BLACK GRAMMARS:
ON DIFFERENCE AND BELONGING

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ABSTRACT

Black Grammars: On Difference and Belonging examines Blackness and difference from my perspective having come to Canada as part of the wave of Ethiopians and Eritreans that migrated to the West in large numbers in the 1980s and 1990s. In this dissertation, I make sense of growing up and living Black in Canada alongside and among other Black communities who have already settled and have been living in Canada for generations. This moment in the 80s and 90s and the emerging diaspora from the Horn of Africa coming to the West encountering Black communities already living here from previous waves of Black migration grounds the dissertation.

Black Grammars opens by analyzing Black and East African student groups in university as one site of this encounter of Black diasporas but also as a point of departure from which to examine how Black difference is thought and engaged in academic study. I draw on my own experiences growing up and attending school and university in Toronto. This project begins by analyzing Black and East African student groups in universities in Canada, and examines the space between these two identities and identifications that our presence opens up for theorization and analysis. I demonstrate how the limits of the conceptual terrain and the constraints represented by and between those two student groups come to be reproduced across Black Studies literature and normative research done on East African diasporas. This conceptual space forms the terrain and point of departure for this study.

As part of the method of this dissertation, I lay out a set of Scenes that lay out how Blackness and Black difference gets taken up in social and communal settings among Black people and how that same Black(ness) difference gets taken up in academic study. I cite incongruities, shortcomings and gaps that are left wanting. I conclude that Blackness and Black difference is taken up in much more engaging and complex ways amongst Black people in the everyday than academic study has heretofore been able to account for. Put differently, the ways Black Studies and African Diaspora Studies come to be constituted form the terrain on which the need and space for a concept like *Black Grammars* emerges. Attentive to this conceptual terrain and prevailing constraints, I posit *Black Grammars* as a theory of relationality that attempts to bring Black diasporas into sociality and conversation with each other.

The central question *Black Grammars* engages: how might we think Black difference otherwise? How do we account for and attend to the multiplicities of Blackness made ever more complex by the various trajectories that make up the fullness of the Black diaspora? *Black Grammars* is an analytic that attends to these gaps and inconsistencies and also centers ways Black people relate to each other in everyday contexts that is rooted in Black Diasporic Sociality. As a heuristic device, *Black Grammars* centers Blackness and Black difference and posits a theory of Black relationality that is anchored in the ways Black people play, politic and perform difference amidst and amongst themselves.

PRELUDE

Preludes are openings, introductory performances, actions, or events that precede and prepare for the principal subject or more important matter. Preludes can also be musical selections or movements that introduce the theme or chief subject. Archetypally, dissertations do not open with preludes, they open with *Acknowledgements*. While I am fully aware of this convention, for my project neither a typical prelude *or* a standard acknowledgements section would have been adequate; on their own neither would do what I needed them to do. How, then, best to open this capacious project? In part, the challenge was to acknowledge what my parents' own unfinished freedom dreams and difficult journeys provided for me: the position, possibilities, and space opened up for me by that confluence of events and circumstance to think and speak Blackness, in its layers, depths, and difference. And to acknowledge the Black Canada from with/in which I came to be ensconced that makes a project like this possible—and necessary.

I wanted to craft an acknowledgements section that did not solely look back but also forward. One that spoke to the groundings that provided for me the grounds from which to be, but also the Black Canada from where I dream(t). I thought the best way to both acknowledge and position my own vantage point was in the form of a prelude that made clear the space from which I write, think, and, yes, dream. The form and genre this opening section attempts to take is an *Acknowledgement* of a long journey that started somewhere in the past, but is not passed and is still yet ongoing; a past inaugurated by my own birth that also reaches forward to an otherwise future in the form of unfinished freedom dreams. Together, these echo and reverberate the experience and "special stress" of looking (and dreaming) both ways at the same time. This

section is also an acknowledgement that the freedom dreaming Black people know especially is a dreaming that necessarily cuts across space, place, and time.

BLACK FREEDOM DREAMS DISPERSED FROM THE HORN

Being Black is a particular kind of story. And being Black and dreaming freedom has always meant a connection to enslavement in a particular kind of way. But this Black story starts differently, with entirely different freedom dreams. The "freedom dreams"[1] I first grew up hearing—which fed, nourished, and animated my imagination—never started in the hold of the ship, or the plantation. They did not begin with enslavement, and these stories never involved an Underground Railroad or followed the trail of a North Star. They never intertwined with abolitionist stories of struggle or braided with the struggle to end Apartheid. The stories my family told did not involve a Great Migration, not one that was ever treated with the use of a proper noun. The freedom dreams I grew up hearing began in the Horn of Africa. My parents told us stories of resistance and subversive struggle that began in a place called Eritrea. These freedom dreams started on the other side of the Atlantic, in East Africa, or what is sometimes referred to as the Horn of Africa.

Through these stories, my parents taught me that when you are fighting for freedom—or something called independence and self-determination in its place—you have to imagine it before you achieve it. Toni Morrison (1988) would later teach me that same lesson at the

[1] My use of "freedom dreams" is influenced by Robin D. G. Kelley's (2002) *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Tradition*, where he posits—writing from the US context—that we are not yet free. For Kelley the important point "is that we must tap the well of our own collective imaginations, that we do what earlier generations have done: dream" (p. xii). Writing from the Canadian context and thinking through the Horn, on both these points—that we are not yet free, and that we must continue to dream "somewhere in advance of nowhere," as poet Jayne Cortez (1996) puts it—I am wholly in agreement.

Clearing. Sometimes, that imagining of freedom can take a very long time. Through retellings of freedom dreams and struggle, my parents also taught me that when you're imagining a freedom to come, imagining over a lifetime or lifetimes—because sometimes that's how long it takes—freedom dreams and imaginings are easier to sustain and hold on to when done in concert with others dreaming the same dreams.[2]

These narratives taught me that sometimes during protracted struggle you have to leave, run away from everything you know and the struggle you poured your entire life into, and start over to make a life somewhere else, an elsewhere halfway across the world. An otherwise life from the one you had imagined, or the one set out for you—one that cost everything and made so much possible. And that somehow part of what you pass on to your kids *is* the struggle, the idea of it, the praxis of it, a life made inside of it—which includes the best parts of it, the hopeful parts. You tell stories about the ongoing fight for freedom in ways that do not make leaving and not-yet-won freedoms feel like absolute loss. But with distance and the passing of time, there is always loss. As people are dispersed, dreams get deferred. So, in the face of freedoms still to come, you tell stories of struggle in ways that make the loss noble, the dispersal and the dreams deferred dignified—you tell yourself that you left because of and for your kids—and you tell freedom stories hoping that they, too, will inspire freedom dreams. You tell the best parts of the struggle, the celebrated parts of the fight; you keep out the most difficult parts, you keep to yourself what you had to do—maybe because you don't want to burden your kids, and maybe because you have yet to come to terms with what war, resistance, and freedom struggles make decent people do.

[2] A community of dreamers in diaspora is one of many ways Eritrean people of an earlier generation often articulate themselves.

My freedom dreams started at my parents' feet with stories that had just enough details to inspire but never enough to satiate or satisfy. In many ways, these were stories not to be passed on. While escaping war and persecution for being freedom fighters, to my family the Americas came to be conceived as a site and space of refuge and exile; a place from which to make a life and to continue to dream freedom dreams, even if far from the lands where they first began. And while my project is predominantly written in (and about) Blackness in the West—in Canada, and from Toronto, the city where I now recite these freedom dreams, where I live and struggle and still dream freedom dreams—it is heavily influenced by the Horn of Africa, where the freedom dreams first started. It is dedicated to all the freedom fighters everywhere who fought (and continue to fight) for a better life, for something larger than themselves in service of a better world. And especially for those like my parents, who gave up a life in one place for a chance to make a better one somewhere else. While Black life in Canada remains difficult, and while my parents are still yet to see the full promise of their freedom dreams fulfilled, they have made full lives anyway. I am here, able to think, struggle, and write this project because of their will to keep on, keepin' on. Now, we dream together.

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INTRODUCTION—"HOPE IN INTERNATIONAL BLACKNESS"

> Blackness is surprising because it should not be here, was not here before, was always here, is only momentarily here, was always over there (beyond Canada, for example). This means, then, that black people in Canada are also presumed surprises because they are "not here" and "here" simultaneously: they are, like blackness, unexpected, shocking, concealed in a landscape of systemic blacklessness; and, they exist in a landscape of blacklessness and have "astonishingly" rich lives, which contradict the essential black subject. In Canada, blackness and black people are altogether deniable *and* evidence of prior codes of representation that have identified blackness/difference as irrelevant. (McKittrick, 2006, p. 93)

> Pops turned 60, he proud what we done
> In one generation, he came from Africa young
> —Nipsey Hussle, "Higher"
> (Ermias Joseph Asghedom, August 15, 1985–March 31, 2019)

When I graduated from high school, I had a choice of four universities to attend for my undergraduate education: two of my top choices were in Toronto. I visited both campuses, one in downtown Toronto and the other tucked away in the northwest corner of the city. Visiting the downtown campus was to me unexciting, and though I did not know it at the time of that visit, that place lacked what I was searching for in a university experience. The second, "less prestigious" university, quite removed from the city's more trendy and hip downtown core, presented me with more of what I was looking for. During that campus visit, I remember that there was a student group fair on display in the campus square. Among many other student groups I saw table booths set up for the Black Student Association (BSA), an Eritrean Student Association (ESA), and an Ethiopian Student Association (ESAY). As I absorbed my

surroundings, I recalled telling myself that *this* was what I was looking for, and what I had lacked in high school—a place where I could explore in depth and in a sustained way what it might mean to be Eritrean, to be Black, and to be both of these things simultaneously in Canada. Putting it plainly, during my campus visit to that "smaller, less prestigious" campus, I saw *more* Black people. And coming from a high school experience where that was not the case, this simple fact gripped and enthralled me, and convinced me that this was where I needed to be in order to address the kinds of questions that most intrigued me.

I entered that university in the northwest area of the city, and during my time as an undergraduate, I joined the BSA, ESA, and the ESAY. Not only was I an active member, I joined the executive committees of all three student groups. Beyond planning and coordinating, I often frequented BSA, ESA, and ESAY events and meetings, which were—unsurprisingly—the spaces where the most generative and invigorating discussions on Black cultural discourse took place.[1] I found that the types of discussions we had in the BSA centred on racism, police brutality, and mainly Black American cultural production and criticism (in particular of film, fashion, television, art, and literature). These were very different from the kinds of conversations we had in ESA meetings. The ESA meetings centred on cultural retention and transmission, gender roles in East African cultural communities, development schemes, NGOs, remittances, and the idea of going "back home" to "help out" in (re)building the still new and developing nation.[2] I have always known and felt that something was lacking *between* those two Black

[1] In particular, the logical university analogs to these discussions—the courses on race and racism offered in the humanities and social sciences—did not provide as invigorating or enriching a space as the discussions we crafted in our student spaces.

[2] Many of us in the ESA were born in Canada, and the few who were born back home were very young when we fled. So the idea of a return to a home most of us did not know was, at most, imaginative and hopeful but not material.

student groups and the conversations those spaces engendered. While the events and the actions we took on campus were worthwhile, to me they always left a lot wanting. I felt that both student groups and the sets of conversations they produced always had something missing: when mutual conversations occurred—and they were few—the groups often talked past each other, and both conversations and the sets of discourses they intended to address left a lot of conceptual terrain unexplored. While on the surface, both were comprised mostly of Black students, and to the uninitiated that might be sufficiently explanatory, I contend that those "two" undergraduate groups—with the BSA on one end and the ESA and the ESAY forming another—were (and are) emblematic of how Blackness comes to be lived and Black difference expressed in diaspora. I am arguing that these two groupings are emblematic of how Blackness and Black diasporas are taken up *in study* too, with studies either focusing on the Black condition and racial terror one side or the ethnic character and nostalgia of a longing for home as in diaspora on the other—with *Black Grammars* I am making the claim that much more is happening here and taking place. The Eritrean and Ethiopian Students' Associations were filled with undergraduate students who were first-generation from the Horn of Africa. In the Black Students Association, both leadership and membership were mostly at least third-, fourth-, or more generation from the Caribbean—and me.

In the BSA, the Black condition normatively understood—of living with and under the reality of racism—and what that meant both on campus and in Canada generally were at the centre of our discussions and of the events and types of protesting we did on campus. Racism was always prominently centred in our discussions, as was Blackness and especially Black American culture: these together were the main concerns and preoccupations in the BSA. But

when I was at Eritrean and Ethiopian Students Association events, Blackness fell off the analytical and material table which is not to say that we were unaware of our Blackness but that it was not at the centre of our focus. Many of us in the ESA and ESAY were studying in fields that reflected the interests with which *we were* preoccupied: International Development Studies, Development Studies, African Studies, or similarly constituted fields. These were symbolic of the types of conversations we had and the kinds of actions we mounted on campus and beyond. When both student groups held events or put on protests, any passing observer could immediately and fairly easily tell—on the surface—when they were in a "Black space or Black event" or a "Horn of Africa/East African space or event." At one event, Blackness, racism and racial terror was prominent, while at the other it was seemingly only an afterthought or an absented presence—in the sense that while we were all obviously Black, we never discussed nor centred any of our events or actions around that patently observable fact. There was always a space, a conceptual and material *in-between* terrain that existed amidst the Black and Ethiopian and Eritrean student groups and was never engaged. *Black Grammars* as a project dwells in that space, and thinks about what might be generative in its interrogation.

Though written sometime after those student group experiences, this project tries to conceptualize a notion of Blackness and Black difference that brings together those two seemingly disparate conversations and the conceptual spaces they represent(ed). With this work, I am trying to conceive a kind of grammar that encompasses the desires of both student groups, the conversations and the contestations they provoked. I come to this project on Black cultural discourse and Black difference by way of the Horn of Africa. I examine the kinds of questions, tensions, contestations, and contradictions that emerge from living, studying, and writing Black

life in Canada. My experiences, having come from Eritrea as a young child and growing up frequenting Black community spaces in Toronto,[3] lie at the core and form the context of this dissertation. Although I grew up in Toronto, the Horn of Africa was always close by. Because my parents were active in the struggle for a free, self-determined, and independent Eritrea,[4] my siblings and I grew up hearing stories of struggle, independence, and freedom from my parents' adolescence and adulthood years "back home." While those stories were from another time and a place halfway across the world, the retellings made them feel much more recent and resonant. It also helped that my parents always told these stories in the *present* tense. Thus, for me, the Horn of Africa has always been geopolitically, imaginatively, and materially present.

In this dissertation, I focus on how Black difference plays out amongst Black people in the West who have migrated (some by force, some due to political instability, some for economic reasons, some otherwise) across different generations and different time periods, and who have come through very different diasporic trajectories. Thinking about those student groups, I explore why Blackness is so prominently centred, expressed, and discussed meaningfully and substantively among Black Caribbean people who have been in Canada for generations, in contrast to the spaces where East Africans congregate and commune. As I did when I was an undergraduate, I continue to move across both of these conceptual and material spaces, and continue to mark these ongoing conceptual divides. I have realized that Black Toronto spaces rarely ever think Africa, much less of the Horn, while in predominantly East African (Eritrean, Ethiopian, and Somali) spaces, Blackness is never substantively discussed but is always

[3] To the extent that a Black community is possible in a structurally racist state like Canada.
[4] Eritrea was in a struggle for independence between 1961 and 1991, and was declared an independent state in 1993. At the time, this war represented the longest war in modern history.

tangential, something the collective already knows but would rather not focus on—as if Blackness—and/or the racism that stems from being Black—was a public secret. The concerns, preoccupations, and discourses of the Black Student Association were never central to the Eritrean and Ethiopian Student Associations, and vice versa. The central focus of one was never the centre of the other. In this project, I focus on how Blackness emerges (or does not) and is obscured or elided, and I use the example of these two student groups as the conceptual framework from which to think and study. Scholarly attention has rarely been paid to the dynamics of Blackness and difference that are produced noticeably and especially in Black social spaces.

This dynamic of Black difference is reproduced in the United States between direct descendants of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and the Middle Passage and later waves of Black migrated peoples. It is also reproduced in the United Kingdom between descendants of the Windrush Generation (Black Britons) and those from the Horn of Africa who arrived generations later. I observed this dynamic during my time visiting Northwestern University (2014) amongst the predominantly Black American graduate students with whom I studied. We audited a course with Professor Michelle Wright, and the entirety of the course texts and seminar discussions were thoroughly US-centric. The limits of thought ended at the US border. Eventually, I became the person to whom the class turned to for a non-American Black perspective. At the end of my stay, a fellow graduate student turned to me and said, "I didn't know there were Black people in Canada. I have so much hope in *international* Blackness now." It was a comment that has stayed with me and informs this project.[5]

[5] This comment is telling in that it reveals which geopolitical landspace this graduate student considered to be the centre of African-American and Black Studies, and perhaps even Blackness itself.

Along similar lines, I visited Harvard University for the 2015–16 academic year, which ended up being quite a tumultuous one for Black uprising and Black revolt.[6] During my stay, I was housed in the "African *and* African-American Studies Department," where similar dynamics played out between the "domestic" Black American students and the continental African students who travelled from abroad to study at that institution. In effect, that one department operated as two departments, in a manner very similar to what I had experienced moving between the BSA and the ESA and ESAY. The "African" and "African-American" poles of the Harvard department were in fact very separate; their events were separate, their discussions were distinct, and the students rarely engaged one another in substantive ways. While I went to the events of both poles/ends of the department, the students, their courses, and their events never really cross-pollinated. The time of my visit Harvard's campus was especially animated as it occurred in the aftermath of the police killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson on August 9, 2014. Almost weekly, Harvard Yard had #BlackLivesMatter focused events, rallies, and protests. The Black American domestic students constantly took the African students to task for their absences from those events. The similarities to the BSA, ESA, and ESAY were (and still are) palpable.

The experience of moving between those two student groups at my university, as well as at various institutions that I visited in the United States, represented, for me, the complexities of Blackness, identity, history, and diaspora. In one student group, Blackness—and in attendant

[6] In 2014, Black Lives Matter emerged as an international cry for the recognition of Black humanity, the resistance and uprising against police brutality which began in the United States and has grown to a global uprising. Black Lives Matter, along with the term anti-Black racism, became even more prominent following the very public murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis Police. Amidst a global pandemic, protestors took to the streets around the world decrying the long history of police killings of Black people.

fashion, racism—was always hyper-present in ways that obscured and occluded the Horn of Africa. In the other student group, East African geography, history and culture was made central, but Blackness was not. Yet Eritrea and the Horn of Africa always informed the lens through which I see the world *and also* how I came to see, explore, and live Blackness. This is the experiential context for the question I so often find myself asking when in Black spaces: Does the "Black" that hovers above and frames this gathering include me? Or, to riff on Rinaldo Walcott's (1997/2003) well-known text *Black Like Who*, I always wondered if *that* Black meant "*Black Like Me?*" To that end, *Black Grammars* explores what being Black and being Eritrean or part of the African Diaspora more generally (in Canada) means and makes uncertain for diasporic Blackness. A secondary focus of this project explores how the Horn of Africa operates as a geopolitical, historical, mythical, and actual space in the Black diasporic imagination.

As I came into my own Black political consciousness in Toronto, I often found myself in Black spaces of collective struggle in this city: fighting gentrification in Jane and Finch, racial profiling on the street, school closures in community, police brutality and overpolicing everywhere. For me, all these situations, including discussions of Blackness and Black mobilizing on campus, put into focus the limited ways Black is sometimes bandied about, typically as a distinctly and singularly Black American iteration or, in Canada, a version of Black that reaches back solely to the Caribbean. I found these particular uses of Black, in and among Black people, to be limited, singular, and even monolithic—and therefore with limited political possibilities.

In this project, I grapple with the reality that Blackness from the Horn *always* surprises. It surprises the surprise that is Black Canada (McKittrick, 2006), and it unsettles the singular hegemonic story that is Black America—or rather, the singular central story Black America tells itself about itself.[7] Black diasporas from the Horn of Africa not only surprise but also ruffle and disrupt diasporic Blackness. So, I begin here with disruption and surprise, and ask: In Black spaces, when do I—Black and from the Horn—disrupt and surprise? In those same spaces, when am *I* surprised? In what ways do those of us from the Horn disrupt and surprise in Black spaces? And while Black spaces have always been spaces of solace, as Dionne Brand (1994) writes of home,[8] for those of us from the Horn living in diaspora, they too have also sometimes been uneasy places. Taken together, uneasiness, disruption, surprise, and ambivalence aptly describe how those of us from the Horn of Africa fit into (or out of) unspoken yet longstanding conceptual boundaries of diasporic Blackness.

What has typically been meant by Black, and its limited framings, often leaves out whole Black diasporas from the Horn of Africa and elsewhere on the continent. Across the Americas, either by commission or omission, the Horn and those of us from there are consistently the absented presence in Black spaces. While mired in Black collectives of struggle or in one of Toronto's many Black community spaces, I repeatedly observed that what was meant by "Black" was always already limited. Usually, I thought and felt it neither included me nor substantively considered the Horn of Africa. I noticed again and again limited framings that were hindering

[7] While we have always known Blackness is a polyvocal song and a multidimensional story, Black America and the stories it tells itself about itself have always been the loudest, which bears grappling with.
[8] In her essay "Bathurst" in the 1994 volume *Bread Out of Stone*, Dionne Brand writes "maybe home is an uneasy space" (p. 67). A prominent theme of home as uneasy is also explored through second-generation Canadians in Brand's 2005 novel *What We All Long For*.

and restrictive, and I did what I could to challenge these limited conceptualizations and voice my concerns about the reductive ways Black was being imagined and deployed. Nevertheless, my concerns were rarely substantively engaged, because of the enduring reality that any deep questioning of the *concept* and *discursive use* of Black (and its imagined boundaries) had to be sidestepped—or as Stuart Hall puts it, foreclosed—so that we, as Black collectives, could act politically in the world. When it comes to Black struggle and survival, there are always more pressing, more deathly concerns at hand than how to conceptualize and imagine how Black cultural discourse might work in a particular space and time, delineating Black difference, Black contestations, and Black complexities. Indeed, one of the many violent effects (and conditions) of structural racism is that it does not allow space (or time) for deeper analyses and engagements with more complicated notions of Black difference and multiplicity. Put differently, in our efforts to resist racism, very often racism robs us of our complexity.[9] Or: not only does racism elide, but so too does "racialization" obscure. Often, for those of us from the Horn of Africa, it has been in Black spaces that we have always experienced and felt—and continue to experience and feel—to borrow Mark Anthony Neale's term, "left of Black."[10]

While studying, reading, and writing this project, I've travelled across Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom, and have come to observe that my experience of unease, ruffling, disruption, surprise, and ambivalence while being in Black spaces in Toronto is common for Black diasporic people from the Horn. Wherever we are, those of us from the Horn of Africa come to realize quite quickly that our mere presence disrupts stable, discrete, and

[9] And our interiority and the time and space to grapple with both.
[10] Professor Mark Anthony Neal's weekly webcast "Left of Black" is an online series hosted and produced by the John Hope Franklin Center for Interdisciplinary and International Studies at Duke University. "Left of Black" is also Neal's Twitter handle.

familiar conceptualizations not only of what is meant by Black but also the sometime singular, limited, and linear history from which Black is constituted and to which it lays claim. On both registers, we fall outside its bounds. Those of us from the Horn are outside the machinery of Blackness, while *inside* the racial schema. The more "conventional" mold of Blackness draws its limited frame by its attachment to a particular reading of history that, while reductive, often goes unquestioned. In this dissertation, I try to bring these unspoken assumptions about "Black" to light, and make clear how its conventions come to be animated, and who is being addressed when Black is articulated—who is in its (pur)view and, more revealing, who is not. My analysis reveals not only that Black diasporic people from the Horn disrupt and ruffle Blackness, but that their presence shows that Black is, and Black ain't what it used to be.

By examining Blackness from the perspective of the Horn, I hope this project sheds light on how the shadow of the Caribbean occludes the important place the Horn of Africa and its diasporas play in shaping, framing, and impacting Black Canada. Moreover, I hope it makes intelligible how Black America (and Black American cultural discourse) occupies an unproductive and overbearing place in Black Canadian cultural discourse and casts a hubristic shadow over global Black cultural discourse. From both Caribbean and African-American perspectives, Black people from the Horn have no place; or if they do occupy space, it is outside what is considered Black inside a Black Canada that centres American Blackness while simultaneously privileging Blackness inflected by the Caribbean. This unique confluence of inclusions and exclusions limit how and what we think about the work Blackness does and how Blackness comes to be lived and expressed in everyday spaces. Through this project, I assert that the Horn of Africa and its diasporas—conceptually and materially—occupy a critically

important, if underappreciated and under-investigated, space (and place) in Black cultural discourse across the Americas and globally, one that cannot be ignored any longer nor remain under any shadow. From the middle of the 20th century onward, diasporas from the Horn have made and continue to make lives in the West that generate important and interesting, as well as destabilizing, questions. Those questions animate this project—and especially of interest to me are precisely their destabilizing effects.

DISSERTATION BREAKDOWN

CHAPTER 1—BEING BLACK AND OTHER FRUITFUL AND UNPREDICTABLE CONTROVERSIES: NOTES ON THEORIES AND METHODS FOR BLACK LIFE

In this chapter, I acknowledge the scholars and theoretical frameworks that have contributed to my thinking. I make clear how I am approaching and framing this project and the influences that have allowed me to think through what theory and method might be and mean for an unconventional (and undisciplined) study such as this one.

Each of the remaining chapters begin with what I call "Scenes of Surprise and Constraint" that animate the kinds of encounters that make the in-between space marked in the Introduction intelligible. These Scenes animate both the sense of surprise that Black diasporas from the Horn engender and reveal, and the kinds of disruption and ambivalence that this surprise leaves in its wake. These in turn reveal the types of constraints under which normative diasporic Blackness operates. These Scenes detail the intimate, communal spaces where Black people convene and where difference emerges, the generative ways Black people play, perform, and politic Blackness. These Scenes are instructive for the questions they generate and telling for the ways they frame how Black people from the Horn experience, come at, and destabilize who is considered (and who ain't) Black in the Americas. Additionally, these Scenes expose the kinds of Black diasporic experiences that are routinely missed and/or obscured in conventional studies in both Black Studies and African Diaspora Studies.

My use of Scenes and its' capitalization builds on Saidiya Hartman's use of Scenes in her influential text *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century*

America (1997) wherein Hartman deploys the use of everyday scenes to move our focus away from spectacular events and incidents of racial terror and violence. In doing so, Hartman focuses our attention to the mundane, the quotidian and everyday ways white supremacy and racial violence comes to be manifested. Leaning on Hartman's methodology, my use of Scenes both builds and departs from Hartman, in particular in my capitalizing of Scenes. In doing so, my intention is not to detail the ways white supremacy is normalized or the ways Black people understand, come to or learn Blackness through incidents of racism but rather the everyday ways Black Sociality comes to be animated and the way difference and Blackness is made to move, and work in order to make it do what Black people (need to) make it do. I capitalize Scenes because I want to imbue some formality to Black Social spaces, Black difference and Black Sociality. And even if they are fleeting under the weight of white supremacy, I want to attend to the sites and spaces that Black people make and carve out, the places where they meet, socialize, commune on their own terms as much and to the extent that we can. I capitalize Scene in my Scenes because I want to direct the reader to pay particular attention to that which is so often ignored, elided, obscured and ignored.

The Scenes detail how those of us from the Horn of Africa come to be read *in and/or out* of Black diasporic collectivity, and the kind of surprise that Horn of African diasporic people introduce and/or bring to Blackness—a constitutive and generative marking. The Scenes are also emblematic of the kind of complex and contested Black Sociality and Black relationality that emerge in Black Third Spaces. They make intelligible the ways that being of East African descent comes to matter when confronted with how Blackness is framed and understood in diaspora. The Black Sociality centred in the Scenes represents the terrain of Black diasporic cultural politics where difference gets worked on, where generative contestation and useful

frictions—or as Macharia (2019) puts it, frottage—takes place. Analytically, this is the plane on which and whereby Blackness itself coheres; where it gets worked and stretched, to use Fanon's (1963) terminology. Collectively, the Scenes detail the surprise East African diasporas represent for traditional Blackness as normatively understood, as well as the kinds of constraints of Blackness they make intelligible.

Chapter 2—East African Diasporas in the West: Reviewing the Landscape of Study

The specific focus of this chapter is the recent literature on East African migrations and diasporas. I examine how Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporas have been conventionally framed in academic literature. I interrogate this literature to unpack how East African diasporas have been charted and analyzed, asking: What do these studies focus on, what patterns might be discerned, and what does this literature miss?

