each field site (Buch and Staller 2007; Hesse-Biber 2004; Reinharz 1992). Aside from being attentive to the participatory demographics, key speakers, and the ritualization of the vigil itself, this approach required an openness to the uncertain fluxes of emotional immediacy and the circulation of unqualified intensities in spaces commemorating loss (Stewart 2008).

Third, drawing upon interviews I conducted with trans people of colour in both New York and Toronto, I illustrate how the performative ritual, which is meant to stress group identity, excludes the individual and group identities that are most often targeted and destroyed through anti-trans violence. I show that any memorialization at TDOR is continuously plagued by a perpetual irresolution from the affective ambivalences and contradictions between the hyper-visibility of the racialized trans body and the impulse to bury it.

Only too aware of the precarity of their presence, most of my interview subjects described their attendance at TDOR vigils as akin to ghosts haunting their own funerals. Marked by the potentiality of racialized anti-trans violence, the TDOR vigil allows us to draw parallels between the cycles of possession and repudiation that characterize mourning the dead body of colour. These cycles, in turn, foreclose the possibility of the living trans subject of colour within the space of the vigil. Through my exploration of the *necrointimacies* that govern memorialization practices in trans communities, I end the chapter by demonstrating how TDOR events are intimately linked to white vigilance, thus illustrating that there is a reason why the bell toll disturbs.

[ii] How to Have a TDOR Vigil

The first TDOR vigil was held on November 28, 1999 in San Francisco. As I explained in the previous chapter, this vigil was organized to honour Rita Hester, as well as the lives of all other victims of anti-trans violence. Prior to this event, vigils had typically been spontaneously-organized reactions to *individual* instances of anti-trans violence in specific communities. Hester's death, however, inspired the creation of the *Remembering Our Dead* website and, in

doing so, marked a departure from small-scale and localized practices of memorialization to broader expressions of mourning.

In my interview with the TDOR founder, Gwendolyn Ann Smith, she described how TDOR's origins lie in an individual memorialization for Hester that took place on a "dreadful, rainy day" in March 1999—an event publicized through the *Remembering Our Dead* website. There, a number of people began to express interest in holding an annual event on the anniversary of Hester's death to honour all victims of anti-trans violence (G. Smith 2016). Within the next three years, however, the date was amended to reflect "the Chanelle Pickett date" of November 20th, to avoid conflict with the US Thanksgiving holiday (G. Smith 2016). By its fourth year, the tradition of holding an annual TDOR vigil had taken root: "It started to get, uh, more interest in the college level, and high schools even and we started to see more, you know, like, more public events. More, you know, like, doing chalk outlines, or setting up, uh, gravestones in the quads with all the names and this sort of thing" (G. Smith 2016).

With the entrenchment of the TDOR vigil as a communal event within the collective consciousness came a standardized set of practices that granted the event some uniformity. As explained by Smith, "When we set out to do the event, we set out kind of basic guidelines that we put out there early on, as far as, [how] to have things, we weren't really telling people 'this is what you do', but kinda saying, 'Here's how you *can* do. Here's things you might want to consider doing at your events'" (G. Smith 2016). Eventually, in order to create a recognizable form for practices of trans memorialization, the *TDOR* website posted a helpful document entitled "How to Have a TDoR" (*Int'l TDOR* 2007a).

Informed by experiences of previous TDOR vigils, and borrowed from non-trans-specific vigils, the guidelines in the "How to Have a TDoR" document are publicly accessible and

provide suggestions for individuals and/or organizations about hosting trans days of remembrance. Enacted through the mechanisms of ‘script,’ ‘production,’ ‘stage,’ ‘performance,’ and ‘reproduction,’ the *mise en scène* of communal memorialization provided by the document is, in effect, a ritualized form of political labour through which trans identities of colour are harnessed in service of trans-homonationalism. In “How to Have a TDoR,” the scripted formation of a universalized trans identity is forged through loss in several ways.

First, following a brief history of the TDOR vigil, the “How to Have a TDoR” document outlines the “guiding principles” of any trans day of remembrance through a melancholic appeal (Freud 2006b) to George Santayana’s cautionary words, which are misquoted as “Those who cannot remember the past are doomed to repeat it” (*Int’l TDOR* 2007a). Modified from its original form, the replacement of Santayana’s original ‘condemned’ with the alternate ‘doomed’ provides a point of contrast between the agential, participatory nature of the former with the passive, destiny-oriented nature of the latter. While we can trace both terms back to the etymological roots of ill-fatedness, in either case, the outcome is the same: the cautionary tone of Santayana’s excerpt functions as an appeal to melancholic attachments as utopian futurity—a recognition of a past loss that *must* be repeated in order for the future to endure.⁷³ As this chapter illustrates, the TDOR vigil performs this melancholic attachment to the disavowed racialized trans other. Thus, the epitaphic quality of Santayana’s words points to the haunting and enduring quality of the vigil, a future-oriented triumph promised through the scripted (re)enactment of loss and perseverance.

⁷³ As I discuss in the next chapter, this future-oriented capacity for endurance is intimately linked to the ways in which we can think about the circulation of affect as working on and through the imagined bodies of non-normative sexual citizens within nationalist discourses of the nation-state.

Second, while the purpose of TDOR vigils is to affirm that all trans lives have value (*Int'l TDOR 2007a*), the mobilization of trans bodies in the production of memorialization also stages belonging within the trans community through an appeal to fellow-feelings rooted in common qualities of endurance and perseverance. As with many events, a planning committee is often responsible for all of the logistical elements that go into producing TDOR vigils, including making decisions about the form of the event, keynote speakers, calls for potential performers, media outreach, volunteer coordination, publicity, and promotion. Forming a working group is of particular importance as decisions about emcees and performers are usually points of contention, and because “some groups might complain,” it is best to “get them involved as early as possible with the process” (*Int'l TDOR 2007a*).

Along with the logistics of managing people, the document explains, there are also financial considerations to take into account. Funds are needed for candles, event spaces, refreshments, promotional materials, performer honoraria, speaker fees, and so forth. While some vigils are funded through grants from LGBTQ organizations, others are self-funded through “‘passing the hat’ at other local events” (*Int'l TDOR 2007a*). Because vigils that are organized by urban LGBT centers typically have access to more resources, they are often considered to be the ‘official’ remembrance events in a given calendar year. They also tend to be the events that take up the most liberal and/or trans-normative narratives of trans life and death. However, as I discuss below, these mainstream approaches to mourning trans deaths often find themselves at odds with the needs and desires of the precarious racialized subjects they interpellate in the service of memorialization. As a result, these ‘official’ TDOR vigils take place alongside ‘unofficial,’ under-funded, events organized by social justice activist organizations or

marginalized individuals seeking to address the systemic exclusion of marginalized populations from mainstream organizing throughout the year.

Third, the production of a TDOR vigil is a performance of loss that stages the literal and symbolic grounds of a subject's grievability. Since commemoration of TDOR does not derive from a shared experience of 'bare life' (Agamben 1998)—i.e., since the bodies of those murdered are often the most marginalized of the already-marginalized—the questions of who decides what form the commemoration takes, who will be included, and what it will seek to achieve are highly politicized. On one hand, there are practical decisions to be made about which bodies and identities will be made visible on the stage. Organizers must grapple with the importance of the representational capital of having particular keynote speakers or particular performers at the event. In each case, further decisions must be made about the time allotted to each speaker or performance and the issues that will be addressed throughout the event. At their root, all of these decisions speak to which trans bodies are made visible in the space, or 'identifiable-with,' not just as subjects in mourning but as subjects *worth* mourning. On the other hand, as my interview subjects illustrate later in this chapter, the political labour that goes into staging this narrative of loss is undergirded at all times by a multiplicity of decisions that manage the visibility of not just bodies present *within* spaces of mourning but also limits the movement of bodies whose presence disrupts the flow of the event by frustrating the cathartic structure of ritualized loss.

Fourth and finally, while the performance of grief at TDOR events is itself a creative endeavor, it is nevertheless structured through repetition and ritual. 'Official' practices of remembrance typically take the form of candlelight vigils or marches, though organizers may draw inspiration from previous events that have alternately included art displays, read-ins,

performative actions, political rallies, readings of the names of the dead, and, as “How to Have a TDOR” offers, “roundtable discussions between local activists and area politicians, a dramatic presentation of over 200 tombstones in the ‘quad’ of a college campus, and other inventive possibilities” (*Int’l TDOR* 2007a). Many of these acts are outlined in the “Sample Event Rundown” that appears towards the end of the document: the distribution and lighting of candles, the ritual recitation of the names of the dead, the optional ringing of a bell to mark the passage of each life, the moment of silence, and, finally, the apropos snuffing out of candles signaling the event’s closure (*Int’l TDOR* 2007a). As the document reads, “The only real limit is the imagination of your [sic] and your planning committee” (*Int’l TDOR* 2007a).

Through the detailed suggestions provided in the website’s “How to Have a TDoR” document, would-be-organizers of TDOR vigils are guided into a scripted form of memorialization that—in ensuring uniformity, reproducibility, and generalizability across all TDOR vigils—produces the *effect* of trans community through the performance of grief and the affective circulation of racialized trans death. A similar argument has been made by Toby Beauchamp (2007) who, in “The Limits of Virtual Memory,” suggests that while TDOR vigils exist “in multiple, fluctuating forms...materials such as statistics, poems and publicity templates from the [*TDOR*] website provide a potential unifying structure for the memorials” (1). Through the far reach of the *TDOR* website, this how-to document confers a certain uniformity to the lexicon of trans grief—an action-oriented performative structure that can alleviate feelings of helplessness by allowing people to “do something” (Doka 2003, 180).

As the next section of this chapter illustrates, this call to “do something” (Doka 2003, 180) often achieves its goal through simultaneously spectacularizing racialized trans death while effacing the systemic effects of ordinary violence that casts racialized trans life as “bare life”

(Agamben 1998). Thus, there are parallels between the circuits of spectacularized trans death in the previous chapter and the haunting absent presence of racialized trans labour in the trans-normative event-space of the vigil.

[iii] The Theater of Organized Grief: A Description of Four Vigils

The *TDOR* website, as I have argued, is instrumental in structuring memorialization along a standardized trans narrative. In order to explore how TDOR vigils circulate racialized trans death in the service of trans-homonationalism, I observed four TDOR events in 2014 and 2015, in two cities: Toronto and New York. Of these four events, the 2014 TDOR in Toronto and the 2015 TDOR at New York's Center were 'more established' TDOR vigils— undertaken by long-standing community organizations that provide the most visible and widespread LGBTQ resources in the city— while the 2015 TDORs hosted by the Audre Lorde Project and "Say Her Name" were newer initiatives organized by grassroots collective seeking social change for multiply-marginalized LGBTQ groups. I attended each vigil as a participant-observer, paying particular attention to the composition of the audience, organizers, and performers, as well as the structure of the event itself. After each vigil, I recorded field notes on my observations of the ways in which particular bodies and narratives were encouraged to take up space at the event.

Toronto, 2014: TDOR at The 519

Since 1975, The 519 (formerly The 519 Church Street Community Center) has provided programming, outreach, and education for the City of Toronto's LGBTQ community. Located on Church Street, in the heart of the City of Toronto's gay 'village,' the three-story building is home to community-led programming, housing and employment services, educational resources, family support services, and policy initiatives. Along with providing a range of trans-specific

programming,⁷⁴ The 519 is also the ‘official’ event venue for Toronto’s annual TDOR vigil. Organized by a volunteer programming committee overseen by Rosalyn Forrester and Sawyer Pow, The 519’s 2014 TDOR event was envisioned as “a memorial, a protest, an opportunity for reflection and a chance to see old friends and meet new ones” (*Rainbow Health Ontario* 2014). Held in a large ballroom, the vigil was structured around a program that included performances and speeches from members of Toronto’s trans community and an outdoor candlelight vigil.

When I arrived at The 519, I observed a predominantly white audience occupying rows of chairs that were set up to face a stage. Amidst the bustle of bodies, volunteers moved about directing people to seats, serving welcome bowls of hot beef chili and ensuring that the event remained closed to members of the media.⁷⁵ Two large screens flanked either side of the stage, and each projected an endless loop of the names of those lost to anti-trans violence in 2014. The morbidity of this repeating tally sat in stark contrast to the deafening buzz of chatter that filled the room. To the left of the stage, against the backdrop of the ballroom’s white walls, a ‘living tree’ of paper messages slowly unfurled as participants drew from blank piles of leaf-shaped paper and added their thoughts to the wall. While many of these handwritten notes contained inspirational messages for other trans people, a handful of leaves memorialized specific individuals who had died over the course of the year.

In her opening address to the audience, the event organizers, Rosalyn Forrester and Sawyer Pow, highlighted the link between anti-trans violence and both indirect and direct systemic violence. Reflecting on the representational gap between the reported victims of anti-

⁷⁴ Aside from “Meal Trans,” a drop-in meal program for under-employed trans people in Toronto, The 519 runs trans support services for trans sex workers, trans people of colour, and youth (*The 519* n.d).

⁷⁵ As event organizer Rosalyn Forrester, explained to me later, the moratorium on journalists also applied to anyone who wished to record or film the event because, in her words, “It’s not a safer space if you allow that shit. It becomes a circus. And this isn’t about a circus” (Forrester 2015).

trans violence and those whose deaths had gone unreported, they stressed that the organizers of The 519's 2014 TDOR event did their best to try and include those who would have otherwise been invisible. Acknowledging the “triggering” nature of TDOR events for many trans people, the committee had ensured that there would be counselors present to offer support for community members throughout the evening. Following this introduction, several scheduled community members spoke about their own organizations’ commitment to trans issues or outlined application procedures for community funding. Interspersed between these speeches were spoken word and drag performances by a range of trans community members. Once the performances were over, the emcee opened the stage to anyone who wished to share their thoughts with those gathered.

As the microphone travelled across the room, many of those who spoke shared hopeful sentiments about trans rights in Canada. For instance, the first speaker, a white trans woman, shared how she had gone into a store earlier that week to buy a dress and was treated with “nothing but absolute kindness” from the patrons and workers there. Reflecting on her positive experience while shopping, she asked the audience to remember that, despite the prevalence of transphobia in the world and the sadness of the TDOR event, “it is getting better and there is hope for all of us.” Other speakers reflected on the pride they felt at being able to hold their heads up high as trans people or on the role played by the trans community in the iconic Stonewall Riots. Interspersed between these sentiments of pride and hope, the only person of colour who spoke was a sex worker who tearfully recounted how many of her unknown and unnamed peers had died from systemic abuse. Appealing to the trans community to support trans sex workers, she ended by reminding everyone that there was still work to do. Finally, a Two-Spirit woman led the attendees outside for a customary candlelight vigil and moment of silence,

after which numerous frost-bitten fingers would carelessly discard their now-extinguished, Dixie-cup enclosed candles around the small public park.

New York 2015: TDOR at The Center

The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Community Center in New York is the city's central service and programming provider for the LGBT community—a role underscored by its colloquial abbreviation as simply “The Center.” Since its establishment in 1983, the organization's mandate has evolved from organizing around the HIV and AIDS crisis of the mid-eighties and early-nineties to what is presently a broad range of social, cultural, wellness, and health-based programming for the LGBT community in New York.

The 2015 TDOR vigil was held in The Center's headquarters at 208 West 13th Street, a beautiful old building whose redbrick exterior still maintains some of the charming architectural traces of its past as a high school. In stark juxtaposition to its modest exterior, the inside of The Center is a bright, airy, space that is punctuated by modern design elements that were added in a recent multi-million-dollar renovation. Considered New York's ‘official’ TDOR vigil, attendance rates were high, and this event required registering online ahead of time.

Although I was initially bemused by the necessity of an RSVP, the sheer scale of the event became clear as the queue I found myself in gradually approached the doors to the hall. Inside, the heavy flow of people lent a chaotic feel to the room. Against the background of loud chatter and electronic feedback, bodies jostled past each other as they navigated the narrow path between the fiercely coveted seats and the few available spaces where one could lean against a wall. At the front of the room, tucked in a corner beneath the stage whose podium now commanded the crowd's attention, stood a small poster board whose contents were indecipherable to all but those sitting in the front two rows. It was only at the end of the event,

when I was finally able to make my way to the front of the room, that I realized the board contained the list of those in the US who had lost their lives to anti-trans violence that year.

The event at The Center opened with a speech about the organizational structure of LGBT programming in New York. After reading a lengthy introduction of her voluntary and professional developments—including the launch of a new website for The Center, completing the large-budget renovation on the building, and strengthening programs to ensure “all LGBT New Yorkers have an opportunity to live happy, healthy lives”—the emcee introduced the event’s first official speaker of the evening: Glenda Testone, the young, white, executive director of The Center. In her introductory comments, Testone explained how the audience seemed bigger every year when she spoke at the event. As a self-identified ally, she reflected, the vigil provided a “bittersweet moment” that served as a testament to how many people supported the trans community and were willing to “recommit” themselves to seeking equality for their trans and gender non-conforming “brothers and sisters.”

The importance of equality was also stressed by the executive director of the Empire State Pride Agenda, a state-wide advocacy organization seeking equality and justice for LGBT New Yorkers.⁷⁶ Likewise, a member of the Human Rights Campaign’s (HRC) Board of Governors and the Political Co-Chair for the HRC’s Greater New York area, spoke about how “deeply moved” she was by the trans community and said that she “stood humbly” as a trans ally. She spoke at length about the Human Rights Campaigns political rallies, non-discrimination policies, and political canvassing during the last presidential election.

⁷⁶ Shortly after this TDOR vigil, in December 2015, the Empire State Pride Agenda disbanded their advocacy group, citing that they had fulfilled their 25-year mandate for equality. Amongst the accomplishments that led to the eventual decision to disband the group were the legalization of same-sex marriage in New York in 2011 and the extension of a law to extend protections against discrimination to include trans-identified people. For more information, see McKinley 2015.

Midway through the evening's programming, a letter was shared from then-US President Barack Obama, which had been sent to The Center on the occasion of TDOR:

I send solemn greetings to all those observing Transgender Day of Remembrance on November 20th. As we honour those who lost their lives or experience violence because of their gender identity or expression, let us come together as a nation and re-dedicate ourselves to securing the full measure of possibility and acceptance in our time and for generations to come. (Obama 2015)

As the audience clapped for the presidential message, I wondered about the patriotic sentiments within Obama's TDOR acknowledgment. What does it mean to secure "the full measure of possibility"? In the space of the vigil—a space where the raw wounds of mourning are lent a haunting immediacy—how might we read the call for securing full possibility and acceptance vis-à-vis the very real uncertainty of the impossible and ever-haunting trans body of colour? How does the promise of freedom work to affectively suture the differences between cis, trans, and gender non-conforming bodies? These questions stuck with me as I observed the rest of the event.

Following these speeches, several individuals who were either involved in organizing or funding The Center's TDOR or trans-specific programming were invited to take the stage. The whole evening was heavily scheduled, and it was not lost on me that the majority of the speakers were white cis people. Interspersed between these speeches were a handful of creative performances by members of the trans community: while some of these were spoken word pieces or short speeches about hope and resilience, there was also an original piece that had been composed for the event by a young, blue-haired, trans man of colour who captivated the room with his song about loss.

Members of the general public were only invited to speak at the on-stage microphone if there happened to be a break between keynote speakers, and then again after the main

programming. Straining to be heard above the general din of the room, many of these speakers were bodies of colour who railed against official sentiments that New York was “the best place on earth to just be yourself” and, instead, spoke about the limitations of trans-inclusive policies in addressing the systemic forms of racism. At least three black trans women were prevented from speaking at, or cut off from, the microphone. Eventually, one of them would leave the room altogether while angrily yelling “We all see the violence, and there’s still silence.”

New York, 2015: Say Her Name

An hour after the TDOR event at The Center ended, I found myself ascending a steep flight of stairs in what appeared to be an industrial building. A thoroughly unplanned detour, this foray into a theatre space in East End of Manhattan came at the behest of DB, a trans person of colour I met at The Center’s TDOR. After learning about my research, DB invited me to accompany them to “Say Her Name,” an event for trans women and people of colour. I soon learned this was a grassroots event organized by actress/performer Cece Suazo-Augustus, a trans woman of colour, in conjunction with the grassroots feminist performance collective, WOW Café Theater.⁷⁷

Envisioned as an alternative to traditional narratives of trans memorialization, “Say Her Name” was a minimally publicized event that focused on celebrating trans women of colour. As Suazo-Augustus would later tell me, the benefit of holding a smaller event meant that about “eighty percent of the audience all knew each other” (2015). In a dimly-lit vestibule, black and brown bodies hugged or greeted each other in buoyant intimacy that seemed incongruous to the tension-filled event I had just come from. A smiling stranger asked if I was there for the show while simultaneously pushing me gently through a door.

⁷⁷ Established as an international women’s theatre festival in 1980, WOW is a decentralized arts collective that prioritizes creative contributions by women and trans people of colour.

Laughter greeted me as I nervously entered the small, dark performance space, and I walked across the stage to find a place on the rickety tiered seating that ringed the central area. The laughter, as I quickly discovered, was not directed at me but was instead part of the warm, spirited banter unfolding between the audience and the emcee. With a simple clearing serving as a stage, the low-tiers upon which our chairs sat meant that the performance space felt intimate.

Indeed, Suazo-Augustus had designed the event with intimacy in mind because she wanted the space to feel both celebratory and relaxing. But, as she explained, she also wanted it to be a place where people could say the names of murdered trans women in “a positive perspective”—a deliberate rejection of the *necrointimacies* that structure racialized trans bodies as spectacles to be consumed. Instead, this black-walled room, whose darkness was deliriously punctuated by the shimmering sequins of audience members and the glamour of performers on the stage, provided space for trans people of colour to congregate and informally acknowledge TDOR through burlesque dance, improvisational comedy, and unscripted reflections on the struggle for black self-determination in a racist, transphobic society.

New York, 2015: The Audre Lorde Project

The atmosphere at the Audre Lorde Project’s TDOR event was notably different. Formed in 1994, the Audre Lorde Project (ALP) was initially envisioned as an HIV policy and advocacy group for gay men of colour. Today, ALP has grown into a center for community organizing for lesbian, gay, bisexual, two spirit, transgender, and gender non-conforming people of colour.⁷⁸ In keeping with writer, poet, and civil rights activist Audre Lorde’s black feminist praxis, the ALP maintains a strong focus on social justice organizing around collective issues of oppression and discrimination for “peoples of African/Black/Caribbean, Arab, Asian & Pacific Islander,

⁷⁸ In the interest of brevity, ALP typically relies on the remarkably long acronym LGBTSTGNC.

Latina/o, and Native/Indigenous descent” (*The Audre Lorde Project* 2015a). Organized by the TransJustice program, ALP’s TDOR event was shaped by the group’s political mandate to “mobilize its communities and allies into action on the pressing political issues they face, including gaining access to jobs, housing, and education; the need for Trans-sensitive healthcare, HIV-related services, and job-training programs; resisting police, government and anti-immigrant violence” (*The Audre Lorde Project* 2015b).

