

“I RAN FROM IT AND STILL WAS IN IT”: MEDIATIONS ON MELANCHOLY AND
RACE...IN THE MEANTIME

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ABSTRACT

This project engages with the question of black liberation. My project asks two key questions: in the absence of liberation, what can or does exist? And will liberation ever arrive? I answered these questions by tracing the figured opposition of Afro-pessimism and Black Optimism. I argue that while many see these approaches or experimental analytics in an oppositional way, it is important to focus on the interregnum of these two critical dispositions if we want to understand the possibilities for a world otherwise. Remaining in the interregnum can allow us to trace how and in what ways the presuppositions of Euro-American constructions of modernity implode. In modernity, Blackness has always been a site of untimely meditation manifesting itself in different and inventive ways. I argue that our current frameworks informed and shaped by white supremacy limit our imagining a future without Blackness, without whiteness and without race, because modern ego formation relies on these very enslaving structures. Beyond just imagining, toward making real, my project asks: what do we do in ‘the meantime’ as we invent (a new now/present and therefore future)? What is rendered central in the meantime, this site of transition and suspension, is a not a linear movement. Rather, the meantime as a method and a device allows a reading of these two radical dispositions about Blackness that discloses the indissoluble relationship between the ontological nothing and Blackness as its sociopolitical allotrope in the logics of melancholia as the liminal end of the world. Instead, staying with and in “the meantime”, I show how collapsing this imagined opposition between Afro-pessimism and Black Optimism (as responses to the anti-blackness and violence against the slave) challenges the melancholic structuration of antiblackness and its contingent utilitarian concepts such as the ego that comes in the desire for a mother and homeland, as expressed through the ‘return’ to Africa for Black people, and the need and desire for a Black other, as expressed through the

figure of the slave, for white people and white supremacy. I thereby arrive at a conversation that nuances race, melancholy and notions of liberation and conclude with reminders of the importance of love to and for revolution.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is written in the name of love, study, and struggle. Three words that have guided my commitment to liberation, freedom, and revolution.

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If you know me or have seen my email signature, you know that love, study, struggle has been central to my life and guides how I try to approach all that I do. That being said, I wouldn't be able to love, study or struggle without those who have taught me, reminded and were examples of what this means and sometimes examples of what it doesn't mean which is also just as important. So, here, I take time to acknowledge all of you who have been constant reminders of love study struggle and reminders of how to love study struggle.

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Prologue: The Meantime's Possibilities

Time, space, and the concepts in the categories of the understanding are not innocent... Space, time and causation, and all of the categories and concepts of the understanding; all of these come from the x accumulation. They are the big bang of the original accumulation. The original accumulation is the unseeable frame of all the possible events, of all space and time. It is the unseeable frame of all possible events, of all space and time. It is repeated in the endless enclosures. The enclosures are not real in themselves; the rationality they seem to represent is only the dream that disguises the desire for perpetual exploitation. (Farley, 2021, p. 91)

COVID Interruptions

In 2020 we experienced a pandemic, and today, we experience that pandemic's afterlives. The pandemic challenged our collective understanding of normalcy in varied ways including how we connected socially, to how we interpreted our livingness in community, in workspace and in thinking. As these shifts continued to domino during and in the so-called after of the pandemic, this project necessarily had to shift with it. I now start my project here. Covid becomes an important beginning to this work because it demonstrated to me, in real time, the possibilities of what I was theorizing, *the meantime*. Covid exasperated the measure of being active now that leads to future making as governments had to respond to the virus in real time in order to regulate and determine the future well-being of societies with drastic intervention. These responses highlighted the capacity of the State to suspend their/our understandings of what is usual in order to act urgently within un-usual times. COVID and its responses are practical examples of the meantime's possibilities.

In 2017, I started thinking about “the meantime” and the way it is used to signal a transition. I was curious, in a linguistic sense, the way it is deployed to direct focus onto something when something else is happening. I became interested in the way it signals to here and there, to now and to the future, in one phrase, ‘in the meantime’. It felt to be about action but also about stillness. The meantime does not ask—it is the use of it that entails asking us to do something or to wait, while something else happens. “I am going to the grocery store, in the meantime, you watch TV”. The person watching TV has been given an action, however they are still waiting. The other person goes to the store, and therefore moves to another space and a future, as they continue on, while the other person stays. In this example the meantime is used in the way it is most often articulated, as an adverb. As an adverb, the meantime forecloses possibilities, shifting the focus of the sentence to something else. My interest in the meantime insists on the meantime as the noun, and the object of inquiry. As the object of inquiry, the meantime allows us to work through that which was previously foreclosed. On many occasions we use the meantime, again as an adverb, when something is too difficult for us to figure out, so, we do something else “in the meantime” with the hope of returning to said something at a time when we can confront this something and grapple with it, when we have found some kind of a solution. It demands, prior to the reparative impulse, a proper diagnosis of the problem and an engagement with the latent potential to move through it – not gradually but immediately.