Chapter 3—The Bridge That Is Not My Back: Learning Blackness/Becoming Black

In this chapter I focus specifically on more recent work that has explored East African diasporas' perspectives on Blackness. Extending the previous chapter's analysis, I examine how Eritrean and Ethiopian diasporas have been brought under the banner of Blackness, asking what kinds of frameworks are deployed to bring in Horn of African diasporas. I offer a critique of the prevailing narrative and persistent analytic of "Learning Blackness/Becoming Black," bringing to the fore its underpinnings and shortcomings. In short, I argue that the idea of "Learning Blackness and Becoming Black" in the West treats Blackness itself as unchanging and

unchangeable, and therefore monolithic and frozen in time. This chapter seeks to shift the Black cultural discursive landscape and terrain, insisting on the need for a wholly different analytic to account for the depths, nuances, and richness (the changing same) of Black difference and its multiplicities.

CHAPTER 4—TOWARD BLACK GRAMMARS AND A SOCIOLOGY OF THE DOOR OF NO RETURN

This chapter fleshes out *Black Grammars* as an analytic. In doing so, it marks, and is critical of the false binary so prevalent in/between African Studies and Black Studies. This binary is laid out with absolutist ethnicity on the one side and an undifferentiated Blackness on the other. I detail an approach that attends to my critiques of the "Learning Blackness/Becoming Black" trope detailed in Chapter 3 and the reifying racial discourse on which diversity and multicultural frameworks—as well as sociology and other disciplinary formations—rely. The intellectual lineage of *Black Grammars* is indebted to Rinaldo Walcott's (1997/2003) important text *Black Like Who*, a set of essays that Walcott describes as an "attempt to articulate some grammars for thinking Canadian Blackness" (p. xiii). Taking Blackness as an open sign as Walcott does, and as relation as Simone Browne (2015) does, this chapter offers *Black Grammars* as an analytic and heuristic that better accounts for and attends to the ways Black diasporas and collectives work on and work through—but never work out—Black difference and multiplicity.

I position Black Third Spaces as a social-spatial hermeneutic to mark the sociality that is produced when Black people from different places and with different histories are living,

playing, working, and thinking collectively in urban spaces. I am interested in shining light on the kinds of spaces where Black people are making their lives, where a certain kind of work is done that both animates and makes sense of Blackness and difference in diaspora. In my project, I call these analytical and material spaces Black Third Spaces, and these moments of difference and surprise—which can be expressed materially, imaginatively, and through a range of temporalities—*Black Grammars.*

CONCLUSION: LOOKING BACK AT THE SCENES

In the conclusion, I suggest what *Black Grammars* can open up in terms of possibilities and approaches to the future study of Black diasporic life and the broader field of Black Studies.

CHAPTER 1—BEING BLACK AND OTHER FRUITFUL AND UNPREDICTABLE CONTROVERSIES: NOTES ON THEORIES AND METHODS FOR BLACK LIFE

> It would be worthwhile for someone who works with languages to reverse the order of questions and begin his approach by shedding light on the relations of language-culture-situation to the world. That is, by contemplating a poetics. Otherwise, [s]he runs the risk of turning in circles within a code, whose fragile first stirrings [s]he stubbornly insists on legitimizing, to establish the illusion that it is scientific, doing so at the very point in this concert that languages would already have slipped away toward the other, fruitful and unpredictable controversies. (Glissant, 1997, p. 120)

> It is good form to introduce a work in psychology with a statement of its methodological point of view. I shall be derelict. I leave methods to the botanists and the mathematicians. There is a point at which methods devour themselves. (Fanon, 1967, p. 12).

> We are constituted through and by continued vulnerability to this overwhelming force, we are not only known to ourselves and to each other by that force. (Dionne Brand, quoted in Sharpe 2016, p. 134)

I approach Blackness and Black difference from an interdisciplinary and wayward perspective, and ask: What might we be able to glean about Blackness and Black difference from Black people in conversation and communion? What if, as a matter of deep study, we paid critical and scholarly attention to Black people in everyday spaces? What kind of Black Sociality is produced from the amalgamation of history, generation, identity, and diaspora among Black people? I situate this project as grounded—but not bounded—in Black Studies. In that field, specific and particular perspectives from the Horn of Africa are sparse and scattered, those perspectives are centered in this work. My general questions are: In Black diasporic spaces particularly, how does Blackness from the Horn of Africa ruffle, surprise, and disrupt what is understood as Blackness? What are some ways Black people do, talk, and live Black difference? What might emerge when Black people's engagements with difference and multiplicity are brought into conversation with formal academic literatures in sociology and related fields? How has the ambivalence with regards to Blackness experienced by diasporic people from the Horn of

Africa been taken up in academic literature? How do we think and make sense of the surprise and disruption that those from the Horn of Africa—and the Horn of Africa's material history itself—bring to Blackness and its assumed fixed, formal, and originary history? And, in light of all these questions, how then to think about (and trouble) Black belonging?

I try to get at the heart of these questions by closely examining how Black difference is expressed in intimate Black spaces, and by considering these issues outside normative conceptualizations of difference understood through the logics of refugee or immigrant frames, race, ethnicity, and/or nation. What might it mean to attend intensively to the terms, tenses, and grammars of Black difference? Relatedly, how could a grammar for Black difference be mapped outside of hegemonic Black American framings?

Due to the lack of focus on Black Sociality and Black difference in normative disciplines, and the dearth of work on East African diasporas in Black Studies generally, I turn in this project to multiple fields including Sociology, Black Studies, diaspora studies, literature, and poetry to make sense of the questions I ask. As that heterogenous list suggests, this dissertation is constituted interdisciplinarily, not only because bringing together these fields elicits unpredictable controversies and generative new thinking but also out of necessity—because on their own none of these fields and/or disciplines as normatively constituted offers adequate conceptual tools and analytical frameworks to answer these questions. In addition, scholars working primarily in the heritage of more traditional disciplines have proven incapable, uninterested, or unwilling to see Black life and Black Sociality as central to the work they do, and therefore offer little in the way of guidance.

In Chapter 2, I enter into conversation with the work of scholars from a variety of backgrounds who have worked on East African diasporas, highlighting some common shortcomings. Each of these works disappears or obscures Blackness or, if it appears at all, employ it as an empty concept, principally a stand-in for race and/or racism. Because Blackness is emptied out, in the end these projects obfuscate and obscure—rather than uncover, extrapolate or attend—Black difference and ultimately Black Sociality. The method I use remains attuned to the ways race, ethnicity, and to a lesser degree nation form the basis and analytical tools of so much work on Black diasporas. This reveals their inadequacy and ineffectiveness for attending to Black difference in its multiplicities. I delineate how Black Sociality itself as an analytic and/or site of study has not been the central concern of Black Studies.[1] In part, I attribute the all-encompassing hegemony of the racial condition as a factor in why Black internal difference and complexity is so often occluded, elided, and obscured. Indeed, it is difficult to look around and think of Blackness, Black complexity, Black interiority, and Black difference from the hold of the slave ship; which is to say, while always on the brink of death. Before I delineate how marking Black Sociality opens new possibilities for thinking and imagining Black subjectivities, in what follows I detail Black Studies methods and frames that inform this work.

[1] According to Darlene Clark Hine's (2014) "Black Studies Manifesto," the prevailing characteristics of a Black Studies Mind are: intersectionality, nonlinear thinking, diasporic perspectives and comparative analyses, and finally solidarity.

Fielding Black Studies[2]

As a field, Black Studies is often preoccupied with detailing and demarcating the racial condition, rather than the social life, produced through living in the wake of the violent interdiction that is the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Across the long history of letters, articulating the Black condition has been accomplished in a myriad of creative and impactful ways. In what follows, I briefly craft a Black Studies conceptual terrain, highlighting some of the ideas that have helped us to understand the intellectual contributions of those working under what C. L. R. James (1970) generatively called the banner of Black Studies.[3]

Black scholars, artists, and cultural workers have always deployed alternative conceptual frameworks and various forms of figurative speech, tropes, metaphor, and simile to convey Black life and Black experience. Black writers have always read and deeply understood the ways language has been used to render Black life inhuman or outside the bounds of humanity. They have always had to wield their own facilities and power of language through creative speech that gives rise to alternative conceptual frameworks, deployed against the ends to which racial discourse have put them—what Sylvia Wynter (1994) describes as our narratively condemned status. Wynter urges our continued resistance to participation in that long-established practice, and that we instead become "undisciplined."

[2] I use "fielding" here in a doubled sense; on the one hand fielding can refer to marking the terrain of any area of study, its conceptual borders and limits, but on the other it can refer to "marking or catching" the main object of study in any given field.

[3] Dylan Rodriguez (2014) offers a useful articulation of the impasse at which Black Studies finds itself and the radical generosity and fluidity that characterizes it as a field, as well as the radical generosity that has always been its practice.

Metaphors are commonly understood words or phrases that are applied to objects (or actions) for which they are not literally applicable—that is, one "thing" which is representative or symbolic of "something else," especially something "abstract." Similes are figures of speech that involve the comparison of one kind or order with *another*, *different* kind or order, and are often used to make description more emphatic, resounding, vigorous, and vivid.[4] In their use and deployment of metaphor and simile, Black scholars, artists, and writers muddy the difference and distinction between the two in creative and generative ways. In particular, when putting these definitions of metaphor and simile alongside the long history of Black people's status in the "New World" as anchored and wedded to that of commodity, pure labour, subhuman standing, and objecthood in place of personhood—the turn to metaphor (i.e., the desire to literally not be applicable to the "thing") and simile (to be compared to another of a different order, say: "the human") is understandable, imaginative, and a form of creative resistance.[5]

In thinking through the multiple waves of Black peoples' migrations to Canada, Carol Talbot (1984) frames Black experience through a set of tropes as riddled with cultural confusion, where the onus is "on us to regroup ourselves mentally, emotionally, and spiritually" (p. 95). Talbot continues:

> I am a voice crying from the wilderness, on the fringe of the diaspora. The threads of our origins have almost faded into oblivion for many of us, but I cannot let

[4] The key point here is the tendency of Black scholars and creatives to deploy metaphor and simile to render Black life and actions as human and within the domain of personhood

[5] Frantz Fanon (1967) called this "the leap." In *Black Skin, White Masks*, he writes "I am not a prisoner of History. I should not seek there for the meaning of my destiny I should constantly remind myself that the real leap [le véritable saut, in the original French] consists in introducing invention into existence. In the world through which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself" (p. 229). In his later works this is the point of departure for what David Marriott, Paul Gilroy, Sylvia Wynter and others have identified as "Fanon's New Humanism."

> them go physically, mentally, or, most important, spiritually. For me, the pathway that shaped our history begins in the pages of African history. I believe our race memory must be with the spirit of those of the Crossing, with the pain of the Scattering, with the humiliation of the Oppression, and now in the pride of the Gathering. May we consciously weave the threads of the past into the fabric of the future. (p. 95)[6]

Talbot offers a useful schematic for thinking about the notable events that shape Black experience and subsequently Black life. In this passage, she deploys the metaphors and similes that are most commonly drawn upon to signify both the events that inaugurate Blackness and the conditions shaping Black life. These include the Transatlantic Slave Trade and Middle Passage, various waves of migration across the 20th and 21st centuries, and the racism and oppression to which Black peoples have been subjected wherever they make their lives. Through tropes, a looser and more extended form of figurative language, Talbot summarizes this long history in the following way: the Crossing, the pain of the Scattering, the humiliation of the Oppression, and the Gathering.

Writing a century earlier and from an American context, W. E. B. DuBois (1969/1903) posits that being Black necessitates a kind of double consciousness.[7] Following his famous proclamation that the great challenge of the 20th century was going to be the colour line, DuBois

[6] This paragraph closes Talbot's important and under-read memoir.
[7] In the "Forethought" to *The Souls of Black Folk*, DuBois (1967/1903) writes: "Herein lie buried many things which if read with patience may show the strange meaning of being black here in the dawning of the Twentieth Century" (p. v). It should be noted that DuBois first used the term "double consciousness" in an article in the *Atlantic Monthly* magazine in 1897. It was later republished with few edits in the chapter "Of Our Spiritual Strivings" in *Souls*.

gives the name "double consciousness"[8] to the twinned awareness Black people required (as necessary for survival) in a racially structured American society. In an oft-quoted passage, DuBois writes,

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (pp. 2–3)

DuBois positions and frames double consciousness as the central trope and conceptual framework of Black experience and uses it to understand the history of not only Black people (our Crossing, Scattering, Oppression, and Gathering) but also the United States as a national project.

Writing from the perspective of the colonized, to Frantz Fanon (1967) being Black and from the Third World means occupying what he called "the zone of nonbeing."[9] In the opening pages of *Black Skin, White Masks* (first published in French in 1952), writing from the "burning fires of this zone," Fanon declares the "Black is not a man" (p. 1) and describes this zone as "an

[8] While it could be debated whether double consciousness is a metaphor or simile, I wonder if perhaps a formulation like "metasimile" might better articulate the amalgamation, push and pull, and playfulness Black artists and thinkers so often make between metaphor and simile.

[9] For engagements with the psychoanalytic dimensions of Fanon's thought, see Nandy (1983); the classic study is Ngugi (1986). In both texts the psychology of the colonized is further developed.

extraordinary sterile and arid region … mankind is digging into its own flesh to find meaning" (p. 2). Along a similar vein, Sylvia Wynter uses a range of metaphoric terms for how Black people have been framed in Western orders of knowledge, for example as narratively condemned, symbolically negated, and dysselected Others. Orlando Patterson's concept of social death has been his central contribution to the canon of Black letters. The central thesis of Patterson's (1982) landmark study *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*, which he positions as a "global analysis of the institution of slavery," is the exploration not of an idea but of a social fact: that slavery was integrally and intimately tied to the Western world's ideal of freedom. For Patterson, slavery had its own distinctiveness as a relation of domination: it was—as he put it—a substitute for death. Slavery is an individualized condition of powerlessness, and the cultural aspect of the slave relation is natal alienation, which rests on power, violence, authority and "the control of symbolic instruments" (p. 5).[10] Patterson asserts "that the definition of the slave, however recruited, [is] a socially dead person … Social Death then is the alienation of all rights or birth right claims to any legitimate social order." The slave's experiences of social death were that of a "secular excommunication" (p. 5).[11]

As a body of thought, Afropessimism builds on Patterson's idea of social death by extending its association not only to forced labour but also directly to slavery writ large. Briefly, Afropessimists encourage readers to stop defining slavery through the *experience* of slaves—i.e.,

[10] In Saidiya Hartman's (1997) framing, "the slave is neither civic man nor free worker but excluded from the narrative of 'we the people' that effects the linkage of the modern individual and the state ... The everyday practices of the enslaved occur in the default of the political, in the absence of the rights of man or the assurances of the self-possessed individual, and perhaps even without a 'person,' in the usual meaning of the term" (p. 65).
[11] Patterson (1982) does note that enslaved people *did* have some social relations, while limited, primarily with other enslaved on the plantation. However, although "a large number of works have demonstrated that slaves in both ancient and modern times had strong social ties among themselves, the important point is that these relationships were never recognized as legitimate or binding" (p. 6).

forced labour and bondage—but rather to interpret slavery, and by extension Black experience itself, *as* social death. In their reading, slavery as social death includes gratuitous violence as integral. Moreover, social death defines not only the relation between enslaved and Master, but also the relation of the Black with all others, where forced labour is merely one example of the relation of social death. According to Afropessimists, another feature of Black social death in modern society is the state of being always structurally vulnerable to gratuitous violence in all its forms. Frank Wilderson (2020) asserts that a common correlate between slave societies and our contemporary society is that both are embedded in a regime of violence constituted foundationally on naked violence toward Black people. Wilderson and other Afropessimists go further, claiming that social life is predicated on and indeed stems from this historical violence on Black people as social fact in the world—to them, it is foundational to the Western order. Therefore, for Afropessimists, slaveness and Blackness cannot be conceptually pulled apart, and the beingness of all others is predicated on this foundational violence and violent linkage.

Somewhat connected to these concepts is the idea of fugitivity prevalent in Black Studies. Damien M. Sojoyner's (2017) conceptualization of fugitivity is "based on the disavowal of and disengagement from state-governed projects that attempt to adjudicate normative constructions of difference through liberal tropes of freedom and democratic belonging" (p. 516). Sojoyner builds on Tina Campt's (2014) argument that "the concept of fugitivity highlights the tension between the acts or flights of escape and creative practices of refusal, nimble and strategic practices that undermine the category of the dominant." Fugitivity or taking flight—not to be confused with freedom or emancipation—has become a metaphoric bedrock in thinking through Black diasporic culture as well as a pathway to understanding futurity in Black feminist theory.

Fred Moten's (2003) *In The Break* is another important work in relation to the metaphors and similes that anchor Black Studies; Moten marks Blackness as "simultaneously both the performance of the object and the performance of humanity" (p. 2). *In The Break* is his attempt to "show the interarticulation of the resistance of the object with Marx's subjunctive figure of the commodity who speaks" (p. 6).

These similes and metaphors denoting Black life and/or Black experience are meant to detail what Zora Neale Hurston called the "essential drama of black life." While I agree with Hurston's characterization of Black life as an essential drama,[12] these metaphors and similes describe not only Black experience but also—and maybe more so—the Black *condition*.

With this project, I signal a move away from the figurative, metaphorical, or tropical representation of the condition of Black life to what I term Black interiority in motion, Black social life, or Black Sociality—or maybe all of these simultaneously. In *Black Grammars*, I think about the *work* that being Black entails and subsequently engenders, and the ways those blackened by history and its Afterlife impact how we name, speak, hail, call on, and work with difference, specifically Black difference. I want to think about what Black Sociality is, or as Keguro Macharia (2019) puts it, I want to think about *frottage*.[13] Paula Von Gleich (2017) asks a similar question:

[12] The next logical question following Hurston's assertion is: To what is the drama of Black life essential?
[13] For Macharia (2019), frottage "tries to grasp the quotidian experiences of intra-racial experience, the frictions and irritations and translations and mistranslations, the moments when blackness coalesces through pleasure and play and also by resistance to antiblackness" (p. 7).

> What if the "social death" (Patterson, 1982) that enslavement brought over "people racialised as Black" (Coleman, 2014) has been never-ending as the Afro-pessimist Frank B. Wilderson III (2010) has suggested? If so, how can we conceptualize Black social life that has undoubtedly endured despite social death in such a framework? (n.p.)

The title of the penultimate fifth chapter in Fanon's (1967) canonical *Black Skin, White Masks*[14] has typically been translated in one of two ways: "The Fact of Blackness" or "The Lived Experience of the Black Man." I have always conceived of *Black Grammars* as a project existing somewhere between those two ideas, the *fact* of Blackness and the *life* of Blackness; as also somewhere inside the condition of double consciousness, from within the break and with what Paul Gilroy (1994) calls the "special stress of looking both ways at the same time." I have come to work on the questions[15] *Black Grammars* engages by occupying the critical standpoint between a life living Black and a life learning the facts of Blackness.[16] Ultimately, what does it mean to be Black? What does it mean to live Black? What to make of Black experience? What of Black experience from with/in Black Canada, from outside assumed Black centres? These questions are always at once difficult and important and, in their fullness and totality, and sometimes always unanswerable yet continually demand to be asked.[17] Yet, although unable to

[14] *Black Skin, White Masks* was Fanon's first thesis. I say first because it was initially rejected by his doctoral committee. I think often about how *Black Skin, White Masks* has become such a foundational text on Black subjectivities and was initially faced with rejection by a committee purporting to sanction what is and what is not acceptable knowledge.

[15] On this point, I am influenced by the work of David Scott's (2004) *Conscripts of Modernity*, where he calls for a reconceptualization of the past and also of our postcolonial present

[16] Moten (2008) is "interested in how the troubled, illicit commerce between fact and lived experience is bound up with that between blackness and the black, a difference that is often concealed, one that plays itself out not by way of the question of accuracy or adequation but by way of the shadowed emergence of the ontological difference between being and beings" (p. 180).

[17] In *Small Acts: Thoughts on the politics of Black cultures* (1993), scholar Paul Gilroy interviews the now late acclaimed author Toni Morrison and describes what he calls the "slave sublime," where she makes the point that the Transatlantic Slave Trade broke the world in half. In *The Black Atlantic* Gilroy (1994) examines various authors,

ever be wholly answered, these questions are asked and asked again, across different times and from different contexts. That they are repeatedly asked, while continually impossible, signals both their importance and their enduring necessity.

The central question of this project, then, is the very one W. E. B. DuBois poignantly poses when he first sets to paper the phrase, "How does it feel to be a problem?" Fanon (1967) responds to essentially the same question at the end of *Black Skin, White Masks*, when nearly half a century later he writes "O my body, make of me always a man who questions!" (p. 232).[18] Reading Fanon's assertion toward the end of *Black Skin, White Masks* as a direct response to DuBois' "How does it feel to be a problem?" is to read Fanon as issuing a charge—to himself and by extension to us—to continue to be a problem to the Western world's regimes of knowledge and limited understandings of what and who is human. I read Fanon's expression of New Humanism as one that constantly and always interrogates, examines, critiques, and continues to be a problem to strictures of knowledge and structures of being that would render the Damned of the Earth as outside the human. In *Black Grammars*, I draw on my own experience being from the Horn living Black, and the questions this set of experience and special stresses has engendered. In the final chapter of the dissertation, I work to make clear how I have landed on grammar as my own figure of speech and conceptual framework for Black difference. In doing so, I demonstrate the need for a grammar as a different kind of analytic, offering a more relational understanding not only of Black difference but of Blackness itself and how we can

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Morrison among them, and their attempts to represent the "unsayable" experience of slavery, what he again calls the "slave sublime." The slave sublime is designed to point us to the impossibility of properly representing the lives of the enslaved in full and substantive ways. Gilroy—building on Edmund Burke's concept of the sublime—posits the notion, conceding that while it is a virtual impossibility for writers, scholars, and artists to "properly represent" the life experiences of the enslaved, there is an ethical responsibility attached to the attempt.

[18] This last line closes *Black Skin, White Masks*, and Fanon prefaces it with "My final prayer."

think of grammar as one of many ways of making sense of impossible (but knowable) Black Sociality.

Black Studies: Ground but not Bound

To work on Blackness, as Saidiya Hartman and Frank B. Wilderson (2003) put it, is to "writ[e] from the position of the unthought" (p. 185). Similarly, in a different diasporic context, Rinaldo Walcott (1997/2003) asserts that writing Blackness is "difficult work ... from out of bounds" (p. xi). Taken together, these observations mark the enduring reality that to think, study, and work on Blackness is to work from the position of the unthought, out of bounds of "normative knowledge." For discipline, for knowledge, for all that is thought and known, Blackness is a problem. Blackness is a problem for understanding questions of humanism; for engaging with questions of living with and alongside nature; for interrogating how we might understand enslavement and freedom, movement and stillness, labour and leisure, rationality and reason. When taken into consideration, Blackness is a problem for the untruths told by America's "founding fathers"—for the very fact that there even could be a coherent subject position called founding father, and for the myth of benevolent nations. Blackness is a problem for land and water, for fugitivity and innocence, history and social sciences, for vernacular and formality, poetry and prose; for all of these questions and more Blackness *still* remains a problem. Wherever and whenever the "Black" figure trespasses and Blackness is smuggled into thought, field of study, and formal discipline, problems erupt. Objects of study that were once so certain become distorted when observed and analyzed from the vantage of the enslaved, the Black refugee or immigrant, or the Black diasporic subject: the utility of stable and coherent concepts that have operated as analytical anchors suddenly becomes inadequate and their future utility

questionable. When all these problems erupt, however, much generativity emerges. This study works from what I call W. E. B. DuBois and Christina Sharpe's "problematic" tradition, and builds by engaging the "space" of Blackness and its conceptual terrain on its own terms. With this project, I am trying to *work on, but never work out* Blackness, asserting that in working from and in Black Studies in radical and interdisciplinary ways, something new can emerge.

Black Third Spaces as the In-Between

I am thinking of the space *in-between* as marking the conceptual terrain that exists between the Black Student Group and the Eritrean and Ethiopian Student Groups in my university experience. It resides between the primary concerns of both student groups: On the one hand the all-encompassing condition racism often presents as and can be, and on the other hand the ways the diasporic condition makes way for an insular, inwardly facing, navel-gazing ethnic particularity that can sometimes result in ethnic absolutism. If the Black Student Group is one space, and the Eritrean and Ethiopian Student Groups together another space, I will call this in-between space of Black Sociality the Black Third Space. Additionally, writing from my own social location of being from the Horn of Africa thinking and writing in Black Canada, then for me Black Third Spaces is an intervention between two other conceptual spaces; on the one hand the overarching hegemonic Black American space and on the other the overarching figure of the Caribbean.

Bhabha (1994) conceived of the Third Space to develop broader horizons in any area of criticism or scholarship, where new ideas and vocabularies might be negotiated to enable comparison and new thinking. The Third Space is a site of contestation and (re)negotiation of

cultural space and cultural standards that offers opportunities to create conventions and practices anew in and between various modes of meaning. The Third Space is where cultures co-mingle, not where they dissolve, disappear, or disintegrate; nor is it a space where cultures simply "clash,"[19] but rather a site of generative fusing and creolizing that does not signal a blindness to difference or a favouring of homogenization. Bhabha's Third Space encourages a focus on difference and multiple identities constitutive of modern personhood, as well as the various and sometimes contradictory perspectives one can hold. I want to think of the Black Third Space as not only a more generative site of contestation and negotiation but also one of making. My use of Third Space leans on social geographers contributions to our understanding of the spatiality of social life. In *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-And-Imagined Places* (1996) Edward W. Soja urges us to consider the spatiality of human life in regards to "place, location, locality, landscape, environment, home, city, region, territory, and geography" (p. 1). With his work, Soja wants us to become more aware of the fact that we are much more spatial beings, and the social consequences of the social construction of our spatiality. For Soja, thirdspace "is a purposefully tentative and flexible term that attempts to capture what is actually a constantly shifting and changing milieu of ideas, of events, appearances and meanings" (p. 2). As my Black Third Spaces are, Soja's thirdspace is imbued with both historicality and sociality, in fact Soja marks thirdspace with a three-sided sensibility of spatiality-historicality-sociality. Soja's thirdspace and Bhabha's Third Space help me think through the sites of Black Sociality where Blackness is played, expressed, and its differences contested and worked on—and helps me better articulate *Black Grammars*.

[19] Here the reference is of course to Samuel P. Huntington's thesis of the clash of civilizations.

I borrow Soja and Bhabha's term to both mark and name the sites of Black Sociality that have so often been elided in formal study. I have landed on "Black Third Space" as the heuristic for the space *in-between*, to give analytical credence and to problematize the ways Black Sociality—in fact, Blackness itself—is difficult for normative disciplines and frameworks of thought. Black Third Spaces allow me to enter the space *in-between* the Eritrean, Ethiopian, and Black Student Associations, *between* African Studies and Black Diaspora Studies, *between* Caribbean and East Africans in Canada and *between* Black Americans who are direct descendants of the enslaved and later generations of Black American migration. Black Third Spaces are the gaps produced by conventional study and disciplines which do not, perhaps cannot, imagine thinking and making sense of different generations of Black people in communion, in community, in contestation, and in complexity—in effect, Black social life.[20] Black Third Spaces is an apt name for the specific postcolonial conjunctural context found mainly in metropolitan centres in the Global North: for, example London, England; Toronto, Canada; or Washington, D.C.—otherwise known as "Chocolate City"—in the United States, all significant sites of East African Black settlement. These cities boast Black populations from different generations and from many different diasporic trajectories, all of which have—in a myriad of ways—blackened their respective cities. Black Third Spaces is an apt heuristic for the spaces of Black Sociality produced when Black diasporas collide across history, time, and space and across the Transatlantic Slave Trade, the Middle Passage, still incomplete decolonization, across continents and across discipline and nomenclature—in the present. By nomenclature, I mean the kind of thinking or analytics that, for me, pulls us away from concepts like race,

[20] As many have argued, these disciplinary formations and methods were never designed to articulate, grapple with, or make sense of Black social life as anything more than object of study in the most inert sense.

ethnicity, nation, immigrant, and refugee and toward interrogating concepts like continental Africans, post-Middle Passage, New Blacks, and Black diasporic subject.

Working from the generative analytic of Black Third Spaces,[21] I wanted to craft a project that thinks deeply about Black difference and Black Sociality while avoiding the discourse of diversity and eschewing the logics of race and ethnicity. I have no desire to privilege concepts like immigrant, refugee or nation. I wanted to think about Blackness, while circumventing the overbearing nature of Black American discourse and doing away with the rationalities offered by Canadian state-based multiculturalism. Being from the Horn of Africa and growing up and living Black in Canada has afforded me a different history from which to draw and a different lens from which to see and study Blackness, and therefore a different method of *doing* Black study (see Kelley, 2018). What this different history and different lens bring into focus is what binds and what bounds Blackness in the Americas. My Horn of Africa standpoint, from which I see and interrogate Blackness, makes clear what boundaries, contested histories, and emergent properties make Blackness intelligible, what marks its borders (geographic, territorial, conceptual, and material) and what myths (sometimes useful and sometimes not) and fictions (necessary, contested, and excessive) make Blackness cohere. Dwelling and thinking from inside a Black Third Space has engendered a set of questions and generated the conceptual observations that animate this project. Together they tell us something about what contemporary Blackness is and the work it does in the world.