I arrived at the event space—a small white Lutheran church on Christopher Street—a little before the 5pm start time for the event. The church seemed out of place amongst the newer redbrick brownstone buildings that crowded it, exuding a country feel, as though it had been plucked from the fields of a different era only to find itself abandoned in downtown Manhattan. Several people of colour thronged the arched central doorway to the church, patiently awaiting their turn to sign their name into the event’s guest list. When I made my way inside, my eyes were immediately drawn to the walls, which were adorned with dozens of handwritten messages that had been scrawled onto colourful pieces of paper.

At the back of the space, a makeshift altar had been erected, silently challenging the long-standing stained-glass depictions of worthier sacrifices. The surface of this simple round table had been draped in gold cloth, and several tall votive candles were set up with flames flickering across two notes that were propped against them: the first note appeared in rough type and was set against a simple, rainbow-washed background that read, “This candle burns for those we lost to suicide.” A second, sparkly black typeset sign, read: “This candle burns for those we lost to lack of access to safe and comprehensive healthcare.” Placed centrally on the tablecloth, a colourful handwritten poem testified to the importance of memorializing the power of those who had died. Above this table, a colourful riot of paper pinwheels were attached to wooden panels

that had been nailed to the wall, and messages could be inscribed within each white fold of the paper wheel. Tacked onto the wall between each pinwheel, rows of rectangular scraps of fabric offered a colourful backdrop to the white squares of fabric that were sown onto them. Messages were written on these bits of fabric too. The walls echoed with the weight of unspoken words made visible.

Amidst the messages calling for “prayers for those whose story hasn’t been told” were short tributes dedicated to the memory of specific individuals, identified only by their name and the location of their murder. Some messages offered a brief glimpse into the lives of those lost. Written in pink felt tip marker, the name “Chloe,” for example, was surrounded by a constellation of the things that gave her life meaning: “long term survivor,” “activist,” “friend,” “fighter,” “lover,” “artist,” and “equestrian.” Upon the rectangles of colourful fabric and squares of paper that peppered the church walls, the words “You are not forgotten—you did not die in vain” appeared intermittently, reflecting a similar message on ALP’s prominently displayed banner at the front of the church: “We will not forget.”

The ALP’s commitment to social justice and accountability meant that several measures were taken to offer support to eventgoers during the vigil. Immediately identifiable upon entering the church, “vibe-checkers”—who were mostly people of colour—explained that they had two functions at the TDOR event: first, to ensure a modicum of non-police provided security; and second, to offer peer support to those who may have been experiencing distress. Additionally, a “wellness space” had been set up in a room just off the pulpit at the front of the church. Envisioned as part of a “third space support” (Rachelle 2015) of which vibe-checking was also a part, this quiet wellness space in the vestry had been set aside as an area where community members were encouraged to take some time out for self-care if they were too overwhelmed or

had been triggered by the event.⁷⁹ As ALP volunteers explained, this “decompression” space was less a space to manage emotions than it was to work through them (Rachelle 2015). Inside the room, a bright, cheerful sign invited trans community members to help themselves at a tea station: “Tea to warm our souls, made with ♥ + rosehips, nettle, lavender, chamomile.”

In another gesture of care, a journaling and colouring station provided a space for creative reflection. Amongst the black-and-white outlines of images of fierce female activists of colour, one could glimpse an invitation to re-imagine new ways of relating to each other, of repopulating the world with literal and symbolic colour. Beside carefully placed shells and colourful gems, writing supplies offered participants an opportunity to journal or write letters to themselves in self-addressed envelopes that ALP volunteers would mail to them after the event. Above this writing table, visual aids provided information about acupuncture for depression, insomnia, pain, and post-traumatic stress. Not far from the soft, green meditation mats on the floor stood a table where one could make their own cleansing smudge stick. Nearby, a bag of deflated balloons and a supply of uncooked rice provided an opportunity to make DIY stress balls.

Needing a brief moment to escape the boisterous crowd in the church-proper, I self-consciously sat down at the DIY table and—with the help of Rachelle, a vibe-checker at the event who had offered their assistance—attempted to make my own stress ball. As I glanced around the room, I could see several people of colour around me who had perhaps found the main room over-whelming and were now engrossed in their creative tasks of self-care. And indeed, there was something rather cathartic about the process. As I filled my forest-green latex

⁷⁹ At the start of the event, the emcee repeatedly invited all participants to take advantage of this “healing space.”

balloon with rice, I found myself fully-immersed in a quiet moment of self-care. In retrospect, this brief experiment in mindfulness offered by the “wellness room” highlights the ubiquity of overly-scheduled programming at TDOR events. By choosing to eschew the scripted nature of memorialization, the healing space created by ALP offered participants of imagining community through creativity, resilience, and self-care rather than centralizing death in narratives of community-making. As Alok Vaid-Menon, ALP’s Communications and Grassroots Fundraising Coordinator explained to me, “The provision of space for collective healing is an implicit recognition that trans people of colour rarely have the luxury of time or space in which to grieve and heal from the “routine systematic violence” (Vaid-Menon 2016) that they experience. Thus, ALP strove to ensure that their events and programming incorporated ‘space’ for people to receive healing, guidance, and mentorship.

After a brief introduction to ALP’s TDOR, which outlined the rationale behind holding a separate event from the TDOR at The Center, the emcee, a black trans woman called Josephine led the audience in “call-and-response” affirmations that recognized the ongoing marginalization of trans people experiencing intersecting barriers due to immigration status, race, education, class, ability, and military violence. After calling for a brief moment of silence— during which the occasional heart-wrenching sob reverberated across the room— Josephine exclaimed “We didn’t bring you here to mourn! We brought you here to celebrate!”

As the audience clapped and hooted in encouragement, she ceded the performance area—which essentially included any space not occupied by a pew or a standing body—to community members. The unstructured nature of the space itself meant that drag shows and spoken word pieces often unravelled into unforeseen improvisational sassing, blurring those orthodox

divisions between performer and audience member. I left the church that night with the sense that I had witnessed an embodied and empowered approach to commemorating TDOR.

[iv] Organizing Race, Organizing Space: On the Scripted Nature of Inclusion

How do organizations plan communal grieving? What challenges do organizers face when planning TDOR vigils? Do most events follow the suggested script laid out by the *TDOR* website's "How to have a TDOR" document or are there differences in interpretation? As discussed in Chapter Two, within the online world of memorialization, the racialized nature of anti-trans violence is often made palatable through narratives that universalize and/or anonymize the victims. Given the over-representation of trans women of colour in each year's vigil, (how) are the universalized and anonymous narratives of trans loss negotiated within the *physical* space of the TDOR vigil? Does the presence of trans people of colour at these vigils necessitate a different framing of trans-vulnerability and trans-victimhood? This section explores event organizers' approaches to addressing two common issues that arise during TDOR vigils: ensuring a representative organizing committee and centering race when speaking at the vigil. Here, I draw on interviews I conducted with racialized trans attendees at all four events described above as well as with organizers of the 2014 vigil at The 519, the 2015 Audre Lorde Project/TransJustice vigil, and the 2015 "Say Her Name" event.⁸⁰

Organizing Race

Certainly, the precarity of trans-feminine lives of colour, and their over-representation in each year's death tally, has led to increased attention to the interlocking effects of systemic transmisogyny and racism. This awareness of the intersectional nature of oppression is reflected

⁸⁰ Although I contacted The Center several times, I was unable to get a response from the organizing committee for the TDOR event.

in the organizational tasks leading up to the event as well as the organization of the event itself. In my interviews with the organizers of TDOR vigils, I found that attempts had been made to incorporate the input of racialized trans people in planning each event. For example, as Rosalyn Forrester told me, the programming committee for the 2014 TDOR event at The 519 was comprised entirely of trans-identified volunteers whose racial demographics were “pretty mixed” and included Indigenous people and people of colour as well as those who did not identify as visible minorities. Although the committee met weekly to make decisions about the event’s structure, publicity, and performers, the open and voluntary nature of unpaid membership in the committee meant that attendance and participation varied throughout the year.

Likewise, for ALP organizers, the task of making TDOR a “representative event” (Vaid-Menon 2016) meant that it was of utmost importance to try and center those most directly impacted by anti-trans violence. As Alok Vaid-Menon, the Communications and Grassroots Fundraising Coordinator at the Audre Lorde Project, explained to me: “the reality of the situation is that the majority of the trans people who are murdered every year tend to be black and transfeminine, so we really try to make sure that the leadership of the event, the visioning process, organizing is led by black trans femmes. And then also supported especially by the work of trans people of colour more generally.” When I asked them about how the speakers had been chosen for the 2016 vigil, Vaid-Menon responded:

So we asked our membership what they wanted and whom they wanted to speak.

What felt really important to us was that we didn’t, uh, have the usual suspects speaking, uh, because what we often notice is, in trans organizing, only a certain few people are allowed to speak for the entire community. And what happens is that the people who are often most directly impacted—people who are doing sex

work, or people who are currently homeless, or people who are drug-users—tend to be not seen as successful leaders. So we really wanted to uplift the leadership of people who are typically underrepresented, even within transwomen of colour organizing. So that’s who we prioritized for giving talks. (Vaid-Menon 2016)

This attention to the interlocking effects of racialization and anti-trans violence is also evident in the introductory remarks made by the emcees at each vigil. For instance, the emcee at the ALP’s TDOR vigil in 2015 began the event by stressing the importance of honouring trans women, because “to be assigned male at birth, and to be transfeminine, is the most radical thing...when you’re assigned male at birth, you have to fight to be feminine. You have to fight for death to be feminine” (ALP Trans Day of Remembrance 2015). But the emcee’s introductory affirmations also highlighted the importance of remembering the intersectional oppressions faced by *multiply-marginalized* trans bodies. Key to the emcee’s message was that the systemic nature of violence itself has a deep impact on trans and gender non-conforming communities of colour. Rather than fall back to a tokenizing gesture of universal inclusion through trans loss, she recited several affirmations urging the audience “to recognize, hold up, and join in solidarity” with those facing specific, and often overlapping, barriers (ALP Trans Day of Remembrance 2015). In particular, she cited those who continue to be imprisoned and detained, those who lack access to necessary medicine, victims of medicalized or institutional violence within correctional and psychiatric systems, both documented and undocumented immigrants, sex workers fighting for rights, young trans and gender non-conforming people of colour who face barriers to accessing “education, safe housing, health care, resources, and the agency to make decisions for themselves,” trans and gender non-conforming people of colour with different abilities who face barriers in accessing spaces and services that the rest of the community takes for granted, and finally, trans bodies of

colour that have been affected by ongoing regimes of military violence, colonialism, and occupation (ALP Trans Day of Remembrance 2015).

Likewise, in her opening address to the audience at The 519's 2014 TDOR vigil in Toronto, co-organizer Rosalyn Forrester briefly highlighted the link between anti-trans violence and both direct and indirect systemic violence. Reflecting on the representational gap between the victims of anti-trans violence whose deaths had been reported and those whose deaths had gone unreported, she stressed that the organizers of The 519's 2014 TDOR event did their best to include those who would have otherwise been invisible. However, when examining both The Center's and The 519's vigils, I found that the inclusion of marginalized voices at the community consultation level often failed to translate into inclusion at the event itself. One way in which this was apparent was through the way racialized bodies were (un)invited to take up space during scripted performances of mourning. In order to expand upon this reflection, I turn briefly to my impressions of spatial organization at the 2015 TDOR vigil at The Center in New York.

Organizing Space

The Center, as I have previously described, is located in a recently-renovated building in a steadily gentrifying area of Manhattan, New York City. The 2015 TDOR vigil at The Center filled the event room to capacity, and the limited chairs filled up quickly. By the time the vigil began, a clear pattern had emerged with spatial—and racialized—implications: The majority of the seated attendees appeared to be white and upper-middle class and, while a few bodies of colour peppered the fortunate seated audience, I was struck by how the cramped spaces against the wall were populated largely by racialized trans bodies. I was not alone in this observation. In their interview with me, DB, a genderqueer attendee of South Asian descent, reflected on the

jarring discrepancy between The Center's sleek aesthetics and the chaotic undertone of their organized mourning:

It's the first time I've ever been to The Center and I was shocked by how much money they have to build this gorgeous building. I was really shocked. Um, it felt okay, so this is really my experience. We, like, went upstairs. I really didn't even know where it was supposed to be. When the doors opened, people just like, I felt like we were just being herded in like cattle. It was really weird. Like, I looked at the room and I thought 'there's obviously not going to be enough room for everybody here' because there were only so many chairs. (DB 2015)

Although DB, too, had noticed how "all the white people were sitting, [and] a lot of, a *lot* of people of colour—and young people of colour—were standing around," and the informal racialized segregation within this memorial space had made them hesitate when they chanced upon an empty seat. They explained, "Like, I had that moment where I was like 'oh, should I get up' and I was like, fuck this shit, all the white people are sitting. I'm gonna, you know, sit" (DB 2015). Reflecting on the ways in which certain bodies were drawn towards other, similar bodies, DB said: "the event seemed to be run by transwomen of colour but, like, it felt like they were more invested in running the event than [in] holding community space" (DB 2015). DB was correct that, while the organizing committee for this event was predominantly trans women of colour, the labour performed by these bodies was not reflected in the structure of their programming. The main emcee was a Latina trans woman whose primary role seemed to be organizing the logistical nightmare of fitting too many people into a room that was, realistically, too small for the crowd. When she was not busy organizing the volunteers, ensuring that the food

was served, and “herding people like cattle” (DB 2015) into whatever standing room was available, her task was to introduce the community supporters of the TDOR event.

As discussed above, the event at The Center began with speeches that reflected the organizational structure of The Center rather than the intentions behind the event itself. Indeed, at various points during the event, the task of memorialization was over-shadowed by campaign-like vignettes about the successful projects run by The Center during the course of the year, references to the Stonewall Riots as anchoring yet-to-be-won freedoms, and lengthy tributes to the various organizations and donors who had sponsored the event.

Over the course of that evening, several cisgender allies were scheduled to speak because they had either been involved in the funding or organization structure of The Center. For instance, the first speaker, a white, cisgender woman, began by reaffirming her position as an ally to the community, charting the various accomplishments of The Center that year, and finally— in a seamless transition from scripted mourning to the reproduction of endurance— concluded by asking everyone to come together as a nation against hate.

Although The Center’s TDOR event is always organized by trans-identified people working with the organization’s “Gender Identity Project,” in 2015 there were only a few *official* trans-identified speakers. Members of the trans community spoke at on-stage microphone if there happened to be a break between invited keynote speakers and then again after the main programming had ended. Sandwiched between these speakers were trans women and men of colour who, having commandeered the microphone from cis allies and white trans men, reminded the audience “Don’t *say* trans lives matter. Act like it.” At once a plea and demand, “Don’t *say* trans lives matter. Act like it” gestured to the continued invisibilization of race and class in structuring contemporary trans identity. This is especially salient today when the

increasing visibility of trans people in mainstream popular culture draws the boundaries between acceptability and unacceptability ever tighter. By asking the audience to “act like it,” the demand for a concrete recognition of the barriers to inclusion also laid bare the exclusionary foundations upon which trans visibility is built.

[v] “Perverse Performances”: Reflections on the Ambivalence of Memorialization

When interviewing my research participants, I began by asking if they could describe what TDOR was. Without hesitation, every person I interviewed responded to my introductory question in an almost uncannily scripted manner: TDOR vigils, they would tell me, are held in order to memorialize the lives of trans people who have been murdered over the course of the year. Not only do they provide a space “for people to collectively come together and mourn the loss of their friends and loved ones that have gone before them” (Jacen 2015), but, as annual events, the vigils are instrumental in “bringing awareness [about] violence against trans people—particularly trans women of colour” (Kusha 2015).

After this initial question and the relative ease of my participants’ answers, I carefully segued into questions about racialization and gender liminality at TDOR events; inevitably, at this point, something would shift—an imperceptible reticence foreshadowing the rupture between my participants’ interpretation of the *intent* of the events and their embodied experiences therein. The seemingly scripted unanimity characterizing the centrality of TDOR to structuring trans life suddenly became untenable when it was to be analyzed from the retrospective vantage point of embodied racialized experience.

What became clear in many of the interviews I conducted was a repeating and profound sense of ambivalence with which trans people of colour seem to participate in TDOR vigils.

When asking trans audience members to describe their experiences at TDOR vigils, the eloquence with which they explained the *what* of the vigil was seemingly undone by the *why* and *how* of their presence. In other words, while they were able to describe the purpose of the vigil with great clarity, they often stumbled over their responses about personal experiences at those events. For instance, when I asked C, a young transfeminine sex worker of colour, what the TDOR vigil meant to her, I received a well-structured response about the importance of TDOR in highlighting the systemic violence faced by trans women of colour and trans sex workers. But when I asked her why she attended TDOR vigils, she suddenly seemed disinterested and told me that she, in fact, tended to avoid them altogether.

Avoidance, as it turned out, was a common solution to the unarticulated problem of racialized trans memorialization—unarticulated because, all too often, my participants described how they would leave vigils feeling “haunted” by something unresolved (Jacen 2015). In response to my asking for their memories of a TDOR event—and in direct contrast to their previous statements about the importance of these vigils—trans people of colour alternately described the events as “retraumatizing,” “too hard,” “depressing,” “horrible,” “disturbing,” “uncomfortable,” “tokenistic,” “alienating,” and just “fucked up” (SB 2015; Kusha 2015; Taashi 2015; D 2015; Carter 2015; Az 2016; Binaohan 2015).

Still, as many participants mused during their interviews with me, they continued to return to these vigils. Why is it that these vigils are particularly haunting for racialized trans people? Why do trans people of colour continue to attend TDOR vigils when these events are experienced as difficult and “perverse” (Carter 2015)? Through my interviews, two overarching themes emerged to account for why trans people of colour attend these events despite their ambivalence: first, a desire to access a sense of belonging within the trans community, and

second, a need to be visible as a racialized trans body within trans spaces. Despite these repeating themes, interview participants also indicated that the former was constantly undergirded by systemic forms of exclusion from trans belonging, while racialized visibility simultaneously required witnessing the potentiality of one's own racialized death. For these reasons—particularly in terms of the ways in which race had a spectacular and accessorial function in the ritual of memorialization—TDOR vigils provoked a profound sense of discomfort in my research participants. To elaborate on these themes, I draw heavily on the narrative of participant H, a young South Korean trans man living in Toronto whose experiences at TDOR events share commonalities with many other participants, before drawing on the similarly ambivalent reflections of TDOR event organizers.

A Sense of Belonging, A Sense of Exclusion

Because TDOR vigils continue to be one of the few events exclusively focused on the trans community, they mitigate feelings of everyday isolation by creating a sense of communal belonging.⁸¹ As I outlined briefly in the introductory section to this chapter, the ritualistic and repetitive nature of vigils has the dual effect of honouring the dead while simultaneously sedimenting feelings of belonging among the living. Indeed, as one of my interviewees, a trans woman of mixed-race ancestry mused, “it’s the biggest event the trans community has” (V 2015). While the intention of TDOR vigils is to show respect for the lives of trans people—and trans women of colour most prominently—by honouring them every year, the annual repetition

⁸¹ To clarify, while some may argue that trans marches held during annual Pride Parades are also events geared solely to trans people, to date, these marches have only occurred in San Francisco and Toronto. Furthermore, unlike the TDOR vigil, whose macabre foundations have become enshrined within narratives about trans identity politics, trans marches are relatively new and lack the same gravitas. For many of my participants, these Trans Pride Marches were exercises in mainstream capitalist consumption (Az 2016; DB 2015; II 2015), that consistently centered whiteness (DB 2015; Forrester 2015; Kusha 2015) by not recognizing the contributions of trans women of colour within the community (Forrester 2015).

of these losses and forms of memorialization also cohere a particular kind of belonging within the trans community. For trans people of colour, who might otherwise feel excluded from support groups run by LGBT organizations, these vigils provide a sometimes-singular opportunity to meet other racialized trans people or to feel recognized as part of a collective, since this event is “when you [see] trans people who you never [see] throughout the rest of the year” (Carter 2015).

Certainly, in my interviews with them, several trans people of colour reflected upon their sense of isolation as racialized gender-liminal bodies existing in overwhelmingly white trans communities. For instance, H started attending TDOR vigils because he felt increasingly alienated from trans support groups where he was always the only racialized person. In H’s experience, the space occupied by trans bodies of colour in Canada is an ambivalent one. On one hand, H is grateful for the formal trans rights afforded to him by his Canadian citizenship because, as he summarized, South Korea is “pretty bad” (H 2015) when it comes to trans rights.

On the other hand, H remains frustrated with the trans community and its relative indifference towards the issues facing trans immigrants. Arguing that discourses of human rights only apply to white trans subjects, H described an overwhelming sense of isolation he experiences in trans communities, where his Korean heritage inevitably renders him an outcast within ‘community’ spaces. But H’s cultural heritage and his trans identity are inseparable: “there are some cultural notions that a lot of people don’t really understand when it comes to this. Like, that whole trans identity and culture..they’re not separate. They’re all, like, meshed together” (H 2015). Likening his very presence within predominantly white trans support groups to a “thorn that’s sticking out” (H 2015), H’s narrative points to the complex ways that programs

purporting to be inclusive can problematically reinstate the white body as the “unmarked norm” (Tate 2014, 6).

H’s experiences of alienation point to the multiple ways in which the presence of the trans body of colour has been viewed as incompatible with discourses of (trans)sexual citizenship that have been overdetermined by whiteness (Bhanji 2013; Aizura 2006). As Sara Ahmed illustrates in “An Affinity of Hammers,” racialized bodies are often the “cause of tension,” changing the very atmosphere in a room with its presence (Ahmed 2016). Certainly, H’s experiences parallel those of another participant I interviewed named Kusha, a service provider running trans programming at an LGBT-focused health-center. A genderqueer trans man of Middle-Eastern ancestry, Kusha spoke at length the lack of supports for trans people of colour in Toronto. Drawing on his own experiences, he described how, as a new immigrant and the only person of colour in trans-specific support groups, he “just couldn’t connect” (Kusha 2015) with people because they were unable to appreciate how his transition to masculinity was affected by structures of race and racialization.⁸²

Resigned to invisibility, H still attends TDOR vigils because he can empathize with the exclusion of the racialized victims of anti-trans violence from broader kinship structures: “if I had died, nobody would mourn for me, kind of thing” (H 2015). A relational obligation, this empathic connection between one trans body mourning another is deeply influenced by

⁸² Reflecting on how white privilege often goes hand-in-hand with class privilege, Kusha explained that it is specifically white trans men who are able to access employment opportunities and gender-affirming medical treatment:

“White masculinity is a privilege for sure. Even if they *do* present as kinda androgynous, still I think there’s a privilege there. Like—and I know many people in the trans community—and, from what I know, um, it’s the white trans guys who have, for instance, who are able to have a job, right? Even here, [at his workplace], we hire mostly white trans guys, right? That’s who, you know, has most access to money. Therefore, they have better access to surgery, right?” (Kusha 2015)

discourses of racialization. H's determination to mourn those who might otherwise be forgotten is structured by the knowledge that many of the victims of anti-trans violence are people of colour and this haunts him because, as he explained, "nobody from my own culture would mourn for me if I were taken to the next level" (H 2015).

In this sense, H's story parallels that of DB, a South Asian trans person who described how they attended TDOR vigils seeking reprieve from their typical feelings of exclusion from most community events: "I go to them because, frankly, I want to feel viscerally like a part of a community that I don't get to access every day. So, like, being in a room that centers trans experience is really nice 'cause it doesn't happen to me. Not that that ever happens in those spaces, but I'm always hopeful that they will" (DB 2015).