In 2017, while I was thinking about the meantime and how to stay with it, conversations were happening about Black futures, afro-futures and imagining a future without Black suffering. It felt to me that Black people were being asked to imagine a future, a world otherwise, while in the meantime, we were being killed. Again, a problem we could not solve moved us to a future with the hopes that the future would offer us a way to resolve the violence of the present, the

ways we know the present itself. In other words, the dream of a speculative future was used to displace the ongoing and very real violence of the present. The speculative gesture was not enough. What would it have looked like if rather than imagining a future, we stayed... we stayed protesting, and fighting until things changed? If rather than seeking comfort in the idealism of an imagined otherwise, we refused to lose sight of our current coordinates of struggle and grammars of suffering? These questions are at the forefront of this dissertation. My arrival in the meantime happened through a series of convergent intellectual paths, as I traced the question of time and (social) death through Black studies scholarship. The term appears throughout countless texts, but often without intertextual reference or explication. In this way, it is symptomatic of many implicit questions undergirding the field. The scholar who, in my estimation, is closest to staying with and properly attending to the meantime, Saidiya Hartman, states:

in the meantime, in the space of the interval, between too late and too early, between the no longer and the not yet, our lives are coeval with the girl's in the as-yet-incomplete project of freedom. In the meantime, it is clear that her life and ours hang in the balance. So, what does one do in the meantime? What are the stories one tells in dark times? How can a narrative of defeat enable a place for the living or envision an alternative future? (Hartman, 2008, p. 14).

Hartman's evocation of the meantime evokes a longing, captive within a structure of unbearable violence. Her account swerves away from any possibility for romance or optimism; she demands that we "bear what cannot be borne," even though and precisely because "some part of the self is missing because of this engagement" (Hartman, 2008, p. 14). However, despite this insistence on staying with the violence, Hartman still poses the question, rhetorical as it might

be, about how such a temporality, a lived experience can fashion the vision for an 'alternative future'. Writing extensively on the meantime, Sarah Sharma says:

Temporalities are not times; like continually broken clocks, they must be reset again and again. They are expected to recalibrate and fit into a larger temporal order. Temporalities do not experience a uniform time but rather a time particular to the labor that produces them. Their experience of time depends on where they are positioned within a larger economy of temporal worth. The temporal subject's living day, as part of its livelihood, includes technologies of the self-contrived for synchronizing to the time of others or having others synchronize to them. The meaning of these subjects' own times and experiences of time is in large part structured and controlled by both the institutional arrangements they inhabit and the time of others—other temporalities (Sharma, 2014, p. 8)

She goes on further to note:

Temporalities, as this book describes them, exist in a grid of temporal power relations. The term temporal, here, does not imply a transcendent sense of time or the time of history. I mean for the temporal to denote lived time. The temporal is not a general sense of time particular to an epoch of history but a specific experience of time that is structured in specific political and economic contexts. The temporal operates as a form of social power and a type of social difference (Sharma, 2014, p. 9)

Along with Hartman and Sharma, I argue that the temporal notion in the meantime offers us a space to untangle and rework the impossible, unbearable violence of our world. It gives us

something. Its possibility is *in* the somethings. Achille Mbembe (2017) speaks of the “cut and scars [left by history] that prevent us from realization of community” (p. 183). He states “This question of universal community is therefore by definition posed in terms of how we inhabit the Open, how we care for the Open (2013, p.183). The meantime, is a method that tell us how to care for the Open. It is the care that allows us to consider the ‘political and economic contexts’ and maybe allows us to ‘reset’, like broken clocks but beyond the projects of White supremacy.