[21] For a correlate, see Erasmus (2017), who does not use this language but frames the text as "grappling with the ways one might think about the inside of racialized social life." The text is a generative exploration of the Black Problem-Spaces that emerge in a South African context.

I have found Paul Gilroy's (1994) idea of the Black Atlantic useful in framing this project. As both a cultural and geographic heuristic concept, the Black Atlantic, as Gilroy puts it, ties West Africa, the United States, and the Caribbean together. I include Black Canada and the Horn of Africa in Gilroy's conceptualization. Additionally, I work from his position that Black Atlantic culture transcends ethnicity and nationality (and I would add, conventional notions of race) to produce something new, which he asserts is a culture that is not specifically or particularly African, American, Caribbean, or British but in some way all of these together simultaneously. Gilroy coins the concept of the Black Atlantic not only to position slavery squarely at modernity's centre but also to argue that Black Atlantic culture cannot and should not be studied through the analytical lens that race (or discipline) offers.

As did Edouard Glissant, I think often about theory, narrative, and method together rather than separately. The epigraph that opens this chapter from Glissant's (1997) *Poetics of Relation* sharply articulates for me the conundrum that comes with deep, formal, study. The conundrum is that any sustained engagement with a topic (for example, race and Blackness, which for me and this study are not synonymous[22])—reading deeply into the literature of that topic, employing and mastering its attendant discourses and logics, making it intelligible on its terrain while at the same time attempting to arrive at new knowledge formations and discourses—is often a contradictory and contradict*ing* exercise. Glissant generatively points us to the subversiveness of deploying poetics—that is to say, asking new questions by and through mangling old languages—in order to break with and away from convention and tradition. My slipping away

[22] In later chapters, I demonstrate the slippage that occurs between something called "race" and something else called "Blackness." In studies reviewed later, I lay out how these two are often conflated, mistaken for each other, or used so often interchangeably—erroneously in my view—that they become synonymous, which serves very little intellectual utility. *Black Grammars* and Black Third Spaces are my attempt at prying these two concepts apart.

from convention and tradition (not to mention discipline) is an attempt to engender—as Glissant might say—fruitful unpredictable controversies. I make use of a bricolage of thinkers and theories, literatures and methods order to build new Black Grammars of difference. As is the case for any Black Diaspora and Cultural Studies project, a dissident framework allows the bringing together of disparate thinkers, theories, disciplines, and knowledge formations, which often produces more in-depth critical historiographies and perspectives on Black life than do normative disciplinary-based theories and empirical methods.[23]

Rather than approach geographic spaces in terms of discrete national units, I approach them as Gilroy's Black Atlantic does: as a complex of territories within which ideas of race, culture, and Black intellectual life circulate. I anchor my thinking in Black cultural theorists to whom I owe a great deal of conceptual debt. First and foremost, Stuart Hall's (1987, 1993) ideas on Black cultures, Black identities, race, and class are integral to how I approach questions of Black popular culture and Black diasporas. Leaning on Hall, it is not my intention to stake out a novel general (or origin) history of Blackness, but rather to articulate how Blackness, Black cultures, and Black difference operate and play out in a particular space, at a particular time, and at a specific conjuncture. I consider how these different conversations think of Blackness as assemblages with a heterogeneity of origins occupying a kind of Black diasporic occupancy that bears, to borrow a term from Edward Said (2001), bewildering interdependencies. Put differently, I am not interested in past debates centred around the binary of "roots" and "routes" but rather in how roots *and* routes figure into contemporary Black cultural discourse and animate

[23] There exists a long history of works in Black Studies that bear this point out, and have engendered new and disruptive knowledge formations and perspectives on race, difference, and Blackness. Some examples that have had particular influence on my own work here and thinking generally include Walcott (2003), McKittrick (2006, 2015), and Iton (2008).

Black social life. I am interested in how the *interplay* of roots and routes contained in Black cultural discourse works and operates like grammar. In this dissertation I carve out Black social relationalities that leave behind facile debates of roots and routes as distinct conceptually, and instead analyze how their braiding[24] gets "grammared" in Black cultural discourse.

As a project, *Black Grammars* has no traditional theoretical framework or *familiar* methodology. In this project I work against—rather than through—conventional disciplines. I choose this approach because of the hegemonic ways racial discourse dominates and occludes the study of Black difference particularly, and Black Sociality generally, so much so that the complexities and nuances of Blackness never come to the fore and the contributions to knowledge production from Black people rarely emerge into the scholarly or intellectual surface. I recognize the need to move away from conventional disciplines and their attendant methods because of an array of Black thinkers whose work demonstrates how disciplines obscure and elide Black Sociality. The need to move away from traditional disciplines is made clear by a host of Black thinkers whose work itself eschews racial logics and does so by crossing or transcending disciplinary strictures that produce Black life as limited to a kind of racial intelligibility. In this work, I use sociology as a case study of how the disciplines, mired in their own histories, inevitably produce the racial logics I intend to transcend.

Katherine McKittrick (2016) bears out this point about disciplinary strictures in her article "Diachronic loops/deadweight tonnage/bad made measure," where she curates a relational conversation across Black Studies, science studies of Blackness and race, geographies of

[24] This metaphor of braiding I owe to Dion (2008).

knowledge, and Black creative texts. She brings these disparate fields together in order to destabilize the biocentric order from which racial discourse has heretofore operated, because for her "how race is theorized, lived, debated, departmentalized, inter-departmentalized, and mapped out in university settings" (p. 4) often operates to discipline—that is to say, to hold and keep in check—more creative and imaginative ways of theorizing race and Black knowledge formations. The empirical and disciplinarily informed methods used to account, chart, and register—one might even say discipline and punish (and punish *by* discipline)—Black life, often focus on counting and accounting for Black *bodies* rather than Black *people*, Black pain rather than Black thought, and the detailing of violence onto Black people rather than Black people's creativity and life- (and world-) making practices. In my project, I break with this scientific, academic (anti-Black) convention and follow what McKittrick (2016) identifies as Fanon's method in *Black Skin, White Masks*, the kind of radical interdiscplinarity in Black Studies in which both McKittrick and I are invested: in particular, a Black Studies that relies on a variety of sources and works that, for example, "bring music and math to sociology, science and history to poetry, slave narratives and psychoanalysis to feminism and everything in between" (p. 5).[25] My move away from formal disciplines, methods, and theoretical frameworks is an attempt to work with McKittrick's "everything in between" in order to actualize what might be called a kind of Black Radical Interdisciplinarity *as* method.

As I have asserted, I think about Blackness from the lens of the Horn, and by centring the perspectives and experiences of East Africans, which have been understudied and

[25] McKittrick (2016) identifies Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* as a quintessential example of this interdisciplinary method, particularly the way Fanon—as a psychiatrist—engages with "fiction, activism, music, philosophy, historical narrative and primary sources, science, psychoanalysis, medical studies and journals, poetry, psychiatry and more" (p. 5).

underappreciated. Yet absence and pathology[26] are not the guiding posts by which I produce this work. This project should not be read as a "contribution," nor as filling a gap, nor as a speaking back toward absented presences. I want what I call "problematicity"[27] and the effects it produces. I needed a word to mark the line of thinking I trace across W. E. B. DuBois's (1969/1903) question, "How does it feel to be a problem?"; Christina Sharpe's (2016) desire of maintaining "problem for thought"; Saidiya Hartman's (Hartman & Wilderson, 2003) thinking from the position of the unthought; and Rinaldo Walcott's (2003) invocation that thinking Black is thinking from "out of bounds." I have landed on "problematicity," building from elasticity, which demarcates the enduring quality of Blackness and the generative possibilities of Black Study (Carter, 2018), both in and of themselves problems that spread further problems for normative knowledge and conventional disciplines (Bascomb, 2014). I want the complicated, I want the complex, I want the abstract and imaginative, I want the material, I want to think through the realities and complications of Slavery's Afterlives and how we imagine and ring what Christina Sharpe (2016) identifies as "an ordinary note of care" while in the wake.[28] I want to be involved in thinking that pushes past romantic and redemptive registers while heeding Hall's call for the end of essentialist Black subjects. I want the freedom to be and think

[26] Fred Moten (2008) makes this point precisely when he writes (it is necessary to quote at length) that "cultural and political discourse on black pathology has been so pervasive that it could be said to constitute the background against which all representations of blacks, blackness, or (the color) black take place. Its manifestations have changed over the years, though it has always been poised between the realms of the pseudo-social scientific, the birth of new sciences, and the normative impulse that is at the heart of—but that strains against— the black radicalism that strains against it" (p. 177).

[27] For an analogue referent, see Denise Ferreira da Silva's "1 (life) ÷ 0 (blackness) = ∞ − ∞ or ∞ / ∞: On Matter Beyond the Equation of Valuem" where da Silva attempts to "activate blackness's disruptive force, that is, its capacity to tear the veil of transparency (even if briefly) and disclose what lies at the limits of justice." (see: https://www.e-flux.com/journal/79/94686/1-life-0-blackness-or-on-matter-beyond-the-equation-of-value/)

[28] On this, readers should consult Denise Ferreira Da Silva's (2014) poethics of Blackness, which "announce[s] a whole range of possibilities for knowing, doing, and existing." For Da Silva, this provides the basis for "releasing Blackness from the registers of the object, the commodity" (p. 81).

complexly Black, while working from a framework that allows me to be free to create as many problems—for normative knowledge and disciplinary convention—as I can think along the way.

CHAPTER 2—EAST AFRICAN DIASPORAS IN THE WEST: REVIEWING THE LANDSCAPE OF STUDY

Scenes of Surprise and Constraint (Scene I): "The *Somali of 2003 was black …*"

For the first Scene, I turn to Mohamed Abdulkarim Ali's (2019) book *Angry Queer Somali Boy: A Complicated Memoir*. In a passage about his stepmother, the following exchange occurs:

> My stepmother encourages us to avoid *those black people*. I looked at her and wondered, which people? The people who lived the best way they could, despite the constant glare of police surveillance? The people who became my friends and classmates? What about them was so bad that I had to avoid them like the plague? And when did we stop being black? Her justification for the aversion to Blackness was the following "*You see they are not like us. They send their kids out on the street to be gangsters. Look at what's all over the news!*" (emphasis in original, pp. 70–71)

I find the ways Abdulkarim Ali's stepmother regards Blackness intriguing, how she carves and divides Blackness and the peoples who are supposed to be associated with it—and those of us who are not. The assumed "us and them" of Blackness in the diaspora is of importance when thinking about Black difference. Also of note are the parallels between how Blackness is taken up in the studies in this chapter, and how both Abdulkarim Ali's mother and my own take up Blackness, which will be detailed later in the Scene. Abdulkarim Ali goes further though, explaining that during his adolescence he observed that for Somalis in Toronto, Blackness came to mean something foreign and odious, a view that "drove a wedge between those born or raised

in Western cities with large populations of black Americans, Caribbeans, or Africans and the elders in our community" (p. 71).[1] The older generation of Somali elders lamented that their young people were aligning themselves culturally, politically, and aesthetically in terms of style of dress, speech, and mannerism with more established, longer-standing Black communities—that is to say, Black Caribbean communities in Toronto. Abdulkarim Ali noted that the elder generation of the Somali diaspora "saw no value in the cultural output of black people in the Americas" (pp. 71–72). Yet later in the text, Abdulkarim Ali seems to resolve—at least for himself—the conundrum that develops in the memoir between his own self-making in diaspora and the unhappiness and dissatisfaction he understood from Somali elders. Echoing Fanon's *Toward the African Revolution* (1964/1967), Abdulkarim writes, "in my disavowing I forgot who I was in the white frame of reference. The truth was that the *Somali of 2003 was black"* (p. 117).[2]

In his memoir, Abdulkarim Ali addresses how Blackness and Black difference get taken up from the perspective of his Somali family, in the context of being Black in Canada. I open with this Scene to mark the difference and contestation itself and also *how* it is written up, in comparison to how it is written in the set of studies I highlight in this chapter. How analyses and studies are conducted and presented is implicated in the level of complexity and depth that ultimately gets attributed to Blackness and the possibility of Black Sociality. In the rest of this

[1] Recall the conceptual space between the Eritrean and Ethiopian Student Groups and the Black Students Association with which I opened this dissertation—although the context is different, it is the same conceptual space or, put another way, the same Black Third Space being called on here by Abdulkarim.
[2] While outside the focus of this study, Somali experiences are both similar to and uniquely different from Eritrean and Ethiopian encounters with Blackness. For reference, readers should consult Fangen's (2006) study on Somali refugee experiences in Norway, Rima Berns-McGown's (2013) study on Somali Canadian experiences with stereotyping in Canada, and Bokore's (2018) study on historical trauma, resettlement, and intervention strategies employed by Somali Canadians in trying to make new lives in Canada.

chapter, I first provide a general historical overview of Eritrean and Ethiopian migration to the West from the 1980s. Then, I move to an examination of research conducted on Ethiopian, Eritrean, and other Horn of Africa diasporic migrations by analyzing three texts in particular. In order of publication, the first text is Matsuoka and Sorenson's (2001) *Ghosts and Shadows: Constructions of Identity and Community in an African Diaspora*, which focuses on Eritrean, Ethiopian, and Oromo diaspora in the Canadian context. The second text, Haile's (2010) *The Ethiopian Experience in America*, focuses on the Ethiopian diaspora in the United States, and the third, Chait's (2011) *Seeking Salaam: Ethiopians, Eritreans and Somalis in the Pacific Northwest*, widens the scope of the previous two by including both Eritrean and Somali diasporas in its analysis. Breaking from the first two, *Seeking Salaam* examines the tensions, contradictions, and contestations that emerge in, amongst, and between Horn of Africa diasporas in the US Pacific Northwest.

I select these three studies specifically because they are representative of the broader field that focuses on Horn of Africa diasporas and represent the first generation of studies on these diasporas. I have selected these texts, because collectively, they are significant and represent influential book-length studies in the field. Three studies fit under that rubric, additionally, these three studies are also particularly useful for teasing out the themes of the broader literature on Horn of Africa diasporas that I outline in this chapter. Beyond centring on conclusions and findings, I also examine *how* these studies reach their conclusions—that is, the methods they employ. I analyze how these studies frame Horn of Africa diasporic experience and expose the patterns that can be discerned in them. Finally, I am interested in what routinely falls under the radar of these works and others like them.

I highlight how the studies assembled here operate from the perspective that these Horn of Africa diasporas are not part of the broader Black diaspora. Specifically, they fail to discuss Blackness in any substantive way. Because the architects of these studies work and operate from normative disciplines and adhere closely to the methods those disciplines offer, they repeat and reproduce the kind of studies that absent Blackness and the Black Sociality that emerges in Black Third Spaces. Due to the ways in which these studies are conducted, these spaces are elided or missed outright. In the latter part of the chapter, I point to the superficial ways that Blackness does emerge in these works. While I acknowledge that the concept of Blackness might not have been available to the authors of these studies in the more generative and substantive ways I am suggesting—whether because of discipline, method, or the time in which they produced these works—I am interested in exploring what work the Blackness they *do* call on performs.

Horn of Africa Migration to the West: A General Historical Overview

Although Africans have been migrating to the United States in large numbers since the 1960s, according to Solomon Addis Getahun (2007) there has been "little or no study conducted on post 1960s African immigrants [generally] in the U.S." (p. 1). Getahun notes that the 1970 American US census did not have any information on African immigrants, and the 1980 census simply referred to them as African.[3] The passage of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act

[3] Getahun notes that other countries had more specific information. To date, Getahun's (2007) *History of Ethiopian Immigrants and Refugees in America, 1900–2000* is the most comprehensive study on Ethiopian migration to the United States; tellingly, it was published under the "New Americans" Series. Getahun estimates that between 250,000 and 350,000 came to the United States between the 1950s and 1990s.

provided the initial opening for Ethiopian migration; more followed after the passage of the Refugee Act of 1980. Eventually, Ethiopians became the third-largest demographic of African immigrants in the United States. While unsubstantiated, some scholars suggest that the first Ethiopians to reach the shores of the New World arrived as slaves, most likely sometime during the 17th century. Nonetheless, the bulk of Ethiopians came to the United States after 1974 when Emperor Haile Selassie's ancient monarchy was toppled, eventually forcing his second exile in less than two decades. The ensuing exodus from Ethiopia, in tandem with a subsequent repressive regime, threw the landlocked East African nation into famine and drought as well as political turmoil. In fleeing, many Ethiopians (as did Eritreans later) initially fled to settlement camps in Sudan or Saudi Arabia before seeking better economic opportunity and more hopeful futures in the United States. Because most Ethiopians arriving in the United States were fluent in English, they tended to settle disparately rather than communing and gathering in ethnic enclaves. Ethiopians were the largest group of Africans to immigrate to the United Sates under the auspices of the Refugee Act of 1980, until Somalis surpassed them in 1994. During the 1980s, about 10,000 Eritreans came to Canada as refugees or immigrants, but as Matsuoka and Sorenson (2001) note, despite their own self-identification *as Eritreans*, according to the Canadian Government's official registers at the time they were all considered to be Ethiopian. It was only following Eritrea's official declaration of independence in 1993 that the Canadian Government officially recognized the refugees' notion of Eritrean national identity.

By the early 1990s, Eritreans were fleeing the Horn of Africa in large numbers seeking safety, security, and refuge from what was one of the longest and most drawn-out wars of its time. For Eritreans, this was a war for freedom, for independence from an oppressive and

dictatorial Ethiopian state. According to Eritreans both at home and abroad, it was a war for a people's freedom and for self-determination.[4] Those who were active in the struggle for Eritrean independence were leaving because they had been deemed *persona non grata* by the Ethiopian government, and were therefore exiled. Others who were not directly involved in the armed struggle left to find safety and refuge for themselves and family elsewhere. Eritreans, though not called such at the time of escape, left a not-yet-independent homeland to form diasporic communities in places such as Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada. Some cities of major settlement include Washington, D.C.; Toronto, Canada; and London, England. Since Eritrea did not win formal independence until 1993, for a time those of us settling and making new lives in new places were—at once—both diasporic and stateless (Sorenson, 1992). Eritreans were seeking refuge from an ongoing liberation struggle and for more favorable conditions for themselves, their families, and most importantly for their children. As a newly formed nation, diasporic Eritreans celebrated Eritrean National Independence in 1991—not freedom, but formal or what is sometimes called flagpole Independence—from abroad.[5]

[4] For an analysis of the importance of nationalism and the nation-state to Eritreans both in country and in diaspora readers should consult Bernal (2004).

[5] For the specific experiences of Eritrean-Canadian women's experiences, readers should consult Ogbagzy (1999), which explores how they negotiate race, ethnicity, and gender, and in particular how nationality—rather than race or colour, as they put it—foregrounds their identity constructions. Additionally, Matsuoka and Sorenson (1999) explore the special problems Eritrean women face in Canada making and negotiating new lives. Osirim (2008) examines the experiences of African women in the "new" diaspora and how transnationalism aids in the (re)creation of home; and, finally, Dlamini and Anucha (2009) and Amoah (2014) mark the specific experiences of transnationalism in the social identities of youth in the Canadian diaspora.

First Generation: A Descriptor and a Predictor

Much of the research conducted on Eritrean and Ethiopian settlement in the West has focused on the acculturating processes of diasporas from the Horn through a "refugee" and/or "immigrant" lens. By that I mean that the studies often centre the experiences of those who have migrated, focusing on what we might call "first-generation" or "settlement" issues such as access to the labour market, cultural integration in communities and neighbourhoods, and Eritrean and Ethiopian refugee/immigrants' access to and experiences with social services wherever they have settled.[6] These studies indicate that diasporic Ethiopians and Eritreans maintain deep transnational links and a strong sense of belonging and obligation toward their homelands (Arnone, 2008; Bernal, 2006). These studies record that Ethiopian and Eritrean parents and their children have been participating in annual Independence celebrations in places like Toronto; Washington, D.C.; Oakland, California; and London, England—cities where Ethiopians and Eritreans have settled in significant numbers (Woldemikael, 1997). While foregoing the celebration of American or Canadian independence celebrations, many diasporic Ethiopians and Eritreans who live in smaller cities often travel to major cities of Horn of Africa settlement to

[6] One study which falls outside of these familiar themes is Yewoubdar Beyene's (2020) study titled *Potential HIV Risk Behaviors among Ethiopians and Eritreans in the Diaspora: A Bird's-Eye View*, an anthropological study that posits culturally specific characteristics that "impede understanding of HIV transmission and prevention education among African immigrants in California" and finds that members of the Eritrean and Ethiopian immigrant community in the United States, California specifically, are aware of HIV/AIDS but do not recognize their own risky sexual behaviours. Some of the potential risk behaviours Beyene observed include: multiple sexual partners; alcohol consumption; stigma, denial, and fear around HIV testing; and repeated vacationing back and forth between Ethiopia, Eritrea, and the United States. Of course, these are not specific to Eritrean or Ethiopian culture, as Beyene erroneously presumes, and the study bears the marks of normative anthropological frames of understanding.

participate in Independence festivals and celebrations as well as to congregate, commune, and socialize with others from the Horn.[7]

For many parents, these celebrations and other such community events serve(d) as a means of ensuring that their children *identify as* Ethiopian, Eritrean, or East African generally, or as the supraethnic and supranational term "habesha."[8] The parents hope that maintaining values, norms, and traditions borne of resistance, preserved and passed on through protracted struggle, will inspire the next generation to construct themselves respectively as Ethiopian, Eritrean, habesha, and/or East African.[9] Much of post-1980s scholarship on Ethiopians and Eritreans in the West focuses on the particular cultural characteristics and specificities of these communities. Like most first-generation African diasporic research, many of these studies have as their central foci cultural retention and transmission, as well as integration and acculturation into settlement societies. These are indicative of the kinds of research that is conducted on first-generation African diasporas more generally. Less documented, but closer to my interests, are the ways Eritreans and others from the Horn have attempted to make home and community *alongside and among* other Black people from around the world in the cities where they have settled. What have those interactions been like? What analytical framework is needed to study these? What method can examine the sociality amongst Black people from different times, spaces, and places in diaspora? How do we think about the kinds of cultural dynamics that produce the Scenes of

[7] Through the theoretical lens of brain drain and brain circulation, Masud Chand's (2019) study examines how African immigrants in the United States engage with their country of origin, the United States, and the diaspora itself, and the balancing act of allegiance they must master.
[8] As is the case with all ethnicities, the history and contemporary use of the term "habesha" is hotly contested amongst Eritrean and Ethiopian diasporas.
[9] For an in-depth analysis of how parents influence the narrative identity construction of second-generation Eritrean and Ethiopian youth see Mary Goitom's (2016) study, which finds that parental, social, and cultural forces "are an inseparable and critical component of the development of identity" (p. 1163).

Surprise and Constraint that follow in subsequent chapters, the Black Third Spaces I reference throughout the dissertation? What existing studies have missed or paid little attended to is how Blackness comes to be altered, disrupted, or, as I will suggest, "worked on" by migration from the Horn of Africa to the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada, and what kind of hesitations, contestations, and questions emerge with and through overlapping Black migrations.

In the next section of the chapter, I analyze the three studies mentioned above. The set of works assembled here and the broader field of Horn of Africa diasporas studies share four central qualities. Together, they broadly capture how Eritreans and Ethiopians come to be framed and understood in academic study, and what work those framings and understandings come to do. First, in these works, Horn of Africa diasporas are generally often framed as "Newly Arrived" and imbued with "Perpetual Newness," a framing that implicates a kind of wide-eyed wonder about the site of settlement and examines the period of time needed for acculturation or adjustment to the new place. Second, the studies seem to present Eritreans and Ethiopians as "Haunted and Haunting," focusing on how these diasporas are haunted by and haunt their pasts, the past family they left behind and the struggles that so often mark(ed) their migratory experiences. Furthermore, the studies concur in terming them "Presently Absent: Here But Not Here," by focusing on the myriad ways these people are somehow maladjusted to their sites of settlement and preoccupied with a return home—in fact, so haunted that it inhibits their abilities, desires, and even willingness to integrate fully and adequately to their sites of settlement. What this frame ultimately accomplishes is to suggest that the difficulties these diasporas encounter with settlement is—in part or wholly—of their own making rather than produced by the site of settlement itself. Finally, the last theme involves the ways Blackness appears and disappears in

these studies. I place particular focus on the ways Blackness is not taken up substantively but emerges in surface ways—that is, Blackness is not brought into these works as a site of analysis, as a relational and collective diasporic settlement and condition, nor is it discussed how these migrations affect Black diasporic collectivity. By "surface" here I mean that Blackness is called on simply as an empty signifier, and often solely as a synonym for racism.

In concluding my discussion of each work, I focus on this last theme of Blackness and how it simultaneously emerges and falls off the analytical plane. I have titled this final thematic "Blackness as Metonymy/Blackness as Synecdoche." I bring together metonymy, which according to dictionary.com is defined as "the substitution of the name of an attribute or adjunct for that of the thing," and synecdoche, which is "a figure of speech in which a part is made to represent the whole or vice versa," as a heuristic that details the ways Blackness is introduced in these works, and works on African diasporas more generally. I make the case that Black appears as metonymy and/or synecdoche because of the ways Blackness comes to be assumed, but never defined or explored; this means it comes to essentially operate as an empty signifier. I am thinking of the way Black is mobilized solely as a substitute for race and/or racism, whereby Black and the work it comes to do is wholly as an attribute of racial reality. Ultimately, Black is really being used as a reference to the racial conditions under which the West is built and which Eritreans and Ethiopians encounter and come into when migrating, with the suggestion that all that needs to be known about Black and Blackness is that it points to something about "race and racism." The effect of this "metonym*ing*" and "synecdoch*ing*" of Black is that Blackness itself comes to be emptied and hollowed out, mobilized in these works only and solely as an attributive

characterization of and/or substitution for the racial terror under which Black people generally are forced to live. *Black Grammars* makes the case that there is more to this story.

Ghosts and Shadows: Constructions of Identity and Community in an African Diaspora (2001)

In *Ghosts and Shadows*, Matsuoka and Sorenson (2001) focus on Eritrean, Ethiopian, and Oromo diasporas in Canada.[10] According to them, more recent African diasporas, and these ethnic groups in particular, are understudied in comparison to the abundance of studies conducted on Caribbean diasporas in Canada. Matsuoka and Sorenson open their study by challenging traditional definitions (and uses) of the terms "refugee" and "exile." Traditionally understood, exile is the "classic image of individual misfortune and tragedy," mainly characterized by helplessness, rejection, and wandering (p. 3), while refugees are those who are "stripped of the specificity of culture, place and history' and are thus liminal and shadowy beings existing outside the 'national order of things'" (Malkki, 1995, p. 517). Both exile and refuge are the kinds of uprooting that involve, by necessity, a near complete break with the past, a violent cutting off from homeland, culture, and tradition (Kumsa, 2007). In contrast, for Matusoka and Sorenson (2001) exile is a creative process *and* a vantage point, and even "an emancipatory one in the sense that movement between cultures and perspectives provides deeper insights (p. 4).

[10] Although not examined here, Martha Kuwee Kumsa's (2005) work on Oromo refugees living in Toronto is an invaluable resource as it troubles be-longing, which she hyphenates "to unfreeze the fixity in conventional notions of predetermined be-longing and to emphasize the often-obscured movement and fluidity inherent in the longing in be-longing" (p. 1).

They evoke Edward Said's (2012) notion that for intellectuals, exile is a privileged perspective that provides an opening to analyze societies and cultures from their margins.[11]

Alongside these more generative definitions of exile and refugee framing their study, Matsuoka and Sorenson employ Avery Gordon's notion of haunting and William Safran's notion of diaspora, categorizing their research on Eritreans, Ethiopians, and Oromo diasporas as "A Ghost Story" (the title of their first chapter). Matsuoka and Sorenson refer to Gordon's (1997) assertion that to understand the ever shifting contours of social life we must attend to their ghostly aspects, so that we might grasp "how that which appears to be not there is often a seething presence, acting on and often meddling with taken-for-granted realities ... In haunting, organized forces and systemic structures that appear removed from us make their impact felt in everyday life in a way that confounds our analytic separations" (p. 64). Matsuoka and Sorenson deploy Gordon's ideas to frame the space and experience of the exiled and refugeed as haunted. They complete their conceptual framework by using Safran's (1991) definition of diaspora:

> 1) they, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original "center" to two or more "peripheral," or foreign regions; 2) they retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland—its physical location, history, and achievements; 3) they believe that they are not—and perhaps cannot be—fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated

[11] Salman Rushdie (1991) marks exile as creating new types of people who are attached to "ideas rather than places, in memories as much as in material things; people who have been obliged to define themselves—because they are so defined by others—by their otherness; people in whose deepest selves strange fusions occur, unprecedented unions between what they were and where they find themselves. The migrant suspects reality: having experienced several ways of being, he understands their illusory nature. To see things plainly, you have to cross a frontier" (pp.124–125).

> from it; 4) they regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return—when conditions are appropriate; 5) they believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity; and 6) they continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship (pp. 83–84).