Racial Visibility, Racial Unrealness

H's narrative above relates to the second reason why many trans people of colour attend TDOR vigils: the need to be visible *as* a body of colour in trans space that is unquestioningly characterized by whiteness. Highlighting how a sense of relational obligation—from one trans body of colour to another—structures his participation at TDOR events, H articulated the hypothetical importance of having another living body of colour at a TDOR vigil in the event of his own death. As H explained, having a racialized trans person present to mourn him would ensure that "at least they would remember a lot of parts about me that had to do with culture and stuff instead of if maybe only white people came to my memorial, then I don't think they would have understood in too full extent how...the things that I went through" (H 2015).

H's considerations regarding being able to relate to the experiences of racialized victims of anti-trans violence illustrates how TDOR vigils are not immune to practices of racialization that alienate or erase these subjects in everyday life. In the event of his potential death from anti-

trans violence, H would hope for the sort of affirmation of an intersectionality that has, thus far, proven elusive within predominantly white trans spaces. Furthermore, he acknowledges that this desire for narrative depth is at odds with the reality that “maybe only white people” will populate his vigil (H 2015). Thus, any posthumous acknowledgement of his multiple, and overlapping, identities would require the presence of another body of colour to ensure that the narrative of his life is not co-opted and de-racialized.

If H feels invisible, misread, and alienated from participation in trans life—through community support groups and discourses about ideal trans masculine bodies—then it would seem that TDOR vigils offer him a modicum of visibility as a specifically racialized trans person at an event that memorializes the loss of mostly people of colour. However, his visibility is conditional—granted only through a hypothetical encounter with the potentiality of his own death and reflected back to him via the spectacularized death of another racialized body. This seemingly contradictory experience of an absent-presence points to a ghostliness that drives the space of TDOR vigils. As with DB, who always “hopes” for inclusion as a racialized trans subject, H’s attendance at the TDOR vigil is marked by a profound sense of un-reality that inevitably arises when the presence of the racialized body in trans space is conditional upon the ghostly, hyper-visible potential of its own annihilation.

TDOR and Racial Trauma

When it comes to TDOR, racial visibility is only really achieved through a close proximity with racial trauma. Like many of my research participants, H shared that attending these vigils often leaves him feeling depressed and haunted by a sense of “powerlessness” (H 2015). Foreshadowed by his own pre-emptive death, his social recognition as a racialized trans subject is but an inclusion predicated on a formative exclusion. H’s reflections show that,

structured through the visible-invisibility demanded by the theatre of the vigil, the price of admission into trans belonging for racialized trans subjects is the simultaneous repudiation of the possibility of racialized trans life for the certainty of racialized death. As H's narrative illustrates, the living racialized body is incorporated into trans subjectivity precisely at the threshold where race is made visible, albeit briefly, as a ghostly presence through the (inevitable) potentiality of its violent erasure.

The nature of this racialized violence, however, is markedly different from the spectacularized visibility of the *TDOR* website I analyzed in Chapter Two. For Carter, a black trans man living in Toronto, the re-enactment of symbolic violence against bodies of colour is most apparent in the ritualistic recitation of the names of those who have been killed each year.⁸³ Traditionally characterized by what has been previously described as an “expectation of reverence and absolute silence,” these quasi-ecclesiastic recitations of the names of the dead—a list comprised mostly of racialized trans women—is “an ecstasy of violence” (Carter 2015). As Carter explained, the expectation that he passively listen to the grisly details of how racialized bodies have been obliterated is symptomatic of broader structures of systemic racism:

...It's all of the ways systemic racism works, so that you're having usually people *not* from the places where these people have died, butchering their names, you know? White people trying to read non-English names. And, for like, two hours! Like, it's just *so brutal* in so many ways. And you don't need to read out *how* people were murdered and describe in such detail how people were murdered. I understand there may be..maybe there is a place, if it was all cisgender people—or

⁸³ While the reciting of names at TDOR events has likewise been challenged by white trans people as reiterating the trauma of anti-trans violence, my interviews show that the process holds particular salience for trans people of colour, who often see themselves and their own potential demise more readily reflected in the list.

non-trans people as I would rather say—and they all had to come and hear about the ways that their fucked upness was causing a world of transphobic violence, maybe. But *why* do this to a whole bunch of trans people..and in front of trans people of colour?! It's so brutal! Here's the day where you're going to come and you're going to hear about all the people who were just like you who were murdered. And you're going to describe exactly, how in grisly detail, how they were murdered, and then..send you home! No closure. I just find it so..awful.

(Carter 2015)

Carter was not alone in his experience of the traumatic nature of TDOR vigils. SB, a brown trans woman also disclosed how the vigil often left her feeling defeated and depressed: “Like, it's like ‘Okay now, we've just read all these dead trans people's names. Now, okay, so carry on..bye!’” (SB 2015)

Notably, it is not just TDOR participants who feel ambivalent about the spectacularized narratives of racialized trans death. Vigil organizers, too, are often conflicted by the scripted demands of trans memorialization practices and the necessary sacrifices they require. Following Toronto's 2014 TDOR vigil at The 519, I was able to interview Rosalyn Forrester⁸⁴ about her role in organizing TDOR events in Toronto and the Greater Toronto Area for almost five years. Forrester described how the prospect of organizing TDOR events was overshadowed by a deep sense of ambivalence borne from her experiences as a black trans woman. Recalling the “morbid days” (Forrester 2015) that characterized the TDOR events prior to 2014, Forrester described how she had tried to move away from the programmed victimization of racialized bodies where they used to “read off a name and bell-ring, read off a name and bell-ring, read off a name and

⁸⁴ At The 519, and in addition to her responsibilities during TDOR, Forrester also coordinates 50+ LGBT programming and trans programming services.

bell-ring and by the end of it, you know, you want to slit your wrists...” (Forrester 2015).

Punctuated by the ominous finality of the bell’s ring, the repeated mispronunciation of many of the names of women of colour would often leave her “really depressed” (Forrester 2015).

Although Forrester played a central role in organization of the 2014 TDOR vigil, she described a deep ambivalence about the ways in which trans communities frequently attach remembrance to narratives of racialized violence and racialized victimhood:

You know, there’s this idea of victimhood—which is another reason why I’m not crazy about TDOR—it’s this focus on victimhood, [that] we’re all victims. And yes, there’s way too much violence, systemic and otherwise, um, but we also *do* a lot of things. So those people who died, um, were also all kinds of awesomeness, right? We had artists and doctors...we have everything out there. Um, so how do we remember them? Do we remember just by saying ‘they died’ or do we remember it a different way, and say ‘they died but there [are] all these great things about people’. (Forrester 2014)

Alok Vaid-Menon had similar thoughts about the invisible nature of secondary trauma as a result of these TDOR events. As a South Asian gender non-conforming person, they were all too familiar with the intersection between racialized and anti-trans violence:

I think one of the things that often happens in our work is that people don’t understand that trans people, um, every time someone is murdered, there’s, like, pangs of fear and anxiety within the community that don’t go away. So, I think a lot of people are able to leave TDOR and think, ‘wow, that was a great event!’ but most of our membership leave being, like, ‘well I hope I don’t get harassed on the way home.’ Uh, so it’s a lot of trauma and pressure and isolation that people are experiencing. (Vaid-Menon 2016)

Vibe-Checking and Racial Realness

TDOR vigils, as I have described, are difficult spaces, particularly for trans people of colour. Populated by individual and collective ghosts and shaped by grief, these events are crucibles of intensity and emotionality. Indeed, the potential for the event to ‘trigger’ unforeseen emotional responses and disrupt the smooth flow of scripted grief is one of the biggest challenges faced by TDOR organizers. In the case of the larger, more established events, this possibility meant strict enforcement of programming with very little space for community members to speak. On the other hand, both the ALP vigil and “Say Her Name” re-created their own versions of “How to Have a TDoR” that deviated from the suggested script and foregrounded racialized trans people. This focus on trans people of colour took shape in primarily two ways: first, through the incorporation of community-based care practices to support those who might be triggered by the event and, second, through a wholesale rejection of scripted forms of mourning.

For Kyla, a gender non-conforming person of colour volunteering as vibe-checker at the ALP vigil, the principles that underlie vibe-checking are a commitment to ensuring that members of “our community are...actually able to, like, keep each other safe and, like, promote each other’s self-determination, try and like name what’s best for ourselves, and, like, how best to care for ourselves instead of always having to rely on external structures like the medical establishment or police. We don’t believe in using the police as a way to keep us safe. We don’t believe in that. So we create alternative forms of safety. And one of those is security, where we are, um, believe in, like, transformative justice and also survivor-led, um, safety and work” (Kyla 2015). This reference to the cultivation of a deliberate ethos of “transformative justice” is a community-based response to systemic violence against queer and trans people, survivors, and racialized people.

This participatory form of social justice activism is what Dean Spade and others identify as a “critically queer and trans political approach” (Spade 2011, 63) that, in a radical departure from mainstream LGBT activism, uses community-based responses to address collective harm and systemic violence. Whereas, mainstream LGBTQ responses to hate-based violence most often seek change through formal legal demands and law enforcement, community-based initiatives such as ALP mobilize around broader social structures that contribute to premature trans and queer death, such as “police violence, imprisonment, poverty, lack of health care, and housing” (Spade 2011, 63). As Kyla’s comments illustrate, ALP’s commitment to centralizing the experiences of poor and trans bodies of colour at its TDOR events is envisioned as an ethical response to the systemic nature of police brutality against bodies of colour. Rather than investing in a disciplinary system that has historically made both trans and racialized people the targets of discourses of criminality, ALP’s vibe-checkers ensured that the venue remained a safe and accessible space that is intentionally created *by* and *for* marginalized populations.

An abbreviated form of *vibration*, etymologically, *vibes* refer to a “person’s emotional state or the atmosphere of a place as communicated to and felt by others” (Oxford English Dictionary). Gesturing to the resonance of instinctive feelings arising from the triggering nature of both racialized and anti-trans violence, ALP organizers told me they understood vibe-checking as something that should happen at every TDOR event. A form of inter-personal embodied accountability, the inclusion of vibe-checking reflects not just an acknowledgement of the body’s capacity to affect and to be affected in turn, but also a respectful recognition of the invisible emotional labour that is often performed by trans and gender non-conforming people of colour in spaces of memorialization. Rachelle, a black gender non-conforming American citizen, explains:

People do emotional labour constantly and taking [sic] care of people. It's not like, "oh, we just live our lives with our needs going unmet until ALP branded this thing called 'vibe-checking'," but it is, like, a category, um, to name what we're doing. Which is, like, "oh, you know, we recognize that trans day of remembrance is a difficult day." It's, like, it's..it's holding space for grief. It's holding space for memory and resilience. But, I think, recognizing that this can be a triggering event. That there need to be multiple ways to access the topic, um, to access the event and the community without having to, like, leave people behind that may or may not be, like, "I can sit through the entire program and I can listen to all this, you know, forever." Like, I don't think that's realistic. I don't think that's very human. (Rachelle 2015)

Vibe-checking, as Rachelle explained, is an opportunity to directly challenge systems which had previously put people of colour in untenable situations, where the onus had been on them to educate through their presence with little provision for after-care: "I think that's what's special about it being [people of colour]-led, 'cause we be thinking about that shit. Like, I don't like it when people be doing that to me, so I'm not about to do that to, like, a shit-ton of people" (Rachelle 2015). Although the vibe-checkers at the event—who were mostly trans people of colour— facilitated the space and offered assistance, their function was primarily to "bring people around to the idea that there are ways that we can heal each other and with ourselves as individuals and as a community without relying on the artificial, um, outside forces and resources" (Rachelle 2015). Thus, it was in this spirit of communal healing that space was designed to deliberately mediate the body-in-grief with the intention of sending the body-in-crisis a signal to turn on its own self-healing or regulatory mechanisms.

While ALP's wholesale rejection of reliance on "outside forces and resources" (Rachelle 2015) may seem to reify racialized and trans insularity, we can also read this as a strategic challenge to scripted and de-racialized structures of mourning within mainstream practices of trans memorialization. Mourning, at ALP's TDOR, was not an individualized event but was instead a communal process that embraced loss and anger as pathways to continued survival. The provision of space for creative, collective healing offers implicit recognition that trans people of colour rarely have the luxury of time or space in which to grieve and heal from the "routine systematic violence" that they experience (Vaid-Menon 2016).

At ALP, the emphasis on trans people of colour also extended into the ways in which the space itself was staged: the pews at the front of the church had been exclusively reserved for self-identified trans people of colour, while white trans people and allies were politely asked to sit towards the back of the room⁸⁵ and to "defer to people of colour in this space" (Rachelle 2015). Indeed, the work that went into staging and producing the event ensured that the vigil did not center discourses of gender non-conformity as being the sole factor in anti-trans violence. Instead, in keeping with the ideals of ALP as driven by social justice, great care was taken to address interlocking systems of oppression that affect trans lives outside of and in conversation with transphobia. During the lip-synching performances, the church erupted in laughter several times as performers went 'off script' when a familiar face walked into room. Occasionally, the audience members and performers would engage in the kind of public banter that could only come from a place of both stubborn affection and heartfelt, queer kinship.

⁸⁵ In cases where there was resistance to ceding space to bodies of colour, vibe checkers were responsible for mediating conflicts and diffusing tension: "our security team members are trained to deal with those situations...more often than not, like, white folks who come here don't ever get, like, violent. Folks *do* get frustrated because they don't understand our intentions, right, and they feel discriminated against" (Rachelle 2015).

Similarly, “Say Her Name” actively challenged the confines of a set schedule or script. While several black trans women had been programmed to perform or speak at the event, lip-synched performances again morphed into saucy improvisational dance routines with audience members. Sometimes, these performances would stop altogether as performers acknowledged or sassed familiar faces entering the room. As an attendee, DB reflected back to me later, “it felt like a family thanksgiving dinner...the attitude was one of laughter and happiness and, like, ridiculousness actually, um, in so many ways. And it wasn’t like everyone was totally, like, loving up each other. There were some people that were annoyed with each other” (DB 2015).

A few weeks later, I spoke with “Say Her Name” organizer Cece Suazo-Augustus. A trans woman of Honduran-Cuban heritage, Suazo-Augustus lives in New York City, where she is a collective member—the first trans woman of colour—in the feminist grassroots performance collective, WOW. With the support of the collective, Sauzo-Augustus envisioned a TDOR event that would “stand out” from previous iterations of scripted mourning:

I didn’t want it to be an earlier event—like they had at The Center or Audre Lorde. All the events kinda looked similar—everybody with Kleenexes, everybody crying, people marching in rallies—I wanted people to really enter a space where they would feel comfortable and be, like, “Okay, I can take off my shoes and have a good time. It’s about *me* now. It’s not about rallies or marches for the community and being boisterous, you know? It’s about *me*. This is *me* time.” (Sauzo-Augustus 2015)

For Sauzo-Augustus, “me time” signified a space in direct contrast to the isolating temporality of rigid structures of memorialization. In this intimate crucible of “me time,” where

“about eighty percent of the audience all knew each other,” black trans women⁸⁶ reminisced about years spent working the streets with their sisters or in learning how to access safe, cheap hormones (Suazo-Augustus 2015). “Me time” was thus enacted through the performance of a historical-presence, inserting racialized resilience within trajectories of racialized expendability. By “Say[ing] Her Name,” the event strove to construct ‘real’ narratives of black and POC resilience outside of the usual narrative trajectories of death and decay.⁸⁷

This sense of “realness” was a recurrent theme in my interviews with research participants. For instance, DB described the performers at “Say Her Name” as “real people” because, although they were putting on a show, “They weren’t putting on a show *for* someone. Because it was for and with and by the community” (DB 2015). Engaging and intimately improvisational, the scripted ‘smooth flow’ of the performance of loss constantly gave way to rougher edges and unexpected segues inviting the audience to play. Recounting, DB shared, “And you’d have disagreements half-way through and interrupt what you’re doing to yell at someone in the audience. I liked it so much because I felt like I was part of it, but I didn’t say a word and did not move the entire time, you know?” (DB 2015)

⁸⁶ Self-consciously aware of my middle-class, transmasculine brownness in an almost all-black space, I had been worried that my presence was an unwelcome imposition. But, Sauzo-Augustus explained, the spirit of the event was that “if you didn’t know [anyone], you were embraced and you were welcomed” (Suazo-Augustus 2015). However, this welcoming approach was one-sided. When planning the event, Sauzo-Augustus had reached out to white trans people but got very little interest. On one hand, this may have been due to the fact that the performances were specifically designed to highlight the talents of trans women of colour. On the other hand, as Sauzo-Augustus mused during her conversation with me, “the non-people of colour must feel that they don’t share the same struggles as people of colour. So it’s like, ‘alright, why be there?’” (Sauzo-Augustus 2015).

⁸⁷ Drawing on Paul Gilroy’s *Black Atlantic*, Cheng suggests that marginalized, racialized subjectivities have always had a “dynamic rapport with death and suffering” that eschews dominant interpretations of death as a delimiting force (2001, 20). An inherently “disidentificatory” (Muñoz 1999) strategy, this transformation of dominant paradigms that relegate the racialized body to the realms of death and decay, is a profound act of resilience in the face of erasure.

In their reflection on the difference between the event at The Center and “Say Her Name,” DB said, “you know when you, like, dress up real good and you give a PowerPoint presentation and you’re, like, trying to show off your best things to the guests. Whereas, like, when you wanna put on a show for your buddies, and you can break character, and you can be real and, like, you know, like, that’s what the second event felt like” (DB 2015). Emerging in and through the unscripted potentiality of communal life outside of normative formulations of queer becoming, “me time” signals the subversive reclamation of the often-abbreviated life spans of expendable black and brown trans bodies.

A holding space for grief, and a crucible for the construction of communal memory and trans resilience, TDOR vigils have historically performed or conjured the racialized body as hypervisible excess and invisible through racial erasure. Keeping in mind that the presence of the living trans body of colour during the vigil is always already prefigured by discourses of death and disposability, any hoped-for encounter with a racialized politics of trans visibility can only take place through a violent identification with the potentiality of abject death. As Carter mused, there has never been any ‘official’ requirement that the graphic details of each death be re-narrated at TDOR events:

I think that the idea—and also if we look at how it started, Trans Day of Remembrance—and those histories, there’s some reasons why they..they..from their places of privilege, chose to set it up this way. And that perhaps in the continuation, now we just do it almost like, if there aren’t a lot of traditions, this has now become a tradition and so it’s a thing that we do. (Carter 2015)

The vigil, as Carter’s comments illustrate, can be understood as a series of stylized repetitions wherein ritual coheres in a familiar form. Tracing a line between identity formation

and Judith Butler's (1993a) seminal formulation of the repetition inherent in performativity, we can understand the ritual of the vigil as a form of authoritative speech that, through stylized repetition, accomplishes constructed identities. In other words, although Butler is particularly interested in how gender accumulates authority through the stylized repetition of acts, we can extend this analysis to how trans-normativity draws similarly from the binding force of ritualized repetition. Considered together with the scripted instructions for "How to Have a TDoR," the performative nature of the vigil is but a "domain in which power acts *as* discourse" (Butler 1993a, 17).

What I am gesturing to here are the ways by which the ritualized force of memorialization conditions trans subjectivity. Although the event organizers are certainly free to be as creative as they want when planning a vigil, practices of memorialization are nevertheless undergirded by a script that coheres potentially unruly forms of mourning by locating them within a historical genealogy bookended by the inaugural legacy of Rita Hester's death and the ceaseless performative injunction to politicize anti-trans violence through "being visible" trans citizen-subjects who, in "speaking out" their grief, can effect change (*Int'l TDOR* 2007). Thus, the afterlife of the TDOR vigil is a time of politicality, one wherein trans-normative subjectivity emerges, or is interpolated, as an effect of racialized death.

The appeal of tradition is in its capacity to cloak any spectacle in a veneer of respectability. Not only does it lend gravitas to the event of the vigil but it also secures the vigil within the primogenitary rights afforded by this entreaty to a lineage. Incorporated into the script of remembrance as a sign of tradition, the "butchering" of racialized names—to return to Carter's phrase—is but a part of the mechanism that grants legitimacy to narratives of trans belonging within the national imaginary.

What it particularly irksome for Carter is that the multicultural turn from excluding non-North American deaths at TDOR vigils to specifically *naming* the places and people from other countries has perhaps unintentionally perpetuated a new form of racism.

You know that there's a white-washing of trans community and trans organizing here, so the way to rectify it is to specifically say 'this person's from Brazil' or 'this person was from Uganda' or whatever, as a way of, like, showing that you're not erasing that they're people of colour. But as person of colour, what it is experienced as is that these people who aren't—I mean, occasionally there's someone from Brazil who reads the names—but often times the people reading the names are not from these places and what you're doing is that you're reinforcing this idea that our countries, our homes, our communities, are always going to be less safe for queer and trans people because we are somehow less open or, um, supportive, or whatever, than Canada. (Carter 2015)

Certainly, we can draw parallels between Carter's observations of the post-mortem “butchering” of the names of the dead with the spectacular re-animation of racialized trans violence that occurs on the *TDOR* website, as discussed in the previous chapter. If, as Sara Ahmed (2006) illustrates in *Queer Phenomenology*, the bodies that are distant or othered through discourses are less likely to be incorporated within the body image, then the body of colour can only remain within the domain of abjection, victimhood, and death. Abject racialized bodies thus circulate in, through, and as *necrointimacies*—the cultivation of trans-homonational tropes of belonging pre-figured through the spectacle of racialized violence.

As inaugural signposts on the road to trans-normativity, the intimate spectacle of the dead or dying racialized body invites the witnessing white body into an affective citizenship that

requires that the Other be simultaneously possessed and repudiated. Secured through performative acts of repetition, this annual “butchering” of racialized names is akin to Carter’s description of “an ecstasy of violence” that produces trans-homonational whiteness as trans resilience (Carter 2015). This is perhaps why Az, a Pakistani trans woman and a sex worker, succinctly described her experience of TDOR as both cannibalistic and productive: “Because this is what’s happening, right? Like, they’re using our dead bodies, reading out our names, and then justifying *their* jobs, *their* positions, *their* authority, *their* validity, based upon, like, us dying. So this is how our suffering is capital..it’s political capital for them” (Az 2016).

Vaid-Menon made a similar link between the consumption of trauma and political capital. In the lengthy quotation below, they argue that TDOR vigils are symbolic of a long structural history whereby the political, emotional, and aesthetic labour of transfeminine people of colour provides the impetus for trans liberation and white futurity:

So this cannibalism is not something that happens just at TDOR but it’s a structure that has been ongoing since the inception of these movements. And I also think that what trans misogyny as a structure is actually is about the invisibilization of trauma, pain, violence, whilst simultaneously the manipulation and utilization of aesthetics, labour, capital. So what happens is that transfeminine people are told that we do not experience the violence that we claim that we experience. And then the types of resistant art forms, the types of resistant fashion and politics and creativity that we create, is not seen as belonging to us—it belongs to the entire queer community. And that always feels very peculiar. So, a lot of what we call queer is actually types of aesthetics, types of language, types of, like, movements, types of flirtation, that were actually

created, and originated, and engineered by extremely desperate people who were trying to invent them as a way to survive: low-income, transfeminine, people of colour—specifically black and Latina folks—um, who were creating things like ‘Fabulosity’ and ‘Fierceness’ and ‘Cuntiness’ and ‘In your face’, etcetera, not just as, like, a celebration of self, um, but actually as a way to affirm and engage in a politics in a world that regards you as disposable. Uh, and so what ends up happening is that this thing ‘queer’ and ‘queer culture’ circulates without a material history of, um, one, who experiences violence for actually being queer, and two, the material conditions with which these aesthetics and politics were created. For me, TDOR is always just, like, a symbolic metaphor for the types of unique power relations that affect the bodies of transfeminine people where what is valued is more so our language, our aesthetics, the political world that we’ve created, more so than our bodies. And there’s that separation between culture and body that feels really scary because I think it’s actually..it helps facilitate violence against us because how are we supposed to be experiencing violence if we do not exist? (Vaid-Menon 2016).