And indeed, we saw this ‘reset’ and re-considering of political and economics contexts during COVID. In Canada there was a suspension of evictions and rent hikes, Universal basic income through Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB). Notably in the US, vaccines and testing were made available, regardless of health care coverage. The ability to do these things, make these kinds of changes, prompted many activists to note that these socially equitable policies and practices, were always possible and should remain. Of course, the response to COVID was not even close to perfect; however, in the massive scale of transformation that did occur (liberal as it was), the contingency of our current state of affairs became more visible and so the responses, even in their inadequacy, pointed to different possibilities and options. Here, I am not interested in the specificities of the responses but rather the evocation of the meantime that allowed governments globally to do something different. In the meantime, while we wait for a vaccine, everyone must quarantine, in the meantime, while we wait for COVID to be over, we will offer income to those not working. It was this that allowed me to think about other times historically the state suspended its investments in modernity’s structures through the use of “the meantime.” Whether it is times of war, fear of terrorism (rational or irrational), public health crisis, the meantime has been evoked in order to allow for a suspension in what we know and the creation of something new.

Similarly, African states like Ghana have followed the same kind of suspension as means to expand their notions of citizenship to *accommodate* those within the Diaspora. This is particularly interesting because I remember visiting Cape Coast Castle in 2008. The castle charged different entrance fees depending on your relationship to Ghana. If you were Ghanaian (I was asked about where I was born, my tribe and who my parents were to prove I was indeed Ghanaian), you paid less, if you were “foreign”, including members of the diaspora, you paid more. Now, through the State’s suspension of traditional approaches to citizenship and nation, Ghana has expanded who has access to the benefits of citizenship. These benefits entangled with notions of repatriation, reparations and reconciliation as the Ghanaian government holds its self-accountable to the violences of the slave trade and African descendants look towards Ghana as an entry point to connect as kindred to a home where their ancestors were taken from. The relationship hinges on collective understandings of imperial violence and resistance but also the insistence of Africa and its descendants desire to contend with the stickiness of time. Within this dynamic, an allowance emerges, encouraging us to re-orient and reconcile ourselves to the violences of time; present and historical.

The measures taken up by states in response to COVID are useful in exemplifying the framework of interaction between the Ghanaian state and the African diaspora, particularly in relation to the meantime and the consequences of these temporal events. The meantime can be and is the device and the method to reorient us away from the idea that something different is only possible in the future. The meantime reminds us that something different is possible now. The meantime speaks to the way the longer we hold on, the more these so-called temporary suspensions become permanent.

Returning to Ghana, The Joseph Project, Ghana's Year of Return and Beyond the Return movement is shifting the diaspora/citizen paradigm as it relates to Ghana. Ghana's introduction of the Joseph project was a supplemental government initiative that has now graduated into a generative heritage tourism investment for the state; Beyond the Return. It is important to note how the state has seated this project under its Diasporic Affairs office, and how the project is a mainstay under their tourism arm. What started out as a supplemental project in the Joseph Project, transformed into the Year of Return and is now Beyond the Return in order to cement that this initiative is past and present and therefore in our future. Differently said, the Ghanaian state intends to continue this commitment to integrating the Diaspora as citizen to their long-lost ancestral home. The meantime function of the state wanting to reconcile the violences of the transatlantic slave trade created open space for African Americans to lay claim to an "authentic" African connection in Ghana. This mean time moment has disoriented what constitutes a Ghanaian citizen, as Diasporic people now have the right to claim citizenship irrespective of their hereditary or national ties to the country. This given right has created a consciousness of a particular kind of Pan-African awareness that has in turn empowered diasporic peoples who have generationally desired to reconnect to the continent. But just as we witnessed in the case of COVID-19, this disorientation has consequences. One of which is a destabilizing for those indigenous to Ghana who become displaced as droves of diasporic peoples immigrate into the country. This wave of investment in tourism and diasporic immigration costs, as the economy and society shift in order to accommodate and capitalize on the presence of diasporic peoples and the wealth, they bring in the form of foreign and social currency.

I am curious about what Christina Sharpe might refer to as ‘the lie at the centre of everything’ (Sharpe, 2014, p.189), in relation to time, the meantime exposes that lie. And in articulating this, I hope to offer tools that enable revolution and liberation.