Safran's definition of diaspora—which anchors Matsuoka and Sorenson's study—recalls precisely the kinds of conversations that permeated the Eritrean and Ethiopian Student Associations at my undergraduate university, as discussed in the Introduction. It is an understanding of diaspora that is solely centred on the past, on loss and the often mythical possibility of return for recovery of that loss. This is a notion of diaspora that is *always* geared toward the past, how the past haunts and is a ghost in the present. Matsuoka and Sorenson tell us that they set out with their methodology to listen to the "ghost stories" of diasporic Eritreans, Ethiopians, and Oromos.[12]

The study traverses an impressive range of topics in considerable depth, from Horn of Africa politics and its various struggles as background to the nature of historical and political

[12] Matsuoka and Sorenson's methodology consisted of surveys conducted in 1989–90 in community centres, churches, mosques, and other gathering places. Those efforts returned 186 questionnaires. Additionally, standard ethnographic techniques were used, such as participant observation and in-depth, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews over 10 years in Toronto, Winnipeg, and Ottawa, as well as Calgary and Montreal. Interviewees consisted of diasporic people and settlement workers. A majority of the 98 formal interviews took place between 1990 and 1996 and were with people between 25 and 45 years of age at the time of interview.

instabilities causing exile and forced migration. It studies how nationalist sensibilities travel with people who flee in search of safety, stability, and security. The authors also focus on the isolating aspects of the refugee experience, as well as how seeking refuge, whether through exile or fleeing, causes a "charged strangeness." This phrase is taken from Gordon (1997), for whom a feature of haunting is that "the ghost imparts a charged strangeness into the place or the sphere that it is haunting" (p. 63). One section examines the haunting long-distance nationalism of Eritrean, Ethiopian, and Oromo exiles.

The second half of the text falls more squarely within the scope of this project. There Matsuoka and Sorenson (2001) substantively analyze the experiences of Eritrean, Ethiopian, and Oromo diasporas and their time in Canada. By way of the work of DuBois, Gordon, and Freud, Matsuoka and Sorenson characterize the Horn of Africa diasporas in their study as living in Canada with a necessary double consciousness, as haunted and as repressing identities that are firmly rooted in a past characterized by a war that was/is a world away. On the topic of being a diasporic population haunted by war, one respondent comments about living in Canada: "You see these people here but really they're walking around on the streets of Asmara.[13] That's where they live. This is just like a dream to them" (p. 94). An Eritrean refugee woman living in Canada, who was having particular difficulties with settling and acclimating, when asked about the possibility of bringing her children over expresses reservations because she feels that in Canada, with all of its strife and difficulty, "didn't feel like real life here" (p. 94). Matsuoka and Sorenson describe the Eritrean diasporas in their study as frozen in time, unable to move past the politics, struggle, and war of "back home." One informant is quoted as saying:

[13] Asmara is the capital city of Eritrea.

> Many people were politically active at home. Politics seized that whole generation ... They retain this sense of campus radicalism. For them, reality is in the Horn of Africa, not here. They are still caught up in the idea of revolution and transforming their country. You can say this is a case of arrested development, they are still at this stage of student politics. They're not interested in what's happening here so they can't adjust well. So this is why people will take any kind of job, as a parking lot attendant or a taxi driver. This is all temporary, they are so interested in politics in Ethiopia, they are just waiting to go back so they will do anything here. (pp. 94–95)

Another respondent Matsuoka and Sorenson quote characterizes Eritrean, Ethiopian, and Oromo diasporic populations as excessively interested in battling old ghosts and fighting old battles. Many of the respondents express a longing for being back home and show much ambivalence about being far removed from the homeland for which they fought and about being disconnected from the ongoing struggles, armed, political, or otherwise. Much of this study engages with diasporic East Africans who were born in the Horn, and who have had first-hand experience of the type of strife that results from political instability and war. The Eritrean, Ethiopian, and Oromo diasporas that are the main focus of Matsuoka and Sorenson's study are first-generation, both those classified as refugees and those who were exiled. The fact that these people who have settled in Canada are Black does not come up until the middle of the text, in a section of a chapter entitled "Generations."

In the "Generations" chapter, respondents speak of the generation gap between the older diasporic people, who have memory of the homeland, and their children, who do not. One respondent states:

> The big problem is the generation gap. The kids don't have any memory of Ethiopia. They are Canadian. To them, it's nothing. They don't speak the same language. Sometimes parents can't even talk to their own children. The parents are locked into the past, they want the kids to be the same but they aren't. (Matsuoka & Sorenson, 2001, p. 104).

Matsuoka and Sorenson (2001) frame the first generation as having deep attachments to the homeland, to the point that it haunts them. According to them, these haunting attachments do not resonate in the same ways for subsequent generations. The deep attachments and the haunting that marked and accompanied that first generation are, in fact, not passed on. While pride in the homeland and knowledge of the difficulty of migratory experiences are passed on, haunting and a longing for back home and the struggle that characterized it are not inherited by subsequent generations. Therefore, that haunting drifts and fades away in subsequent generations, but, as the authors put it, while "the structures of feeling of the two generations are not the same, shadows of the 'homeland' unite them" (p. 105). This idea of being held together by shadows is particularly insightful, because many of the children of first generation diasporic East Africans living in Canada have no direct memories or first-hand experiences of their respective homelands. While they long for more material experiences with "back home," the longing they experience is not commensurate with the haunting their parents experience. Yet, be it haunting or

longing, what ties both generations is that neither is satisfactory. The authors come to perceive the longing as a lack that second-generation East Africans attempt, in some measure, to imaginatively fill by conjuring community and making attachments among themselves, invoking commonalities and conceptualizing themselves as having shared commitments to their imagined pasts and longed-for homelands.

When references to Blackness eventually show up in the section on "Generations," it is through the words of a respondent. Matsuoka and Sorensen (2001) write,

> Attachments to the distant, imagined community are strengthened by personal, cultural, and institutional racism in Canada: "No matter how long I stay here, I'll never be accepted as a real Canadian. My kids will never be real Canadians either. That's because they're black." (p. 105)[14]

Let us examine this first mention of Blackness, and the kind of work that it does. First, it is important to note that Blackness enters this work following Canadian institutional racism. This is common in the literature in the field. More interesting here is the authors' claim that Canadian-based institutional racism in Canada buttresses attachments to the kinds of communities that "back home" conjures up. For Matsuoka and Sorenson, racism and Blackness mark a divide between the first generation and their children, who—because of Canadian-based institutional racism—will be/are considered Black. I want to emphasize that Blackness, when positioned in this manner, is framed as both an indication of racism and an undesirable by-product of it. Not

[14] This is similar to a moment in Rinaldo Walcott's (2003) *Black Like Who* in which a Somali elder is quoted on television, stating that we (Somali parents) need to teach our kids how to be Black in Canada.

only are the first generation in this study marked by their exilic or refugee experiences, haunted by being far removed from their homeland, and *not* considered Black; the next generation, because of Canada's racial constitution, will be considered Black but *not* Canadian. This divide (and dynamic) is encapsulated nicely by one respondent: "My son *will be* born here but he won't be one hundred per cent Canadian. Because *he's* black, they'll treat him differently" (my emphasis, p. 210). In both these passages, the authors introduce Blackness as something with which the next generation has to grapple, but never as something the parents and that first generation must consider. It is not clear whether Matsuoka and Sorenson consider that first generation in their study as Black, too. What is clear is that the informant confirms that their yet-to-be-born son *will be* identified and treated as Black in Canadian society. Blackness, as it is drawn upon here, assumes a loss of East African cultural retention and specificity, while it simultaneously positions Black as a lack of and/or apart from Canadianness.

For the most part, Blackness does not appear as a standalone substantive analytical concept in Matsuoka and Sorenson's study, but it does appear as a synonym and stand-in for racism. This is especially evident in Chapter 8, titled "Phantoms of Identity and 'Race'" (single quotes in original). For example, speaking of an informant's comment, Matsuoka and Sorenson (2001) position racism in Canada in this way:

> Racism was a new experience, that confronted our informants with new ways of knowing themselves: "I didn't know I was black until I came to Canada. People in Eritrea don't think about such things. Here there are some foolish people who call you names but I don't care about them. It's not their fault. It's all political. Those

> who have power use these things to create divisions between people and distract them." (p. 208)

In the same chapter, the authors mark the dearth of attention to the situations of Africans (as opposed to Black people) in Canada by stating that the racism and whiteness of Canada does not allow the differences and complexities among Eritreans, Ethiopians, and Oromos to emerge in any substantive way. According to the authors, the Canadian nation-state, its media and public, demonstrated no desire to differentiate among Africans and their respective histories and settlement experiences. For example, some informants indicated the many ways they were reminded that Canadian was synonymous with white. One informant shared:

> People always say "where are you from?" They just look at you and think, "He's not Canadian." So how are we going to be Canadian? You can never be really accepted here if you're black. They always assume you are from someplace else. Canadian just means white to them. (Matsuoka & Sorenson, 2001, p. 206)

Another illustrative example:

> I'll tell you about one experience I had, it's a very good example of racism, I went to an interview with an engineering consultant. Because of my name, a lot of people think I'm Jewish. I went to the interview and the secretary told him, 'Mr. [X] is here to see you.' He came out, walked right past me and looked around. Then he went back into his office. So the secretary calls him again and he comes

> out, looks again, and then the secretary says, 'This is Mr. [X].' He was very surprised but he took me into his office. Then he starts saying, 'We don't have a job right now, we're just looking into the future,' and so on. You see, he wasn't expecting me to be black, he couldn't even see me in the waiting room. And he started telling me these things so he could get rid of me. It was so obvious (pp. 208–209).

These comments and their framing are illustrative of how Blackness emerges in Matsuoka and Sorenson's study and many others on East African diasporas. When the authors write "Black," what they are actually signifying is the racist conditions and racist experiences their informants encounter in Canada. In many ways, Black is simply a shorthand and placeholder, even just a synonym, for racism. Matsuoka and Sorenson do not consider the Blackness of the diasporas in their study, and so miss all the analytical possibilities that emerge when exploring how Blackness operates for the diasporas. What might emerge if Blackness was substantively engaged in all its complexities and depth? *Ghosts and Shadows* almost completely focuses on the refugee, exile, and immigrant status of Eritrean and Ethiopian diasporas, and this focus forms and overdetermines the lens the researchers use and the questions they ask. Matsuoka and Sorenson emphasize how these diasporas are concentrated on the past, on loss and return, on the possibility of return for and as recovery. Moreover, as in many prior studies, their main focus is on the acculturating experiences of Ethiopians and Eritreans in relation to the state, rather than the social worlds and the sociality they carve out when living in and around other Black communities—what I have referred to as the Black Third Spaces. These studies never analyze Ethiopians and Eritrean diasporas as Black among other Black diasporas and

communities but rather always singularly, and in isolation. When Blackness does appear, it is always in relation to race and the racist conditions under which these diasporas live in their places of settlement. Blackness never stands on its own as a viable analytical concept to explore, only as a stand-in for the racial infrastructure of the site of settlement.

The Ethiopian Experience In America: Second Edition (2010)

Kebede Haile has been documenting the lives of Ethiopian refugees and immigrants in the United States, chronicling their "immigrant plight and adaptation." In *The Ethiopian Experience in America: Second Edition* (2010), he details why, how, and when Ethiopians first came to settle in the United States, from the reasons and root causes for their "escape," as he puts it, to their resettlement in America. The Ethiopian experience Haile details ranges from life in refugee camps to permanent resettlement in the United States. According to Haile, his intention with this study is to "enlighten Ethiopian refugees and others about Ethiopians' life experience in America," and in doing so, to "address questions such as: Why do so many Ethiopians have to leave their country? How did they manage to land in the U.S.? What factors prompted some of them to return to their country?" (p. xvii).

Haile places specific focus on what he terms "cultural orientation" and the impact of "culture clashes" among Ethiopians who have settled in the United States. He separates them into three groups in his study: (1) naturalized Ethiopian-Americans—many of whom came as students; (2) American-born children of Ethiopian-Americans; and (3) new refugees and migrants (p. xxi). Haile (2010) frames Ethiopian refugees' escape to the United States as being

based on their desire to achieve a form of democracy as well as their attempts to maintain forms of community, which was met with various degrees of success (p. 45). He writes,

> Just as other ethnic minorities in the United States, Ethiopians came with problems they could not escape and have sought comfort by trying to create their own community. They have created their own class system among themselves to maintain their ethnic identity. Even though they have relocated, they are still divided, and they continue to disagree with each other over the same ethnic, political and religious matters that divided them back in Ethiopia. (p. 45)

This passage nicely captures Haile's main preoccupations in this research. Like Matsuoka and Sorenson, Haile (2010) marks the difficulties associated with knowing the size of the Ethiopian population in the United States, because "Ethiopian immigrant communities have not been given due attention" (p. 45); but according to Haile's own research and unofficial estimates, he puts the number at about half a million.

Haile describes the main push factors for large Ethiopian migration to the United States as the result of the rejection—after the 1974 revolution in Ethiopia—of Ethiopian refugees and exiles by many neighbouring countries in the Horn of Africa, who hoped to avoid tensions with the new Ethiopian government. Some Ethiopians already had longstanding ties with Ethiopians in the United States, and those connections facilitated migration. Haile (2010) indicates that while all these factors played a role in migration to the United States, the path was equal parts "preference and default" (p. 51).

Of particular interest is the chapter titled "Generation Gap," where questions relevant to my project emerge. Haile (2010) uses the American-centred idea of the "melting pot" to anchor his thinking on how best to make sense of younger American-born Ethiopians:

> The Ethiopians came to the U.S. with the idea that America is a land of immigrants where they can accomplish the American dream. They are among the most recent ethic minority of African descendants to come to America. But whether they have melted enough into the "melting pot" is another question to be answered because some want to achieve their aims without mixing fully in the American society while others have adjusted to attain their goals. (p. 279)

Here Haile (2010) identifies the initial desires of Ethiopians migrating to the United States. He uses the idea of the "melting pot" as the framework for how much Ethiopians have integrated and/or acculturated into the United States. He provides the disclaimer that "it is difficult to generalize about the life experience of the Ethiopians in America since their experiences have been diverse" (p. 279); yet the central question in this part of the work is "How does one retain some cultural pride in being an Ethiopian and at the same time become an American?" (p. 280). Haile quotes Arthur Hertzber's definition of what it means to be an American; for Hertzber, becoming an American necessitates not only acting in accordance to U.S. law but also becoming "like everyone else; to enter the mainstream of American life" (Hertzber as quoted by Haile, 2010, p. 280). For Haile, Ethiopians in the United States had accepted such a framework in theory but rejected it in practice, because they feared losing

Ethiopian cultural specificities, customs, traditions, and practices. This concern preoccupies first-generation Ethiopians, less so American-born Ethiopians.

While Blackness does not enter Haile's work by name, I read "becoming American" and its associated fears and hesitations around cultural loss and fading ethnic pride as having the same effect as when Matsuoka and Sorenson utilize Black as a synonym for racism. How Haile works with the idea of "melting" into American society gives us insight into how Blackness might be considered if it were to enter Haile's analytical frame. Haile centres the fears of a loss of Ethiopianness, perceived by first-generation Ethiopians as being opposed to Americanness, integration, and acculturation. By Haile's framing, for first-generation Ethiopians becoming or melting into Americanness means a direct loss of identity, history, and Ethiopian specificities, cultural traditions, and customs.

Seeking Salaam: Ethiopians, Eritreans and Somalis in the Pacific Northwest (2011)

Sandra M. Chait's (2011) *Seeking Salaam* is another substantive study of East African diasporas. Between 2004–2010 Chait interviewed 41 Eritreans, Ethiopians, and Somalis, who had settled in Seattle and Portland in the Pacific Northwest of the United States.[15] *Seeking Salaam* is divided into seven chapters and examines the "competing narratives that shape and color the identity of these three Horn of Africa peoples" (p. xii). Chait frames this study not as an

[15] Interviews took place in coffee bars, homes, offices, shopping malls, taxicabs, and on both University of Washington and Portland State University campuses. Follow-ups were conducted by phone and email. According to Chait's respondents, 25,000–30,000 Ethiopians, 8,000–10,000 Eritreans, and 30,000–35,000 Somalis live in the Greater Seattle Area. In the Greater Portland Area the breakdown is as follows: 3,000–4,000 Ethiopians, 2,000–3,000 Eritreans, and 3,000–4,000 Somalis. A mix of just-landed refugees and immigrants with longer standing were interviewed.

ethnography, an anthropology, or any other life-story-writing discipline; rather, she foregrounds the stories and narratives as well as the lived realities of respondents. *Seeking Salaam* (loosely translated as seeking peace) is about how the past—political conflicts, war, and famine—of the Horn of Africa is not passed,[16] and in particular how Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia's geopolitical and cultural histories influence and impress themselves upon the present lives of Horn of Africa diasporas. Like Matsuoka and Sorenson, Chait makes use of the metaphor of haunting, and focuses her study on the ways the Horn of Africa's historical afterlives trouble and haunt the lives of diasporic people in the American Pacific Northwest. *Seeking Salaam* works to make sense of how respondents construct themselves, their identities, and their cultures, in particular the entangled histories of the Horn of Africa, while being mired in and negotiating American society. In Chait's (2011) approach, "how they shape their stories to find meaning and coherence, why they organize them in the particular ways they do, what is left out and why are the questions that form the backdrop to the content of their stories" (p. xiii). An illustrative passage:

> At a dinner for young Eritreans at my home, I pursue the questions of Eritrean identity further. For Esayas Mehanzel, who came to the States in 1984, identity emerges from "what you have in your heart." It's "the sense of familiarity that I felt when I returned to Eritrea in 2001 and saw people that looked just like me." He holds his fist over his heart. A slim, clean-shaven young man in a red sweatshirt and black jacket, Esayas frequently expresses nostalgia for the place of his birth. (p. 100)

[16] For an elaboration of how the past of modern society is not passed, see Michel-Rolph Trouillot's (1995) *Silencing the Past: Power and The Production of History*.

The openness with which respondents spoke with Chait is impressive and revealing. For the most part, her respondents were very motivated to share their versions of historical events and how these inform present-day perspectives. On this, Chait (2010) writes, "Having been nurtured in the bosom of their communities by stories imbibed with gunpowder and mother's milk they are determined to tell *their* versions of historical events before others displace their stories with their own" (p. 5). Yet, in stark contrast to Matsuoka and Sorenson's conclusions, Chait's informants were more interested in looking toward the future than being haunted by the past or stuck or stymied in the present. Chait notes that "although the past remains always with them, the future lies in their adopted country"; and while nostalgia is woven into their narratives, "they are ultimately much more concerned with their here and now in the United States" (p. 31).

Similar to Matsuoka and Sorenson's study, history and ethnic pride rooted in struggle and survival are integral to the ways in which Chait's respondents construct their self-image. In addition, and much like in *Ghosts and Shadows*, identity is a central anchor in Chait's study. For example, a respondent in Chait's (2010) study comments, "My Eritrean identity helped me survive being a refugee and gave me the courage to make a new life for myself in America" (p. 100). It is clear that for this respondent a sense of strength is derived from their "Eritreanness." Similarly, Yegizaw, another of Chait's respondents, remarks that something beyond birthplace held reverence and relevance: "Look, identity, for me, is not a place. I don't associate my identity with a land. For me, identity is the values instilled in me. I don't have that special need to go back to Eritrea in order to be Eritrean. I'm here, and I'm Eritrean, because it's in me. I take it with me" (p. 100). Many of the Ethiopian and Somali diasporic people with whom Chait spoke

report that a strong sense of pride and jubilance comes with the (re)telling of histories of struggle. Throughout the study, it becomes clear that for respondents, the retellings of stories of struggle, hardship, and survival help to dull the intensity of the strife and difficulty associated with refugee and settlement processes.

As in Matsuoka and Sorenson's study, the fact that these diasporas are Black and were living alongside other Black people and communities does not emerge in any substantive way in Chait's work. One respondent, Yosieph, does note the following, though:

> If I hadn't known my identity and history ... I, too, would have been a prisoner without a name, a cell without a number ... That's why I want Abraham to know his identity. If he's a black man in America without any history, he's [his son] lost in this world. (Chait, 2010, p. 100).

Here we observe that, similar to Matsuoka and Sorenson's informants, Blackness is conceived as "more of a generational thing." That is to say, Chait's respondent is preparing for the reality that his son Abraham will have to grow up being seen as Black. Transmitting cultural identity, history, and memory will, he believes, combat, buttress, or perhaps supplement and fill a void that for Yosieph Blackness—or being perceived *as* Black—represents. It is not clear toward which aim—transmission, buttressing, supplementing, or a filling of a void—Yosieph is intending by ensuring Abraham knows his East African heritage. It is the idea or conceptualization that East African heritage, history, culture, and identity *comes up against* Blackness that is intriguing and merits further exploration. Similar to Matusoka and Sorenson,

Chait fails to probe such mentions of Blackness, and so "being a black man in America without any history" is left unexplored, and how respondents see *themselves* in relation to being Black or racialized in the U.S. context goes unexamined and therefore unstudied.

The discussion toward the end of *Seeking Salaam* on how respondents see themselves acclimating and making full lives in the United States is especially relevant to my project. The final chapter, titled "New American Narratives," is rather tangential to the scope of the larger project itself. According to Chait (2010), while Somalis, Ethiopians, and Eritreans lived with the "haunting cobwebs" of the past, they were ready and willing to work toward a livable future under the principles of "cooperation, unity, and teamwork," which were the keywords they employed when speaking about a collective future, not only with each other but also with and alongside the "African American community as a whole" (pp. 227–228). Chait's respondents were slowly coming to the realization of a difficult but hopeful reality; on the one hand their ability to have an impact on the political processes back home was fading, which meant the possibility of return[17] was virtually nil; and on the other hand this realization made it clear that "in fact, home was America: they were becoming American" (p. 229). In Chait's framing, their becoming American meant a slow fading away of the primacy they had associated with their own distinctive cultural identities, histories, and backgrounds: the divisions between and amongst them withered away and became less and less significant. Chait's framing implies this is an either/or formulation, much like a zero sum game between Africanness, becoming American, and in a distant third something called Blackness.

[17] The return I mark here refers not simply to the tourist variety, but the substantive return that points to having an impact on the social, political, and economic affairs of the home country. The difficult realization that the country for which they fought and struggled for has effectively left them behind is the reality with which Chait's respondents are grappling.

In the "New American Narratives" chapter, Chait (2010) posits that for her respondents, the question of identity is an all-consuming question and "as acculturation takes place, the initial 'Who are we?' develops into a more considered 'Who do we want to be?'" (p. 246). What Chait means by "a more considered" question must be interrogated in light of my concerns. While this is not addressed in the chapter, what is presupposed is a binary/dichotomy between being Eritrean, Ethiopian, or Somali against being something called an "American." The following passage is illustrative, as Chait curiously positions increasing success in social and postsecondary contexts as essential to the possibility of questioning one's self-construction, seen as a marker of some sort of progress:

> Success in the academic and social environments of the university builds confidence, and students examine their choices, trying on different identities for fit: Are they still Ethiopian, Somali or Eritrean, despite their American accents? Or are they American? Or simply Africans? East African is yet another option, or else Ethiopian American, Eritrean American, or Somali American. (p. 246)

Taking this passage on its surface, Chait is making the claim that as those from Horn of Africa diasporas learned, studied, and found social success in the United States, *it was only then* that they more deeply questioned and accepted the fluidities of their identities and the possibilities of being both East African *and* American. This assumes that previously their East African identities were fixed, hardened, unwavering, and perhaps even constructed as essentialized. Up until this point in the study, Chait positions these diasporic people as haunted (positioned as a lack) by

their past lived experiences; their histories are all-consuming and leave little room for deeper questioning or exploring other possibilities of how they might construct their own self-image and identities until after American education and social success in the United States. Yet from this passage we are to understand that once Chait's respondents were able to live in the United States for some time, learn, study, and attain social and academic success, only then are they able—it would seem—to develop more critical and complex notions of self. Chait maintains the binary between East African and American that informs the crux of her analytical framework, even in this last chapter of her study. In Chait's framework, however, Blackness does not appear in the binary and receives less substantive focus than what she calls "American."

Chait does devote some pages to the ways Horn of Africa diasporas both confront and are confronted with race and/or being identified as Black. Similar to Matsuoka and Sorenson, black as Chait uses it here[18] is nothing more than alternative nomenclature or, put differently, another way of saying race.

> Like other Africans before them, these students increasingly identify with "black" or the cultural designation "African American," and not always by choice. Previously, few Eritreans, Ethiopians or Somalis thought much about race. Having grown up in black communities, they had never needed to define themselves by the color of their skins, but upon entering the Pacific Northwest, they entered an ethnic marketplace that, despite local claims to the contrary, bases itself on race. Americans here seldom, for example, make distinctions between

[18] Note Chait's lowercase use of black.

> Japanese, Korean, and Chinese, referring to them all indiscriminately as Asians. How much easier it is then to categorize everyone with a black skin as African American. For example, when Senait first started school in Spokane, she was the only black student. Since most Americans hadn't heard of Eritrea, she thought of herself as the only African American. "A lot of my life I identified as an African American because, as much as I want to be Eritrean," she says, "people don't see me as that. First, they see me as a black person." (Chait, 2010, p. 246)

While there is much with which to tarry here, such as the idea of an "ethnic marketplace" and the conflation of race with skins and Black, I begin with the binary frame Chait constantly returns to concerning the possibility—or more specifically the lack thereof—of her respondents conceiving of themselves as being black, African-American, *and* East African. By not interrogating those possibilities or posing inquiries to the effect, Chait fails to grant her respondents the opportunity to demonstrate the various ways they might imagine their own identity constructions in different social contexts—in particular, as is my interest, in and among other Black peoples. Additionally, as she does throughout her study, in this passage Chait conflates race, Blackness, and ethnicity, thus making a monolith of all Black people. That conflation is quite different from the ways Horn of Africa diasporas and other Black Americans might conceive of and make sense of their own differences in relation to each other. Finally, in the quotation that ends the passage above, what Senait identifies is a recognition of how race operates in the visual register in the American context or, as Fanon calls it, the visual architecture of racial schema. Senait says that in the Pacific Northwest—and here we can generalize to the wider American context—when others encounter her she is seen as Black *at first*. As we have observed, Chait does not ascribe to Senait,

or to her respondents more generally, the capacity to contend with the complexities, contestations, and constraints of living in a society that forces her to grapple with being marked and identified as Black *at first* while also being Eritrean, and thus claiming, representing, and having a say about both. As Chait frames her respondents, she does not see this as a possibility.

The next passage illustrates further this framing and the limitations with which Chait (2010) observes her respondents:

> "I'm not going to die if somebody calls me black or African; it makes me complete as a person," explains Redi Mehanzel. He sees his color and race as simply further designations of his multifaceted identity, like ethnicity, nationality, and religion. His sister Mehret goes further. "As soon as one becomes American, one inherits the problems and issues of African Americans, but at the same time one benefits from the sacrifices they have made over the last one hundred years." She goes on to say, "I'm proud to identify as an African American." That young Eritrean Americans assume they will eventually become African Americans, with all the complexities that involves, suggests that race remains a factor in how we perceive people in Seattle and Portland. Skin color adds yet another category of separation to the many divisions with which East Africans contend, although not an entirely new one. (pp. 246–247)

Again we see that Chait associates becoming African-American with a sense of loss, lack, and an inheritance of the problem of race, and that Horn of Africa diasporas lose something on the way

to acculturation and acclimation. This passage is yet another example of Chait's constant conflation of Eritrean American, African-American, and the identification Black.

Finally, it is unclear who Chait means by "we" in the above passage. Unclear, too, is the skin colour that opens the final sentence in the above passage. In order for Chait to conflate and confound race, skin colour, Eritrean American, and African-American, Blackness has to represent a void and an empty signifier. For Chait, Blackness means nothing and carries with it no substance because she cannot conceive that Black might mean something substantive and social both in the United States and globally. Black then becomes an empty container open for conflation and confounding. This is especially telling in the following passage:

> Despite their parents' disapproval, many of them aspire to the African American nomenclature. In the final analysis, of course, racists often do not distinguish between East Africans and African Americans. Whether Ethiopians, Eritreans, and Somalis desire it or not, the African narrative of race may be imposed on them, their complex characteristics of nationality, ethnicity, and clanship condensed into a single symbolic identity: black. (Chait, 2010, p. 247)

Again, this passage is perplexing because it is not clear what Chait means by "African American nomenclature," and she does not expand on what informs the parents' disapproval. Like Matsuoka and Sorenson, Chait positions the imposition of race and American racism, as well as their violent effects, and thus overdetermines the effects on the possibility for and complexities

of Black social life, and Black Sociality generally.[19] In effect, since for Chait there is race and racism, and no generative idea of Blackness, the impact of her argument is to position the Horn of Africa diasporas as incapable of taking part in or contributing to Black Sociality (if Chait recognized such an idea). Nor does Chait recognize that Black peoples, communities, collectives across generations, and diasporas might constitute their own kinds of Black interiority, different ways of being and sociality outside of racism and its determining conditions and resisting social practices.[20]

The way these three studies are constructed, especially in terms of how Blackness emerges and is framed within them, makes me wonder what would emerge if East African diasporas utilized a Black Cultural Studies lens that considered Blackness at its centre and Black Sociality and Black interiority as viable analytical concepts from which to work. What if such a study opened with the late 20th-century movement of Black people from the Horn of Africa (specifically Eritreans and Ethiopians) to the West as its starting point, and considered what happened in Black communities and Black spaces when these diasporas enmeshed? What kinds of sociality might emerge in our analysis if this was a project's messy starting point? I say messy because, if such a study were constructed, it would uncover how for many Black people in the West those from the Horn are *sometimes* considered *not really* Black—and said study might ask,

[19] In addition to oversimplifying the identity constructions of Horn of Africa diasporas, Chait also oversimplifies how African-Americans perceive and make sense of these relative newcomers to the Pacific Northwest. This passage demonstrates that oversimplification: "Whether African Americans welcome them into their community is a complex question. Some African Americans perceive the newcomers as unsophisticated and 'from the bush.' To them, they are other, different in many ways, and yet strangely the same. Many African Americans still carry historical chips on their shoulders and deride those Africans whose ancestors might have known about, if not actively participated in, the sale of their own ancestors into slavery" (Chait, 2010, pp. 247–248).