Indeed, that racialized trans death preconditions the brief visibility of racialized trans life in trans spaces explains why TDOR vigils are such intense sites of ambivalence for so many of my research participants. Often barred from discourses of liveability, TDOR vigils are fertile provinces where the body of colour can access visibility as trans bodies and the trans body is deliberately read for race. Still, structured through a three-fold process of spectacularization, consumption, and erasure, the living trans body of colour can only be folded into trans inclusion when the racialized body is once again effaced or rendered ghostly. Thus, not unlike H’s self-

characterization of his presence as a “thorn”—that foreign, irksome presence demanding recognition from the social body—visibility for the trans subject is preconditioned by affective dynamics of the *necrointimacies* that relegate racialized trans bodies to positions of liminality in TDOR vigils.

I argue that in this case, in contrast to Avery Gordon’s (2008) notion that the ghost is a social figure that needs to be banished, at TDOR vigils the ghost is summoned in order that it be vanquished once again. The vigil *wants* to be haunted. It desires the ghost. In her thoughts about the function of the TDOR vigil, participant Dee, a mixed-race trans woman, described how she felt like these vigils demanded something of her: “The *feeling* that I get from TDOR is..want. You know, they want your body. They want to know that you have died some horrific death so that they can hold on to this, like, you know, feeling of pain or whatever. They can, you know, justify their vigilant fight for trans rights, um, and forget about you later” (Dee 2015). These reflections on the desire for the racialized trans body, I argue, is not simply that it be excessive in death. Rather, this *need* for the racialized body extends to the domain of life as the demand for a presence-as-absence.

Taashi, a South Asian genderqueer transmasculine person living in Toronto, traces this demand for the racialized body as intimately entwined with a performative cycle of guilt and negation:

I think that, like, instead of memorializing people once a year, like, how many trans women have been killed in the US this year? And almost entirely black. And, like, that’s not a situation that is, like, only a US situation, it’s a situation here. So if folks really cared about it, they would actually want to care about policy change or care about structural changes, instead of being like ‘it’s so sad..that so many people died’ once a

year..and then feel good about their guilt..and move on. Like, that's literally what it feels like, right? It's this, like, cycle of, like, 'I feel good because I feel bad about these people' and then like..or 'I feel bad in this moment, but I feel so good that I can feel that badness.' (Taashi 2015)

Thus, even when mourning for the death of a racialized person from anti-trans violence, the body of colour performs an invisible labour. This is perhaps why many of my participants experienced attendance at TDOR vigils as an additional, invisible form of affective and necropolitical labour.

As the next section illustrates, because memorialization is sutured through the repetitive ritualization of racialized trans death, trans subjectivity emerges as the teleological property of whiteness and trans-homonationalism. Made banal and fungible, racialized trans death propels the trans-normative citizen ever-forward into a neoliberal futurity where ghostly bare life can be simultaneously spectacularized, claimed, and then erased. In order to explain this, I return briefly to a specific interaction that unfolded during the 2015 TDOR event at The Center in New York.

[vi] Things Fall Apart; The Center Cannot Hold: Black Death and White Tears

When trans-identified members of the community were invited to take the stage at The Center's 2015 vigil (as previously discussed, this occurred only if there happened to be a break between invited keynote speakers and then again after the main programming had ended), dozens of eager hands shot into the air. I wondered whose voices would be heard in this deviation from scripted mourning as my thoughts drifted to the role of speaking subject as intimately bound up with notions of epistemic authority and the potential for resistance (Alcoff 1991). This is especially true in the case of melancholic attachments to narratives of loss, since the narration of loss is a performative act that buttresses the authority of the speaking subject with the

indisputable weight of aggrieved legitimacy and admirable resilience. Yet, every act of narration is necessarily also connected to questions of space. The ability to claim space as a speaking subject is an embodied reflection of the social location of the speaker (Alcoff 1991). Thus, in any invitation to take the stage, there arises a problem of representation: Which bodies are allowed to claim space as privileged speaking-subjects? Whose voices will be heard when there is no script? What sorts of narratives will materialize from the collective venting of trans loss? If trans people of colour are rendered ghostly by the necropolitical inclusion of race within tropes of death and decay, what happens when the ghost speaks?

During one of the unscheduled breaks between speakers, a trans woman of colour took to the stage and sought to remind the audience the trans community was not affected solely by discrimination based on gender; more training and resources were needed, she said, for professionals to learn how to deal with trans-identified people with mental and/or developmental disabilities. She also highlighted how many trans-identified individuals had great difficulties finding jobs or furthering their education and, furthermore, that these forms of systemic classism were compounded if the person lived outside New York City's urban population.

Another trans woman of colour spoke about how she was disturbed by the event because “[We] only acknowledge our sisters and brothers, and we only acknowledge each other, at events like this, only today. You really gotta think about it.” Time and time again, people of colour attempted to talk about the intersections of race and gender non-conformity: A black trans man who, incensed by the lack of accurate research or data on the rates of HIV transmission amongst gay transmen, came to the podium to say “If you’re gonna stand with us, stand with us for the *entire* experience—don’t just mourn our deaths, celebrate our lives.” Aggravated because she was not able to speak to the audience about a fundraiser for trans women of colour, a black trans

woman yelled “We still see the violence, and there’s still silence. Get outta here!” while the white trans man who had commandeered the microphone continued to read a poem he wrote about loving his trans sisters and brothers.

At some point during the middle of The Center’s vigil, the emcee made an announcement about a phone that had just been stolen from a member of the community who was a black trans sex worker. At this point, a black trans woman strode to the center of the room. Standing in the narrow aisle between the densely packed chairs, her body visibly trembling with anger, she addressed the seated faces before her:

...And she wants her shit back, honey! I’m sitting in a room full of all LGBT people, honey, holding their motherfucking heads up, like they’re the shit up in here...come on! I’ve been doing this shit while you all bitches were still trying to figure it out! You all bitches get these motherfucking positions and think you’re all the motherfucking shit. Who gave you all that pride? Your community gave you all this motherfucking pride! Who built this motherfucking building, we built this motherfucking building, with our motherfucking tears, working on these motherfucking streets and giving our motherfucking lives for these motherfucking buildings and these causes..and we don’t have shit!

Peeling herself from the tiny area she occupied by the wall, another woman of colour approached the middle of the room, yelling, “She went through a lot to buy this phone! I witnessed that. She went through a lot to buy her phone. She cannot be working without her phone.”

In that moment, the audience was confronted with the lived reality of trans women of colour who were sex workers and who were marginalized both economically and politically. Thinking back to the event unfolding, DB said, “I think I was also just, like, ‘Good! Yell! I

mean, everything you're saying is true..like, yell! I think when I watch folks have *real* emotions verbally in those spaces, I feel like..like I'm cheering them on from my seat—'cause that's what I want to be doing—and I don't know how to. And so, it felt like..like revealing a crack in this beautiful thing that they had built" (DB 2015). The self-congratulatory coverage of the organization's events over the past years and the invitation to visit the webpages of their financial backers had to cede to a moment that "was so real...there was actual emotion in that room and everything that she was saying was, like, so honest. And I'm so happy that she went on for as long as she did. And then it turned *bad* so quickly" (DB 2015).

The "bad" DB referenced started when the emcee, in an attempt to continue with scheduled programming, began to introduce the next keynote speaker. There was a palpable rupture in the smooth-flow of this ordinary event. Having lost the audience's attention, his amplified voice was now anxiously competing with the disgruntled buzzing from the handful of people of colour who were attempting to console the distraught woman and the lower registers of those attempting to shush them back into attentiveness. A "seething absence" (Gordon 2008, 8) suddenly made present, the materialization of distraught trans bodies of colour from the corners of the room laid bare the workings of capitalism, political labour, and homonationalism within the rubrics of trans mourning. What had previously been "a blanket, mainstream, white event" now had "cracks in it where people of colour were screaming out and the organizers did everything they could to hold it down" (DB 2015).

In *Ghostly Matters*, Avery Gordon (2008) writes of haunting as one way in which "systems of power make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life, especially when they are over and done with..." (xvi). As an animated state, this formulation of haunting lays bare not only the "sedimented conditions of everyday violence" (Gordon 2008, 8) that

bolster the mechanisms of social and legal exclusion that define bare life but also, and perhaps more frighteningly for many in that event space, produce a “something-to-be-done” (xvi). By pointing to the “cracks” (DB 2015) in the foundation of trans memorialization, haunting invites us to pay attention to the ways in which organized forces and systemic structures impact our lives. What is interesting, however, is *how* the invitation to grapple with the “ghostly matter” of race and class within practices of trans memorialization played out at this TDOR vigil.

When the audience learned that both women self-identified as sex workers, a middle-aged white man suggested that a hat be passed around to buy her a brand-new phone. Suddenly, hands dipped into wallets—“all the white people gave her money” (DB 2015)—guiltily feeding one-, five-, and twenty-dollar bills into the grateful maw of a blue baseball cap. When she learned that the donations far exceeded the cost of her stolen phone, the woman burst into conflicted tears, explaining that whilst she was grateful for the money, and apologetic for her angry outburst earlier, the money itself meant nothing compared to the way people like her were constantly overlooked except on the occasion of TDOR. Her flustered *thank yous* were met with the self-congratulatory zest of a flurry of white hands in applause. Dismissed, her body shrank back against the confines of the standing-room-only wall space.⁸⁸

As I have illustrated, for many of my participants, TDOR vigils are undergirded by an implicit structural violence that occurs through the scripted consumption of racialized suffering. Yet through the figure of this speaking ghost, we can also see how neoliberal ideals and trans-normativity is sutured through white guilt, such that, while it seeks the ‘ghost’ in order seal the

⁸⁸ Later that night, at “Say Her Name,” I would watch that roll of money shrink as this “renegade ghost” slipped bill after bill into the bras and waistbands of other trans women of colour—almost as though she were trying to wash the memory of the event away (Gordon 2008, 40).

event of memorialization, the structure cannot hold when the laboring ghost itself demands an audience.

Immediately after this haunting spectacle of the speaking ghost, a white speaker took the stage to tell the audience that while mourning the pointless violence of transphobia was important, “it *is* getting better and there is hope for all of us and for a brighter future” (The Center 2015). This familiar refrain that promises ‘better’ trans futures finds its affective antecedent in Dan Savage and Terry Miller’s “It Gets Better” Project. Created in 2010, this viral video campaign emerged as a celebrity response to an increase in suicides among queer North American youth. Through harnessing discourses of hope and freedom, the project invited distraught queer youth to imagine a better, queerer, future. While the project was undoubtedly successful in providing space for the expression of public anguish and collective mourning, scholars such as Jasbir Puar (2010), Patrick Grzanka and Emily Mann (2014), and Amy Saunders (2016) have also been critical of the mobilization of queer death in serving the homonational agendas of a privileged few. While the aforementioned scholars differ in their approaches to understanding the political afterlife of death in “It Gets Better,” what is particularly poignant here are their critiques of how homonormativity and whiteness emerge as the privileged signifiers of a hopeful LGBT futurity.

In a dialogue with José Muñoz, Lisa Duggan postulates that the deployment of political hope is often “premised on nostalgia in false histories, complacency about brutal presents, and desires for an idealized future of unchallenged domination” (Duggan and Muñoz 2009, 275). Rooted in the nourishing fantasy of a common past, this democratic language of hope bypasses the present, locating the grieving trans-normative subject within the shared dream of a genealogy wrought by the possessive economy of *necrointimacy*. Indeed, at the 2015 TDOR event at The

Center, this deployment of a hopeful futurity circulated as “the affective reward for conformity, the privatized emotional bonus for the right kind of investments in the family, private property and the state” (Duggan and Muñoz 2009, 276).

Although TDOR serves as a focal point for much trans activism and political organizing, these vigils are markedly different from, for instance, the annual anticipation of Pride events, which are organized around LGBTQ acceptance. In stark contrast to Pride, the scheduled recognition of trans identities on November 20th is achieved predominantly through stories of death and violence. Yet, as with Pride events, the events organized by more-established LGBT centers tend to frame trans subjectivity through the sorts of rights-based claims that implicitly link hopeful discourses of trans-homonational acceptability and utopian futurity to necessary whiteness.⁸⁹

As I have argued in this chapter, the turn to trans futurity requires a three-fold movement of spectacularization, consumption and erasure. In its first iteration, as with the *TDOR* website, TDOR vigils structure the inclusion of the racialized trans subject through discourses of death and violence; however, it is a provisional inclusion. To grant a voice to the disgusted Other to whom visibility has been foreclosed is, as I argued in Chapter One, to lay waste to the discrete myths that sustain the ego itself. This is why, following Cheng (2001), “white liberals need to keep burying the racial others in order to memorialize them” (11). The racialized Other *must* be maintained within existing structures as a “formative but denied ghost” to be conjured and consumed in times of crises (Cheng 2001, 12). Unlike those who have already been victims of racialized anti-trans violence, the presence of racialized trans life at the TDOR vigil has a haunting effect on both the rituals and spaces of memorialization. Thus, in the third and

⁸⁹ This observation is echoed in a recently published piece by Micha Cárdenas who observes that “Often, trans experience begins with an affective claim to futurity that rejects the truth of the visible” (2017, 178).

simultaneous movement, the “ghostly matter” of race and class must be absented from the narrative of trans-homonationalism, since it problematizes the neat genealogy of trans belonging within queer futurity.

Reading the performative ritual of TDOR vigils as a form of vigilance allows for an appreciation of how the scripted ritualization of trans death becomes a “substitute for dealing with the ghostly matter” (Gordon 2008, 16) that is the troubling role of race in modernity. As this chapter illustrates, perpetually vanquished via the consumptive spectacles of *necrointimacy*, the role of racialized bodies in TDOR vigils is central to structuring trans-normativity. In the next chapter, I examine the ways in which the trans vigil colludes and collides with post-9/11 vigilance in service of trans-homonationalism.

Chalk Dust: Vigilance and the Necrointimacies of Trans-Homonationalism

chalk [chawk] n. an methamphetamine derivative used in the form of a crystalline hydrochloride; used as a stimulant to the nervous system and as an appetite suppressant.

A controlled substance.
- Oxford English Dictionary

[i] Introduction

We live in times more sensitive than ever to hatred based violence, especially since the events of *September 11th*. Yet even now, the deaths of those based on anti-transgender hatred or prejudice are largely ignored. Over the last decade, more than one person per month has died due to transgender-based hate or prejudice, regardless of any other factors in their lives. This trend shows no sign of abating. (*Int'l TDOR* n.d.b; emphasis mine)

I came across this quote a few years ago while preparing for a guest talk at a TDOR vigil in the Greater Toronto Area. In order to better contextualize trans memorialization within the Canadian landscape, I had been researching several Canadian LGBT advocacy centers and, in the process, discovered a clear pattern: without exception, every Canadian LGBT organization drew upon, or provided a hyperlink to, the aforementioned quote from US-based *TDOR* website in order to contextualize the importance of trans memorialization.

This evocation of 9/11 within the framework of anti-trans violence, and the push for state-sponsored trans protection, continues to trouble me because of its implicit mobilization of racialized bodies as threatening and antithetical to both the nation and trans rights. In this quote, the transnational recirculation of the trauma of 9/11 is used as leverage for the inclusion of gender-nonconforming subjects within state-sponsored protection. However, the deployment of

the abstract figure of the violent terrorist also raises anxieties about safeguarding the nation's borders, and the resuscitation of national trauma inspires a defensive turn towards military exceptionalism and increased surveillance. This juxtaposition of the violent Orientalized terrorist with the vulnerable Western (trans) subject ostensibly creates a (white) trans-normative subject who is worthy of state protection from anti-trans violence. In other words, the mobilization of terrorism as an appeal to tolerance strengthens and legitimizes the very forms of state surveillance that are antithetical to the continued existence of racialized and/or gender-nonconforming bodies.

As this chapter argues, the circulation of national hypervigilance in response to fear leads to a contradictory form of trans-homonationalism. Following the events of 9/11, trans activists from the West increasingly spectacularized trans of colour deaths from Muslim countries in order to highlight the need for stronger trans rights in the West. As a result, in the US, the trauma of 9/11 has been deployed as a defense of trans human rights and patriotism by both the conservative right and trans activists. Of course, when it comes to the state, the inclusion of trans bodies within rights-based discourses is likewise duplicitous. State powers will refer to trans populations in order to justify the war against terror, or the increased surveillance of Muslims, whilst simultaneously excluding the trans population from the same rights which they benevolently purport to grant.

The flip side of this, as I will illustrate, is that circulation of these violent *necrointimacies* inevitably condition spaces of constructed visibility for the emergence of (some) trans subjects who must then adhere to new forms of trans-homonational inclusion while justifying increased forms of military exceptionalism against foreign countries. Thus, I argue that we need to understand the apparent alignment of the state with LGBT rights as but a provisional, and

strategic, mis-alignment, whereby only ‘some’ transbodies are folded within the cozy confines of state-approval and only some of the time.

The framing of anti-trans violence and trans memorialization in the service of securing trans *life* raises a number of important questions about the shared affective space within which the trans vigil and the vigilance against terrorism coalesce: In an era when the extraordinary is the new ordinary, how do experiences of extraordinary fear and trauma feed back into the ordinary landscape? How do bodies circulate differently within these circuits of (extra)ordinary affects? How do we trace the interlocking effects of race and (trans)sexuality within these animations of (extra)ordinary affects? What is the relationship between counter-terrorism and trans activism? How can we conceptualize the deployment of the abstracted terrorist body in service of the visibly obliterated trans body? How do we trace this slide between the vigilant reactions borne of nationalism and the vigil that re-acts the violent intimacies of hypervigilance in modernity?

In order to analyze trans memorialization within the context of post-9/11 counter-terrorism, I begin this chapter with a brief discussion framing the relationship between fear, trauma, and hypervigilance. In particular, I describe how post-9/11 US governmentality has invested heavily in the culture of fear via the rhetorical deployment of potential terror. Second, through participant observation at the National September 11 Memorial & Museum, I illustrate how post-9/11 trauma serves as a “Ground Zero” for the mobilization of fearful national subjects within broader mechanisms of surveillance against people of colour. Through a brief analysis of the curated theatrics of the spectacularized re-circulation and re-virtualization of 9/11 trauma in the National September 11 Memorial & Museum, I illustrate how the consumption of national

trauma sutures national identity together and allows for the strategic inclusion of normative subjects in the future anterior (Massumi 2010, 6).

Third, bringing 9/11 hypervigilance into dialogue with TDOR vigils, I illustrate the contradictory place occupied by trans bodies within the North American rhetoric of counter-terrorist nationalism. On one hand dangerous and on the other recuperable, the stealthy trans body parallels the stealthy terrorist body in its capacity to unsettle the perceived integrity of the nation's literal and metaphorical boundaries. Linking the 'byte-sized' servings of post-9/11 trauma to the memorialization of trans of colour victims on *TDOR* website, I show how the invocation of the abstract figure of the racialized terrorist becomes an invitation for transnormative bodies to provisionally assemble under the sign of the American flag.

As Achille Mbembe (2003) explains, life "exists only in bursts and in exchange with death" (15). In this final section, we catch fleeting glimpses of life's textures within the worn creases between the wakefulness of the vigil and the restlessness dance of collective vigilance. Turning to the *TDOR* website's portrayal of narratives of anti-trans violence in perceived 'enemy states,' I show how the revirtualization of post-9/11 trauma coalesces with *necrointimate* imaginary thus mobilizing patriotic fear in the service of trans-homonationalism.

[ii] Fear and the Cultivation of Ordinary Hyper-Vigilance

What is the work of fear? Fear, as Brian Massumi (2005) explains makes itself felt as a nonconscious force on the body, compelling it into action, before the content of that fear is consciously registered. Fear activates the body and triggers the nervous system into "a networked jumpiness" (Massumi 2005, 32). In many ways, fear has the same effect on the nervous system as the manufactured amphetamines whose synthesized feedback loops follow many of the same

pathways as fear. Amphetamines ‘amp up’ the central nervous system, flooding it with the steely rush of adrenaline needed to combat ‘combat fatigue,’ and modulating the body so that it is primed for (re)action. In the throes of this synthesized emergency, the body’s involuntary responses operate in overtime, temporarily suspending the background operations that characterise daily life. The body twitches or trembles with that sense of heightened alertness that is the trademark quality of vigilance. Waiting, watching, wondering, wandering, and wary, engulfed by the electric quality of uncontained energy, the entire system is in a state of taut incipience, like a live wire, jack-knifing erratically with paranoid expectation.

As with amphetamines, this capacity of fear to “activate” (Massumi 2005, 36) the body at the nonconscious level means that there is often a disconnect between the source of fear and the feeling of fear. By virtue of this disconnect, fear can be thought of as an unqualified intensity: “Fear at this level of pure activation in the time slip of threat is the intensity of the experience and not yet a content of it. Threat strikes the nervous system with a directness forbidding any separation between the responsiveness of the body and its environment” (Massumi 2005, 37). The murkiness between the experience of fear and the content of fear marks the affective terrain of fear amenable to political intervention.

As with my preliminary example, the cultivation of fear is a controlled substance whose manufacture, possession, and use is regulated by the mechanisms of governmentality. The irony, of course, is that substances which ostensibly require the oversight of government control are the least likely to actually *be* controllable.⁹⁰ But, while the trope of fear works to safeguard a nation-state against enemy outsiders, as with any ‘controlled’ substance, fear refuses the neat contours

⁹⁰ In this sense, the distribution of (un)controlled substances mimic the volatility of repressed emotionality.

of domestication. Instead, fear has, what Sara Ahmed (2002) describes as, a rippling effect.⁹¹ One cannot know in advance what effects fear will have on the socio-political contours of a nation or a community. The trick to controlling the uncontrollable lies in the careful modulation and deliberate calibration of these doses of stimulation.

The modern experience, writes Susan Buck-Morss (1992), is centered on sustained doses of ‘shock’. Marked by suddenness, shock is an often-unpleasant unexpectedness, that disquieting *something* which interrupts the flow of the ‘normal’. However, post-9/11 counter-terrorist rhetoric shapes the normal through shock. A hallmark of modernity, this plugged-in, jacked-up buzz that characterizes the “battlefield experience” of hypervigilance shapes our present as fearful time in which “things are [always](potentially) happening” (Stewart 2007, 36). Certainly, as Sara Ahmed (2004a) explains, the “complexity of the spatial and bodily politics of fear has perhaps never been so apparent in the global economies of fear since September 11 [2001]” (128).

Indeed, several scholars have already illustrated how post-9/11 US governmentality has invested heavily in the culture of fear via the rhetorical deployment of potential terror (Larabee 2003; Massumi 2005, 2010; Rothe and Muzzatti 2004), an ever-expanding reach of surveillance (Gandy 2007; Gates 2005; Lyon 2003), and the cultivation of a docile patriotic nationalism (Katz 2008; Puar and Rai 2004). Central to the production of patriotic docility was the crystallization of racialized bodies as the targets of the new systems of surveillance (Welch 2006). Indeed, the intersections between counter-terrorism, biometrics, racialization, and the fear of domestic terrorism has already been well documented in the United States (Finn 2011; Grewal 2003; Monahan 2010; Onwudiwe 2010; Puar 2007; Razack 2008) as well as Canada, Great Britain, and

⁹¹ For more on the “rippling” effect of emotions, see Sara Ahmed’s (2002) *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, pg 45.

Australia (Abbas 2004; Leman-Langlois and Brodeur 2005; Monaghan 2014; Poynting and Perry 2007).

But, as Buck-Morss explains, the problem is that “under the conditions of modern shock—the daily shocks of the modern world—response to stimuli without thinking has become necessary for survival” (1992, 16). Ordinary hyper-vigilance characterizes this habitual banality of taut expectation—the toes curled in tense anticipation at the edge of a slippery diving-board—that intensity of incipience, the in-breath that hyphenates any action. Ordinary hypervigilance, is thus, emblematic of the mechanisms of banal violence—a state wherein ever-watchful vigilance marks the borders between the docile subject and the enemy other.

[iii] Ground Zero: Productive Fear and the Re-Virtualization of National Trauma

Fear at this level of pure activation in the time slip of threat is the *intensity* of the experience and not yet a content of it. (Masumi 2005, 37)

Waiting in line at the entrance to the ‘National September 11 Memorial & Museum’ feels like a combination of the resigned impatience of an airport security check with the anticipatory impatience of an amusement park ride. Witness the flush-cheeked, squealing children weaving through and in-between the civilized forest of adult legs, the anxious fiddling with wallets and purses at the window by the entrance, and the expectant dash inside upon payment.

The descent into the dark belly of the museum is akin to being entombed: the sunlight that streams through the large windows and across the rusted, warped, steel girders saved from the ruins of Ground Zero eventually dissipates and fades as the surrounding chatter gives way to a hushed, gloomy silence. The world down here is muffled, dark, and subdued. As your eyes adjust to the dimly-lit foyer, take a moment to notice the groups of camera-bedecked tourists fluttering anxiously around their patient guide as they wait for tours to begin, the slightly bewildered pair

of retirees clutching check-marked roadmaps filled with attractions of national importance, and the impatient toddler straining against the indignity of the child's harness tethered to his back. This could be any museum in Anywhere-America. But beneath the sublime portraiture of this ode to patriotic nationalism, lies something more tenuous: a message that's harder to swallow.

The tour guide slowly pirouettes towards you as he gathers his flock together. You notice his black polo shirt, upon which is embroidered a white number nine, followed by the crystal-blue number eleven, whose tall rectangular shape is evocative of the ghostly towers that once stood in this very place. Paired with unremarkable khakis, this uniform is uncomfortably similar to the shirts worn at McDonald's counters across America. The gap between his cheerful smile and the ordinariness of the polo shirt—such a ubiquitous part of the service industry in this modern post-industrial American landscape—against the backdrop of the twisted skeletal remains of the two towers is unsettling.

In stark contrast to the somber tomb-like atmosphere of the museum lobby, a brightly-lit gift store beckons you to cast your eyes across the rows of commemorative memorial keychains and fridge magnets, all of which bear that ubiquitous image of the gleaming twin towers as they stood before September 11th 2001. Or perhaps you would prefer a commemorative t-shirt bearing both the 9/11 Memorial and Museum logo and the FDNY logo as a tribute to the brave men and women who were part of the New York City Fire Department. Or perhaps you could choose to take home an official 9/11 Christmas tree ornament. Should you choose to forgo the pleasures of the postcard selection, you may select a simple memorial stone, upon which is engraved: "No day shall erase you from the memory of time." But, if Virgil's words don't appeal to you, there is always time to buy that limited-edition 9/11 eraser.

At the back of the gift store, right by the cashier, a floor-to-ceiling projection of the chaos on the streets on the morning of September 11th 2001 loops endlessly in a carefully choreographed bid for your attention. You examine the careful displays of American flags and memorial bags, the totes, mugs, DVDs, iPhone cases, and postcards, as larger-than-life, ash-covered strangers run, limp, or crawl through the debris-strewn street.

Peppered with the electronic beeps of an overworked debit machine signaling each guilty purchase of trauma's souvenirs, the gift shop offers an aesthetics of revirtualized (Masumi 2005) trauma through the commodification of artifacts, overlaid with the technologically-mediated persistence of the sounds of wailing sirens and screams of outrage and desperation. And in that moment, "something throws itself together in a moment as an event and as a sensation; a something both animated and inhabitable" (Stewart 2007, 1). This is where the innocent banality of a child's stuffed toy dog butts uncomfortably against the haunting legacy of the fluorescent orange vest it is wearing, upon which the words "search and rescue" are printed in bold.

Eye-contact is studiously avoided as sweaty hands reach for the familiar outlines of wallets and overly-cheerful voices pander about the merits of their purchases. Strangers become co-conspirators in maintaining of this façade of normalcy as technologically-mediated screams intensify, reaching a fevered climax as the South tower (re)disintegrates on the giant LED screens at the back of the store.

Regardless of whether you choose to make a purchase, you will leave the gift shop with the only item without a price tag: that disquieting sense of unease when the smooth flow of the ordinary has been interrupted through the paradoxical reformulation of the extraordinary as ordinary.

Ground Zero— a fixed point in space, a zero-dimensional point on a map. Here stood the World Trade Center, its towering twins a testament to the might of the American dollar and the ubiquity of the American dream. This almost fifteen-acre scar in Lower Manhattan, New York City still echoes with the living memories of fear, terror, destruction, chaos, anger and pain. While many still search through the socio-political rubble for the origins of their trauma, Ella Shohat (2002) tells us that “[d]espite its traumatic magnitude, September 11th is neither the end of history, nor its beginning” (68). As with Reagan’s “Zero Tolerance” policy, whose War on Drugs would set the stage for today’s prison industrial system and proliferation of techniques of racial profiling, Ground Zero is just one manifestation of violence’s unfolding. Zero Tolerance and Ground Zero are the jacked-up and high-jacked nodes of intensity, the twin towers of experience through which affect operates virtually on the national psyche.

When tragedy turns the once-ordinary scene into a memorial, the afterglow of trauma transforms bare narrative into nationalist elegy. When the ordinary becomes extra-ordinary, this catastrophe propels individuals from their cocoons of self-absorption into the fragile embrace of a tentative “we.” Galvanized by an anxious multiplicity, the memory of a single traumatic event, such as 9/11, can become a collective reservoir of national identity or a sticky referent to which disparate populations may attach in tentative, provisional alliances. As effectively/affectively common ground, Ground Zero is a symbolic space that structures the ever-unfolding, abstracted appeal to memory in which, as Homi Bhabha (1990) points out, “the difference of space returns as the sameness of time, turning territory into tradition, turning the people into one” (213). Everything else is either in excess of, or in want of, the constancy of its fraught legacy. As “space that is used to represent space” (Smith and Katz 1993, 69), anything outside of Ground

Zero's borders is seen as elusive, opaque, unfamiliar and seemingly unfathomable. As such, Ground Zero is not an abstract space of boundless neutrality; rather, it is the symbolic manifestation of sovereign space. At once delimited by the always-already racialized legacy of Reagan-esque 'Zero Tolerance' policies, Ground Zero sets the limits of contemporary American imperialism and the delineation of its absences/presences, visible/invisible, insider/outsider, citizen/foreigner, good/evil, self/other, and of course, life/death.⁹² Ground Zero, then, is the space where fragments of the past scar an already abstract present, which can only bleed these losses into an imagined, and uncertain, future.

More than just a traumatic space, Ground Zero is also the well-spring for contemporary administration of regimes of productive fear. In the wake of the events of September 11 2001, what was once a "risk society gave way to the empire of fear" (Larabee 2003, 19). The events of 9/11, argues Massumi (2005), provided a "perceptual focal point for the spontaneous mass coordination of affect" in the service of socio-political intervention (33). Following the terrorist attacks on American soil, then-President Bush's management of the unnamed terrorist threat was a speculative and metabolic feat that *harnessed* the resultant fear to justify government intervention in those countries assumed to be responsible for the attack.

The anonymity of this nameless threat meant that it could represent "virtually any abhorrent act of violence" perceived as directed towards American soil (Hoffman 1999, 13). Indeed, as Ann Larabee (2003) argues in her analysis of the cultivation of nationalism in response to post-9/11 fear, the abstraction of the enemy allowed for an expansion of the category

⁹² Indeed, as Enrica Picarelli (2011) has argued in her analysis of the mobilization of 9/11 in media culture, aside from being a "watershed moment" (297) for the tautological dissemination of increasing forms of social control in the pursuit of freedom and democracy, the event itself has a self-perpetuating quality that allows for fear to be re-booted in the "affective solicitation of urgency" (301).

of the would-be-terrorist to include those who would seem to threaten American values, thus eroding national unity.

Certainly, several scholars have already drawn upon Foucauldian analyses of fear as an instrument of governmentality (Ahmed 2002; Butler 2006; Cavarero 2009; Massumi 2015). In particular, the biopolitical production of terror has been tied to the entrenchment of sovereign rights, the defense of property, the legitimization of state surveillance, and iterations of individual freedom (Agamben 1998; Ahmed 2006; Hobbes 1985). An overarching theme in all of these works is the role of insecurity in mobilizing a collective body against a threatening object, regardless of whether that particular object is removed from the actual source of fear. But what is important here is that fear is intimately connected to an imagined future loss, the anticipatory nature of which requires that the nation always be hypervigilant. In other words, fear works to mobilize the collective psyche into a state of ordinary hypervigilance. Thus, we can understand how those domestic anxieties which plague the nation-state are intimately connected to a praxis of hypervigilance—the “quiet stranglehold of a full-time alertness” (Gordon 2008, 206)—shaped by the ordinary terrors securing the nation.

But how is hypervigilance sustained? How does hypervigilance—which is characterized by fear and traumatic repetition—work to secure freedom? In *Ordinary Affects*, Kathleen Stewart writes that the turn of the century, with its technological advancements and modern warfare, means that the “hard, resilient, need to react has become a charged habit” and a habitual function of state power (2007, 16). However, the hypervigilance she is gesturing to is a state of (extra?)ordinary crisis that cannot be maintained indefinitely. Rather, in order to be effective, this politics of “everyday fear” must be continuously exposed to the traumatic event to which it is attached. Or, to follow Sara Ahmed’s formulation of the utility of fear, the fantasy of the

“imagined community” (Anderson 2005, 48) of the nation is dependent upon the “perpetual re-staging” (Ahmed 2004b, 118) of another kind of fantasy altogether—the fantasy of violation.

This re-virtualization of the trauma of 9/11 allows for an examination of the re-circulation of the productive economy of fear that, in turn, serves as a locus for the defense of human rights and nationalist-patriotism by both the conservative right and trans people.

Traumatic Chronographies and the Re-virtualization of Productive Fear

The project of inspiring a healthy fear of the nameless enemy has been impacted by the hypermediacy ushered by technological advances (Grusin 2010). Although America had seen a previous attack⁹³ on Ground Zero, the real-time mediatization of 9/11 lent it an intense quality of immediacy that had never been seen before. Indeed, “absence, latency, unrepresentability, the invisible trace, deferral or belatedness were terms that seemed entirely misplaced in the face of thousands of victims, the smoking ruins of ground zero, the endless flow of images, not to mention that ensuing ‘War on Terror’” (Elsaesser 2001, 195). Likewise, Thomas Riegler (2016) argues that, unlike in the past, “when trauma had been followed by a latency period in which its cultural meanings could be negotiated, present-day media instantly provides images and corresponding interpretation” (111). Thus, by virtue of the “you are there” drama that unfolded through the real-time broadcasting of the attacks on the World Trade Center, 9/11 departs from previous terror attacks because of the unprecedented virtualization of terror (Kellner 2004, 44).

However, in the intervening years, the recirculation of the initial virtualized trauma of 9/11 has led to the *re*-virtualization of national trauma in the service of surveillance. A good example of this re-virtualization and recirculation of trauma occurs in the Memorial Museum’s

⁹³ The World Trade Centre had been the target of an organized “terrorist” attack in 1993 when a truck bomb was detonated below the North Tower. Six people lost their lives and scores were injured. See Nacos 1996.

immersive staging of the timeline of September 11 2001. In this experiential labyrinth of suffering, museum patrons wander through time-marked twists-and-turns of a darkened maze whose disorienting effect is highlighted by an auditory cacophony of over-lapping news reports blaring from speakers hidden in the corners of the exhibit. The exhibit itself is staged in such a manner as to prevent back-tracking once you have entered its doors. Unable to escape, you have no choice but to relive the events in gruesome detail: minute by minute. Essentially a *traumatic chronography*, the exhibit re-creates, or re-virtualizes, the immediacy of being trapped at a visceral level by offering its patrons a carefully curated version of national trauma: the endlessly looping tracks of sirens overlaid with panicked news reports, the suffocating darkness, the dense crowd pressing at you from all sides due to the narrow pathway, and the plaintive wail of a frightened child, all elicit real-time responses in the body despite the fact that there *is* no real threat. You lunge forward, anxious to escape the desperation of the bodies around you. But what you desperately hope is the green glow of an “Exit” sign turns out to be another blind corner filled with the illuminated, dust-covered displays of broken spectacles, the charred remains of prayer cards and rosaries, orphaned wallets, and blood-spattered shoes.

This re-virtualization of trauma in real-time lends the romantic glow of nostalgia to the contours of the nation-state; the throbbing wounds of territorial violation drawing bodies closer together in “the guise of an illusory futurity: [a defense of] what one is and will continue to be” (Puar 2007, 215). The reason that trauma is such a ‘sticky’ object is because of the wretched suspension between the event and the perception of the memory of the event. Or, as Massumi beautifully describes it:

Memory and perception share the moment, entering into immediate proximity to each other, while remaining strangers. Their disjointed immediacy syncopates the instant from

within. We do not see now what we can never have seen, even as we watched: the enormity of the *event*. The present tense where memory and perception come disjunctively together is the time of the event that is like a lost between of the towers and their ruins, an interval in which life was suspended for an instantaneous duration that was more like a stilled eternity than a passing present, comprehending reflection gone AWOL. (Massumi 2015, 63)

Deterritorialized this abstraction of the enemy body— which could be anyone and anywhere— only served to highlight the territorial mechanism of the defense against national trauma: an instance where the unresolvable uncertainty evoked by *le terreur* slams into the certain stability of the unconcludability of trauma narratives, especially in relation to the materiality of the physical *terre* of Ground Zero. National trauma, in other words, presents us with the fanatical demands of an unfinished story, an obsessional neurosis that must *remain* unfinished since the fantasy of the collective wound cannot withstand its closure.

The resulting hypervigilance is a socio-political symptom that “surfaces,” or creates the effect, of the nation’s boundaries and its subjects. Hypervigilance, like fear, is symptomatic of the legacy of loss and a defense against the possibility of future loss. But, following my discussion of the performativity of loss and its role in shaping queer and trans communities in Chapters 1 and 3, this loss requires constant re-narration “lest we forget.” In other words, if the consumption of these traumatic narratives works to suture the fragile threads of national belonging, then national stories of collective trauma are dependent on the strategic deployment of losses that must be periodically repeated in order to cohere the “imagined community” (Anderson 2005, 49) of the nation-state. Furthermore, the prohibition against forgetting, and the

narratives that guard against the betrayal of memory, are intimately aligned with the politics of belonging to the nation-state.

Hypervigilance, writes Massumi, is intimately entwined with the direct activation of disparate bodies that can be addressed “from the dispositional angle of their affectivity, instead of...from the [subjects’] positional angle of their ideations” (Massumi 2005, 34). As an instrument of modern governmentality, the nervous system requires the deployment of fear in increasingly larger doses in order to achieve the same opioid effect of patriotic hypervigilance. These necessary fantasies of violation depend upon the constant re-enactment of trauma through the mobilization of patriotic narratives of remembrance. Through side-stepping the present, the mechanism of hypervigilance conjures provisional identities through the consumptive circulation of the “postmemory” (Schwab 2010, 13) of future national trauma.⁹⁴ Coupled with the abstraction of the enemy, the after-the-fact-ness of meaning was a political operator that allowed fear to circulate and stick to “whatever-enemy” and “whatever-object” (Massumi 2010, 9). Thus, the weapons of this contemporary form of speculative governance were a “mode of power,” a “growth politics” (Massumi 2010, 3) whose meaning solidified— however temporarily— only after the fact.

There are myriad approaches to thinking through the commodification of trauma. Of particular importance are understandings of traumatic storytelling, or the narrativization of historic violence, as a political pastime rooted in national sentimentality (Colvin 2006; Yaeger

⁹⁴ I use the term provisional here to signal the shifting affective terrain of disparate identifications that are contingently mobilized against targets of insecurity via the re-narrativization of collective trauma. Whilst the term “postmemory” originated in Holocaust Studies as a descriptor for the phenomenon of inter or trans-generational trauma, my application of it “reflects [the] uneasy oscillation between continuity and rupture” of memory as well as the mechanisms of investment, projection, and [re]creation that sustains it (Hirsch 2008, 107). Thus, the post in ‘postmemory’ operates under the misleading sign of a belated inheritance that characterizes other hyphenated moments: post-modern, post-colonial, post-race, and, most recently, post-9/11.

2002). Indeed, as Christopher J. Colvin (2006) illustrates in “Trafficking Trauma,” the psychic and political reconstruction of “[g]lobalising forms of trauma discourse and practice also run parallel with globalising forms of political intervention” (173). In particular, Colvin argues that media outlets and museums reproduce and reconstruct traumatic stories and so that they may be recirculated for global consumption by a diverse array of audiences. Specifically, they point to the traffic in trauma as narratives of suffering that have been “reduced to the most important, shocking and morally obvious details of harm, circulated less as specific histories in need of specific interventions or response but more as ‘signs of injury [or] symbols of the moral bankruptcy’” (Colvin 2006, 173) as a result of a political system and thus a vector for group identity formation through a common rejection of a common enemy or set of beliefs.⁹⁵

As Massumi (2005) illustrates in “Fear (The Spectrum Said),” we can trace the rogue affects of calibrated emotionality in the 2002 colour-coded terrorism alert system and the abstraction of the figure of the enemy in the service of vigilant nationalism. Installed by the Department of Homeland Security, the alert system was implemented as “part of a series of initiatives to improve coordination and communication among all levels of government and the American public in the fight against terrorism” (US Department of Homeland Security 2017). The imminence of ‘threat’ addressed the individual body at an affective level, effectively reterritorializing the singular under the sign of collective docility such that “the nation has danced ever since between yellow and orange. Life has restlessly settled, to all appearances

⁹⁵ Nowhere was this need for a “common enemy” so apparent as in the museum’s recreation of the events leading up to 9/11. Sandwiched between the dark viscosity of the *traumatic chronography* of the minute-by-minute 9/11 experience, and a light airy atrium filled with pre-9/11 movie posters of the Twin Towers from popular movies, the room dedicated to Al-Qaeda’s involvement in the attacks circulates the figure of the terrorist through strategic abstractions. In stark contrast to the symbolism of glossy Hollywood nostalgia, the build-up to the trauma of 9/11 is narrated to us via the spectre of malevolent terrorist bodies whose disembodied presences are magnified by the untranslated guttural Arabic dialogue echoing back-and-forth across the room.

permanently, on the redward end of the spectrum, the blue-greens of tranquility a thing of the past. 'Safe' doesn't even merit a hue. Safe, it would seem, has fallen off the spectrum of perception. Insecurity, the spectrum says, is the new normal" (Massumi 2005, 31). This chromatic calibration of ordinary affects manipulated the central nervous system (Buck-Morss 1992) of the masses by simultaneously inciting fear and hyper-vigilance whilst encouraging "life-time, capital-time; time of growth, time for fear" (Massumi 2010, 2).

However, aside from the reification of neoliberal patriotism, the simplistic model provided by the Department of Homeland Security also did something else: it addressed the body from the dispositional angle of the helpless figure of the child. Reduced to childhood's palette of bright reds, oranges, yellows, blues, and greens, the colour chart strategically eschewed the obligatory niceties of providing the "infantile citizen" with any information beyond what was necessary to trigger the public response (Berlant 1997, 27). Under this rubric, the colour red simply indicated the severity of threat's immanency. In other words, the colour-coded system evoked a primal paternalism which commanded the American public to "stop" with the insistent appeal of a traffic light. Triggered in this way, the imminence of the unspecified threat shaped the contours of indeterminate fear: "[t]hreat triggers fear. The fear is of disruption. The fear *is* a disruption" (Massumi 2010, 8). Closely linked to these theatrics of speculative fear was the re-coding of trauma in a way that converted the threat from a geopolitical manifestation to the generic status of economic disruption (Massumi 2010, 4). Thus yoked to capitalism, the defense

against trauma was maintained through the neoliberal, state-sanctioned exhortation to “keep shopping”⁹⁶ lest the terrorists win (Massumi 2010, 4).

The infamous colour-coded alert system was eventually replaced in 2011 with a two-pronged alert system that was starkly different from the primal vibrancy of its predecessor. This new “National Terrorist Advisory System” (NTAS) consists of two types of alerts: elevated and imminent. Under this advisory system, an “elevated threat” warns the public of a “credible



terrorist threat against the United States and its territories that is general in both timing and potential location such that is reasonable to recommend implementation of protective measures to thwart or mitigate against an attack” whilst an “imminent” threat maintains potential variance inherent in the uncertainty of a “credible, specific, and impending terrorist threat or on-going attack” (US Department of Homeland Security 2017).

Figure 6: National Terrorism Advisory System Awareness Poster

But what is particularly intriguing about the new NTAS is how we can trace the shifting affective terrains in the manipulation of the now-growing figure of the infantile public imaginary. While the old colour-coded terror alert system drew upon the simplicity of primary colours, the posters advertising the new NTAS alert system feature a monochromatic image of a tall building resembling the World Trade Center with a colourful American flag in the foreground, a juxtaposition which, argues Deepa Kumar, “can be read to

⁹⁶ Indeed, the gift store at the ‘National September 11 Memorial & Museum’ is but one manifestation of the defensive mechanics that demand the consumption of national trauma. The macabre proximity between capitalism and trauma is evidenced by the location of the store, just above the 8,000 human remains that were placed in a repository in the museum’s basement. For a distraught family member, the museum was akin to a “tourist attraction” that was profiting off his dead son’s body (Hamill 2014). A cemetery with tourist amenities, for the relatives of those lost on that morning of September 11 2001, the keepsakes on sale at this “Little Shop of Horrors” was distasteful given its proximity to so many unidentified (and unidentifiable) remains.

symbolize the resilience of the nation and how far it has come since the trauma of 9/11. The choice of black and white connotes a dark past, while the present is represented by a resplendent flag” (2018, 143). Thus, marked by an aesthetic shift from the chromatic activation of fear in the “infantile citizen” (Berlant 1997, 27), this new model effectively revirtualizes unresolved trauma through the symbolic virtualization of the possibility of an old threat.