[20] Rima Berns-Mcgown's (1999) study *Muslims in the Diaspora* interviewed over 80 Somalis in Toronto, Canada and London, England and examined the integration and acculturation processes of Somalis in the West. While early in the text Berns-Mcgown does identify her respondents as Black, similar to the studies reviewed here, this identification does not result in any substantive engagement with what that might mean in either locale.

why? If such a study were conducted, it would uncover that the reasons for the "not-really-Black perspective" are multilayered and complicated. Some intriguing explanations that might emerge are that many Black people in the West consider East Africans to have lighter phenotypes, which they believe shield them from the full brunt of everyday racism that structures the rest of Black life. If this study were conducted, what would also emerge is the messiness that diasporas from the Horn introduce to the origin story of Blackness. This study would force an encounter with and maybe even a reconsideration of the commonly understood origin story of Blackness. This imaginative and generative study might then begin to grapple with the notion that diasporas from the Horn bear no direct genealogical, historical, or material link to the rupture that was (and is) the Transatlantic Slave Trade and the Middle Passage,[21] which is associated with and understood as being core, integral, and central to Blackness's origin story. This study could challenge the authority, universality, and assumed fixity and/or monolithic meaning *that* origin story has regarding how Blackness is conceived and conceptualized. Such a study would force open many new (and better) ongoing questions, which might lend themselves more to the kind of fruitful and unpredictable controversies Glissant suggested, and thus ultimately would produce and generate new and creative knowledge.

This project, *Black Grammars*, attempts to be that study, one that is more interested in exploring the "messiness" that comes with charting less-travelled scholarly territories and the

[21] Throughout this project (and my work generally), I write the Transatlantic Slave Trade and the Middle Passage with proper noun treatment because I view this period in human history as world-changing events with the significance, effect, and aftermath of the often written-about two World Wars—which themselves are always unquestionably given proper noun treatment. As Toni Morrison said in an interview with Paul Gilroy (1993) in *Small Acts*, this period broke the world in half—I write and think from that break. Also, in this project I write both the Transatlantic Slave Trade and the Middle Passage *always together* because both are important and they are not the same. As Rinaldo Walcott (2018) writes, representations of the Middle Passage, while necessary, are relatively sparse.

destabilizing questions that come with such endeavours. I say messy because—as with any unwieldy and undisciplined project—the questions they raise very often undo more than they attend to and generate more questions than they ever aim to answer. For example, *Black Grammars* is also trying to make intelligible the Black Third Space that concerns itself with the ways East African diasporas, as "post Middle Passage subjects"—one of many unsatisfactory terms in the literature—talk, live, and explore Blackness with and alongside earlier generations of Black diasporic communities. What are the kinds of Black Third Spaces that emerge? While I find significant shortcomings with the terminologies of "post Middle Passage subjects" and "direct descendants of the Transatlantic Slave Trade," I use them here to set the terms and terrain of what this project ultimately interrogates and explores. The body of literature on Ethiopian and Eritrean diasporas, as well as on broader East African diasporas' transnational communities, has focused on integration and acculturation experiences (socially, culturally, politically, and economically). Few studies have been concerned with questions of how the presence of East African diasporas has altered and continues to alter Black cultural politics and the very terrain on which Blackness is contemplated in the West, Global North, or overdeveloped world. It is that gap toward which this work now turns and attempts, in some measure, to fill.

CHAPTER 3 – THE BRIDGE THAT IS NOT MY BACK:[22] LEARNING BLACKNESS/BECOMING BLACK

> Those African persons in "Middle Passage" were literally suspended in the "oceanic"…[R]emoved from the indigenous land and culture, and not-yet "American" either, these captive persons, without names that their captors would recognize, were in movement across the Atlantic, but they were also *nowhere* at all. (Spillers, 1987, p. 72)

Scenes of Surprise and Constraint (Scene II): Black Is Black Ain't…[23]

When I was seven, I brought home a form from school that my parents had to sign, which asked of me to identify my "cultural" background. Reflecting now, I don't remember why this information was being solicited by the school; perhaps it was an early rendition of a student census of some sort. Nonetheless, being a conscientious student and having read the form, without much thought, I filled it out and sought to have my mother sign it. As I took the form to her, she went to sign as she had so many forms before, but after momentarily screening it, something she saw halted her abruptly: I had entered "Black" in the space where the form asked for racial/ethnic identification. She asked why I had written Black, to which I replied because "I'm Black." My mother reacted with genuine confusion, befuddled bewilderment, and in a declarative but wondering tone responded: "You're not Black, you're Eritrean." While my mother intentionally let the moments following that statement be filled with silence, her more declarative rather than inquisitive tone alerted me to the fact that this was one of those statements of hers that were to be left unquestioned. Another sidestepping of sorts. It was in that precise moment, and through continually thinking about it and communally reliving it with many other

[22] This Chapter title riffs off and pays homage to the feminist anthology edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria E. Anzaldúa,*This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, first published by Persephone Press in 1981 and the second edition by Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press in 1983.

[23] *Black is... Black Ain't*, Marlon Riggs' (1995) award-winning feature-length documentary, is an in-depth exploration of the multiplicity of expressive positions in African-American identity and Blackness in general.

diasporic East Africans across the Black Atlantic[24]—not to mention in all that was purposefully unsaid yet definitively communicated—my idea of a kind of Black Third Space was born. What I take from this Scene are the ways Blackness is contested and resisted by those of us from East African diasporas. For me, this is a rife space for analysis and articulation of the ways Black cultural politics play out and animate among Black peoples from different diasporas who have settled in place, in cities across different generations and over different time periods.

In Chapter 2, I examined three texts that were emblematic of the first wave of research on Horn of Africa diasporas. In the present chapter, I reference studies that focus on second-generation East African diasporic people; in other words, the children of those immigrants, exiles, and refugees, who were—for the most part—born in their respective countries of settlement. I examine how Blackness emerges in this second wave of studies, noting the variances from the first wave and marking the ways that Blackness is positioned, framed, and theorized. By engaging and centring literature that cuts across East African diasporas and Blackness, I make intelligible the theories and analytical frameworks that anchor these studies' conceptions of Blackness and how Horn of Africa diasporas are being brought into the fold—by which I mean the diasporic Black collectivity on which the second half of the chapter focuses. The questions anchoring my analyses in this chapter are: What are the questions guiding the second-generation wave of studies? What are the frameworks being used? How are Horn of Africa diasporas positioned within larger Black diaspora framings? And what do these framings and positionings ultimately say about our conception of Blackness itself?

[24] My formulation of the Black Atlantic as it is used in this project includes Canada, the U.K., the United States, *and* the Horn of Africa.

In the second half of the chapter, I move away from studies that focus on East African diasporas and examine how academic literature has positioned "post Middle Passage" subjects or "continental Africans," not just from the Horn but Black people generally, and their movement in/to the West in the time of the "Afterlife of Slavery" (Hartman, 1997). I offer an analysis of what Michelle Wright (2013) marks as the "blackness" that stems from Middle Passage Epistemology (MPE), which is her attempt to make sense of and differentiate Black people who have come to the United States—and the West more generally—as direct descendants of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, and those who have come post-emancipation throughout the 20th century. In the latter part of the chapter I also examine the "Learning/Becoming Blackness" analytical framing that relies on the MPE framing Wright gives us.

With the excerpts from Abdulkarim Ali and the Scene with my mother, I suggest that Blackness is a space and terrain of complex identity negotiation as well as a site of tensions, contestations, and constraints. In particular, Blackness in Canada and in the United Kingdom are both overly inflected by the Caribbean, so much so that the region comes to be read as the entirety of Blackness. As a hegemonic representation of Blackness in Canada and the United Kingdom, the Caribbean both takes up too much space and occludes other forms of Blackness that come from different diasporic trajectories and other geopolitical histories. This overly Caribbean inflection is especially prevalent in Toronto, where Abdulkarim and I think and write: in Toronto Blackness is often understood as being solely from the Caribbean, especially Jamaica, and this is the Black that stands and speaks for all.[25] Thus, Blackness that comes from the

[25] See Benjamin (2003), in which she takes on what she terms the "Jamaicanization of crime."

continent is absented. Bibi Bakare-Yusuf (1987) writes of the same phenomenon emerging in the U.K. context. Concerning the West Indians who settled there, he writes:

> There is a tendency for the cultural practices of one particular black national group to appear as the essence of all black cultural practice. The patterns of migration and the timing of various waves of immigration into Britain have resulted in a hegemony of Caribbean culture in general, and Jamaican culture in particular. It is the under-class and working-class Jamaican cultural practices which are called upon to speak for and represent the cultural tastes of all Britain's blacks. (p. 81)

It should be noted that racism does not allow for Black complexity, but it is also the result of general ignorance of Africa, and of the Horn of Africa and its diasporas, on the part of Canadians that cannot conceive of Black diaspora as a global phenomenon, layered with difference emerging from different parts of the world over many generations. Moreover, the complex interactions and layers of difference that get subsumed under the category "Black" have often historically come from both the racist's *and the* anti-racist's standpoints. Winston James (1992) describes the experience of West Indians who, upon landing on the shores of the United Kingdom, instantly learned that they were Black after having lived lives classified as "white" in the Caribbean. Stuart Hall (1987) has written about his own discovery of being "Black" and how Blackness gets to be constructed based on (and lived through) difference:

> ["Black"] has always been an unstable identity, psychically, culturally and politically. It, too, is a narrative, a story, a history. Something constructed, told, spoken, not simply found. People now speak of the society I come from in totally unrecognizable ways. Of course, Jamaica is a black society, they say. In reality it is a society of black and brown people who lived for three or four hundred years without ever being able to speak of themselves as "black." Black is an identity which had to be learned and could only be learned in a certain moment (p. 45).

Stuart Hall points to the power and productive force of history and historical context when Blackness emerges, situationally and contextually. Additionally, the power of official story, of narrative and historical instability, is also part of how we should understand Blackness. To that end, we stay in the United Kingdom and turn to Helen Haile, a young Eritrean woman, to provide us with another example of how certain kinds of stories emerge when Black people from the Horn of Africa come to the West and surprise Blackness, revealing its assumed limits, imagined constraints, and lived material tensions.

A popular video blogger and content creator, Helen Haile lives in London, England and reflects and riffs through YouTube on her East African background and the politics of Blackness as it plays out in her U.K. context. She describes herself as a "weird young lady that speaks my mind." She has been vlogging (video blogging) since April 2013, boasting a following of 51,000 YouTube subscribers, with comparable digital imprints on Snapchat, Twitter, and Instagram. Through her YouTube channel, specifically, she presents content that aims to teach her viewers about Eritrean/Ethiopian cuisine, culture, language, and customs. Haile has over 4 million total

YouTube views, but her most viewed video, by far, is her episode titled “I’M NOT BLACK” (emphasis in original; Haile, 2016). Haile begins the video by declaring in a sarcastic tone, complete with an eye roll and a kiss of her teeth,[26] that “Apparently I'm not black and I have Asian and European ancestors.” Haile recounts to viewers that she had attended a networking event that was predominantly for London’s West African community. She tells us that she has a lot of West African friends and they encouraged her to attend. The event was a convention of sorts for people desiring to work in the arts and creative sectors. She encounters one “guy and his friends” and engages in small talk about life, as she puts it, where the following exchange occurs:

> So one of the guys asks me what country I'm from. Now for those that don't know, I'm Eritrean which is in East Africa. So I told him I am from Eritrea. And you know he was like “Oh Eritrea? Where's that? Never heard of it before” which is probably one of the most common replies I get all the time. And I’m cool with it, I’m cool with it! I tell him oh Eritrea's in East Africa and the Horn of Africa located next to Ethiopia whatever whatever. I just tell him you know the general get down of it. So he tells me “Okay so you're African you're black okay so what else you mixed with like what else is there?”
>
> That’s it. I'm a hundred percent Eritrean, like I told you.
>
> He was like okay but you’re not black though.

[26] Haile’s eye roll here (a physical gesture) and the kissing of her teeth (an audible gesture), are deployed together to communicate annoyance to her viewers.

Haile responds, “What do you mean I'm not black?”

> No, you don't look black init like you have that curly hair the long nose the thin lips that kind of European facial structure like don't look black init. And I’m just thinking yo okay okay what does black look like then? Please elaborate on that.

Haile’s unnamed interlocutor goes on to detail how East Africans have got European, Asian, and Arabian ancestry resulting in the facial structures and hair type that is, in his words, “not Black.” Haile comments on the confidence and assurance with which he was certain of these conclusions, pointing out—as an East African—how often she hears these types of comments:

> It’s just been playing in my head because all these years so many people tell me that I'm not black because I look a certain way, my hair is this texture I have a certain body type, people tell me I'm not black. What is black? Like what is, what’s black? I don't understand what is a black person meant to look like?

Haile hears these types of comments repeatedly because “to the majority, a black person is only from West Africa.” And she recounts that even from teachers in primary school she learned “that Eritrea and all countries in East Africa have all had ancestors that are from Europe, from Asia,” and therefore are not Black.

Haile then details the cumulative effect that repeatedly hearing these kinds of comments has had on her:

> So many people saying that to me got to the point where I actually started to believe that I'm not black like when people ask me what are you? I just say I'm Eritrean okay, I'm just Eritrean. I don't really know if you're confused about what you are, do research. That's how you learn about who you are. Don't listen to all the BS that people feed you cause it can honestly brainwash you. From a young age, I was just told so much by people: "Are you sure you're not mixed with this? Are you sure you don't have that in you? Are you sure your granddad's not Italian? Literally I've been told I'm from France, I've been told I'm from Saudi Arabia. I've been told I'm from everywhere and you know it just made me, I just got confused I was like what the hell am I then if I'm not black?

Haile concludes by telling her audience that the motivation behind her video is that she feels a lot of people who are from smaller and lesser-known countries could relate to what she is saying. She says that, while these subject areas amongst Black people and communities are very "taboo and debatable" topics of discussion, despite the constant challenges to the contrary she is Black and proud. The moments these Scenes describe are emblematic of the ambivalences and tensions that are present in and among Black people in diaspora, and illustrate some of the myriad ways difference plays out in Black Third Spaces. As noted previously, my interests in this project pertain to the particular tensions and ambivalences that emerge when Black people from the Horn of Africa come to Black city-spaces in larger and larger numbers. While Helen Haile marks this scene as "taboo," for those from the Horn of Africa encountering Black people from elsewhere the Scene is familiar: we often feel like a problem for Blackness in somewhat of the

way DuBois articulated. Black people from the Horn are marked as outside of Black's bounds for two deeply connected reasons. One, they come from the *other* coast of Africa, the one not materially linked to the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Two, since Black people from the Horn are understood to bear no *direct* genealogical connection to the Transatlantic Slave Trade—and are often vaguely associated with Arab ancestry—they are seen as free from the everyday effects of slavery's Afterlife. This second reason plays out in many ways, one of which is demonstrated when Helen Haile's unnamed interlocutor indicates that Black people from the Horn are commonly understood to have fairer skin and more conventionally "European" facial features associated with normative definitions of beauty like a smaller nose and longer, flowing, straight—rather than kinkier—hair.[27] For these reasons and others, Black people from the Horn of Africa are often positioned by other Black people in the West as *not really Black*.

Haile's dilemma is an example of the kind of Black Third Space where Blackness is contested and its constraints become intelligible. This Scene shows how an overt and rigid overemphasis on genealogy and an overly literal reading of the Transatlantic Slave Trade's history as solely connected to West Africa—and by extension West African peoples—together operate to frame which Black people are perceived to live within the purview of slavery's Afterlife. This purely genealogical reading of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and its purview informs the everyday material ways Black difference gets lived, here motivating Haile's unnamed interlocutor's claim as to who is and who is not Black. This is a quintessential example of how the Transatlantic Slave Trade and Middle Passage historically—and West Africa, the Caribbean, the United Kingdom, and the United States (and to a lesser extent Brazil)

[27] In his PhD dissertation, Hamid Mohammed Mohammed (2006) wrote that Habasha women are sometimes referred to by others in the Black diaspora as "Caucasian women dipped in chocolate" (p. 233).

materially— become the geographies from which "*Black*" people come. Not only does being from those geographically and historically specific spaces mark who is Black, those spaces also mark the boundaries from which to read who is *not* Black in diaspora or the "New World." Put another way, those geographies and their linked histories mark who has (and who has not) been Blackened in the wake. I borrow the terminology of "Blackened" and being "in the wake" from Christina Sharpe (2016), who describes the wake in the following way:

> Transatlantic slavery was and is the disaster. The disaster of Black subjection was and *is* planned; terror is disaster and "terror has a history" (Youngquist 2011, 7) and it is deeply atemporal. The history of capital is inextricable from the history of Atlantic chattel slavery. The disaster and the writing of disaster are never present, are always present. In this work, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, I want to think "the wake" as a problem of and for thought. I want to think "care" as a problem for thought. I want to think care in the wake as a problem for thinking and of and for Black non/being in the world. Put another way, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* is a work that insists and performs that thinking needs care ("all thought is Black thought") and that thinking and care need to stay in the wake. (p. 5)

Overly literal readings of the Transatlantic Slave Trade produce both *geographies* and *genealogies* of the sort I have just detailed. This makes intelligible yet another layer of surprise that Horn of Africa diasporas introduce to Blackness, revealing its anchoring conventions and attendant assumptions. Blackness from the Horn always surprises and disrupts; but what if,

rather than relying on genealogy—dwelling on which Black people are from where, and who bears what facial features or whose hair has which kinks or other texture—what if we did not simply rely on sight or a kind of Black nativism (by which I mean a direct genealogical tracing of an origin to West Africa and/or the Caribbean and attendant nationalities and ethnicities) to mark our difference? There is an African proverb that reminds us that what we see blocks our sight. What if we did not rely on the phenotypical to mark our difference? What if we began with Christina Sharpe's assertion that we are all in the wake? What other ideas, what other ruptures, might be necessary to grapple with Black difference and forge new ways to engage with, and be Black alongside, each other—with thinking and, yes, with care. This approach would treat the surprise and disruption brought by Black people from the Horn of Africa as part and parcel of the terrain on which Blackness and Black difference emerges. What if we invited the tensions, the contestations, the contradictions that come up in Black Third Spaces? What if we eschewed notions of nativism, phenotype, and discrete readings of the Transatlantic Slave Trade as the basis on which we mark our difference? What if we did away with the idea of a hegemonic centre of Blackness? Of Black thought? It is my contention that *Black Grammars*—as I flesh out in depth in my final chapter—have the potential to attend to these possibilities. And like Sharpe's wake, *Black Grammars* invite us to do so; in fact, *Black Grammars* insist that we do.

Being Black and Eritrean: The Second Wave

In this next section, I focus on academic literature that engages the question of East African diasporas and Blackness, what I term the second generation or wave of literature on East African diasporas. I focus on the overarching framings, methods, and conclusions of the studies,

as well as their implications. Elizabeth Chacko's (2003) study "Identity and Assimilation Among Young Ethiopian Immigrants in Metropolitan Washington" sets out to explore the "concepts of immigrant and identity by examining the creation and reconstitution of racial and ethnic identities of 1.5-and second-generation immigrants of Ethiopian heritage in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area" (p. 491).[28] The terms "1.5-generation" and "second-generation immigrant," which anchor her study, are defined in the following ways: "Second generation immigrants … [are] those who were born in the United States and have at least one parent who relocated to the United States," while 1.5-generation are "identified as comprising persons who immigrated with their parents to the United States when they were less than twelve years of age" (p. 491). For this study, Chacko interviewed ten 1.5-generation and ten second-generation Ethiopians, 12 of whom were women and 8 who were men. They ranged between the ages of 18 and 27 years of age at the time of the interviews, and all lived in Washington, D.C. and/or its inner suburbs in Virginia and Maryland.[29]

While the interviews Chacko (2003) conducted contained closed-ended questions delineating age, race, ethnicity, education, and length of stay in the United States, the open-ended questions related to racial and ethnic identification are the findings that most resonate with my project. Participants "were asked about their preferred form of self-identification, whether there were situations in which they adopted nomenclatures different from the ones they originally gave, and the reasons for their varying answers" (p. 492). Chacko begins her analysis

[28] While outside the scope of my focus here on the West, or the Global North, Tewolde (2019) has done important work on Eritrean migrant experiences in post-apartheid South Africa .
[29] At the time of Chacko's study, four of the respondents were in high school, and nine were undergraduates; seven had full-time jobs and most of the students worked part time. All respondents were interviewed face to face for about 60–90 minutes.

by foregrounding the divide between first-generation Black immigrants, also referred to as non-native Blacks, up against or opposed to native Blacks in the United States. According to Chacko, "native Blacks in the United States" is a descriptor and label that is both undistinguished and generic. Chacko cites Mazrui's (1996) suggestion that new immigrants gravitate toward the term "American-Africans" to mark their difference and that of their children. Chacko sets out to explore how first-generation Black immigrants from the Caribbean and Africa constitute their efforts to resist identifying with an undifferentiated Black identity—in their own self-identificatory constructions and those of their children—while facing concerted pressure to do so (Woldemikael, 1989; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Waters, 1996). Notably, Chacko's study was conducted after the 2000 census in the United States, which for the first time allowed self-identification in multiple racial categories.

For Chacko's (2003) respondents, the United States is a country where they are frequently confronted with racial classification, most often in the form of the question "What is your race?" While they were aware of the standard set of responses, they never became comfortable with responding to these queries with what they felt were "obligatory responses" (p. 497). When these questions came up in everyday life, Chacko's respondents found much more fluidity and room for maneuverability in their use of race than in the concept of ethnicity. Overwhelmingly, the respondents identify that Black was the appropriate response to the question "What is your race?" and that it was even expected and demanded at some points; but 70% prefer "African" as a *racial* marker. Selam, who falls under the 1.5-generation group of respondents, comments:

> Given a chance, I would still say that I am African. But usually you don't have a choice. You know how they have Black or African American for race? They don't have African on forms for race ... Sometimes I check "Black." Sometimes I check "Other." (p. 497)

Chacko engages the topic of nomenclature in Black American culture, indicating that while the term "African-American" has come to be considered synonymous with "Black" since the 1980s, her respondents do not identify with it, despite their qualifying factors, namely their African heritage and American citizenship. Indeed, it is interesting that Chacko asserts that "African-American" as a term is not preferred by either native-born descendants of African slaves or more recent immigrants from Africa. The Ethiopian respondents in Chacko's study are ambivalent about the term African-American because they wholly associate that term with "native Blacks" (it is not clear whether this is Chacko's term or the respondents'), and they do not wholly identify with it nor wish to be included in an undifferentiated manner. Chacko's respondents "claimed that becoming American did not mean becoming African American" (p. 497). Rather, they viewed "native Blacks"' perceived disapproval of the term "African-American" as a rejection of the legitimacy of Native Blacks' African roots. Yet over time in the United States, the immigrants began to develop a more nuanced perception of both Blackness and Africanness. Moges, who is 1.5-generation, remarks,

> During the first couple of years [after arriving in the United States], I considered myself only Ethiopian. Then I starting thinking of myself as African. As time passed … I interacted more with [native] Blacks and other Americans. This

country made me more aware of my race. I was Blacker than I thought I was! (p. 498)

While Chacko takes time to detail her respondents' chosen nomenclature and perceptions and politics of naming, she indicates that they were keenly aware that in a society steeped in deathly race configurations, when it came to life and death they were identified as Black. That they knew.

Shelly Habecker's (2012) paper "Not Black, but Habasha: Ethiopian and Eritrean Immigrants in American Society" details her exploration of the identity choices of Ethiopian and Eritrean immigrants of various ethnicities and locates her research in the "larger debate on how non-white immigrants are being incorporated into American society" (p. 1200). Habecker's findings are intriguing, because on the one hand she argues that immigrants resist racialization, and on the other that immigrants' "actions and attitudes potentially reinforce America's racial divide" (p. 1200). Let us explore how this rather curious conclusion is reached. Like Chacko's research, this study is located in Washington, D.C. and explores the following questions:

> Are Ethiopian and Eritrean immigrants, who are officially classified as black, affected by the same deeply entrenched racial injustices that disadvantage American blacks in Washington, DC? If not, are they doing something to improve their racial status? And what are some possible implications of their actions for the future of race relations in the U.S.? (p. 1201)

This research is taken from a larger ethnographic study comprised of six groups of first-generation African immigrants in D.C. between 2005 and 2006. "Not Black, but Habasha" focuses on two of the six groups, who were of Ethiopian and Eritrean descent. Through her work at the US government Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), Habecker became familiar with the Ethiopian Community Development Council (ECDC). By virtue of the connections garnered from this working relationship, she consulted with 50 Ethiopians and Eritreans who contributed to this specific study. Habecker, an anthropologist, sought to "obtain thickness of data within the context of well-established relationships (rather than statistically significant data within a representative sample)" and to that end relied "on the data collections methods of semi-structured interviews, informal conversations, watching and listening" (p. 1203).

According to Habecker's (2012) findings, the Ethiopian and Eritrean participants in her research, who were of Amhara and Tigrinya ethnicities, marked their "Habasha" identity as a distinct and separate "ethnic *and* racial category that is not black and that emphasized their Semitic origins" (p. 1203). For Abir (1985), Habasha is loosely translated in many ways, but what is most relevant here is that it is a description of "Abyssinian" lands in both East and West Africa, and when used as an identity by Habecker's participants separates them from African-Americans as well as all other blacks.[30] This use of Habasha, with its thread of exceptionalism, harkens back to Ethiopian elites who popularized it as a way of making themselves (as Ethiopians) and the nation (Ethiopia) exceptional and elite. For Ethiopian elites, Ethiopia was the

[30] As Habecker puts it, the various other ways Habasha has been used include: "'a wandering on' (Abir 1985), an Arabic term for Ethiopian slaves, sunburnt Egyptians that were the colour of Ethiopian slaves who were considered exceptionally handsome and intelligent (Willis 1985). Ethnic Amharas and Tigrinyanas, who were Orthodox Christians who monopolized state power in the highlands of Ethiopia (and what is now Eritrea), gradually began to use the term Habasha to distinguish themselves from other peoples of Ethiopia, particularly pagans and Muslims" (pp. 1203–1204).

quintessential "symbol of Africa and freedom," while at the same time "Ethiopians were neither Africans nor black" (Sorenson, 1993, p. 27)—with the implication they were higher in station and standing than other Africans and other Black people. As time passed, with Eritrea's emergence as an independent nation-state and the scattering that occurred following the long war with Ethiopia, Ethiopian and Eritreans living in diaspora came to use the term Habasha as an identity marker and category that differentiates them as being of East African descent more broadly. Across the Americas and the U.K., where I have observed Habasha in contemporary usage it has been utilized in a much looser, much more fluid fashion, denoting less exceptionalism and more of a way of marking Black difference and Black differentiation—specifically, a Blackness of East African descent. Yet, even in this more wide-ranging and inclusive usage of the term, some of East African descent would welcome being included in its purview, while others from the Horn would vehemently reject being gathered under it, both at home and in diaspora. While Habecker (2012) did not set out to study Habasha identity, it became her agenda because of the ways her participants strategically evaded ascribed racial identity:

> When I began my fieldwork, I did not set out to study Habasha identity. However, I began to notice that my informants were responding to racialization in the USA not only by highlighting their national identities, as most other African groups do, but by attempting to de-emphasize their ascribed black racial identification by promoting a Habasha identity amongst themselves (p. 1206)

Habecker asserts that for her respondents Habasha-ness was both an ethnic *and* a "unique racial category," specifically a non-Black phenotype, and that this was a strategy, which was not specific to Eritrean and Ethiopian diaspora, assisted in resisting undifferentiated assimilation into Black Americanness. Habecker identifies four distinct strategies employed by her participants in maintaining Habasha-ness: maintaining transnational ties (p. 1207), the production of Habasha spaces (p. 1209), becoming a model minority (perpetuating the image of success; p. 1211), and preserving Habasha beauty through group preference for endogamy (p. 1213).