Furthermore, unlike its predecessor, the new NTAS system also tasks the citizen with the responsibility of surveillance: the text beneath the image on the poster urges citizens to “report suspicious activity to local law enforcement” (Figure 6). As Kumar (2018) explains in her analysis of the productivity of fear in contemporary American nationalism, by appealing to ordinary citizens to partake in a nationalized ritual of surveillance, this form of “security nationalism offers atomized individuals a sense of belonging through the enactment of security rituals” while offering “a form of psychological security in an era characterized by economic insecurity and precarity” (155). What emerges from this inheritance of surveillance is the anxious, hyper-vigilant figure of the over-dependent “infantile citizen,” whose love for the nation is sustained through the post-memory of colour coded trauma and the ordinary, nationalistic ritual of surveillance (Berlant 1997, 27).

The circulation of this form of “productive fear” (Masco 2014, 18) is essential to the cultivation of a national ethic of surveillance in the neurotic citizen-subject: one whose anxieties and insecurities are objects of government not in order to cure or eliminate such states but to manage them. Tasked with self-surveillance, it is the terrain of the body, at the level of bodily difference, that the hyper-vigilant infantile-citizen manages the figures that threaten the symbolic domestic space and signal the death of the national family.

[iv] 9/11 and the Paradox of Trans Rights

In May 2016, during an interview with a right-wing radio station, American Christian Evangelist Pastor Anne Graham Lotz suggested that God had let 9/11 happen because of America's new-found tolerance for transgender "silliness" (Alexander 2016).⁹⁷ Moreover, she added, God had "backed away" and let the terrorists win because the transgender "craziness" was evidence that the US had abandoned God as a nation (Duffy 2016). What would have been excused a mildly-amusing instance of right-wing extremism immediately made international news because of the infamous nature of this particular case of filial piety: Pastor Anne Graham Lotz happens to be the daughter of prominent Evangelical figure, Reverend Billy Graham. Graham Sr., too, has had a history of strong opinions about the connection between liberal American politics, trans people, and spiritual purgatory. Later that year, a "disgusted" Graham Sr. criticized the Obama administration for earmarking \$8.4 million a year for sexual reassignment surgery for members of the US military (Chapman 2016).

The timing of these comments coincided with a year of intense, and often vitriolic, legal and political debates about the rights of trans people in America's public bathrooms⁹⁸ and change-rooms. Whilst "Bathroom Bills" are beyond the scope of this dissertation, it is important to note that these juridico-legal debates, which reflected the profound anxieties mainstream

⁹⁷ Although, in fairness to Graham Jr., she also attributed shifting weather patterns and violent storms to 9/11 as symptomatic of God's disapproval of the chaotic state of America's souls.

⁹⁸ Notably, the "Bathroom Bill," which was passed in North Carolina in March 2016, overturned existing LGBT anti-discrimination provisions by requiring trans individuals to use bathrooms that corresponded with the sex designated on their birth certificates. While exceptions were made for those who had the sex designation changed on their birth certificates following sex-reassignment surgery. Given the prohibitive cost of both gender-affirmative surgical interventions and the legal costs for the paperwork involved, the "Bathroom Bill" effectively enshrined a policy which advocated further discrimination against trans people of colour who are overwhelmingly underemployed and face higher rates of poverty (Herman 2013; Vipond 2015).

America had around the shifting meanings of gender, also occurred during the volatile electoral campaign between Donald Trump's socially-conservative Republicans and Hilary Clinton's more liberal Democrats. Coloured by the prospect of an influx of Syrian refugees and undergirded by passionate debates about the fortification of the US-Mexico border, with the future trajectory of the nation still unclear, the question of passing trans-affirmative legislation presented a moral precipice for America's voters. In this climate marked by uncertainty, only the careful policing of these shadowy "predators" from the sanctity of the nation's bathrooms and borders would "make America great again!" (Chapman 2016).

Paradoxically, while the racialized nexus of counter-terrorism, fear, and hypervigilance in a post-9/11 landscape led to the increased scapegoating of trans bodies as threats to the nation-state, what also emerged was the celebration of the queer liberal subject as emblematic of Western freedom and liberty (Agathangelou et al 2008; Puar 2007). The defensive, patriotic turn to the re-entrenchment of ideals of liberty and freedom in the wake of trauma is not antithetical to nationalist projects of mourning.

For instance, in Canada, 2016 marked the introduction of the Canadian version of a "bathroom bill" by the Trudeau government. In keeping with the Liberal tradition of human rights advancements, Bill C-16 was launched on the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia with the aim of ensuring "that Canadians will be free to identify themselves and to express their gender as they wish while being protected against discrimination and hate" (Mas 2016).

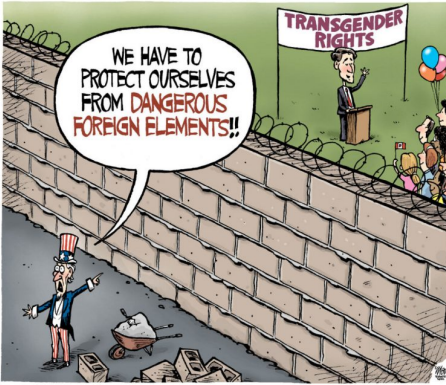


Figure 7: Moudakis, Theo.
"Transgender Rights," 2016.

In a pointed comparison to the policies enshrined south of the Canadian border, a *Toronto Star* article titled “Bill C-16: A Glorious Trans-Formation That Went Mostly Unnoticed,” reported the Bill’s protection of gender identity under anti-discrimination policies by contrasting Canadian liberalism with the “insulting” bathroom bills being passed in the US (Coren 2016). Similarly, editorial cartoons, such as the one in Figure 7., gleefully juxtaposed the nobility and wisdom of Canadian politics with the “flying elbows, flamboyant displays of self-righteousness or party stupidity” (Coren 2016). Thus, through this self-congratulatory form of Canadian “transgender exceptionalism,” *Toronto Star* readers were invited to invest in the fantasy of the nation-state as superior, tolerant, and exceptional in relation to its treatment of its trans-identified citizens (Aizura 2016).

Central to these contradictory examples framing the simultaneous debates about neoliberal inclusion and state securitization, the invocation of the trans body in national space “embodies the distraction that lies at the heart of the spectacle as a system of power...in a way not unlike a car wreck...something that command[s] the attentive and fascinated gaze” (Lafleur 2013, 67). As these opening examples of the political fervor invoked by the figure of the trans citizen illustrate, bathrooms and borders function similarly in policing spaces where “those who do not ‘belong’ are separated from those who do” (Aizura 2006, 289). Certainly, this link between the terrorist body and the trans body is not a new one: several scholars have already explored the literal and metaphorical parallels between the borders safeguarding the national body and the perceived integrity of the properly sex-gendered body (Beauchamp 2009; Puar and

Rai 2002; Browne 2004). As both anti-trans violence and transnational counter-terrorism are intimately linked by virtue of the role of the state in the “securitization of identity” (Rose 2000, 326), we must read the policing of the borders of gender as “part of an active policing of borders between states, the borders between states and non-states, and the borders between the (safe) self-state and the (dangerous, terrorist) other” (Shepherd and Sjoberg 2012, 20). However, as ordinary spaces that engage in practices of segregation and surveillance, both bathrooms and borders are spaces where the pulsative affective nodes of vigilance (re)circulates the racialized trans body as “the site of war, the terrain of its violence” (LaFleur 2013, 31).

Indeed, as the following section illustrates, the national threat posed by the invocation of the predatorial gender non-conforming, racialized body mobilized the fight for trans rights in particular ways. In response to the conjoined discourses of counter-terrorism and anti-trans equality as safeguarding the nation, trans activists in both Canada and the US invested in trans-homonational narratives that folded the trans-normative body— marked by whiteness— into rhetorics of trans-exceptionalism while simultaneously casting the trans body of colour as outside neoliberal, Western formulations of liberty and equality.

Trans-Homonationalism and the Surveillance of “Stealthy Bodies”

In “Queer Times, Queer Assemblages,” Jasbir Puar (2005) argues that narratives of queer liberalism are inhibited by the staging of US exceptionalist nationalism, that operates “via a praxis of sexual othering” which positions western discourses of homosexuality against “Islamophobic constructions of sexuality in the Middle East” (122). In order to achieve this effect, a paradoxical socio-political discourse simultaneously “castigates the other as homophobic and perverse whilst maintaining the imperialist center as tolerant but sexually, racially, and gendered normal” (Puar 2005, 122). For instance, in the context of Iraq’s infamous

Abu Ghraib prison, this interplay between sexual modernization and cultural difference was capitalized upon to create “culturally specific” torture techniques with the aim of understanding the “Arab mind” (Puar 2005, 123). At the same time, the Orientalist notion of a “Muslim sexuality” also resulted in the reinforcement of ‘normative’ gender behaviour through (queer) torture techniques that aim to create a passive (feminine) native informant. In this sense, argues Puar, terrorist masculinities and queer masculinities are similarly perceived failed and perverse, with “femininity as their reference point of malfunction” (Puar 2005, 127). Therefore, counter-terrorist discourses depend on queers and terrorists as monstrous identities⁹⁹ to be paradoxically avowed and disavowed.

For instance, the work of Siobhan Somerville (2000) demonstrates how certain bodies, typically those that were racially or sexually mixed, were cast as degenerative threats to western norms and security. Likewise, as figures that threaten the symbolic domestic space and signal the death of the national family, both trans and terrorist bodies are subject to similar modes of state-surveillance. Akin to society’s grim reapers, these othered bodies have always been present in national “real politik” as harbingers of destruction and indicators of domestic cohesion (Puar 2005, 121). Like the terrorist body, the trans body is cast as the ‘stealthy’ body that could be anywhere.

Nowhere was this conflation between the terrorist body and the trans body so apparent as in the 2003 official advisory issued by the Department of Homeland Security. Emphasizing the possibility of further terrorist attacks by the passing figure of the transsexual-terrorist body, the advisory cautioned that “[t]errorists will employ novel methods to artfully conceal suicide devices. Male bombers may dress as females in order to discourage scrutiny” (Sandeep 2015).

⁹⁹ Jasbir K. Puar and Amit S. Rai’s (2002) reflections on monstrosity as a “regulatory construct of modernity” are particularly salient here.

Since it emphasized both the fear of the passing racialized body as well as the fear of being taken in by gender deception, this “terrorist drag queen alert” (Sycamore 2006, 174) illustrates how those bodies that are subjectively perceived to be non-normative are disproportionately surveilled¹⁰⁰ for their failure to ‘pass’ according to state-sanctioned performative ideals.

This evocation of the stealthy trans body, writes Toby Beauchamp (2009), is evocative of the militaristic act of “going undercover, of willful secrecy and concealment, perhaps even of conscious deception...” (358). To be “stealth” is a cautious enterprise that connotes a certain craftiness or slyness; a predatorial adjective that signals a deliberate manipulation as with ‘stealth bombers,’ or ‘stealth technology.’ Stealthiness, in other words, is that attribute of the passing trans body, the truth of which may escape detection, not unlike the possibly passing terrorist body or sleeper cell who threatens the integrity of the nation-state. Thus, as Beauchamp explains, “[b]y warning security personnel of the gendered disguises that terrorists may appear in, the [2003 advisory issued by the Department of Homeland Security] neatly fuses the threat of terrorism-in-disguise with perceived gender transgression, marking particular bodies as deceptive and treacherous” (359).

Shortly after the events of 9/11, in the wake of newly implemented counter-terrorist measures, the National Center for Transgender Advocacy recommended that trans travelers exercise “strategic visibility” at airports and border crossings as terrorists were more likely to

¹⁰⁰ Surveillance, as Toby Beauchamp (2009) explains, has been historically built into the production of the very category of transgender. Certainly, trans scholars have frequently dealt with the topic of surveillance in terms of medical and psychiatric monitoring of trans people (Spade 2009). In particular, these mechanisms of surveillance are intimately linked to the trans body’s performance of successful ‘passing’— the obliteration of any traces of the trans person’s assigned-at-birth gender by a successful, and therefore undetectable, performance of their chosen gender. Thus, as Beauchamp explains, the medically-sanctioned narrative requires the trans person to “withstand and evade any surveillance (whether visual, auditory, social, or legal) that would reveal one’s trans status. To blend. To pass” as normatively gendered (Beauchamp 2009, 357).

engage in “stealth” practices (Beauchamp 2009, 362). In his provocative analysis of the mechanisms of state-surveillance following 9/11, Beauchamp highlights how the demand for trans visibility began to be “couched in terms of distinguishing between the good, safe transgender traveler and the dangerous, deviant [racialized] terrorist in gendered disguise” (362). Predicated on the historical construction of normative middle-class bodies as standing in direct opposition to the historical figure of the deviant, monstrous, racial other, this advice by an organization tasked with advocating for the rights of trans citizens ends up reifying trans-homonationalism.

The ability of a trans person to go “stealth,” as Beauchamp has suggested, is closely linked to gender, class, and race privilege. Practically, the terrorist attacks on September 11 “heightened border surveillance, increased attention to travel documents, and more stringent standards for obtaining state-issued identification all have made life more complicated for many transgender people” (Stryker 2008, 150). Indeed, the implementation of restrictions in a post-9/11 America actually “gives transgender people more in common with immigrants, refugees, and undocumented workers than they might have with the gay and lesbian community” (Stryker 2008, 150). Yet the NCTA’s call for strategic visibility is a privilege that can be afforded by very specific kinds of bodies. Historically, “western medicine has consistently linked race, gender and sexuality such that the norm of white heterosexuality becomes a marker against which deviance is constructed” (Beauchamp 2009, 357; Somerville 2000, 10).

In light of how the docility of the legitimized body has been historically inscribed as inversely proportional to the perversity of its racial schema, it is important to note that the ability to be “classified as normatively gendered is also to adhere to norms of racial and economic privilege” (Beauchamp 2009, 357). For some bodies, these agentic “strategies” of disclosure are

foreclosed because they are already hypervisible or excessive. Yet, as with the circulation of trauma, this excessive quality of racialized, gender-nonconforming corporeality is precisely what is demanded from the nation in order to secure its borders, for “it is only by effacing the particular scrutiny leveled at trans people of color and trans immigrants that the figure of the non-threatening trans traveler emerges” (Beauchamp 2009, 362). In other words, NCTE’s strategy is only able to isolate gender from practices of surveillance by disregarding the complexities of intersectional identities, since “[n]ot all trans people can occupy the role of the good, safe transgender traveler” (Beauchamp 2009, 363). Thus, Beauchamp asks the following provocative questions: “Which bodies can choose visibility, and which bodies are always already visible – perhaps even hyper-visible – to state institutions? For whom is visibility an available political strategy, and at what cost?” (Beauchamp 2009, 363).

These contrasting examples of debates about trans rights in both Canada and the US exemplify two key iterations of my articulation of the paradox of trans-homonationalism. First, the inclusion of the trans body within already-established discourses of Canadian homonationalism¹⁰¹ illustrates how contemporary trans existence is folded into the patriotic image of the nation-state as tolerant, progressive, and neoliberal. However, this form of trans-homonationalism downplays the ways in which respectable trans lives are folded into neoliberal narratives of equality, while also obfuscating the gate-keeping mechanisms of the benevolent state which, for example, continues to “privilege particular intersections of sexual, raced, classed and gendered belonging” (Murray 2014, 23) in Canada’s refugee determination system. In other words, the celebratory focus on the inclusion of trans rights within Canadian homonationalism

¹⁰¹ For critical analyses of Canadian homonationalism, see David Murray (2014), Tim McCaskell (2016), OmiSoore Dryden and Suzanne Lenon (2015).

“obscures a more urgent conversation about what modes of dispossession are possible under the ruse of state inclusion” (Snorton 2017, xi).

Second, the invocation of 9/11 as the consequence of “transgender silliness” illustrates how the presence of the trans body acts as a distraction not just from the fragility of American military exceptionalism but also the uncertainty of the future, while simultaneously serving as a metaphor for national anxieties about the liberal horrors of human rights policies. Thus, the rhetoric of the possibility of trans rights and, by extension, the stealthy threatening body, activates the aforementioned fantasy of violation via the imaginary figure of both the passing [brown] terrorist and the passing [trans] pervert.

[v] TDOR and Ground Zero

Who is the ‘we’ that has been hailed by the patriotic sentiment that enshrines post-9/11 vigilance within the TDOR vigil? What is the link between the trauma of 9/11 and the toll of anti-transgender violence?¹⁰² How do quasi-nostalgic appeals to collective national trauma suture disparate populations under the banner of national belonging? How are these nostalgic turns to collective national trauma also a nostalgia for an anticipatory future grounded in provisional (trans)sexual rights? What bodies are conjured up at the same time as others are consumed? How does the slogan “9/11 We will never forget” relate to TDOR’s “Remembering our dead”? How do the circuits of “productive fear” animate TDOR? Reformulating Sara Ahmed’s (2004a) provocative introductory question in “Affective Economies,” how might the spectacularization

¹⁰² I do not mean to conflate terrorist violence and the ‘panacea’ of anti-terrorist discourses with the intensely personal discomfort of the trans experience or anguish many of us feel about the loss of another trans life due to senseless violence. But I am suggesting that these disparate fields can be analyzed for their geo-political affectivity: both are informed and influenced by the notion of a “normal psyche, which is in fact part of the West’s own family romance— a narrative space that relies on the normalized, even if perverse, domestic space of desire supposedly common in the West” (Puar & Rai 2002, 123).

and consumption of 9/11 trauma “work to align some [trans]subjects with others and against other others” (117)?

Individually, the numbers 9 and 11 do not represent anything of significance. Yet the symbolic weight proffered by their proximity to each other conjures narratives that resist the confines of their ordinal stability. Together, the numbers 9 and 11 can gesture to the prophetic, familiar, nature of the 911 emergency number, whose meaning is likewise rendered mutable by the state of emergency generated by the events of 9/11, the emergent post-9/11 states of control and new regimes of hi-tech state surveillance. Unmoored from any need for justificatory logics, together the numbers 9 and 11 are an evocative symbol of American might or perhaps a reminder of that might’s vulnerability; an embroidered logo upon the shirt of a volunteer at the World Trade Center’s repository of unidentified human remains; a quasi-causal justification for the ensuing “War on Terror” on those who will-have-been responsible (Massumi 2005, 35). Or perhaps they may just wash up amongst the thousands of other numbers on a site dedicated to remembering the murdered victims of anti-transgender violence.

September 11 2001, as I have discussed, serves as a ‘Ground Zero’ for the beginning of a neoliberal era of hypervigilant governmentality. As the inaugural signpost ushering in a twenty-first century landscape of fear (Massumi 1993), Ground Zero is removed from its predecessors both by the globalizing reach of technological mediation and by the wide-spread effects of counter-terrorist discourses borne of US exceptionalism. Like TDOR, Ground Zero functions as a traumatic epicenter around which bodies fold and unfold as they produce, and are produced by, “fellow feelings” of belonging. As both the literal hypocenter of national trauma, and the symbolic foundation for national healing, Ground Zero invokes the solemnity of a national vigil, as well as the anxiety of the need for further vigilance against those forces who would bring

about its destruction. As Sara Ahmed (2004a) explains in “Affective Economies,” the communal alignment that is nationalism is “affected by the representation of both the rights of the subject and the grounds of the nation as already under threat” (118). Yet these threats need not be immediate. Rather, as Brian Massumi (2010) writes, the activation of productive fear utilizes ordinary, “everyday dangers...perpetually stirred up, reactualized, and put into circulation” (1).

The irony is that, without exception, all anti-transgender hate crimes are perpetrated *by* cis bodies and *against* trans bodies. Assuming that most informational sections on websites seek to shed light on those who are unfamiliar with the content, the bodies that are hailed by this iteration of the inclusive “we” in “We live in times more sensitive than ever to hatred based violence, especially since the events of September 11th,” (*Int’l TDOR* n.d.b) might well be cis-identified. It would follow that this alignment of a victimized trans community with the cis community—the perpetrators of anti-trans violence¹⁰³—is predicated on a hate-based, traumatic national experience that is then resurrected or fed-back as the basis for an antithetical identification. In other words, the shared trauma of 9/11, as a hate-based violence, circulates as self-referential proof that, regardless of any ideological differences, “we” have been hurt similarly by an outside “other” whose proximity will always threaten our re-discovered shared values. So, in this first interpretation, the use of “we” assumes a patriotic kinship whose traumatic roots supersede the lived realities of cis-perpetrated, anti-trans violence, even as the latter section of the statement concedes that the prevalence of anti-trans violence is something which is “largely ignored” by the cis-public (*Int’l TDOR* n.d.b).

On the other hand, assuming that the visitor to the TDOR identifies as trans, this appeal to national kinship still displaces the domestic racial violence of anti-trans hatred. Thus,

¹⁰³ The oppositional quality of the clause, anti-, already dictates that subject responsible for acts of violence against the trans body does not identify as trans or tolerate the very existence of the trans body.

irrespective of whether the person accessing the TDOR website identifies as trans or cis, the reference to “the events of September 11th,” (*Int’l TDOR* n.d.b) and the semantic function of the inclusive pronoun “we,” means that the reader is explicitly addressed as American and, through harnessing the fear of the terrorist other who threatens national freedom, implicitly assumed to be white. This raises an obvious question: which trans bodies are being erased by an appeal to patriotism and national trauma that excludes “any other factors” as contributing to what is an ostensibly systemic violence that “shows no sign of abating”? (*Int’l TDOR* n.d.b).

What is a factor but a single contributing element that is overshadowed by the importance of an outcome? In this case, the quote’s clarification of the (in)difference of these ‘other factors’ serves to undermine the voices of the margins within the margins. The irony, however, is that this insistence on the superfluous nature of otherness follows a brief paragraph acknowledging the centrality of Rita Hester’s death in shaping present day TDOR vigils:

The Transgender Day of Remembrance was set aside to memorialize those who were killed due to anti-transgender hatred or prejudice. The event is held in November to *honor* Rita Hester, whose murder on November 28th, 1998 kicked off the ‘Remembering Our Dead’ web project and a San Francisco candlelight vigil in 1999. Rita Hester’s murder— like most anti-transgender murder cases— has yet to be solved. (*Int’l TDOR* n.d.b; emphasis added)

Without doubt, Hester’s murder played a central role in shaping the present-day TDOR vigils that continue to “honour” her (*Int’l TDOR* n.d.b). However, the honoured legacy of Rita Hester in death is accorded a level of importance denied to the body of Rita Hester in life. Rita Hester was an African-American trans woman who had been criminalized by the police as a sex worker and demonized by the media for both her gender identity and class (MacKenzie and Marcel

2009, 91). Yet, these multiple layers of intersectionality which determined her “life chances” are rendered irrelevant in death, even as the figure of Hester is resurrected annually to lend credence to TDOR vigils worldwide (Spade 2011, 109).¹⁰⁴ The abridged shadow of Rita Hester in death is effectively more affectively valuable than the messy complexities of those ‘other’ facts of her short life.

Furthermore, the accessorial-function of ‘otherness’ within the website’s explanatory section denies the systemic nature of intersectional oppression and erases the specific histories of trans women of colour, whilst simultaneously gesturing to what Lamble (2008) has previously described as the monolithic portrayal of anti-trans violence as divorced from the intersectionality of other factors. In this simplified equation, “factors” are expressions of divisibility that render unstable the mythic indivisibility of post-9/11 patriotism, thus undermining equality claims for transnormative inclusion within the nation-state and providing a frame of validation for the self-surveillance of the trans community.¹⁰⁵ Thus, both the appeal to “other factors” and the re-iteration of the memory of 9/11 as a state of emergency, point to the phantasmatic construction of race and citizenship in structuring the grid of intelligibility around trans-normative inclusion.

Any analysis of TDOR must locate the trans subject within broader discourses of, specifically, American and Canadian nationalism, notions of neoliberal freedom, and state-

¹⁰⁴ A form of population management, the maldistribution of life chances, such as racism, ableism, transphobia, xenophobia, and sexism, are the biopolitical result of programs and policies that naturalize and erase the historical and contemporary conditions that perpetuate systems of inequality. See Spade (2011), especially Chapter 3 of *Normal Life*, for his insightful analysis of the disciplinary modes of power that have been inscribed into legal claims for equality.

¹⁰⁵ On the other hand, if we consider the use of ‘factor’ as a verb— for instance, to ‘factor into something’— then we recognize the essential nature of that ‘other’ element as contributing to the overall outcome. In the case of anti-trans violence, a singular focus on transphobia is an inadequate explanation for why trans women outnumber trans men on the list of those murdered. Similarly, any focus on trans-misogyny alone does not account for why the majority of the women who have been killed are women of colour.

conferred rights. As I will illustrate in the following section, the affective economies of counter-terrorism have also been taken up by trans activists in order to argue for trans inclusion within the nation-state. Metaphorically weaponized by the dual effects of racialization and gender non-conformity, how does the trans body of colour structure the affective economies of everyday fear? What happens to racialized trans liveability when discourses of counter-terrorism are evoked in the memorialization of anti-trans violence?

If, as Freud (2006b) describes, in mourning the world “has become poor and empty,” then it is unsurprising that we can trace the watchful nature of the vigil in its etymological offspring, vigilance (313). This intimate connection between the vigil and vigilance means vigils are spaces marked by a heightened state of observance, an affective moment where the body’s taut imminence is palpable and open to the fraught potentiality of hypervigilant affects (Seigworth and Gregg 2010). It is in this haunting gap between the vigil and hypervigilance, between national trauma and the defensive entrenchment of patriotism, and between homonational respectability and its strategic dependence upon racialized others, that we can trace the affective deployment of trans-homonational *necrointimacies* on the *TDOR* website. Thus, in order to address these concerns, the next section explores how both counter-terrorist discourses and *necrointimacies* of trans memorialization function to create the trans-homonational imaginary.

‘Lest We Forget’: Happiness and the Psycho-Choreographies of Trauma

Since its inception in 2007, the *TDOR* website has reported¹⁰⁶ the details of hundreds of anti-transgender murders. Although the pre-2007 “Remembering Our Dead” website no longer exists— and the present-day *TDOR* site does not list any murders that took place prior to 2007—

¹⁰⁶ However, this could be accounted for by rapid shifts in technology at the time as personal computers and internet access became more affordable.

I was able to use the *TDOR* website's publicly-accessible spreadsheet to glean some information on the narrativisation of anti-trans deaths occurring in countries perceived to be "enemy states." Whilst little data was available on non-American deaths, pre-9/11, the data recorded in the aftermath of 9/11 showed an overall increase in anti-trans deaths internationally, particularly in South America. However, as this section will illustrate, there are stark differences in how the deaths of victims from predominantly Muslim countries are narrativized.

As I have discussed in Chapter Two, the grass-roots nature of data collection for the *TDOR* website's annual lists means that there are huge disparities in the breadth and accuracy of the accompanying information for each reported death depending on the victim's race and class. These obituaric inconsistencies are further exacerbated by the geographical location of the murder victim. In particular, trans women of colour who have been murdered in 'developing' or 'non-Western' countries are often virtually eulogized through links to sensational, tabloid-esque media sources. So, in light of the connection made on the *TDOR* website between the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and hatred-based, anti-transgender murders, would there be a difference in how the deaths of trans people are reported when they come from countries assumed to be responsible for 9/11?

The first recorded death of a trans person from one of the "enemy countries" assumed to be responsible¹⁰⁷ for 9/11 was that of Hasan Sabeh, an Iraqi citizen who was murdered in 2007. While the *TDOR* website entry for 2007 states only that Hasan Sabeh was "stripped and shot

¹⁰⁷ Following the 9/11 attacks, President George W. Bush prepared the country for a "war on terror" on the "enemies of freedom" (Bush 2001). With al-Qaeda quickly identified as the perpetrator of 9/11, the focus of this "war on terror" shifted to enemy countries who might be harbouring the stateless terrorist group: in particular, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and Saudi Arabia were identified as primary strongholds. However, there were other predominantly Muslim countries included in this list: Algeria, Libya, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Pakistan, and Turkey were also seen as potential targets. For more, see Perl 2001.

dead by an Islamist death squad,” the spreadsheet provides an additional narrative on the life of a contemporary trans-identified person of colour in post-9/11 Iraq (*Int'l TDOR* 2007b):

Hasan Sabeh was a happy, talented 34 year old Gay Transvestite fashion designer, also affectionately known as Tamara. He lived in the al-Mansor district of Baghdad. Two months ago, Hasan was tending his fashion accessories stall in a street market. Out-of-the-blue, an Islamist death squad, wearing Iraqi police uniforms, seized him. They stripped off his clothes in the street and shot him dead. Hasan's brother-in-law was nearby and rushed to cradle his body. He, too, was shot dead at point blank range. The killers then took Hasan's body, and hanged and mutilated it, as a warning to other Gay and Transgender Iraqis. (*Int'l TDOR* n.d.a)

With few exceptions,¹⁰⁸ the spreadsheet entry for each white trans or American person contains only the briefest details about the cause of death. The entry for Sabeh replicates the longer descriptive style used in many of the entries for trans bodies of colour from outside the US.

Typically, these narratives contain a gruesome description of how the body of colour was literally ripped to pieces. However, the entry on Sabeh's death departs from these descriptions of abject corporeal destruction by locating the body of colour within discourses of “happiness,” capitalist consumption, and counter-terrorism. Furthermore, the figure of the terrorist “*makes possible* the construction of a national identity, providing a contrast that the [trans normative] citizen is formed in opposition to” (Beauchamp 2008, 364).

¹⁰⁸ On the *TDOR* spreadsheet, the murders of North American trans people tend towards truncated descriptions of the cause of death and the website entries for them typically contain links to media articles from local news sources. On the other hand, as discussed in Chapter Two, the spreadsheet entries for non-American trans people of colour— especially South America— are replete with description of corporeal destruction whilst the website will contain media links to tabloid press reports.

In *The Promise of Happiness*, Sara Ahmed (2010) gives us a framework with which to understand the connections between the affective value of happiness, technologies of citizenship, the affective-choreographies of trans necropolitics, and North American ideals of freedom within the nation-state. This aside to “happiness”—the first in all the murders tracked between 1970 and 2012—stands in stark contrast to the deaths of those before him. “Happiness,” however, should not be conflated with “feeling good.” Rather, this poignant picture of a “happy” life cut short is a political gesture that “functions as a promise that directs us towards certain objects, which then circulate as social goods. Such objects accumulate positive affective value as they are passed around” (Ahmed 2010, 29).

To re-iterate my previous discussion of the utility of national trauma, “9/11” serves as both metaphor and metonymy. Eclipsed by palimpsestic narratives, 9/11 is a “sticky sign” that, like the national flag, grants the public imaginary “the impression of coherence (the nation as ‘sticking together’)” (Ahmed 2004b, 74). Unlike the “stickiness” (Ahmed 2004b, 74) of the national flag— an object which signifies national love and the pride of “territorial conquest” (ibid.) — I have argued that 9/11 is bound with the hyper-vigilant stickiness of indeterminate fear and re-circulated trauma. Furthermore, as I have illustrated in my discussion of the 9/11 Memorial Museum, the spectacularization and repetition of this (re)circulated trauma, produces a neurotic juvenile citizen, a “docile body” as overdetermined by whiteness and patriotism (Puar & Rai 2002, 136). But whilst the memory of national violence is crucial for “surfacing” the effect of the nation as white, we can also trace how shadowy figure of the stealthy body— as terrorist or trans— is likewise essential to the nation’s future happiness.

Happiness, writes Ahmed (2010), is a future-promise which is intimately connected to technologies of citizenship which binds the body to a national ideal. Whilst Ahmed’s formulation

of the utility of happiness focuses upon the passing around of “happy objects,” or the feel-good stories of neoliberal sexual liberation, tracing the utility of this brief story of Sabeh’s “happy” life in Iraq highlights a perverse form of affective gymnastics. Happiness, Ahmed writes, is intimately bound with the project of US empire-building. The “pursuit of happiness” is actually enshrined as a right in the United States under the 1776 Declaration of Independence (Ahmed 2010, 133). Contrasted with the brutality of a specific form of “Islamist” brutality, what Sabeh’s foreclosed happiness illustrates is not so much how the trans body of colour circulates as an object through which the Western trans subject aligns itself with neoliberal ideals of freedom but rather how that very freedom is a fantasy that is dependent upon the compulsive maintenance of the strategic invocation of a romanticized brutality. As such, we can read this evocation of “happiness” as indicative of the “slide between affective and moral economies” (Ahmed 2010, 30).

Although the *TDOR* website has since removed the media links that had been posted under the entry for Sabeh’s death, amongst these links were several US-based blog entries reflecting upon “the senseless killing of queer and genderqueer people in Iraq” (*Int’l TDOR* 2007b). Of particular interest was the following blog post by The Bilerico Project, a US-based, invitation-only, online LGBT group whose goal is to foster political and cultural commentary to “help shape the LGBT movement”:

Really makes you think about if you were born in another country. For all we queer people complain about the US, things here could be a lot worse. That is by no means an excuse for the heterosexual supremacy in our own government, but we should use that to have some perspective and some compassion.

But seriously think about being born gay or trans in a place like Iraq, chaotic for anyone,

but especially violent for you. According to the article, Shia death squads go after queer people, execute them publicly, and the most the government does is criticize anyone who doesn't respect this aspect of their culture. But by some stroke of luck, we're here in the US instead of in Iraq, Nigeria, or Zimbabwe. (Blaze 2007)

Whilst the death of Sabeh was, indeed, another instance of a horrific assault on a trans-identified person, what I am attempting to illustrate here are the ways in which that 'other' body is resurrected, recuperated, and subsequently deployed within contemporary frameworks of neoliberal, trans citizenship—a trans-homonational politics which requires that that same brown body also be demonized for being Muslim and Iraqi. Thus, “trans-homonationalism” is a melancholic assemblage which labours under the sign of abject racialized corporeality.

The spectre of Sabeh's foreclosed happiness is not altogether removed from the trauma of 9/11. Sabeh's murder took place on January 11th 2007, only six years after the infamous attacks on American soil. This was a tumultuous period during which President Bush had deployed an additional 20,000 American troops to Iraq¹⁰⁹ as part of his infamous “Operation Iraqi Freedom.” In this context of the post-9/11 invasion of Iraq, the circulation of Sabeh's foreclosed happiness actually (re)produces and (re)circulates the West as an enlightened beacon of freedom, a formulation that is not far removed from Edward Said's (1979) analysis of the “discursive” construction of the Orient in relation to the Occident (23).

The juxtaposition of Sabeh's entrepreneurial spirit— one of the pillars of Western neoliberal democracy— with the barbarism of “Islamist death squad[s]” reinforces the image of the West, and particularly America, as the “Land of the Free” whilst simultaneously creating a space for trans-normative subjects to align themselves with the nation-state. In other words, the

¹⁰⁹ See Dale 2011 for a complete breakdown of “Operation Iraqi Freedom.”

figure of Sabeh's brutalized body must be adopted within the rubrics of trans kinship so that it can be disavowed in the service of the larger project of trans-homonationalism. Thus, the trauma of anti-transgender violence coalesces with anti-terrorist and anti-Islamic sentiments— which are reactions to the trauma of post-9/11— to produce discourses that install a politics of trans-homonationalism whilst simultaneously disappearing the body on which the discourse was built.

The shadowy figures of these Iraqi “death squads” reappear three more times in the *TDOR* spreadsheet. In each of these cases, no other information is given about the names of the victims or even the physical cause of their deaths. Rather, the racialized figure of the terrorist overshadows the material facts of anti-trans and racialized violence. This precarious balance between the vigil that mourns for the foreclosed “promise of happiness” (Ahmed 2010) and the vigilance provoked by these spectres of 9/11, surfaces once again in the case of Ali, an Iraqi citizen who was murdered in 2008.

Unlike Sabeh, Ali's death has substantial coverage on the *TDOR* website. Whilst the spreadsheet states that Ali was “executed by Iraqi death squads,” (*Int'l TDOR* n.d.a), an entry for Ali on the *TDOR* website adds that she was “executed for being transgender” (*Int'l TDOR* 2008). But we are also provided with a link to a YouTube video of “Ali before she was executed,” beneath which a brief “important notice” has been added that states that two other (nameless) Iraqi, transgender women were also killed at the same time (*Int'l TDOR* 2008).

Clicking on this link beneath Ali's name takes you directly to a YouTube video titled “Death at the Hands of Iraq's Islamohet Supremacists” (2008) which has been uploaded by the United Gay Force Independent Communications Unit, another US-based blog about LGBT rights. Overlaid by perversely upbeat Arabic pop track, the grainy footage in the video begins by showing Ali, a Niqab-clad woman, in the process of forcefully getting the veil lifted from her

face. Behind her stands a man in a light-blue, button-down shirt that has been embellished with epaulettes. He stands with his arms folded. Leering in its trajectory, this man's body oscillates between leaning in for a better look whilst still keeping an almost performative distance— an instance where the fear of contamination has given way to the ominous ascendance of a malicious curiosity. A hand suddenly enters the frame, forcefully adjusting the woman's Niqab in order to reveal more of her face. As the camera shifts, we see the man in the blue-shirt laughing and shaking his head in disbelief whilst the man to which that hand was attached steps into the frame. He, too, is wearing a light-blue shirt, except that his epaulettes have three silver stars on a black ceremonial band of cloth— the signatory rank of a police captain.¹¹⁰ As the camera pans closer, we can see the weariness in Ali's eyes. Suddenly the veil is yanked down, concealing her face once more.

The footage then cuts abruptly to a scene of Ali sitting down on a small stool so that her back is to the camera and we can see her shoulder-length hair. No longer dressed in a Niqab, Ali is instead wearing the red and silver kaftan which was just visible beneath the Niqab in the first scene. The passage of time is betrayed by the dark stubble now peppering her face. The music fades and we can now hear dialogue in Arabic. Amidst the brief flash of a rifle and legs clad in military fatigues, is the unmistakeable buzz of the hair clippers that have suddenly appeared. Ali sits quietly as her hair is completely shaved off. The camera pans to the floor, showing the heap of freshly-shorn black hair strewn around feet clad in black-and-gold women's sandals. The video ends.

It is important to contextualize what has happened in this video *post*-production without diminishing the horror of this particular case of anti-trans violence. What was the purpose of the

¹¹⁰ For more information on Iraqi Federal Police Rank Insignia, see Pike 2012.

upbeat Arabic-language pop track that was added to the first half of the video featuring Ali in her black Niqab? Had this video not been posted on the *TDOR* website, this video could ostensibly represent that essentialist notion of the oppressed Muslim woman. But, coupled with the image of a subdued, oppressed woman in a Niqab, the addition of Arabic music— whose upbeat track stands in stark contrast to the harrowing scene before the viewer— is reflective of the coded narrative of brown women who need to be liberated from brown men by white men.¹¹¹

Certainly, several scholars have already examined the ideological construction of non-Western women as the victims of a monolithic, misogynist, and sexist religion that then justifies the “civilizing mission” of Western imperialism, particularly in the aftermath of 9/11 (Toor 2011, 166; Mahmood 2011, 196). In the aftermath of 9/11, Muslim women in general, and Afghani women in particular, were increasingly mobilized as symbols to justify the “War on Terror” (Abu-Lughod 2002, 784). If the contemporary version of “imperial feminism” invokes the figure of the veiled woman to justify attacks on other countries, then the *unveiled* figure of this trans woman reflective of the discursive construction of trans-homonational, neoliberal, American whiteness-as-freedom.

As with most media sites, YouTube provides suggestions for similar content based on the particular video a user is currently streaming. To give you a sense of the genre of video that the *TDOR* website linked to Ali’s entry, YouTube’s suggestions for video content related to “Death at the Hands of Iraq’s Islamohet Supremacists” (2008) are titled “Gay killings in Iraq,” “Gay Witch Hunt in Iraq,” “Terror Video,” and several “Beheading” videos. Invoking the spectre of barbarism and primitivity, the titles of these videos implicitly place both cis and trans bodies of colour outside neoliberal, Western formulations of liberty and equality. The comments below the

¹¹¹ The work of Gayatri Spivak is of particular importance in understanding the colonial civilizing mission as “white men saving brown women from brown men” (Spivak 1988, 212-313).

video range from outrage to patriotic self-righteousness: “it’s a shame people behave this way. Reminds you of how open and accepting western civilization really is when compared to much of the world” (Ross 2008). Regardless of the fact that Ali was clearly in the custody of the Iraqi police— an organization which had to be reformed by the US-led “Coalition Provisional Authority,” a “hastily improvised multinational organization,” following the 2003 invasion of Iraq— Ali’s death has been re-narrativized as the result of an Iraqi death squad (Dobbins et al. 2009, iii). Yet, homosexuality, in general, was not criminalized under Saddam Hussein’s regime— “indeed Iraq in the 1960s and 1970s was known for its relatively liberated gay scene. Violence against gays started in the *aftermath* of the invasion in 2003” (Sarhan and Burke 2009).

Anna Agathangelou et al. (2008) describe ‘affective economies’ as “the circulation and mobilization of feelings of desire, pleasure, fear, and repulsion, utilized to seduce all of us into the fold of the state” (122) such that social anxieties about crime, migration and economic insecurity are used to elicit support for state practices of violence such as war, occupation, imprisonment and border controls. These affective economies of fear play upon, and exacerbate distinctions between proper citizens who are considered worthy of security and protection, and dangerous non-citizens (or failed citizens), those chalky bodies who must be figured as the cause of insecurity together with those traumas so necessary to the production of trans-homonationalism. Framed by the twinned discourses of racialized vulnerability and trans rights, we can read Ali’s racialized trans body through the “strategic value” that has allowed it to be cast as a “mascot” that signals the “future rights and future privileges..in the homo-friendly liberal democracies of the global North” (Aizura 2016, 127). Thus claimed under the benevolent umbrella of what Aren Aizura (2016) has termed “trans exceptionalism,” the *necrointimacies*

evoked by Ali's affective vulnerability circulates as a form of currency through which racialized trans bodies are reanimated in the service of trans-homonationalism (127).

As with most YouTube content, the user who uploaded the video— in this case, a member of the United Gay Force Independent Communications Unit— may post additional information beneath the video. The post reads,

This is Ali, an Iraqi M2F transgendered person, in the hands of the Iraqi pigs over a period of 2-3 days (note the beard growth between the beginning and end). No one has heard of her since this video was taken in December 2007. She could be dead. She is being tortured if she is still alive. They like to torture you before they murder you for another *backward, barbaric*, stupid bunch of *religious* lies and bullshit. (Ross 2008; emphasis mine)

The proximity of the adjectives “barbaric” and “backwards” to the description of Muslim bodies is indicative of the consumptive work of the racialized *necrointimacies* so necessary for the emergence of the trans-homonational subject in neoliberal modernity.

Ali's case is not unique. Similar sentiments that place the trans body of colour outside neoliberal, Western formulations of liberty and equality were echoed in the wake of the 2011 murder of 24-year-old Ramazan Çetin, a young transwoman from Gaziantep, Turkey. According to the data provided on the *TDOR* website, Çetin was “shot to death by her brother” (*Int'l TDOR* 2011). The entry on Çetin includes the following information:

The transwoman had an accident and was seeking treatment at the local hospital. Her brother found out about the accident and went to the hospital and shot her to death in front of witnesses. Upon leaving the hospital he calmly said to the police, “I killed my brother as he was a transvestite. I cleaned my honour!” (*Int'l TDOR* 2011)

Interestingly, this single reference to “honour” as a motivating factor in Çetin’s murder resurfaces in a blog post amongst the 35 links that were posted below the website’s list of victims for 2011. In her blog post entitled “Not all fun and games,” Claire Delilah Jane Black reminds her readers that “we often take our liberties for granted, especially those of us who live where tolerance is common and sensitivity is expected. But there is a time to reflect on the price that people have paid in places where differences are justification for oppression, or in times that were not so enlightened as these” (Black 2011). In this case, the ghostly brutalized trans body of colour, a body which is always already anachronistically displaced from narratives of trans arrival to belonging without complication in the nation-state, becomes a focal point for the collective assemblage of emergent feelings that circulate amidst narratives of nationalism and patriotism. The *necrointimate* encounter with the brutalized trans body of colour surfaces the contours of the trans-homonational collective:

Lest we forget, our freedom did not come cheaply; it was won with the blood of our soldiers, and the anguish of their loved ones, and yes, the resolve of our leaders. And, it is maintained by the same bravery and service of country, without which there would be no equality of the sexes, human rights commissions, transgender days of remembrance, pride parades, etc. (Black 2011)

If, as I outlined in Chapter One, homonationalism describes how “good queer” subjects are encouraged and rewarded by the state-sponsored ethos of freedom-as-equality, then trans-homonationalism is the process by which trans-normative subjects are provisionally welcomed into the benevolent embrace of the nation-state as proof of the state’s tolerance (Kouri-Towe 2012). Thus, I understand the turn to trans-homonationalism as reinforcing the rhetorical humanitarian justification for trans-inclusive policies that tentatively celebrate LGBT “rights” in

the West whilst demonizing “repressive” states. For instance, referring to Çetin’s murder, Black writes,

Let’s stop apologizing for people like that, “understanding” them, or accommodating their culture. Their culture is incompatible with our freedoms, and it is time we got that obvious and simple point. Let us not undo with politics what was won with dear lives. Take that moment of silence today seriously, and reflect – really reflect – on all that was given so that we may live better. And, never forsake our countries’ protectors – our men and women in uniform – for their well-being is ours too. Peace be with us all. (Black 2011)

These racialized narratives of oppression are the price for the emergence of the contemporary trans-homonormative subject.

As I have illustrated, the “systematic engineering” (Thrift 2004, 57) of affect as central to political life, highlights a pressing need to be attentive to how affects circulate in the neoliberal production of trans-homonationalism— those “rogue intensities” (Stewart 2007, 44) that occur when we “offer certain classes of subjects a tenuous invitation into the folds of empire...[using] the bodies of (non)subjects [to] serve as raw material for this process” (Agathangelou et al. 2008, 123). Akin to the preserved relics at the site where the World Trade Center once stood, the spectacularized, brutalized bodies of Sabeh, Ali, and Çetin circulate as absent-present objects that are imbricated in, and excessive of, the *necrointimacies* of racialized violence undergirding contemporary trans-homonationalism.