Mary Goitom has been capturing and detailing recent experiences of Eritrean and Ethiopian people in Canada for some time. I want to spotlight a piece of research Goitom published in 2017 that, like much of her work, focuses on the ways second-generation Eritrean and Ethiopian youth construct their identities and sense of self and belonging in Toronto. "'Unconventional Canadians': Second Generation 'Habesha' Youth and Belonging in Toronto, Canada" explores the ways second-generation Ethiopian and Eritrean youth perceive, construct, and forge, their sense of identities in Toronto.[31] Goitom analyzed 20 in-depth interviews she conducted, and was keenly interested in the identity constructions of second-generation Eritrean and Ethiopian youth in a Toronto context that is both racialized and yet purportedly multicultural. In this work Goitom explores how "they ... perceived and forged their identity in a society increasingly influenced by forces of globalization and how this construction of knowledge is influencing how they (self-identify) their citizenship" (p. 179). Goitom frames her

[31] While outside the scope of this project, another work worthy of mention here is Goitom's (2018) "'Bridging Several Worlds': The Process of Identity Development of Second-Generation Ethiopian and Eritrean Young Women in Canada," for which she conducted 10 in-depth interviews with young second-generation Ethiopian and Eritrean women on continuities of identity and ethnic custom through the maintaining of traditional culture. For Goitom's research here, the family is the primary site of analysis, and the role of Eritrean and Ethiopian women is centred. She finds that it is women who bear the brunt of the responsibility of maintaining and passing on Eritrean and Ethiopian cultural traditions and practices.

analysis by articulating that Eritrean and Ethiopian who are second generation come to encounter a dichotomy between on the one hand "racial boundaries that construct an imaginary and undifferentiated Black identity" and on the other "ethnic boundaries which have material and sociocultural implications in their homelands," which are experienced as losing their nuanced significance (Madebo, 2014, p. 8). Goitom continues,

> Part of this process includes deemphasizing the encyclopedic classification of "black" and instead reclaiming or underscoring their national origins—which stands in opposition to Western narration of blacks and blackness. (p. 180)

Though from a different context, we can read Goitom (2017) offering her own version of an analysis of the Scene that opened this chapter. She writes, "first-generation Ethiopian and Eritrean immigrants methodize this difference by actively socializing their children to eschew a monolithic black identity, as a means of combatting pressures to assimilate into Western conceptions of blackness" (p. 180). According to Goitom, Eritrean and Ethiopian families place a substantive and specific focus on collective identity, education, religion, and transnational activities that reinforce links and connections to the homeland, group preferences for endogamy, and the mounting of cultural spaces that offer many opportunities for socialization within and amongst community members. These are part of a plethora of strategies that push back against being subsumed in a monolithic Black identity that demands an undifferentiated Blackness to cohere.

Of the 20 people Goitom (2017) interviewed for this research, 12 were second-generation Ethiopians and 8 second-generation Eritreans. All were Canadian born, between the ages of 18 and 30, with parents who were first generation from Eritrea or Ethiopia. The two strategies employed by Goitom's participants and that subsequently emerge in Goitom's analysis are the developing of "cultural capital and ethnic identities and ethnic heritage maintenance and cultural values" (p. 183) and the becoming of Habesha, the supra-national and supra-ethnic term also deployed in Habecker's (2012) work (although in alternate spelling). For our purpose we will focus on how becoming Habesha comes to be a strategy for identity construction and retention for second-generation Eritrean and Ethiopian people in Toronto.

Goitom's (2017) framing of "becoming Habesha" is important. In Goitom's analysis, her participants deploy becoming Habesha as a strategy to combat and buttress the kinds of racial dynamics that operate in Toronto specifically, and Canada more generally. In fact, Habesha serves as a way to push back multiculturalism and its operation:

> Habesha to respondents is a term that extends beyond established borders and instead is a collective labeling that is based on shared common language, culture, religion, physical characteristics, ancestral origins, and shared experiences as second-generation Ethiopian/Eritrean youth in the Diaspora (p. 186).

In Goitom's positioning, Habesha is an identity construction as well as a site of negotiation between the traditions of the past and the conditions of the present. Put another way, adopting Habesha as an identity—which, according to Goitom's subjects, was supra-ethnic, multinational,

and not racial—was a way to honour the past, the traditions, culture, and practices of their families and where they came from, and also a grappling with the marginalization and exclusion a substantially white Canadian society presented. I would also suggest that in some form, as I have seen it used widely in American, Canadian, and U.K. contests, Habesha served as a buttress against an undifferentiated Blackness, while also an attempt to fight racial ordering. Goitom's (2017) respondent Selam explains in the following way:

> When you say you're Habesha, there's certain things that people expect. Grow[ing] up with either your parents were Ethiopian or Eritrean, your upbringing, having visited there. I feel like, when you say Habesha, it's like there's a whole bunch of things attached to it. Saying Habesha, yes I am Ethiopian or Eritrean and my morals, most of the morals are established with Habesha and for us also pieces of what makes you part of Canada too. Like, okay I'll never fully be accepted as a Canadian but I am also influenced by it right? So yeah, Habesha speaks to that and adds pieces that make sense like the law to an extent, rational thinking stuff like that. This is what the youth choose to call themselves and identify with. (p 186)

In the passage above, Selam details the collectivity that the term Habesha plays for second-generation Eritreans and Ethiopians. Habesha is not an ethnicity or a race, but an identity construction and space that is deployed to bring Eritreans and Ethiopians under a common banner, while also providing particularity and specificity.

The last piece of research I examine in this section comes from Kassahun Kebede, who has been documenting Ethiopian experiences in the Washington, D.C. area for some time. His 2017 article "Twice-Hyphenated: Transnational Identity Among Second-Generation Ethiopian-American Professionals in the Washington, DC, Metropolitan Area" draws on the experiences of 21 second-generation Ethiopian-American professionals (8 men, 13 women) and explored the "dual challenges of maintaining Ethiopian identities while embracing American values and aspirations" (p. 252). The questions that framed Kebede's work include:

> What factors shape identity formation for second generation Ethiopian-Americans? How do second generation Ethiopians understand and navigate racial identities? In other words, how do they view themselves in relation to the group the receiving society would assign them to, in this case African-Americans? How do they cope with ethnic and racial boundaries? How does the second generation interpret, negotiate, or reconcile their ethnic and racial identities? (p. 253)

Kebede centres a set of responses that are framed as strategies for navigating ethnic and racial identity in an American context. These fall under the following themes: interethnic relations, parental perspectives on passing on ethnicity, education and career choice, the importance of community institutions, and Ethiopian youth culture. Kebede identifies the family as the site in which the most powerful socialization takes place. According to Kebede's (2017) participants, the most pressing issue their families grapple with is the "powerful force of racialization." That is to say, at the forefront of parents' concerns is the reality that they and their children are perceived as Black in the United States, and the ways that being racialized as Black overshadows

all ethnic particularities and specificities. Thus, Ethiopian families "attempt to instill in their children the value of being both Ethiopian (knowing one's family roots) and being American (getting a good education as the gateway to success in the U.S. society) and the importance of avoiding racial categories" (p. 258). Kebede details other strategies that his participants deploy against being subsumed under racial categories: these included moving to smaller cities to avoid urban inner-city cultures, hiring Ethiopian domestic workers as soon as they can afford to do so, and ensuring grandparents remain close and influential in the raising of children, specifically to impart Ethiopian cultural practices, customs, and traditions.

Kebede's informants are also very interested in the ways their Blackness had an impact on their experiences in the United States As Kebede (2017) puts it, "at home the fact that they are perceived to be 'different blacks' than native-born blacks dominated conversations with my respondents about race and ethnicity" (p. 260). Many of Kebede's respondents also note that as they reached high school years and then adulthood, they gravitated toward their Ethiopian culture and practices, the same identities they rejected as youth. However, they reported that when they returned to their "Ethiopian roots," they were seen as "less Black" and even disregarded entirely by African-Americans (p. 260). As one, Mike, puts it: "They (African Americans) do not think we are lost cousins or something. They even looked down upon us because we are from Africa" (p. 260). Yet Kebede was told by an informant that he should not "overemphasize the exclusions they experienced and the fact that they were seen as different" (p. 261) because, as one respondent, Alex, puts it, "I appreciate a lot of African American culture. I listen to hip-hop. In college we helped each other because it was a dominantly white school" (p. 261).

The last aspect of Kebede's work of interest to my study is the idea that second-generation Ethiopians construct themselves as having "blending identities." Kebede's participants consider American society as difficult for them to fully integrate into, on the one hand because of their Ethiopian heritage and on the other because American culture—from their viewpoint—is difficult to nail down, capacious in its constitution and ambiguous overall. To that end, the second-generation Ethiopians in Kebede's study blend Ethiopian and American, which then results in criticism from Ethiopians and criticism from Black Americans. Beza, another respondent, describes this conundrum, or cultural tightrope:

> Ethiopians often say I mean like, you know, "You are not really Ethiopian, are you? You are very much Americanized." I agree. I am. Even if it is a misrepresentation of who I am. Conversely, here on campus my American friends comment, "You are so Ethiopian." I really am not so something. There is always another side to me. I am simply Beza, an Ethiopian-African-American. I do not like to typecast myself. I think of myself as a third culture kid. (p. 264)

Beza's comment on being a "third culture kid" gestures toward what I have called the Black Third Space, a space where second-generation Ethiopians navigate multiply located cultural demands, which are more complex and layered than codeswitching. As Kebede writes, they must juggle across and between multiple world views and gain the facility to demonstrate and dance across multiple cultural competencies. For Kebede (2017), "third culture kid" is an accurate descriptor of the adaptability of his participants to adjust, shift, and mold to "the demands of different situations and contexts" (p. 264). The second-generation Ethiopians Kebede spoke with

appreciate their ability to constantly change over time and understood their identities and their responses to various situations and contexts as being contingent and capable of flux over time. They recognize situational contexts and their responses as fluid, and that even if the situation and/or context were similar, how they might respond today may not necessarily be how they would respond in the future.

Learning Blackness/Becoming Black: Larger Frameworks

In this section, I examine the larger analytical frameworks that attempt to make sense of what are sometimes called "Continental Africans," and/or "post Middle Passage subjects." These are Black Africans who came to the West and are not directly linked to, and are not direct descendants of, the Transatlantic Slave Trade, meaning people who are Eritrean like myself, Somali memoirist Abdulkarim Ali, or Black British Youtuber Helen Haile. When the perspectives of post–Middle Passage subjects are centred in relation to Blackness, they are primarily and most often viewed through a lens of "Learning Blackness" and/or "Becoming Black." So often is this framing and lens used that I would even say it is convention. Whether discussing West African migrations of the mid 20th century or Horn of Africa migrations of the late 20th century, scholars, intellectuals, and writers who chart these migrations and analyze their experiences with Blackness all deploy some variation of the "Learning Blackness/Becoming Black" frame. For example, Inua Ellams, a Black British playwright, has a popular play titled "Barber Shop Chronicles."[32] The play is set in barbershops in Peckham, England; Johannesburg, South Africa; Harare, Zimbabwe; Kampala, Uganda; Lagos, Nigera; and Accra, Ghana. While

[32] While the play was first performed in 2017, it gained popularity in 2020, with reviews in *The Guardian* early that year and an online mounting of the play during the COVID-19 pandemic.

the play is multiply located, the entire show occurs over a single day. The play centres conversations mainly among African men, some of whom live on the Continent and others who are African but live in the United Kingdom. Black culture, as well as Black male masculinity, lie at the heart of the play, as do identity, diaspora, and migration. These subjects are broached and explored by being woven into the fabric of the conversations in which the characters of the play engage.

Recently interviewed in *The Guardian*, Ellams said: "I was born a man, it was only when I came to England that I became a black man. And I am still a Nigerian, so I am still an African man. I am not a Black British man" (Guardian Culture, 2017). Ellams here invokes the "Becoming Black" (Asante, 2012) trope by marking that his Blackness emerges with his arrival in diaspora, for him in the United Kingdom. Ellams refuses the linking of Blackness with Britishness, which is to say that, while he is living, writing, and creating in Britain, there is some working of British life that does not allow him to accept being Black *and* British, or perhaps even Black British.

Similarly, in an interview with National Public Radio (Aspen Institute, 2014), famed Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie tells NPR's Michele Norris that while in America, she observed that she was "taking on a new identity. Or no, rather, I found a new identity thrust upon me." Adichie elaborates,

> I became black in America and I really hadn't thought of myself as black in Nigeria. I think that identity in Nigeria was ethnic, religious ... but race just wasn't present ... I like to say I'm happily black. So I don't have a problem at all, sort of

> having skin the color of chocolate. But in this country I came to realize ... that meant something, that it came with baggage and with all of these assumptions. And that the idea of black achievement was a remarkable thing. Whereas for me in Nigeria, it wasn't. It was not. And I think that's when I started to internalize what it meant and that's when I started to push back. So for a long time I didn't want to identify as black.

Adichie continues in the interview to say that "finding" identity in the US context was a long process which involved, for her, a "self-styled reading journey." This self-led reading journey comprised reading both American and African-American history books to gain a more in-depth understanding of the roots of racial conflict, racial conditions, and racial stereotypes in the American context. Adichie goes on to explain how the self-directed reading in which she engaged pushed up against the backdrop of other ideas about Black people in the American context:

> When you're an immigrant and you come to this country, it's very easy to internalize the mainstream ideas. It's easy, for example, to think, "Oh, the ghettos are full of black people because they're just lazy and they like to live in the ghettos," because that's sort of what mainstream thinking is. And then when you read about the American housing policies for the past 100 years it starts to make sense. And then it forces you to let go of these simple stereotypes. It was a conscious effort and it was an interesting journey, but still a journey.

In Adiche's comments, we can see both tropes of "Becoming Black" as well as "Learning Blackness" at work in her telling of acclimating to diaspora in the United States. Like Ellams,

Adichie articulates her becoming Black as being wrapped inside, or put another way, as part and parcel of, the settlement experience. It is in becoming diasporic that Blackness is arranged, organized and embedded. This framing is how post Middle Passage subjects and/or Continental Africans come to be understood as (in or outside of) Blackness in diaspora; and more normatively, how they most often come to understand themselves. We see it in the exchange Helen Haile has with her unnamed interlocutor—that being Black is tied to West Africa from where most of the enslaved were taken. And those that who come from elsewhere have to learn and become Black.

Awad El Karim M. Ibrahim's work focuses on Black subject formation in Canada. The crux of much of his work in this area builds on the "Becoming Black"[33] analytical framework I am teasing out here. For example Ibrahim's (1999) article "Becoming Black: Rap and Hip-Hop, Race, Gender, Identity, and the Politics of ESL Learning" concerns an ethnographic study conducted in a southwestern Ontario high school where Ibrahim worked with French-speaking immigrants. For this project, Ibrahim interviewed 16 African youth aged 14 to 18, including 10 boys, of whom 6 were Somali, 1 Ethiopian, 2 Senegalese, and 1 from Togo. All 6 girls were Somali. Ibrahim's primary methods of data collection were individual interviews and two focus groups with all of the young people who identified as male and the other with all of those who identified as female. Ibrahim allowed his interviewees their choice of language for focus groups and interviews; while some chose English, the majority chose French.[34] In addition to their youth and refugee status, he examined the formation of their social identities, particularly the reality his informants now faced being in North America with the attendant social imaginary in which "they

[33] See Asante (2012).
[34] Ibrahim translated all interviews conducted in French himself.

were already Blacks." Note that Ibrahim's deployment of the "Becoming Black" analytical framework suggests that his informants became Black in North America's social imaginary. Ibrahim reports:

> This social imaginary was directly implicated in how and with whom they identified, which in turn influenced what they linguistically and culturally learned as well as how they learned it. What they learned, I demonstrate, is Black stylized English (BSE), which they accessed in and through Black popular culture. They learned by taking up and repositioning the rap linguistic and musical genre and, in different ways, acquiring and rearticulating the hip-hop cultural identity. (p. 351)

Ibrahim works through the modality of language, in particular with students whose primary language is not English. On that, he writes that the African francophone students with whom he worked used Black English as style, subcategory, and language. Rather than mastery or proper ways of speaking Black Talk, Ibrahim (1999) writes, respondents

> bank more on ritual expressions (see Rampton, 1995, for the idea of rituality) such as whassup (what is happening), whadap (what is happening), whassup my Nigger, and yo, yo homeboy (very cool and close friend), which are performed habitually and recurrently in rap. The rituals are more an expression of politics, moments of identification, and desire than they are of language or of mastering the language per se. It is a way of saying, "I too am Black" or "I too desire and identify with Blackness." (p. 351)

For Ibrahim (1999), patterning their modes of speech in these ways means that "African youths enter the realm of becoming Black" (p. 352). He proposes that to choose to become Black in a society structured by racial domination—be that Euro-Canadian and/or the United States—means that one is then expected to "be Black, act Black, and so be the marginalized Other" (p. 353). Additionally, Ibrahim positions the African youths' taking up of Blackness as their "desire to belong to a location, politics, a memory, a history, and hence a representation" (p. 353). In another passage that briefly harkens back to Chapter 2 of this dissertation, Ibrahim details *his own* becoming in the following way:

> Being is being distinguished here from becoming. The former is an accumulative memory, an experience, and a conception upon which individuals interact with the world around them, whereas the latter is the process of building this conception. For example, as a continental African, I was not considered Black in Africa; other terms served to patch together my identity, such as tall, Sudanese, and basketball player. However, as a refugee in North America, my perception of self was altered in direct response to the *social processes of racism and the historical representation of Blackness* whereby the antecedent signifiers became secondary to my Blackness, and I retranslated myself: I became Black. (p. 354, emphasis added)

Ibrahim here aligns with the notion that Black was something that did not exist in Africa, but something that he became here, in Canada or more broadly the West. When Ibrahim (1999) asks the African youth with whom he works, "Where did you learn English?" they all respond with

television. Ibrahim's analysis of this response is to position the Black popular culture that the African youth are taking up and learning from as a particularly African-American located Blackness. It is a Blackness that holds Black America as its centre. He goes so far as to write, "Black popular culture seems to interpolate (Althusser, 1971) African youths' identity and identification" (p. 359). So the Blackness Ibrahim registers here is solely American:

> Because African youths have few African American friends and have limited daily contact with them, they access Black cultural identities and Black linguistic practice in and through Black popular culture, especially rap music videos, television programs, and Black films (p. 359).

For Ibrahim (1999) the hegemonic representations of Blackness in the West are predominantly negative, and when the young people with whom he spoke encounter these negative Black representations they in turn search for other Black cultural sites of positivity or positive identity frames with which to identify. One respondent, Omer, spoke to the ways African young people are mostly influenced by Black American representation:

> Black Canadian youths are influenced by the Afro-Americans. You watch for hours, you listen to Black music, you watch Black comedy, Mr. T, Rap City, there you will see singers who dress in particular ways. You see, so. (individual interview, French) (p. 361).

Another respondent, Mukhi, echoed the sentiment:

> We identify ourselves more with the Blacks of America. But this is normal, this is genetic. We can't, since we live in Canada, we can't identify ourselves with Whites or country music, you know [laughs]. We are going to identify ourselves on the contrary with people of our color, who have our lifestyle, you know. (group interview, French; p. 361)

For Ibrahim (1999) then, Black popular culture—more specifically Black American popular culture—"emerged as an alternative site not only for identification but also for language learning" (p. 361).[35] Ibrahim sees rap, hip-hop, and Black popular culture generally as sites of curriculum. In choosing these sites, the African youth saw that becoming Black meant engaging the margin, as well as choosing resistance to the exclusion Canadian society produces for Black people living in Canada. Ibrahim asserts that choosing Black popular culture as sites of curricular material and resistance from the margin is also to "legitimize otherwise illegitimate forms of knowledge." (p. 366). In Ibrahim's analysis, the Blackness that his respondents are becoming and learning is entirely and wholly American. In this formulation, then, Ibrahim takes the African youth with whom he is working as passive recipients and/or receptacles absorbing Black American cultural specificities. He positions them as simply parroting these Black cultural practices rather than as active participants in what might be considered a Black diasporic sensibility.

[35] In Matsuoka and Sorenson (2001) a respondent makes an astute observation that applies here: "Canadians just assimilate us with black Americans. They see the colour and think everyone is the same. It's a misunderstanding" (p. 210). In contrast to Ibrahim, this respondent is marking a changing same and difference to being Black in the United States and being Black in Canada, a difference that Ibrahim does not acknowledge or suggest to his respondents.

Continuing with this line, Michelle M. Wright's (2004) *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora* positions the dynamic I am detailing here front and centre for study and scrutiny. Wright's text is an in-depth analysis of Black responses to Enlightenment discourse on subject formation. She critiques how theories of Black identity are overly patriarchal and positions her contributions as a feminist intervention. At the centre of her critique is Paul Gilroy's concept of the Black Atlantic, whereby he argues that diasporic countercultures play central roles in re-examinations of Western discourses of belonging, subjectivity, modernity, and nation. For Wright, Gilroy's Black Atlantic model is patriarchal, and her aim is to introduce gender and sexuality into the mix. Ultimately, Wright makes the convincing case that, while underappreciated, Black female subjects play integral and generative roles in the constitution, theorizing and ultimately the expression of Black diasporic identities.

It is with Wright's conceptualization of Blackness that I want to linger. According to Wright, Blackness "in the West" (quotation marks in original) is inaugurated with the forced removal of Black people from West Africa through the Transatlantic Slave Trade and Middle Passage. Black subject formation, or Black identity, was produced in contradiction, because while there remains no biological or genetic basis to racial categories, Wright (2004) argues:

> Blacks in the West have nonetheless had their History shaped by the very concrete effects of Western racism. Unlike Black Africans, who ultimately define themselves through shared histories, languages, and cultural values, Blacks in the diaspora possess an intimidating array of different historical, cultural, national, ethnic, religious, and ancestral origins and influences. At the same time, despite

> this range of differences, they are most often identified in the West as simply "Black" and therefore as largely homogeneous. Given these contradictions, the attempt to offer an overarching definition for Blackness looks to be a losing game. (pp. 1–2)

Wright's formulation produces a firm distinction between "Blacks" and "Black Africans" based on the history of slavery and Western racism. In my reading, Wright is asserting that Blacks in the West whose history traces back to the Transatlantic Slave Trade and Middle Passage do not have a straight line back to an ethnic or national origin, meaning no shared histories, and resulting in no ultimate way to define themselves in any kind of unified way. The ways Black Africans are able to trace back to their own ethnicities and nations, reflecting a diversity of histories, languages, cultural values, and origins, provides them solace from the genealogical violence (the tear, the rupture, the void) entailed by being produced directly from the Transatlantic Slave Trade and Middle Passage. Wright then concludes that because of the dizzying and obfuscating effects of racism, the category Black is edifying in the sense that it produces erasure and homogeneity overall, reinscribing the violence of the tear, the rupture, and the void.

As with the previous studies we have reviewed, Wright (2004) makes the analytical slip of conflating Black with the racism that white supremacist settler states produce. Wright concludes that the aim of an overarching, all-encompassing definition that would capture the entirety of the Black diaspora—continental and descendant—is frivolous. In contradistinction to my efforts here with *Black Grammars*, Wright's perspective is built with the white gaze and

white supremacist state in mind, because while her text is invested in the development of theories that proliferate Black subjectivities in the African diaspora, her starting point is "the Black Other, that figure from late-eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Western philosophy without whom the white subject could not have come into being" (p. 28).[36] For Wright, Blackness inhabits the contradictions between material and abstract, the individual and the collective. The inherent fluidity of Blackness holds the "ability both to harm and heal the Black individual" (p. 2). Wright's project, then, is to create a workable, usable definition of Black diasporic identity that must be able to hold "the diversity of Black identities in the diaspora yet also link all those identities to show that they indeed constitute a diaspora rather than an unconnected aggregate of different peoples linked only in name" (p. 2).

Wright (2004) points out that scholars have attempted to link Black and African diasporic consciousness in the West through two polar ends, a common historical moment or shared cultural trope, which often becomes the Transatlantic Slave Trade via West Africa. These efforts, Wright rightly points out, have been met with criticism because of the lack of consensus on a common or originary historical moment or workable cultural trope that would effectively link African diasporic communities living in the West. Wright puts it this way: While the Middle Passage is of course an event of significance for many, "it is not what brought him or her into Germany"; while "an Ibo woman or man of Maghrebi or East African origin is automatically located outside a Yoruba cultural trope" which may be "directly significant to many contemporary Caribbean and/or African American communities" (p. 3).

[36] On this point, Wright (2004) further notes that for the West and its attendant orders of knowledge, the Black Other occupies the site of Black inferiority in its "need for self-definition. In order to posit itself as civilized, advanced, and superior, Western discourse must endlessly reify Africa and the Black as its binary opposite" (p. 27).

For Wright (2004), Black is a signifier for

> the complex negotiation between dominant and minority cultures that all peoples of African descent in the West—philosophers or not—must make in order to survive, whether physically or psychologically (and here we might include the rejection of one cultural identity over the other as a negotiation, however unsuccessful). (pp. 25–26)

For Wright (2004) then, becoming Black makes central "the fluidity of Black identity in the West, and our ever evolving understanding of it" (pp. 25–26). One of the aims of Wright's work is to highlight the ever increasing diversity of Black subject positions, identities, and subjectivities that are present and currently working themselves out alongside each other in diaspora. Wright's project is similar to my own in the sense that we are both trying to grapple with how best to understand Black difference across generations and time, in particular across the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Wright insists that all negotiations of identity, history, and diaspora are embedded in negotiations of understandings of Blackness. As with all negotiations—done by Black people or otherwise—they are always and already ongoing, in the making, never the final word, fixed or concrete. Yet in Wright's formulation, there is a firm and distinct break and binary *between* the Black that is American and is formed or constituted through the Transatlantic Slave Trade, and the Black that comes from elsewhere and otherwise in the wake of it. Wright is interested in exploring the possibility, or lack thereof, of a unifying definition of diasporic Blackness that might contain, suture, repair, or provide redress for the

distinct break and binary Wright marks between descendants and non-descendants. This is where we disagree: Wright is interested in a unification that gestures toward suture, repair, recovery, and redress, while *Black Grammars* considers that Blackness is, at least in part, the tear, the rupture, and the void, with no desire or possibility of repair, redress, or recovery nor even unification. That Blackness is, in part, the grammar that attends to the irrecoverable.

Conclusion: Learning *Static* Blackness and Becoming Black *American*.

In this chapter, I wanted to demonstrate how the "Learning Blackness/Becoming Black" framing often means "Learning *static* Blackness and Becoming Black *American*." In the first part of this formulation, Blackness is something rigid, static, and fixed. Very often when scholars, cultural critics and analysts say Becoming Black, they mean Black American cultural discourse, and so re-privilege and re-centre it. For Abdulkarim's mother and my own, Blackness is something else, something undesirable, something Caribbean, something otherwise. For London, England–based Haile and her unnamed interlocutor, the Transatlantic Slave Trade and Middle Passage is purely an event, one that is temporally and affectively located in the past. Conceiving of that as an event in this temporal way, with a beginning and an end—read as a complete break—means that the present in which we live is in the *aftermath* of that history, rather than, as Saidiya Hartman (and by extension Christina Sharpe and others) frames it in her work, the *Afterlife* of slavery. For Hartman, Gilroy, Sharpe, and others, the history of enslavement has set the stage for and shaped the current arrangement of the world.[37] Seeing the long history of the

[37] The Transatlantic Slave Trade is not simply the oft-ignored period in "American" history and Euro-American modernity but, together with the Middle Passage, Blackness is the backbone of the West. It is, in of itself, the active backdrop against which the American, Canadian and British nations were constructed.

Transatlantic Slave Trade and Middle Passage as a discrete event—which reading it as a complete break does—implies that it produced *some* Black people who emerged in its wake and others who did not. This is how (and why) Haile's unnamed interlocutor can make the claim that she is *not really* Black because she did not emerge directly from that history. This line of thinking is what makes intelligible the binary of post Middle Passage subjects/Continental Africans, which collects Black Americans and direct descendants under one rubric (and the United States as its hegemonic centre) and places Continental Africans under another, and does not allow for internal difference, vibrancy, or complexity. According to some scholars and cultural critics, this divide and binary is never to be crossed. In this dissertation, I contend that these divides and the difference they produce are being grappled with every day. Black Third Spaces and the Scenes presented here attend to that fact.

The "Learning Blackness/Becoming Black" analytical framing as I have laid it out here relies on a set of conceptual anchors that give it credence and provide it intelligibility: first and foremost that it is indeed *possible*—for those who have been Blackened by this history—to either *learn* or *become* Black in the first place. I titled the Scene that began this chapter "Black is, Black Ain't," to bring to the fore the ways that Learning Blackness (re)produces an individuated Blackness—or, put differently, the notion that some are Black and some are not by virtue of genealogy or personal choice. The individualizing effects of this framework occur because the Blackening effects of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and Middle Passage are attached to *specific* Black people and not to others. Linking Black designation to some Black people and not others also "racializes" and segments the afterlife of this history—as if it has only affected some Black people, while leaving the rest of the human population unaffected. One does not say that only

some of us live in a post–World War II world. To borrow again from Christina Sharpe, we—and here I mean the global human we—are all in the wake.

In addition to the discriminating effects of this framework, using it to centrally frame Black diasporic experiences means positioning the history that inaugurates Blackness as a discrete event in the past, rather than an unfolding history informing the present we currently inhabit. As Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995) would put it, the past is not passed; this might allow us to think differently about the history of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and Middle Passage. We might consider this history as ongoing, as still unfolding and so producing Blackness on an ongoing basis rather than discretely in the past. As Black people move in the world shaped and formed by this history, as Black people across generations and with different relations to this history, Black Third Spaces and Black Sociality keep being reformed and reformulated anew. *Black Grammars* offers another way of thinking Black diasporic collectivity, Black identity, and subject formation.

Moreover, when we think the Transatlantic Slave Trade and Middle Passage as a discretely bounded event in the past, what logically follows is a differentiation between who is and who is not Black. Thinking Blackness and the history that inaugurates it in this limited way gives inadequate analytical credence or weight to the history that made Blackening some humans possible or necessary. The framework treats Blackness not only as encounter in the West: "Learning Black/Becoming Blackness" makes Blackness singularly a Western phenomenon, solely in the Americas, with no global resonance.[38] Blackness in this formulation becomes

[38] On this point, refer to Pierre (2014).

monolithic, individual, and unchanging. Following that logic, Blackness cannot be dynamic: it must remain static for this model to hold; and therefore Black people cannot contribute to its fluidity, and Blackness cannot change over time—it remains fixed in time in the past and stuck in place in the United States. This framework cannot account for the shifts that emerge in the Black cultural discursive landscapes and terrain that inevitably occur when different Black people from different places come to encounter, create, work, and build on Blackness together. I have centred this chapter on this most prevalent, often unquestioned framework, to lay bare the assumptions from which it operates. Doing so brings forward its core ideas and implications, and demonstrates what might be at stake when trying to understand Black experience across difference (and time). Ultimately, laying out these frameworks and their suppositions identifies a need for a wholly different analytical framework to attend to the depths, nuances, and richness of Black difference and its multiplicities—an analytic that more closely attends to the changing-same, fluid quality of what Black means across the diaspora.

CHAPTER 4—TOWARD BLACK GRAMMARS AND A SOCIOLOGY OF THE DOOR OF NO RETURN

> The task of theory in relation to the new cultural politics of difference is not to think as we always did, keeping the faith by trying to hold the terrain together through an act of compulsive will, but to learn to *think differently*. (Hall, 2017, p. 174)

Scenes of Surprise and Constraint (Scene III): Black Grammars from Below

I have been teaching in Toronto in one form or another since at least 2005. Whether it was in the role of youth worker, or running spoken word/literacy programs in community, I have been working with Black youth in some capacity since I was in my teens. In 2009, I became a certified teacher in the province of Ontario. While that accreditation gave me the formal license to work as a teacher, I long had held that function in Toronto's Black communities for some time. In fact, I was working with in proximity to Black youth for much of my adolescence and into adulthood. At 12, I began participating in community programs, and so I grew up with Black youth and then became their community worker and/or teacher. While in these roles in Toronto, I encountered Black youth from across the Caribbean, West Africa, and the Middle East and like myself from the Horn of Africa. Some Black families I came to know were twice displaced: first from the Caribbean, then from the United Kingdom where they lived for some time before finally settling in Toronto, where we all found ourselves in predominantly Black and racialized programs and communities. We were all attempting to make and make sense of lives in Toronto from various vantage points influenced by the different starting points from which we all came. This heterogeneity of Black people in Toronto and the cacophony of Blackness it produced makes it a thoroughly Black diasporic city-space. By virtue of where and how I grew up and

what work I found myself doing, I was immersed in a community of Blackness that claimed scattered roots and circuitous routes. All the Scenes speak to that. Indeed, it is the richness of Black dispersal in Toronto that raises important questions for Black Study. Moreover, the Black youth with whom I have been living and working require deep consideration as well.

I introduce this history here because the Black youth in Toronto—the ones I grew up with as well as the ones I later taught and would work with—who are studying, playing, and living alongside each other, provide insight into questions of Black difference. I have observed how Black youth make Blackness move, mix, and mingle across cultures: what they do to and with Black culture subverts genre and contorts language. Hearing these Black youth speak to each other, I saw how they collectively and seemingly effortlessly dance(d) across and between English, their "own" first languages, and each other's languages. Simply by virtue of being Black and in proximity of each other, they picked up various non-English words from each other's cultures and then play(ed), placed and position(ed) them in *their own* speech patterns. Borders or boundaries—whether of language or background—meant very little to the Black youth I was around; either they did not see them, or they did and danced around them anyway. For example, a common exchange: I would hear a Somali youth make a claim to some disputable fact in a patois accent—with what sounds like an undeniably Caribbean inflected accent so in tune and on pitch that I wondered whether the speaker was from the Horn, or if he had just landed in Toronto from the shores of Kingston, Jamaica. The Somali patois-accented kid would be responded to by a Black child from the Caribbean with "say walahi"—which in Somali loosely translates to "if what you are saying is true, then swear on it." In effect, the Black Caribbean child was challenging his Somali counterpart in his own language and dialect, after

having just been engaged by a Somali speaking to him in a Caribbean accent. To these Black youth, this was commonplace. To me, this was fascinating on every level. These Black youth communicated with each other through advanced forms of call and response: they were also doing something thoughtful and playful with and to Black difference.

In this short—and, to them, rather unremarkable and everyday exchange—we can trace the leaps of each turn of phrase and the dance of language. In other similar instances, I see Black youth move across countries and continents and traverse a range of accents while dancing across a variety of languages that take listeners conceptually across and around the Caribbean, to Somalia, crisscrossing Nigeria and Ghana back to the Horn, all nestled in a bed of local slang and Black American English.[39] What these Black youth have done/are doing with *and to* language and culture—moving, mixing, and mangling—is not limited to everyday conversation. I detect this kind of Black diasporic creativity and bricolage not only in their sociality but also in their artistic, culinary, and musical expressions. With Scene III, I am making the claim that what these Black youth are doing with and to language (and culture) is more than simple translation. In effect, what they are doing is building grammars of (and with) Black difference. By this I mean a different way of relating to each other that is grounded and rooted in Blackness, that works and builds Blackness in relational kinds of ways. The exchange I detail here, on its surface is a seemingly simple example: but if we dig deeper below the surface, they are performing a depth of conceptual work. Consciously or not, they are—as the kids say—doing the most.

[39] While there exists a plethora of studies conducted on the sociolinguistics of Black American English, very few studies exist that center the sociocultural and linguistic dynamics I am centering here. To do so would indicate the centrality, depth and richness Black Toronto provides for future study.

The ways Blackness is being engaged here is not bounded by nation or ethnicity; rather it comprises a *grammaring* in which all the Black youth were/are participants, were/are both interlocutors and contributors, rather than simple passive absorbers of an imagined, rigid, and/or fixed American Blackness that is offshore or borrowed. In addition, these short, swift exchanges (such as the one detailed here) suggest how these Black youth are recognizing, acknowledging and expressing difference rather than glossing over or passing by it, they are recognizing it, working it and playing with it. My long term observations of how Black youth engage each other, and the ways they grammar Blackness amongst themselves, is one (among many) starting points for my idea of *Black Grammars*—the title of this specific chapter and dissertation more broadly.

These Black youth provide us with another way of thinking about Black difference: to think about it as a working *in and through* difference and as a kind of creative relationality, which is precisely the kind of work I am calling *Black Grammars*. I see *Black Grammars* as an alternative way of thinking about Black difference, but also as a name for what takes place in Black Third Spaces, where the working on and stretching of Blackness happens. The alternative grammars evident in Black youths' everyday language and interactions with each other, which I consider as advanced forms of call and response might be likened to the ways Black artists and preachers have always troubled the binaries and (perceived) boundaries between performer and audience, speaker and listener, activity and passivity, stillness and movement. In this chapter, I argue that what those Black youth were engaging in *is* the language of the diaspora, and it has its own grammar. Moreover, thinking of Blackness as grammar and as the language of diaspora, means thinking about Blackness unburdened by race, and unencumbered by overdetermining

fixed and static notions of ethnicity and/or nation. As an analytic, *Black Grammars* extends our current thinking on Black difference but also on Blackness itself. The idea of Black Third Spaces draws attention to the possibilities of Black Sociality and *Black Grammars* is thinking Black difference otherwise.

In J.L. Dillard's important text *Black English: Its History and Usage in the United States* (1972), grammar is used to mean not the "correct use of language, but the way a language works" (p. xi) and I am mobilizing grammar in much the same manner here, to signal attention to the ways Black difference works and is animated in Black Third Spaces.[40] Thinking Black difference as grammar attunes us to the traces and differences made intelligible and—as in the Scene that opens this chapter—emerging in Black speech that marks, mobilizes, animates and makes malleable the multiply scattered changing same, the particularities and qualities that make(s) Black life. When considering Black difference through an analytic of grammar, what becomes detectable/discernable are the structural, historical and linguistic (re)semblances that marks Black life as always diasporic and always multiply located, even while in place. *Black Grammars* is an intervention in the ways Black difference has been thought heretofore and accomplishes my own desires to move away from unproductive overreliances on race and ethnicity as explanatory anchors of Black difference. At the same time, *Black Grammars* interrupts the stability and durability of difference being narrowly expressed through geography, nation, episteme and reductionist notions of identity to which ethnicity attaches and on which normative scholarship on Black differences also relies. *Black Grammars* brings to the fore the ways blackness is dialectical, syncretic and reciprocal. Most importantly, what *Black Grammars*

[40] In contradistinction to more pessimist perspectives, the tandem of *Black Grammars* and Black Third Spaces offers a way of thinking the possibility (and possibilities) of Black Sociality

as an analytic and heuristic makes most clear is the way Blackness as grammar not only makes Black Sociality possible for thought but also it resonates with the ways Blackness is sympoetic, that is to say the ways that Blackness, its contestations, complexities and differences, are (re)created in concert, marking Blackness social, relational and collective.

Since conceiving of this project, I have paid attention to the myriad of ways grammar shows up in Black Studies. Typically Black Studies scholars invoke the idea of grammar when delineating or deciphering oppressive grammars or calling for new grammars on different registers. I use grammar differently: rather than as a response to detailing the different registers of and tenors to grammars of racial oppression (Spillers, 1987), I suggest it generative to think Blackness and difference *as grammar.* I conceive of *Black Grammars* as a signaling to the sympoesis[41] that takes place in Black Third Spaces, an example being the Black youth in the Scene that opened this chapter. Blackness is (re)created, (re)worked and repeatedly stretched collectively and in concert with and amongst each other and by each other here I mean specifically Black people. For me, thinking Black difference through sympoesis rooted in diasporic Black Sociality is an eminently more useful and generative way of thinking and working with Black difference. *Black Grammars* marks the collective procreative power of Black Sociality, open to and inviting of all the different ways it is lived, animated and expressed across the interdictions of history, space, geography and time.

In part, *Black Grammars* takes as its impetus from Walcott's question in *Black Like Who* (1997/2003): what is the grammar for thinking Canadian Blackness? Taking that question as one

[41] From Ancient Greek σύν (sún, "together") and ποίησις (poíēsis, "creation, production"), coined c. 1998 by M. Beth Dempster. en.wiktionary.org › wiki › sympoiesis Accessed 06/21/2021

(of many) point(s) of departure, I am also moved by Wynter's charge that social scientists, intellectuals and scholars are most useful when thinking of themselves as "grammarians of our time." Black intellectuals, particularly those in the academy, are tasked with dealing substantively with race, Blackness and their attendant classificatory logics, sometimes despite and in spite of discipline. As theory, *Black Grammars* builds on the understanding that another way of delineating Black difference is through stories and narratives—that is to say the narration—of Black people rooted and grounded in their respective local cultures based built upon their various diasporic trajectories. *Black Grammars* is a theory of and an argument for the idea that Black difference can be understood through Black Sociality. *Black Grammars* together with Black Third Spaces makes it possible to think of an arena and architecture for Black difference.

In my thinking, *Black Grammars* draws intellectual sustenance from another set of Wynter's important body of thought, which is that of a deciphering practice. For Wynter, a deciphering practice is "part of the attempt to move beyond our present "human sciences" to that of a new science of human "forms of life" and their correlated modes of the aesthetic" (pg. 240). The "deciphering turn" Wynter calls for is a move away from deconstruction, literary criticism and critical theory as the frontier of thought while at the same time urging a move toward a focus on social and cultural production as intercommunion. As grammarians of the present order of knowledge, we must be more attuned to the commonplace, quotidian simple significations of everyday life. In some measure, *Black Grammars* is my attempt to heed Wynter's call.

At its core, *Black Grammars* is an argument for thinking Black relationality, sociality and difference together. In this regard, this work is indebted to Mark V. Campbell's thinking on remixing relationality. In *Everything's Connected: A Relationality Remix, A Praxis* (2014) Campbell is interested in pushing past Canadian state-sponsored policies and initiatives of multiculturalism that engender static performances of ethnicity. Rather, building on McKittrick's "archipelagos of human Otherness" (2006, pg. 123), Campbell grapples with thinking inventively about animating forms of social difference. He accomplishes this by centering innovative Afrosonic creative acts while "read[ing] them alongside a future multiculturalism or ways of living with difference" (pg. 99). Building very directly on Campbell's thinking, *Black Grammars* attempts to extend Campbell's work by imagining relationality and interconnection in Black Third Spaces as a way of thinking Black difference otherwise.

In addition, I conceive *Black Grammars* as leaning on two other important works in Black Studies. The first being Tina Campt's A *Black Gaze: Artists Changing How We See* (2021) and the other, Terrion L. Williamson's *Scandalize my Name: Black Feminist practice and the Making of Black Social Life* (2017). These two works and their contributions help to articulate the necessity for an examination of Black difference on terms Black people lay out for themselves, that center the ways Black people creatively express their own knowledge production. Campt argues that the artists she profiles in her most recent work are curating a distinctively Black gaze. Campt writes, "it is a gaze that is energizing and infusing Black popular culture in striking and unorthodox ways. Neither a depiction of Black folks or Black culture, it is a gaze that forces viewers to engage blackness from a different and discomforting vantage point" (p. 8). Campt continues, making the claim that when artists push our ways of seeing and even our gazing, they "are choosing to look after, care for, and reclaim an uncomfortable Black visual

archive that makes audiences work through and toward new ways of encountering the precarity of Black life" (p. 8). Campt's Black gaze details what's at stake when we look at or look with, Campt continues, "it is a Black gaze that shifts the optics of "looking at" to a politics of *looking with, through and alongside another*. It is a gaze that requires effort and exertion" (emphasis in original, p. 8). Thinking alongside Campt's Black Gaze, is Terrion L. Williamson's commitment to a notion of Black social life. For Williamson, Black social life is "fundamentally, the register of black experience that is not reducible to the terror that calls it into existence but is the rich remainder, the multifaceted artifact of black communal resistance and resilience that is expressed in black idioms, cultural forms, traditions, and ways of being" (p. 9). For Williamson, Black social life is in stark contrast to social death theory but also a concerted examination of Blackness that does not solely route itself through racism, white supremacy and racial violence. *Black Grammars* is indebted to these thinkers and their works and attempts to build on their foundational ideas.

At the heart of what I am laying out here is the difficulty of thinking Black diasporic consciousness and Black Sociality together across the ravages and interdictions of History, time, displacement, and the nation-state, which all coalesce around and are inaugurated by the Transatlantic Slave Trade and the Middle Passage. I wanted to imagine a way of thinking Black difference outside of the strictures of race, ethnicity and nation, both of which are by-products and ongoing technologies of antiblackness. This project is my attempt to on the one hand avoid familiar framings of thinking Black difference while still holding on to the generative possibilities that thinking Blackness provides. In Chapter 2 and throughout this dissertation, I both analyze and problematize the constitution, methods and conclusions of studies produced when they are grounded in a disciplinary modus operandi because studies produced in and by

academic disciplines regarding Black people adhere to race, ethnicity, and nation as anchoring and explanatory concepts. These normative studies do not (in fact, I argue cannot) imagine the kind of Black Sociality and relationality that I am centring here, because disciplines anchored by normative disciplinary concepts ensure a disciplining of thought and imagination ensuring, not creative thinking, but rather the reproduction of disciplines.

In this dissertation, I wanted to think about my own experiences living Black and being Black with other Black people from other places who were doing the same. Scene III with the Black youth and their creative grammars suggests alternative structures of relations that are much more useful and generative for thinking Blackness and difference together than the lenses offered by various disciplines. When applied to Scene III in particular, and others more generally, *Black Grammars* makes clear that an analytic device or heuristic was necessary to better attend to how the politics of Blackness and difference are being lived, performed, and played out. The Scenes demonstrate that the set of studies we have on offer do not and cannot account for Black Sociality and by extension cannot attend to Black relationality. These unsatisfying studies make clear that a different kind of analytical device (Black Third Spaces) is necessary to make visible a certain kind of discourse like *Black Grammars* possible. And it was clear I needed to think of some ideas to help me get there.

Thinking the combination of Black Third Spaces and the Scenes is what made *Black Grammars* as a discursive intervention possible: how these Black youth were living and what they were showing me simply by living Black alongside each other makes *Black Grammars* necessary. Without being reified, *Black Grammars* can also be useful as an opening and as a

heuristic device or conceptual framework because the concept suggests a more itinerant, fluid, non-hegemonic, un-centred Blackness. Thinking of Blackness as grammar works against the provincializing of Blackness and toward a Blackness that attempts to hold sameness and change in interrelation: a Blackness that can maintain the idea of shared conditions (social, oppressive or otherwise) while still holding possibilities for specificities and particularities, creativity, openness and interdependence. *Black Grammars* is my attempt to think Black people's own structure of relations not beholden to the logics of race or the strictures of ethnicity or nation, a heuristic that tries not only to account for but also attend to the vast depths of Black difference stemming from our various diasporic trajectories and frames of understanding. *Black Grammars* places emphasis and focus on how Black difference comes to be expressed and animated in Black social spaces without eliding friction or sidestepping frottage, but in fact, as a concept that is inviting of them. *Black Grammars* centers Black difference and contestation that always pushes back against a Blackness rooted in undifferentiated sameness, which—as the Scenes of Surprise and *Constraint* make clear—is always fictional.

Thinking *Black Grammars* as the language of the diaspora moves us away from a centring on the United States that is unproductive, especially when it is held up as not only the centre of Black life and thought but also as its apex. I consider *Black Grammars* to be connected to and building on what Brent Hayes Edwards (2003) calls the practice of diaspora. The Scenes, as points of departure from a U.S.-centric analysis, open up a way of thinking diaspora that reimagines Blackness through the poetics of Black sociocultural production but also that considers Black Sociality itself as cultural production, beyond mimicry and beyond nation. In the next section, I offer some examples of how *Black Grammars* can be mobilized in an analysis and

in doing so detail what becomes animated and intelligible in the wake of the openings *Black Grammars* provides.

Scene IV: Myth And Materiality: The Horn of Africa in the Black Imagination

In what follows, I break with my convention of one Scene per chapter to mobilize *Black Grammars* in an analysis and to demonstrate the conceptual space that gets opened up with this analytic but also the questions that emerge in its wake. I detail another scene from my childhood one that took place in a barbershop; it highlights the usefulness (and for me urgency) of an idea like *Black Grammars*. It marks the importance of thinking Black difference differently but also how myth and materiality (history by another name) comes to be animated in the diaspora. Additionally, to begin, two framing epigraphs:

> Human beings participate in history both as actors and as narrators. The inherent ambivalence of the word "history" in many modern languages, including English, suggests this dual participation. In vernacular use, history means both the facts of the matter and a narrative of this facts, both "what happened" and "that which is said to have happened." The first meaning places the emphasis on the process, the second on our knowledge of that process or on a story about that process.
> (Truillot, 1995, p. 2)

> Myth is of course seductive, but it needs material power to enforce it. (Brand, 2012, p. 129)

Barbershops have always held a certain kind of place in Black popular culture. They are often positioned as sites where Blackness gets shored up, by which I mean made more certain and rendered more stable. In particular, Black barbershops are communal sites, especially sites where Black masculinity gets rehearsed and performed. Yet for me, Black barbershops have always been sites of destabilizing, sites of deterring and especially a detouring away from any certainty. Coming from the Horn, Black barbershops always represented a move away from what I thought I knew for certain about what Blackness meant, be it in Canada and/or beyond. In some sense, they were also mythic in the space they held in Black cultural production but also mythical for me in how they were sites of Black imaginative expression. When sitting in Black barbershops, I was always taken away from where I was, and outside of the time I thought I was living in. In what follows, I share how a small barbershop in northwest Toronto, took me to the world and beyond demonstrating for me how Black imagination can be, as Dionne Brand puts it, materially and conceptually powerful.

Black Barbershops: Destabilizing, Deterring and Detouring

The name of the barbershop was Rubino's, and it was owned by an Italian man of the same name. I realized this was a barbershop I frequented more for the conversations that took place there than the haircuts. While Jane and Finch is now a community predominantly populated by Black and racialized people, most of the single-family homes and commercial properties were built by Italian labour and owned by Italian people who immigrated to Toronto in the 1950s and 1960s. Rubino's was one of the few barbershops in the area that rented chairs to

Black barbers. There were barbers from all across the Black diaspora—from the Caribbean, Africa, and everywhere in between. I was about eight or nine years old when I started going to Rubino's to get haircuts, but realized I always got a whole lot more. One always gets a whole lot more with Black barbershops. In this instance, that more was an education in Blackness and Black Canada because in Rubino's barbershop there was always a cacophony of diasporic Blackness. In fact, thinking back, it was probably one of the few Black "public" spaces we could congregate relatively free of surveillance without having to really buy anything. Come to think of it now I question how many haircuts I actually received or saw firsthand. Again, to reiterate, very quickly the prime purpose of going to Rubino's stopped being to actually get haircuts.

In any case, I was too young to understand all that was said and the various debates that occurred, but I knew and felt they were important and worthwhile exchanges. For example, I remember Rastas "bigging up" Ethiopia and the Emperor Haile Selassie, and saying they wanted to leave Canada and go back to the place that my family and I had just escaped. I remember being genuinely befuddled by the praise and adulation both Ethiopia and the Emperor were receiving from a small barbershop in northwest Toronto—halfway across the world. Rubino's was where I first heard stories about the Horn of Africa and its histories that didn't come from my parents. These stories or the geography of the Horn never seemed to make it onto the pages of Canada's supposed multicultural texts books and curriculums. These were stories that regaled Ethiopia as a place in the world "untouched by European colonialism," a space that was revered as a Black Mecca, which signaled for many Black people, and especially for the Rastas at Rubino's, the apex of Black freedom and liberation, mainly because it symbolized, at once, a site

of resistance, rescue, redress, and return, a kind of global North Star of freedom for Black people.

These were the kinds of exchanges that took place in Rubino's, and they were in direct contradiction to the types of histories and stories my parents told me of "back home" and the role Ethiopia played in their/our own freedom struggle—stories in which they took an active part. Notwithstanding, those *de facto* sessions on Black Canada and on the Black diasporic imagination that took place in Rubino's barbershop were especially generative and fruitful. That barbershop and other spaces where similar exchanges occurred were spaces of disruption and surprise. They, too, were a Black Third Space that made (and continues to make) way and space for Black Sociality, such as the kind this dissertation has been describing.

While these stories contradicted the ones I heard at home, I kept going back. On some level, what fueled my constant returns was on one hand educational and on the other subversive. Hearing stories that excited and contradicted the ones I heard at home felt volatile too. Without knowing how or why, it also felt like this "shit" mattered, that it was deeply important. I listened intently to Rasta, Caribbean, and African barbers discuss Blackness, Black politics, and Black Mecca in the everyday. Conceptually, they would travel from Jamaica to Shashamane in Ethiopia,[42] with Toronto as the throughway, discussing Black history, a vernacular Black Radical Tradition, and their place (and *placing*) in what I came later to think of as the Black Atlantic. In the span of a 20-minute haircut, followed by hours of conversation, these Rasta, Caribbean, Black Canadian, and African barbers trekked through and across over 400 years of history. They

[42] In 1948, Emperor Haile Selassie I donated 500 acres of his private land in Shashamane, Ethiopia to Rastafarian expatriates and the Ethiopian World Federation (EWF).

rarely agreed on historical specificities, and over time details in their individual journeys changed in the retelling. The stories never stayed the same; the stories themselves moved, each (re)telling ever more bombastic than the last. Their details, their protagonists, their sequence of events—in fact, their very constitution—were always in flux: the stories were fluid, they flowed like water (re)modulating to the shape of its container. Said another way, the stories always seemed to be attuned specifically to the audience designated to receive and contain them. What seemed to matter most was neither narrative consistency nor a social science–informed kind of reliability or validity—but rather the very act of (re)telling, as the stories collectively took us on long paths of converging and diverging traditions of Black resistance, ultimately speaking aloud utopian landscapes of Black freedom and emancipation. Only in looking back did I come to realize that the fact that these conversations were set in the 90s to a Toronto backdrop was, in itself, important too. Even as a somewhat naïve nine-year-old, I could *hear* a certain kind of dancing between, in, through, amongst, and around fact and fiction, history and myth, all nestled inside always creative but often self-serving and bombastic storytelling. If I were asked to imagine a space that represented the *fact* of Blackness and the *life* of Blackness at the same time, I would start with thinking about Rubino's barbershop—and the dance that happened there between fact, truth, the mythical, and the material—as a site where a Black Third Space was made real. Rubino's barbershop was a thick site of Black Sociality where Black imagination, in the form of narrative storytelling, came to be animated.[43]

The combination of willful trickery and Black bluster that surrounded the (story)telling and mythmaking—and which oftentimes resulted in deep passionate disagreement of the

[43] In another writing currently under development, I think through Rubino's barbershop and the combination of narrative storytelling and Black imagination being animated alongside Saidiya Hartman's critical fabulation.

shouting variety—required effort to decipher what was intended as historical fact and what, also intentionally, comprised a mythical Black triumphalism in the interests of constructing usable pasts. In and amongst fluid definitions of historical fact, it seemed that truth in its capital "T" iteration held little importance. For me, the mystery, zeal, and excitement of trying to decipher these stories, as they wavered between what would now be termed fiction and creative non-fiction, or what Saidiya Hartman might call "critical fabulation," has remained exhilarating, endlessly fulfilling, and, as evident in this project, theoretically informative.

At the core of this barbershop Scene is the question "What does it mean to be Black?"[44] The conversations that filled those barbershop days revealed layers of that important and enduring question. Because of the ebbs and flows of the historical and contemporary trajectories that brought Black people to a place like Canada (or the United Kingdom and United States, for that matter), from the Horn and the Caribbean, the question "What does it mean to be Black?" necessarily evolves into "What (and when) does it mean to be Black, where you are, and from whence you came?" The Scenes demonstrates some ways these questions get asked and taken up in everyday Black community settings. I contend that these sites offer us much to grapple with. The fact that *this* question was being asked in Toronto, Canada made the conversations (and their implications) all the more interesting because those conversations were a speaking back to an overbearing Black American hegemonic discourse that assumes and demands core and centrality, and *at the same time* a speaking *with* the Caribbean (as these barbers came to Canada from there), and a speaking *through* the Horn of Africa, from where my parents and I came. To riff on Rinaldo Walcott, something worth thinking about was happening here in Black Canada, and one

[44] In my reading, this question is asked by every generation, and every iteration is simply a riff of DuBois's (1969/1903) central question in *Souls of Black Folk*, where he first pondered "How does it feel to be a problem?"

of those "heres" of Black Canada was Rubino's barbershop. The significance of those conversations are still, I argue, as resonant today as they were when in my youth. And still remain yet unexplored.

My dad has his own story about the Emperor Haile Selassie. He first encountered the Emperor as a young child back home. During my father's youth, Haile Selassie would visit Eritrea from time to time.[45] When the Emperor visited, it was always a state holiday and streets and schools would close. People would line streets to ensure the Emperor would have the audience that a man of his importance and stature demanded. My dad said that although there was no school on days the Emperor would visit, he had a brand new school bag and was excited to run to the front of the crowd, up to the side of the street to catch a glimpse of this imagined larger-than-life figure. Because of the expected size of the crowd, my dad tells me he knew he would only get a glimpse, if even that, but he also wanted to venture to the front to see if he could scrap some change. It was customary that during these parades for the opulent and flamboyant Emperor to throw money into the crowd for the people to collect. The money was never a lot, and the chance of collecting small, but it was enough that people without much could not pass on making an attempt. Amidst widespread poverty, the money also ensured that audiences were always plentiful.