In yoking the memory of 9/11 to the project of trans memorialization, we see how the necropolitical resuscitation, and subsequent spectacularization, of brutalized trans bodies— which are overwhelmingly those of people of colour— also utilizes the figure of the terrorist

‘other’ in order to shore up the borders of communal identification within the nation-state. The aside to 9/11 within the space of the trans vigil highlights the shared space within which the *trans necrointimacies* of the trans vigils and the vigilance demanded by counter-terrorist discourses coalesce, thus realigning configurations of race, class, sexuality with contemporary forms of national (in)security. Thus, TDOR vigils can be read as a space wherein the shared discursive modernity of counterterrorism and trans memorialization colludes/collides via a narrative traumatic spectacularization that works on several registers: it re-members the dismembered corpse and, in so doing, stages the re-emergence of imagined territory shaped by the necropolitical circulation of fear, and the future-promise of inclusion within the rhetoric of trans-homonational citizenship.

[CONCLUSION] The Affective Afterlife of Necrointimacies

chalk [chawk] *tr.* To spread chalk on (land) as a fertilizer.
- Oxford English Dictionary

While it may have been designed for impermanence, chalk nevertheless retains a stubbornly contaminative quality. It clings, it coats, and it coheres. Above all, the palimpsestic marks left behind by chalk gesture to “intense encounters with *something*” (Stewart 2007, 105). Taking as my inspiration the barely-legible but haunting narratives of ordinary violences that emerge from rituals of memorialization, this dissertation on *trans necrointimacies* explores the centrality of racialized trans death in structuring white trans life. Throughout this dissertation, I illustrate how whiteness is perversely linked to the consumption of racial expendability. In tracing the numerous chalky outlines that gesture to the connections between the spectral, affective circulations of racialized trans death and the patriotic discourses that structure collective belonging in a post-9/11 era, I argue that the disposability of racialized bodies is central to the securitization of whiteness and trans-homonationalism within the nation-state.

This dissertation raises a number of questions about how to ethically approach TDOR: How should trans people honour the victims of anti-trans violence? How do we do justice to narrating stories about the dead? How do we give voice to racialized grief—to the invisibilized, intimate, objects to which whiteness so strongly clings— without reproducing the same historical structures of fungibility and negation? Perhaps reimagining the vigil means “refusing to write off the most vulnerable, the least presentable, and all the dead” (Love 2009, 30).

In response to critiques of TDOR, there has been a recent proliferation of alternative approaches to memorializing the victims of anti-trans violence. The vigils organized by the Audre Lorde Project and WOW Café Theater that I discuss in this research are just two examples of events that emphasize racialized resilience within the dominant trajectories of racialized expendability. In 2014, the Trans Day of Resilience campaign was created by the ALP to challenge the narratives of disposability that relegate racialized trans bodies mainly to realms of death and decay. Envisioned as an art project dedicated to re-imagining trans futures of colour as thriving and powerful, the Trans Day of Resilience focuses on creating cultural change by simultaneously resisting exploitation and challenging tokenistic discourses of inclusion. Indeed, as the Trans Day of Resilience website explains, “For trans people of colour to not only survive, but thrive, we need to reimagine our world” (*Forward Together*, n.d).

It is in line with this goal of reimagining the world that I have proposed the concept of *trans necrointimacies*—the cultivation of trans-homonational tropes of whiteness emerging through the affective circulation of racialized necropolitical violence. Envisioned as a theoretical bridge between the fields of affect studies, critical race theory, and trans studies, my formulation of *trans necrointimacies* underscores the specificity of histories of racialization in the deployment of biopower while simultaneously offering a framework for the analysis of state-surveillance, vigil(ance)s, and the mobilization of affects within broader practices of memorialization.

At the root of my research are guiding questions about the political value and expendability of racialized trans lives more broadly, and the affective economies of racialized death in particular. As this dissertation illustrates, while the presence of racialized lives is often perceived as antithetical to national discourses of trans rights, the spectacularization of racialized

deaths highlights the indispensability of racialized expendability to communal meaning-making. Racialized trans lives, in other words, are inexpendable by virtue of their expendability. In TDORs, the material realities that structure bare life are effectively effaced while structuring a de-racialized intimacy forged through proximity with the deathscapes of racialized violence. Through my analyses of the practices of memorialization engendered by annual Trans Day of Remembrance vigils and the *TDOR* website, I show how intimate circuits of ordinary violence are produced through the spectacularization of the dead or dying body of colour, the consumption or circulation of racialized anti-trans violence, and the eventual erasure of race from discourses of remembrance. These *trans necrointimacies* of ordinary racialized violence prefigure entrance into realms of whiteness, state-sanctioned acceptability, and trans-homonormativity. Furthermore, I illustrate how the *trans necrointimacies* emerging from the consumption of racialized trans death, and the circulation of post-9/11 hypervigilance, reinforce discourses of whiteness the service of trans homonationalism.

Practices of memorialization are symbolically and affectively mediated by discourses of inclusion and exclusion; yet, all too often, the consumption of racialized death is offered as a stand-in for the former while justifying the material structures that keep the latter in place. Indeed, as I illustrate in Chapter One, death provides a fertile province for the cultivation of group identity. Theorized as the cultivation of trans-homonational tropes of belonging prefigured through the spectacle of racialized violence, my conceptualization of trans *necrointimacies* draws upon analyses of mourning in psychoanalysis, affect studies, trans studies, critical race theory, and homonationalism. However, while each of these disparate fields offer a valuable interrogation of loss and memorialization, individually they fall short of addressing the

paradox that is the necessity of racialized trans death in shaping the racialized erasures upon which trans homonationalism is so dependant.

Although psychoanalysis and critical race theories lend themselves to an understanding of the role of the unconscious in structuring the cannibalistic nature of memorialization, neither can fully account for the *generative* intimacies, or “worldings” (Stewart 2007) created through circulation of racialized, trans death. Seeking to explore the affective utility of TDOR, my integration of psychoanalytic, affective and critical interpretations of loss has allowed for an engagement with the visceral yet invisible reverberations of those violent intimacies born in the consumptive afterlife of racialized trans death. In particular, I extended Freudian approaches to thinking through mourning and melancholia to account for the *generative* intimate affects arising from the inability to completely abandon the racialized Other. Expendable in life, the necropolitical intimacies generated by racialized deaths simply sustain the macabre unfoldings of whiteness upon which contemporary trans homonationalism depends for its expression.

Of particular interest to me were these “imagined communities” (Anderson 2005) that seem to coalesce and dissipate in the wake of anti-trans violence. No longer abstracted, the afterlife of trans of colour death populates social imaginaries through the reanimation of abjection, brutality, and violence. Indeed, in both real and virtual worlds, death transforms the expendability of invisibilized “bare life,” enfleshing it with the perverse economies of necropolitical intimacy. As I discuss in Chapter Two, the re-virtualization of racialized trans death illustrates how whiteness-as-trans-normativity emerges through re-enactments of historical violence within practices of depoliticized memorialization. As the primary database for the collection of media reports on anti-trans deaths, the *TDOR* website allows us to trace the tentative intimacies of imagined kinship wrought through the online memorialization of what are

predominantly trans women of colour. No longer genericized, in death these now-spectacularized trans bodies of colour circulate as ‘sharable’ or ‘likeable’ objects from which value can be extracted, reconstructed for mass consumption, and then vanquished once again. What I have termed *trans necrointimacy* thus describes this retroactive formation of whiteness and trans-normativity as emergent forms of belonging through the scopophilic consumption of racialized trans bodies.

As absent-presences, racialized trans death likewise structures the performative space of the vigil. In Chapter Three, I analyze how vigils often re-enact, or ritualize, the ordinary violences they seek to memorialize while simultaneously solidifying those tenuous bonds of belonging. Through participant observation and interviews at vigils in New York and Toronto, I was able to explore the affective circulation of racialized *necrointimacies* in the scripted organization of the memorial itself. While the scripted nature of memorialization would ostensibly seem to preclude any rogue affects from disrupting the smooth flow of the vigil, as I soon discovered, the presence of racialized trans life was often incompatible with the ritualized demands for racialized trans death.

What is notable is that, at two of these ‘official’ TDOR events, the macabre interplay between the hypervisibility of racialized trans death and haunting erasure of racialized trans life was highlighted by emergent discourses of trans rights as a future-oriented politics of hope that obfuscated the material violence resulting from the interlocking effects of systemic transmisogyny and racism in the present. Indeed, we can read these melancholic repetitions of racialized death as performances of the permanent deferral of any ethical reckoning with loss lest the object of desire be lost completely. Thus structured through a three-fold process of

spectacularization, consumption, and erasure, the living trans body of colour can only be folded into trans inclusion when the racialized body is once again effaced or rendered ghostly.

But another way of interpreting the *necrointimacies* circulated by TDOR is to read them as identity-affirming and generative for those who have traditionally been the objects of consumption. As José Esteban Muñoz (1999) writes, melancholia allows “communities in crisis...to map the ambivalences of identification and the conditions of (im)possibility that shape...minority identities” (74). In the face of this erasure, as I illustrate in Chapter Three, the TDOR vigils organized by grassroots trans collectives have increasingly prioritized centering those directly impacted by anti-trans violence, making spaces for “realness” through unscripted affirmations of resilience in the present and through creative approaches to self-determination. Of particular importance is this turn to addressing the broader social structures that contribute to premature trans and queer death. Certainly, ALP’s approach to making visible the ongoing invisibilization of racialized bare life highlights the nefarious ways in which practices of memorialization often conceal the workings of capitalism, political labour, and the state-securitization of minority identities.

Extending *necrointimacies* to account for the invocation of 9/11 in acts of remembrance, in Chapter 4 I reflect on the ways in which trans bodies are folded into these abstract practices of state-securitization. Placing the affective circulation of *trans necrointimacies* in conversation with national trauma, fear, and counter-terrorist discourses, I argue that racialized trans death is central to the securitization of both whiteness and trans-homonationalism within the hypervigilant nation-state. Whilst narratives of counter-terrorism tend to be US-centric, the terrorist ‘other’ who haunts TDOR vigils also has implications for Canada’s multicultural approach to trans activism which draws heavily on its US histories. As I illustrate, in both the US

and Canada, the circulation of violent *necrointimacies* borne from rituals of memorialization inevitably condition spaces of constructed visibility for the emergence of (some) docile trans subjects who must then adhere to new forms of hopeful trans-homonational inclusion while justifying increased forms of military exceptionalism against non-Western countries. Despite this ambivalence between identification and disavowal, the production of trans-homonationalism remains indebted to these ‘unmentionable’ figures since they suture the bonds of belonging.

My dissertation raises several implications for disparate fields of research ranging from nationalism and memory, contemporary approaches to race and racialization, settler colonial critiques of expendability, trans of colour critiques, and queer affects. But *necrointimacies* also generates new questions for future research on the necropolitical value of memorialization: First, the deeply racialized public memorialization of death that has circulated since I began my research is striking. Indeed, in the time that I began researching TDOR, queer national imaginaries have been variously captured by the 2016 Pulse nightclub tragedy in Orlando and the multiple murders left in the wake of Bruce McArthur’s killing spree in Toronto between 2010 and 2017. Undergirding both of these tragedies are discourses of race, nationalism, fear, and the circulation of *necrointimacies* in the service of whiteness.

Expanding on these two examples of memorialisation as it relates to nationalism, my dissertation illustrates that the affective circulation of *necrointimacies* is tied to the circulation of post-9/11 regimes of hypervigilance constituted through the fear of the racialized other. Related to these regimes of fear is the way in which the national imaginary begins to invest in a politics of whiteness. Fear, as I have discussed in Chapter Four, often mobilizes national subjects within broader mechanisms of surveillance against people of colour. Indeed, we can trace these *necrointimate* investments in the memorialization of racialized death following the Pulse

nightclub tragedy in Orlando in 2016. In the wake of the shootings—which claimed primarily Hispanic LGBTQ people—social media was flooded with transcripts of 9-11 phone calls, visceral descriptions of ruined bodies, and images of blood-stained floors. Once a safe space for queer and trans Latinx people, the Pulse nightclub galvanized political articulations of sympathy and solidarity for the LGBTQ community. What quickly emerged was a binary between the “good gay” was deserving of state protection—with its concomitant investments in increased surveillance of LGBTQ bodies— versus the “bad” Muslim shooter who had targeted American bodies for slaughter. Lost in translation was the implicit invocation of the deserving [white] homonational citizen versus the dangerous, anti-gay [racialized] threat. What emerged instead in the memorials following the Pulse shootings was the affective circulation of *necrointimacies* wrought by the simultaneous consumption of deracialized violence and the invitation to identify within patriotic discourses of hypervigilance.¹¹²

We can trace a similar production of whiteness and homonationalism in the mainstream media coverage of Bruce McArthur. In January 2018, the well-liked, grandfatherly landscaper and seasonal Santa was arrested for a string of murders committed between 2010 and 2017 in Toronto’s gay village. Within days of his arrest, the remains of several gay men were found buried in large planters on the properties of his clients. The public would soon learn that all but two of his victims were racialized men of South Asian origin. While Majeed Kayhan, Selim Esen, Skandaraj Navaratnam, Soroush Mahmudi, Abdulbasir Faizi, and Kirushna Kanagaratnam¹¹³ had been reported missing in the years leading up to McArthur’s arrest, it was not until the disappearance of a white gay man, Andrew Kinsman, that the Toronto Police began

¹¹² As signaled by the trending hashtag #weareorlando.

¹¹³ Although Dean Lisowick, a sex worker in the gay village, was also one of McArthur’s victims, his struggle with homelessness meant that he was never reported missing.

taking the case seriously (Nasser 2018). Within days, posters for the missing Kinsman peppered community poster-boards and lampposts: “He was presented as a local — an upstanding citizen, a pet lover, a man with a sense of humour” (Larocque 2018). The disparity between the treatment of Kinsman’s disappearance and those of the transient and ethnic is jarring.

As one journalist noted, “A queer person of colour is used to being dehumanized. We are used to having our bodies fetishized, beaten and dismantled. We are used to being put on display for the benefit of white eyes. A killer merely took these cultural realities and rendered them in literal grisly detail. He tore bodies apart and put them into pots on wealthy lawns” (Larocque 2018). Fetishized in life, and ignored by the law in death, it was only after Kinsman’s disappearance that the lives of these racialized men gained symbolic value as bodies deserving of state protection. Later that year, the Toronto Pride Parade—a hotbed of intense debates about the ethics of police inclusion—would incorporate a “mourning procession” in the annual march. This amalgamation of the vigil into the celebration of gay pride illustrates the ways in which bodies of colour can be consumed within broader discourses of state-security. Etched in chalk along the sidewalks of Church Street, invisible in life, it was only in death that the lives of these missing racialized bodies began to fully matter. Animated by the ghosts of systemic violence, TDOR vigils are symptomatic of broader questions about the haunting trouble of the racialized resurrections so central to world-making. Both the Orlando tragedy and the Bruce McArthur murders implicitly place cis and trans bodies of colour outside neoliberal, Western formulations of liberty and equality. These discourses of grievability circulated by memorializations define the contours of inclusion and exclusion, not just within minority communities but also within the nation-state.

Second, my dissertation raises questions about the ethics of memorialization. While my initial approach to this project was not without a great deal of skepticism, this project has been shaped, in part, by an ethics that embraces Sara Ahmed's provocative formulation of a "feminist killjoy" (Ahmed 2010)—the refusal to participate in the thick sociality of imagined future-oriented happiness that often accompanies mainstream TDOR events. Over time, it has become increasingly clear that my discomfort with the obligation to witness and commemorate trans death in has important broader implications for understanding remembrance and memorialisation. For, as I have argued throughout this dissertation, rituals of remembrance *do* something. Through the reverberative force of ritualized violence, the spectacularized repetition of racialized trans death produces whiteness as political life. Animated by the ghosts of systemic violence, TDOR vigils are symptomatic of broader questions about the haunting trouble of the racialized resurrections so central to world-making. The discourses of grievability circulated by memorializations define the contours of inclusion and exclusion, not just within minority communities but also within the nation-state. What is striking are the ways in which *trans necrointimacies* play an increasing role in the national imaginary. Through my analysis of the invocation of the trauma of 9/11 in TDOR, and by extension the fear of the terrorist threat to patriotic bodies, my dissertation would suggest that rituals of trans memorialization are intimately entwined with larger questions of surveillance, state-conferred rights, and the production of trans-homonationalism.

Third, my dissertation offers a way of extending *necrointimacies* beyond an analysis of trans theory to account for the racialized and affective frameworks through which we may analyze the broader implications of the valuable deployment and consumption of dehumanization and death in the service of the nation-state. Indeed, we can read both the vigil

and hypervigilance as inextricable from the affective terrains of ordinary violence that is so amenable to political manipulation. These macabre disseminations of racialized destruction, I argue, are central to the production of patriotic docility. In turn, the circulation of re-virtualized, but abstracted fear, justifies the increased surveillance of marginalized populations while simultaneously allowing the conditional inclusion of privileged subjects within contemporary democratic regimes of tolerance and freedom.

As this dissertation illustrates, my concept of *necrointimacies* allows us to interrogate the contemporary period in which the affective circulation of racialized death has gained predominance. I offer this formulation of *necrointimacies* with the hopes that it might “make room” (Ahmed 2010, 20) for the abject figures haunting the contours of contemporary discourses of liveability and grievability *beyond* trans studies while also providing a provocative framework for understanding the resilient ways that racialized people reimagine their political futures. In that sense, this killjoy’s approach to memorialization is a hopeful one shaped by the productive possibilities of inhabiting the negative world of loss through sustained commitment to tracing the chalky outlines of the *necrointimacies* to which we so stubbornly cling.

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Appendix A: Call for Participants

Are you a trans-identified person of colour? I want to hear from you!

Hello, my name is Nael Bhanji and I am a trans-identified person of colour who is pursuing a doctoral degree in York University's graduate department of Gender, Feminist, and Women's Studies.

I am doing a project about the different ways that trans-identified people of colour negotiate belonging within the trans community and within communities of colour. I am also interested in hearing about your experiences during community events (such as the Trans Day of Remembrance and Pride). It is time for our voices to be heard and this research seeks to address the lack of diversity in what's out there about trans communities.

So if you're a person of colour who identifies somewhere along the trans spectrum (MTF, FTM, genderqueer, gender fluid, two spirited etc), are 18 years of age or older, and live in the Greater Toronto Area, I want to hear from you! The interview would only take an hour and your identity would remain anonymous.

If you would like to participate, or have any questions, please contact me at:

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, you may contact the Senior Manager and Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5th Floor, York Research Tower, York University, telephone _____ or email _____. This project is conducted with the supervision of my project advisor, Dr. Enakshi Dua and you can contact her at _____.

Appendix B: Interview Guide for Participants

Pseudonym:

Name:

Age:

Race/Ethnicity:

Pick three words to describe yourself:

1. Choose a pseudonym that I can use to refer to you in this project.
What pseudonym did you choose?
Tell me about it: Why did that name appeal to you?
2. Tell me about yourself:
Tell me about the three words you wrote down on the questionnaire.
How do they describe who you are?
3. Tell me a bit about how you identify:
Do you identify as trans, a transman, a transwoman, genderqueer etc.?
How do you identify in terms of race?
Have you always lived in Toronto/Kingston/New York?
4. Do you belong to any communities?
If POC community: What is it like for you as a trans/queer person in your racialized communities? Describe the folks you hang out with.
If queer/trans community: What is it like for you as a racialized person in your trans/queer communities? Describe the folks you hang out with.
5. Tell me a little about what it's like being a trans person of colour living in Toronto/Kingston/New York?
How do you negotiate work/school/family?
Have you travelled outside of the country? If so, tell me about some of your experiences at border crossings? What happened? How did you feel?
6. What does the Trans Day of Remembrance (or TDOR) mean to you?
Do you attend them? If not, skip to 10. If yes, continue to next question.
7. How many times have you been to TDOR vigils? Who do you usually go with? Where do you usually stand or sit?
If once, tell me about your first experience at a vigil: Where were you? Who organized it? What happened there? Who spoke? How did you feel? What did it make you think about?

If more than once: When talking about the vigils you have attended, which experience stands out to you the most and why? Is there a particular vigil that you remember well? Why?

8. Tell me a bit more about the other people at these vigils:
What sorts of people do you usually see?
What sorts of people don't you see? How do you negotiate this in relation to your own body?
9. Do you feel that attending these vigils has been beneficial to, or difficult for, you?
If so, can you describe some of the benefits?
If not, please explain.
10. Tell me a bit about your thoughts on the people remembered or mourned at TDOR vigils.
Are there people that you feel are not remembered or mourned?
11. Do you think TDOR vigils are important? Why or why not?
12. Have you encountered any resistance to attending a TDOR vigil? If so, why and from whom?
13. How has it felt to talk so much about the Trans Day of Remembrance and about being a trans person of colour?
Is there anything you wish I had asked about?
Is there anything you want to add?

Appendix C: Interview Guide for Organizers

Pseudonym:

Name:

Age:

Race/Ethnicity:

Pick three words to describe yourself:

1. Choose a pseudonym that I can use to refer to you in this project.
What pseudonym did you choose?
2. Tell me a bit about how you identify:
Do you identify as trans, a transman, a transwoman, genderqueer etc.?
How do you identify in terms of race?
Have you always lived in Toronto/Kingston/New York?
3. Do you belong to any communities?
If POC community: What is it like for you as a trans/queer person in your racialized communities? Describe the folks you hang out with.
4. What does the Trans Day of Remembrance (or TDOR) mean to you?
5. How did you get involved with the organization of the TDOR vigil?
Have you organized more than one?
Why did you decide to get involved in organizing a TDOR vigil?
6. Tell me a little bit about the most recent vigil you helped organize:
How many people were involved in planning it?
Were they volunteers or did they have to apply to be on the committee?
What was the composition of the organizational committee?
How long did it take to plan the event?
How did you decide on what to do for the TDOR vigil?
Were there speakers or performers at the event? Tell me a bit about them.
How many people do you think attended that vigil?
7. Have you encountered any resistance about organizing a TDOR vigil?
If so, why and from whom?
8. And what about positive feedback? Tell me a bit about some of the positive feedback that you've received.

9. How many times have you been to TDOR vigils as a participant instead of as an organizer?
Who do you usually go with? Where do you usually stand or sit?
If once, tell me about your first experience at a vigil: Where were you? Who organized it? What happened there? Who spoke? How did you feel? What did it make you think about?
If more than once: When talking about the vigils you have attended, which experience stands out to you the most and why? Is there a particular vigil that you remember well? Why?
10. Tell me a bit more about the other people at these vigils:
What sorts of people do you usually see?
What sorts of people don't you see? How do you negotiate this in relation to your own body?
11. Do you feel that attending these vigils has been beneficial to, or difficult for, you?
If so, can you describe some of the benefits?
If not, please explain.
12. Tell me a bit about your thoughts on the people remembered or mourned at TDOR vigils.
Are there people that you feel are not remembered or mourned?
13. Do you think TDOR vigils are important? Why or why not?
14. How has it felt to talk so much about the Trans Day of Remembrance?
Is there anything you wish I had asked about?
Is there anything you want to add?