So on the day—as my dad tells it—he squeezes his way curbside. He knows the Emperor's delegation is nearing because the crowd is getting louder and louder. Then, in a second, mayhem erupts. Bodies pile on top of bodies, and he finds little crevices through which

[45] Between 1962 and 1991 Eritrea was a far northern province of Ethiopia

to travel. My dad sees change under a pile of bodies and scrambles to that spot, but having no luck he lunges to another. The mayhem clears, as quickly as it began. The Emperor could not have been in my dad's proximity for more than a minute before he moved on. As the bodies rearrange themselves, everyone rises back on their feet. My dad gets back on his own two little feet, straightens his school uniform—which he wore because of course it was mandatory, even though there wasn't any school; one always looked good and proper for the Emperor. Once settled and back to balance standing upright, my dad opens his hands, checks his pockets and reaches for his bag. That is when he realizes: No money, no school bag. When my dad tells this story, he always makes a point of mentioning that, at the time, it was widely reported that while many of the people over whom the Emperor presided lived in extreme and abject, and completely avoidable, poverty, his dog ate from a solid gold plate.

While the adulation of the Emperor and Ethiopia more generally chorused often, I never shared this story in Rubino's Barbershop. Maybe because I was too young, or maybe I was too apprehensive to challenge or contest the mythical tales being told of messiahs and meccas. But this story is worthwhile, too, whether I felt at the time that there was no conceptual space for the conversation to be had, or that it would not be received well. *Black Grammars* is about finding and exploring ways that might bring these two conversations together—the one the Rastas at the barbershop were having and the story my dad told me—so that deeper, more generative, and fuller and sustained conversations might be had. This Scene makes especially evident, too, that the best discussions about Blackness and Black difference are always necessarily circuitous and multiply located across many geographies, precisely because of the different routes Black people

have been forced to travel (and endure) throughout history, and the scattered roots to which Black people can (and do) lay claim.

A secondary question that found its impetus in that barbershop is how the Horn of Africa figures into the Black social, cultural, and political world that those conversations collectively created and critiqued and demonstrates how the imaginative is within the purview of *Black Grammars*. What made that yet-to-come, imagined emancipatory world—the Black Mecca those Rasta barbers were simultaneously imagining and (re)calling on—all the more complex were the ways the Horn of Africa was being included in a *contemporaneous* manner. I found the move an ethical one because in all other contexts I have encountered, whether in the academy, popular culture, or otherwise, and especially in Black American discursive and cultural spaces, Africa falls silent or disappears altogether.[46] However, the ways the Horn of Africa was included and invoked in that barbershop Scene—in part embodied in/through the figure of Haile Selassie—and particularly the way Rastas and some of those Black Caribbean people brought the Horn into their Black diasporic mythical imagination could be in stark contrast to how I—an East African of Eritrean descent who had just come from there—made sense of the material history of the Horn.[47] Yet, while I (and many others from there) would disagree with how they thought of the Horn, I appreciated the engagement. To some degree, *Black Grammars* makes another kind of conversation possible.

[46] In many American-centered studies that purport to study Black cultural discourse, not only does Africa fall silent, so too does the Caribbean and Canada.
[47] On July 9, 2018 Eritrea and Ethiopia signed a peace agreement formally ending the border conflict between the two countries.

Later, in similar conversations, I came to understand that there exists an intriguing, useful, and generative disjuncture between the way the Horn of Africa is mythologized—that is to say, imagined as prominent in the Black diasporic imagination—and the lived material histories of diasporic East Africans across the Black Atlantic world. Ethiopia has long held a special meaning, not only in the United States but also in Jamaica and beyond. Formerly known as Abyssinia, Ethiopia stood—and in many ways still does—as a symbol and synonym for Black pride and Black independence as far back as the 1760s. The name Abyssinia, later changed to "Ethiopia" with the signing of the 1931 Constitution, possessed strong biblical associations. The more modern name "Ethiopia," from the Greek meaning "burnt-faced ones," and also familiar from the English Bible became a harbinger of African decolonization and independence. Throughout the twentieth century, Ethiopia has been the Continent's (and the diaspora's) symbolic North Star, in particular because the century opened with widespread colonial violence and by mid-century erupted with the hope and optimism that followed the wave of African independence. The idea of Ethiopia and its symbolizing of Black freedom travelled to the United States, the Caribbean, and the United Kingdom.[48] As Teshale Tibebu (1995) writes, "The pan-African construction of Ethiopian identity made Ethiopia the concentrated expression of Africa" (p. xv). In the United States some have even at times—for example, during the American Revolution—identified as Ethiopian as an act of transnational solidarity, as did Black American poets Phillis Wheatley and Jupiter Hammon. Describing themselves as Ethiopians was a long-

[48] Sorenson (1998) takes on this myth on directly: "Most people do not understand the difference between ancient Ethiopia and contemporary Ethiopia. Because of this historical misinformation, Africans who were colonized or enslaved by Europeans, except those who were enslaved and colonized by contemporary Ethiopians, wrongly considered contemporary Ethiopia (former Abyssinia) as an island of Black freedom because it was able to maintain formal political power, albeit with the help of Euro-American powers. However, Ethiopia was only directly colonized by fascist Italy between 1935 and 1941. Most Blacks 'knew very little about the social and political conditions of Ethiopia. What they wrote or said about Ethiopia was at best a manifestation of their emotional state' (Scott, 1993, p. 26). Other Africans are unaware that Ethiopia's political power came from allying with the colonizing European powers" (p. ##).

practiced tradition of Black intellectuals, borrowed from the European custom of applying the label "Ethiopian" to all African peoples.[49] In its more colloquial usage the name "Ethiopia" came to stand for the Black world writ large. Wanting to link and tie the Black world to the Horn of Africa, Abyssinian state elites replaced the name "Abyssinia" with "Ethiopia," in part as an attempt to evoke biblical ideological history. As Sorenson (1998) writes, this positioned "the modern Ethiopian state as the direct heir to the Ethiopia mentioned in biblical and classical sources. Ethiopian and Western scholars presented Ethiopia as an entity that had existed continuously as an integrated and independent state for three thousand years." (pp. 233–234). Throughout the 20th century, many Black artists, cultural workers, and social movement architects have uncritically made use of Ethiopian iconography, conflating the biblical myth making and triumphant Ethiopianism with the history of the Ethiopian state that acts in its name. Not only was the symbol of Ethiopia Africa's North Star, for the Black diasporic imagination it was a symbol of undying and endlessly victorious Black resilience and defiance.

In the literature, exceptionalizing and exalting of Ethiopian history and culture is called "Ethiopianism." Ethiopia is evoked as an always exalted and mythological symbol, a vaunted place in Black American cultural discourse and the Black diasporic imagination more generally. In part, Ethiopia being the home and birthplace of the African Union is testament to this meeting of Black diasporic imagination and the mythical meeting the literal.

[49] Budge (1928) writes: "The descriptions of Ethiopia given by Homer, Herodotus, Diodorus, Starbo and Pliny make it quite clear that they indicated by this name the vast tracts of country [regions] in Asia and Africa that were inhabited by dark-skinned and black faced peoples" (pp. 120–121).

In retrospect, in Rubino's Barbershop, Ethiopia was exalted as the bastion of freedom and the teleological end point to the Black freedom struggle whose past was predominantly and almost solely American. This is an exercise in Black diasporic imagination, in fact a prime example of Black diasporas (re)constructing usable pasts. This Black diasporic imagining of Ethiopia is not only a construction—or reconstruction depending on vantage point—of an exalted and triumphant Ethiopian past but also a striving toward a future where the loss and the break that was the Transatlantic Slave Trade and Middle Passage is sutured by a never-colonized Ethiopian North Star. This imagining of Ethiopia as the Black diaspora's North Star is one that has "travelled well," from Black American poets, to Caribbean mythology, Bob Marley's song lyrics, and even into the hearts and minds of the barbers of my youth.

Listening and taking part in these loud and bombastic conversations from a very young age, I learned that conversations about Black difference, and the difficult work of thinking what Blackness *does,* never take place in (only) one conceptual space, location, or even temporality or line of flight[50] and that engaging Blackness substantively means moving beyond keeping the United States at its centre. Black diasporic imagination always exceeds national borders. Rubino's barbershop demonstrates how myth and materiality operate in the Black diasporic imagination and how they persist across borders, history, time, and space and ultimately across perceived understandings of what is truth and fiction, the mythic and the material.

[50] I recall these sentiments being echoed in conversation with John Comaroff, Harvard Professor of Anthropology, who remarked that Fanon could never (in fact should never) be read or understood without deeply engaging with Steven Biko—which is to say, South Africa is in Algeria and Martinique, and vice versa.

These kinds of myths serve important purposes in Black diasporic imaginings, and while I am arguing here that they must be countered with more critical historical renderings, their utility, importance, and perseverance must never be diminished or disqualified. I am interested in what Rolph-Truillot (1995) urges us to do, to hold together in a complex tension both the facts of the matter and a narrative of facts, both "what happened" and "that which is said to have happened" (p. 2). Placing equal focus on the facts and the narrative of the facts leads me back to the epigram from Dionne Brand (2011) that opened this section, which reminds us that while myth is seductive, "it needs material power to enforce it" (p. 129). For me this serves as a reminder that some of that material power is imaginative. History and the connections we make with it are also like a kind of grammar. *Black Grammars*, as I have been suggesting are contemporaneous, that is to say they are about how we make sense of our engagements with Blackness in the present. While this section and chapter more broadly seeks to reinforce that idea, another way of entering *Black Grammars* is through our self-identifications with and across history, and the kinds of usable pasts we construct from that interplay. The specificities of that interplay, its rhythms, its registers and its ebb and flow are the imaginative foundations on which our visions of Black futurities rely. Rubino's Barbershop as a Black Third Space demonstrates how our usable pasts—from the Horn to the Caribbean—inform the kinds of freedom dreaming we do in the Americas. What this Scene and chapter detail is how our interplays—with history and geography and how we think, dream, and imagine them—are too an aspect of *Black Grammars.*

Scene IV: Street Level: Little Ethiopia Confronts Black Broadway

At Rubino's barbershop, the contradictory stories of the Horn and its history is confronted and grappled with at the level of the imaginative and through storytelling and narration. On Black Broadway in Washington D.C., similar dynamics played out on the street and in urban space. In 2012, the CBC aired a nationally broadcasted radio program titled *Black Broadway and Little Ethiopia*.[51] The radio documentary profiled the story of the historically Black neighborhood in Washington, D.C. colloquially referred to as "Black Broadway." Central to the program was the friction caused when Ethiopian-Americans, having settled there for decades, put forward a petition to rename a portion of Chocolate City to "Little Ethiopia." African-American residents, who had been living there for generations, vigorously resisted the renaming, citing historic reasons and ties to what Black Broadway signified, in particular the Black American history it symbolized. However, notwithstanding the hundred years of African-American history associated with Black Broadway, more recently the area had come to be synonymous with inner city strife, urban decay, drug use, and general deprivation—so the narrative went. Yet, in recent years, the area had become a more popular and desirable place to live. This made the renaming motion more complex: the area's resurgence is in large part due to decades long Ethiopian migration and settlements and their subsequent business investments in the area.[52]

[51] *Black Broadway and Little Ethiopia* (CBC, 2012) aired on August 17, 2012.
[52] For an analysis of how Ethiopian placemaking transformed the Washington Metropolitan Area, see Chacko (2003), who examines Ethiopian "ethnic sociocommerscapes," which are "ethnic business areas that serve dual purposes as commercial areas and sites of social interaction between co-ethnics." (p. 21)

The tensions and conflicts that developed between Ethiopians in Washington, D.C. and Black Americans is an example of the many effects produced by the burgeoning East African diasporas that have gathered not only in the United States but across Canada and the United Kingdom. The tensions detailed above might be considered along racial and ethnic lines, then subsequently framed as ethnic conflict, both rooted in and stemming, from the Transatlantic Slave Trade and Middle Passage. The way the radio documentary is put together places the explanatory power in the ethnicities and different histories those from the Horn of Africa and Black Americans have stemming from their different standpoints relative to the history of enslavement that, in the words of Toni Morrison "broke the world in half." So, as normative analysts would have it, these ethnic differences and the differently located histories in relation to the Transatlantic Slave Trade *explains* this urban conflict. We observe this in the previous chapter too, where these different set of relations to the African continent and the history of enslavement is mobilized to make sense of who is or who is not Black in the interaction between Helen Haile and her unnamed interlocutor. What if there is another way to think about what is happening with Little Ethiopia and Black Broadway? What if we thought of it through the opening *Black Grammars* provides? What if we thought of what is happening in Little Ethiopia and on Black Broadway through a framing that exemplifies a struggle for resources, the complexities of Black multiplicity, how representation can become stratified, and how history, while in the past, is not past. Little Ethiopia, in its confrontation with Black Broadway, highlights the very different histories and diasporic trajectories of East African diasporic people and African-Americans who have been in the United States for generations that come to be animated on different registers and is being worked and reworked in the present. The radio documentary featured the difficulties, tensions, and contradictions that result from waves of late

20th-century Black migrations to the West, and how these get mapped onto and play out in (and across) urban spaces.[53]

Scene V: Blackness and Borders

In this final Scene, I am interested in demonstrating further how *Black Grammars* might be mobilized in an analysis. Here I offer a reading of a conversation between Chimamanda Adichie and Zadie Smith that took place at the Schomburg. It was on March 9, 2014 that Adichie and Smith held a public conversation in New York City at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.[54] It is important to note that Adichie, who was born, raised, and partly schooled in Nigeria, and Smith a writer of Jamaican and British descent who grew up in the United Kingdom—were meeting in New York City, a decidedly Black city, at a Black research centre. The conversation began with technical discussions about writing, literary topics such as character development, the writerly life, and how one writes against what one is supposed to—or expected to—particularly as Black women writers. Smith then turned the conversation to how Adichie writes her Black characters in *Americanah*, and how class is written into the novel. For context Smith recalled her own upbringing as an English, Jamaican-Caribbean person growing up in the United Kingdom, and how highly regarded Nigerians were in that context by the general white British public, often identified as their "preferred Black." Adichie then detailed how and why she

[53] Kassahun Kebede (2017) examines how these urban sites become reflective of Ethiopian heritage and culture in Washington, D.C. and Maryland, as well as the formal organizations that have been established in the United States with the intention of cultural retention and transmission of Ethiopian culture and heritage to subsequent generations of Ethiopian youth.

[54] The event, "Between the Lines: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie with Zadie Smith," can be found here: https://livestream.com/schomburgcenter/events/2831224

could only have written *Americanah* living in the United States because race there is such a social force, saying that while it is not a real thing, to her it becomes more real every day.

Eventually the conversation turned to common though banal stereotypical tropes associated with Blackness in America: fried chicken, Black women's hair, and the qualms of eating watermelon in public, and finally to the relationship between "Africans" and "African-Americans"—all of which occur in Adichie's *Americanah* and are typically handled in an us (African-Americans) versus them (Africans living in the United States) binary fashion, which is not accurate about how Blackness and Black culture are lived in the very situations Adichie depicts in *Americanah*. Both Adichie and Smith conflated something called race as a sense of self and something called Black as a marker of identity. Adichie details how race and Blackness was an identity or a self she resisted when she first moved to the United States. Adichie here is engaging with Blackness in the United States as a fully formed, discrete identity, a formulation that posits a Blackness that is a fixed and hardened social phenomena. Thought of in this way, Blackness in the U.S. context is something Adichie had to learn and grow into and eventually accept. This description of her experience belies the reality to which Adichie and Smith both were contributing: what Blackness is in the U.S. in this very moment by virtue of the public conversation to which they have been convened, despite the fixity they accord Blackness.

Black Grammars offers a much more generative way to think about Blackness, and to understand what took place in their conversation at the Schomburg. While the conversation was *designed* to focus solely on the American context, the conversation veered beyond U.S. national borders, bringing into orbit the social and cultural dynamics of Blackness on a more global scale.

I detail Adichie and Smith's conversation because I want to emphasize that two Black non-American authors were convened to have a public conversation on American racial and cultural dynamics, a conversation that encapsulated the kind of tensions and shifting cultural landscape of Black difference that undo the very premise on which their conversation was set to occur. This undoing was effected by decentring and destabilizing what I call Black American Exceptionalism (BAE) that demands and then disperses a narrow heliocentric Blackness, on which the event itself was based and which in some ways the Black authors reproduced. The conversation generated discussions on belonging and non-belonging *within* Blackness in the American context (being Black enough): the writers discussed movement and displacement and the kind of perspective these factors afforded them regarding race and Black cultural discourse. In my reading, while the conversation was titled Between the Lines, I take from both title and conversation, a renewed commitment to *Black Grammars* and the fallacy that the U.S. could ever be the center of Black cultural discourse. In fact, while the event was titled "Between the Lines"—we can infer these lines to mean lines on the page but as it relates to these two Black women authors and how the conversation unfolded lines can also mean to refer to borders—contrastingly though a more generative way of thinking about this conversation, is that what in fact was happening at the Schomburg was a working on (out loud and in public) of a kind of *Black Grammar*.

CONCLUSION: LOOKING BACK AT THE SCENES

In Scene I, which centered on Mohamed Abdul Karim's experience with Blackness as a Somali growing up in Toronto as well as his conversation with his mother. Consequently, Scene II, which was titled Black Is…Black Aint centered my own conversation with my mother that focused on identifying as Black on a school form and the consternation and generative thinking it both produced and provided. Scenes I and II detailed entry points into the kinds of Black cultural politics that exist in Black diasporic communities. I termed the material, conceptual, and analytical sites where these politics come to be animated: Black Third Spaces. Scene II foregrounded the ways that genealogy in relation to the Transatlantic Slave Trade and the Middle Passage play a material and figurative role in setting the terrain of Black cultural politics and determining how they play out in Black social life. In their own ways, all the Scenes mark how Blackness comes to do work in the world. The work I am referring to here is multifaceted but in my project I focused on the ways this work makes and unmakes what is and what aint' Black. Scene III specifically is an entry point to the ways myth and materiality operate in the Black diasporic imagination when it comes to Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa. The Black Third Spaces outlined in this Scene congeal around the Horn of Africa as a geo-political place, as a historically and materially situated site, and also as a mythical space. The Black diasporic imagination is a powerful site of mythmaking that have literal and material ramifications in the world. This is a rife area for future consideration in Black Diasporic Studies.

Taken collectively, the Scenes explore not only what it means to be Black when historical multiplicities and diasporic complexities come to the fore and give rise to Black Third Spaces

but also how the dynamics of history, identity, social location, and diasporic travels coalesce, congeal and or contest. The Scenes do not demonstrate fixity, rigidity, or an agreeable (or agreeing) Blackness. And by travels here, I mean both the travels that one has taken to get where one is and the travels that are not conceived of solely as "in the past." The dynamic of diasporic travel as it relates to Black people is most evident in Chapter 3 of this dissertation, where the Transatlantic Slave Trade and the Middle Passage became the partition that Helen Haile's unnamed interlocutor used to mark who is and who is not Black. In Scene V of this chapter titled Blackness and Borders, not only is travel revealed to matter but so do both history and standpoint; for me an escape from the Horn and coming to the West, refuge and Blackness cohere, for the Rastas and other barbers a return to the Horn of Africa—for some Africa more broadly—is the *consummation* of Blackness and Black struggle. History and one's standpoint toward and within it play a prominent role in the Scene at Rubino's Barbershop. Finally, in the Scene with Little Ethiopia confronting Black Broadway in Washington D.C.'s Chocolate City, we observe how Black history gets mapped onto and is contested in and through urban space.

The Scenes also assist in detailing the kinds of tensions generated in Black Third Spaces. They depict questions posed (and debated) *by* Black people, *to* Black people, and *among* Black people. Being from the Horn of Africa, I found it incredibly generative to be present for these conversational rides. While I did not know it then, looking back I came to realize that those conversations would be formative in how I came to think about myself, and also theoretically informative for this project and concept I am now calling *Black Grammars*.

Black Third Spaces and Their Structures of Feeling

In a time when there was an increase in interdisciplinary work, Raymond Williams coined the term "structure of feeling," which I understand as both a kind of concept and method. Williams mobilized "structure of feeling" to understand social and cultural change beyond traditional textual or linguistic analyses. In *Marxism and Literature* (1977), Williams attempted to attend to this divide through this concept, which he defines as a "kind of feeling and thinking which is indeed social *and* material, but each in an embryonic phase before it can become fully articulate and defined exchange. Its relations with the already articulate and defined are then exceptionally complex" (p. 131, emphasis mine). For Williams, the concept marks an "unease, a stress, a displacement, a latency" (p. 130) that is yet to emerge in times when normative methods of analyses dominated. This idea resonates with me and describes well how those of us from the Horn of Africa interact with, encounter, and engage Black(ness) as normatively constructed in the West. Black diasporic people from the Horn of Africa constantly encounter and grapple with when in Black spaces, feelings of unease, disruption, surprise, and ambivalence. I tried to convey these through the Scenes. What future thinking might emerge if we continue to think and work with *Black Grammars*? What might emerge if we delved more into, rather than sidestepped, our differences, our various structures of feeling? *Black Grammars* provides us an opening, a space perhaps to how this might be done.

What if this phenomenon of being left of Black, or what might be called Blackness *against* the grain or Blackness that *pushes* the grain is made to be the central "problem-space"[55] of future analyses? What might this tell us not only about Blackness and Black difference but

[55] I borrow this term from David Scott's (2004) *Conscripts of Modernity*.

about how they are lived, animated, played with, played on and expressed in Black spaces amongst Black people? Perhaps such studies would demonstrate for us how Blackness operates as a grammar not capturable through the analytical tools on offer from any one discipline. To be clear, my interest has always lain in understanding how Blackness gets worked *on* by Black people in the everyday—as opposed to how Blackness gets worked *out* by academy and discipline.[56] If this study is about anything, it is a study about Blackness, Black difference and its multiplicities, it is not about race. We took Fanon's great leap and we embarked on a life of invention. Race is what they gave us, Blackness is what we made.

With this work, I focus on the ambivalences, tensions, and contradictions that lie in thinking about Blackness in a world made ever more complicated by overlapping histories, diasporas, and Black global movement. I consider the "structure of feelings" marked by ambivalence toward Blackness portrayed through various Scenes within East African Diasporas across the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada; but also the ambivalence Horn of Africa diasporas met from other Black people. I explore that doubled ambivalence. This is but one riff on a very scattered multiply located changing same. There are many more riffs. Our charge is to decipher their grammars. This project thinks more deeply about the questions and implications of these structures of feelings and in doing so introduces openings and hesitancies to Black Studies, African-American Studies, and Black Diasporic Cultural Studies.

Through the Scenes, I wanted to imagine the movements and cultures of Black people in other than "immigrant" or "refugee" frames, beyond binaries like scientific racism and biological

[56] On this point I am heavily indebted to Katherine McKittrick, whose work on Black study, science, and discipline should be compulsory for any and all purporting to ethically study Black life. See McKittrick (2006, 2016, 2017).

determinism, ethnic absolutism, and undifferentiated Americentric Blackness, beyond African fundamentalism and/or African-American hegemony. *Black Grammars* as the language of diaspora, cuts across all these binaries and attends to the reality that diaspora makes Blackness move.

In this project, I think through how to make sense of not only the kind of Blackness that was being evoked in the various Scenes, without privileging abstract concepts like "race" or "ethnicity." I wanted a heuristic, a concept, a way of explaining what was happening in these Scenes and the Black Third Spaces from which they were generated—that is, among Black people—that allowed for diasporic complexities, temporal contestations, and Black similarities to emerge. I wanted whatever concept I came up with to be able to contain Black difference *and* sameness, and to maintain the temporal, textual, and transnational registers evoked across all the Scenes. In other words, I did not wish to uphold or give analytical hegemony to that "nation thing"—be it American, Canadian, or otherwise—or any primacy or credence to constructs like "race" or "ethnicity." I wanted my work to be about Black people and the things they do with difference. I hope that I have, in some measure, succeeded in that/those endeavour(s).

This more complicated, difficult, and complex way of conceptualizing Blackness reveals a commitment to paying attention to the inherent and internal movement, vibrancy, intrigue, and historical contexts within which Blackness is lived. It reveals that the Blackness so often portrayed as static, rigid, and monolithic will always be inadequate and disingenuous. That approach also shows a lack of taking Black people and Black cultures seriously in all their histories, depths, complications, and nuances. I wanted to add to the chorus of works that attend

to the full measure of Black difference and, like those before, build a project that operated from the vantage point that Black people—and the ways they commune, live, probe, play, talk, and do difference—are important and worthy of occupying the centre of a dissertation project. All these commitments pay homage to the fact that Black peoples have always had a stake not only in contemporary cultural discourse but in the (re)making of this world.

I offer *Black Grammars* here as an analytical framing, another way of thinking Black difference designed to attend to and ameliorate aforementioned disciplinary shortcomings. *Black Grammars* works across sign, relation, difference, and history, to address how Black diasporas exist on ever-shifting continuums across and beyond the crude framing that terms like exile and belonging offer. What if the Black condition could be thought of as working like/on (a) grammar? What if we moved away from leaning on "learning or becoming" as the central analytical mechanisms for understanding how we come to do Blackness? What if Blackness and Black difference could be thought as "a working on a grammar" *inside* Dubois' colour line, attending to the fact that to think Blackness and diaspora together force us to look in multiple directions at the same time? What if we can think *Black Grammars* as one way to conceive of the inner logics, architecture and machinery of Black Sociality? What other kinds of studies might emerge? Might *Black Grammars* be a way of thinking about the Black nod—the nod that stems from the passing glance shared among Black people when they find themselves outnumbered in White spaces? Maybe *Black Grammars* help us think through the fictive kinship that is called on and animated by the nod, often through silence, that communicates an understanding of shared condition. And maybe *Black Grammars* can help us think about the call and response of the Black nod, the shared acknowledgement of where we are and the world we inhabit as

approaching a shared yearning and desire for an/other more free world. *Black Grammars*, maybe, just maybe, is when that silence is punctured and shared imaginings in concert and communion become possible. Maybe.

The idea of Black Third Spaces came from my desire to think *an arena* of Black cultural discourse, circulation, and exchange that subverted American exceptionalism but that also did not negate the Afterlife of Slavery. I wanted to think of a space for thinking Blackness that was not based in a continental, post Middle Passage subject chauvinism mired in being either after (and therefore exempt) from the history (and archive) of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and Middle Passage, or above—and worse—beyond it. I wanted to think and envision an arena of and for Blackness, a thinking across direct descendants of and post-Middle Passage subjects, an analytical space for what Ashon Crawley (2016) calls our "sacred interrelations." Rather than working outside of these histories and realities, or erecting them as an irreconcilable divide, we instead mire and mix with/in them—not for the purposes of crafting plans of escape or "loopholes of retreat" from the difficulty of violent histories in whose Afterlives we all live, but rather to think through what substantively working *on* them, without the intention of working them *out*, may look like. Black Third Spaces as site and *Black Grammars* as a method offer, I hope, useful ideas with which to think.

Black Grammar Futures

This project started with a desire to centre my experience and those of a set of Black peoples from the Horn of Africa who have made lives elsewhere from where they began, and the

Black people from past generations we encounter in the places where we landed. For many Black people in the diaspora, ancestry and rights of return are merely fanciful privileges of the imagination, entirely flights of fantasy. The movement of Black people in this century is difficult, troublesome, and cumbersome, and still ongoing. We have been forced to make sense of our lives in tongues that are not our own—but we have, and we are. And sometimes new grammars can emerge that can tie and bind in new and creative ways. This project, then, is also about how we Black people in diaspora encounter and make anew. *Black Grammars* is an imaginative hermeneutic. It is about how we live with and alongside each other; it is about our source of self-regard, the sociality we make. It is also about how our freedom dreams get expressed, how we mobilize our liberating drives in concert, no matter where they may have first germinated. It is about how they sound on the street, in the barbershop, on campus, and everywhere in between. *Black Grammars* is about how we communicate with each other silently through the Black nod, an analytic designed to sidestep the propensity to provincialize Blackness on racial, historical, ethnic, and national registers.

Blackness is its own grammar, its own relation and way of relating. And perhaps fictive kinship is not so fictive but rather a very real grammar. Maybe Black Third Spaces are not only where difference and contestation emerge but also are the spaces where a certain kind of politics happen, a kind of freedom dreaming. Maybe we might call this the zone where freedom dreaming happens, the Zone of the Black Fantastic—as a site where, yes, we fight and organize our survival against racism and white supremacy but also where a kind of worldmaking can and does take place. Can Black Third Spaces, where I locate Black Sociality, also be thought of as a Zone of the Black Fantastic, where the idea of something called Black Joy might be broached?

With Black Third Spaces, I wanted to point out that Black life and our cultural expressions are beyond simple acknowledgements and proclamations of racism, and that our lives not wholly framed as resistance to it. I like this line of thinking, that locates Black People's Sociality beyond race, racism, nation, and borders, refugee and migrancy claims and exile, beyond the precinct of policing to the Zone of the Black Fantastic with/in the realm of the joyful, and part and parcel of the process of making Black Joy. *Black Grammars* helps us to tell a Love-and-Joy story about Black people. From us to us. And *Black Grammars* is rooted in the belief that Black people sing in their different voices, while imagining audiences that could always hear those songs.

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