All Black Time is 1441¹ is the provocation and the big bang (Farely, 2021) that guides and organizes my dissertation that is on political ontology, racial slavery, sovereignty, and temporality. This notion of time that unfolds over the dissertation – an analysis that constellates Afro-pessimism, Black optimism, and psychoanalysis – to render intelligible the temporal production of modernity. All Black Time is 1441, slavery’s original accumulation. With this, I mean that Blackness is perpetually made, unmade and (un)registered through the matrix of racial slavery and Middle Passage. The task before me is to render legible and perceptible the ongoing structure of slavery’s original accumulation (1441). It was to contend with the fact that the feitoria² inaugurated the modern world through its brutal architecture of captivity, and thus apprehend that the movement of time is nothing other than the accumulation of Black death. My venture was that, through an insistence on the meantime, we as Black people will be able to make sayable and speakable the vexed temporal position from within which we are held captive. How else are we to understand the ‘freedom’ that remains predicated on ‘somebody’s slavery,’ (DuBois, 2021, p.121) the inability to ‘leave my past behind (Hartman, 2008),’ and the intractability of circuits and structures of anti-Black interdiction resulting in the following position: ‘I ran from it and still was in it’ (Moten, 2007, p. 1). We run from it and still are in it,

¹ Sylvia Wynter introduces the temporalization of 1441. Tiffany Lethabo King introduces 1492 as the starting point of modernity, what she calls the ‘shoal.’ Rather than focusing on the ‘discovery’ of the New World, Wynter’s turn to 1441 emphasizes the Portuguese landing on the West Coast of Africa the initiating moment of the trade in captive Africans.

² The feitoria, although Portuguese for ‘factory,’ refers to the fortified ‘trading posts’ built on the coast of West Africa to establish the trade in captive Africans. To contend with the feitoria is to contend with the architectonics of slavery/modernity and slavery/modernity’s temporal infrastructures. Elmina Castle might be the most famous of these feitorias (or slave castles as they are often referred to in the contemporary process of memorializing slavery).

the meantime tells to stop running and demand we stay in it because “the project of a world that is coming, a world before us, one whose destination is universal, a world freed from the burden of race, from resentment, and from the desire for vengeance that all racism calls into being (Mbembe, 2017 p.183).”

Introduction: Economies of Melancholy, Race and Ego Formation

“Most men today cannot conceive of a freedom that does not involve somebody's slavery.” (DuBois, 1968, p.16)

“I knew that no matter how far from home I traveled, I would never be able to leave my past behind. I would never be able to imagine being the kind of person who had not been made and marked by slavery. I was black and a history of terror had produced that identity. Terror was “captivity without the possibility of flight,” inescapable violence, precarious life. There was no going back to a time or place before slavery, and going beyond it, no doubt would entail nothing less momentous than yet another revolution.” (Hartman, 2006, p.13)

“What do white people become without white supremacy? Men without patriarchy? People without the supposed purpose capitalism infuses in their lives? What do blacks become when blackness is no longer a site of oppression?” (Molefe, 2016, p.37)

Like most strands of Black Studies, contemporary Afro-pessimism emerged as a key theoretical engagement with the W.E.B. DuBois' famous question in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903): “How does it feel to be a problem?” DuBois' question describes how the condition of Blackness has been deployed historically—as an unsolvable difficulty, if not impossibility. Addressing indirect questions about his racial position from well-meaning whites, DuBois cuttingly remarks to the real question, “how does it feel to be a problem? I answer seldom a word” (DuBois, 1903, p. 1). Here, DuBois points to himself (specifically, to the way he exists as a Black man) as unsolvable. This problem is taken up in Afro-Pessimism, which Nahum Chandler (2013) argues is the onto-epistemological problem of the colour line, a global-level problem that organizes being across a divide that produces ‘the threshold’ of the world. Building on Fanon's work and engaging with some of these conversations, David Marriott contends that Blackness marks “the figure of dislocation at the heart of modern sovereignty” (2018, p. 227), and so occupies the impossible possibility of an abyssal being. In contrast to this, Black Optimism, that is, the “covert operation” (Hart 2018, p. 7) signals the fact that Blackness, though made to be an unsolvable problem, is a mission, a movement, a revolution. “Black Op is an

optimistic will born of a pessimistic intellect and Black Op is a fugitive optimism and operation that roots in the slave experience and its contemporary afterlife” (Hart 2018, p. 7). In other words, the optimist sees within this position of dereliction a positive capacity to produce both a social life in excess of that dereliction and the germinal possibility to undo the order that makes it. This shift in orientation is, in turn, informed by the Black Radical Tradition’s insistence on the internal ontological totality of Blackness, which resists the thingification of Blackness while still taking seriously the Afro-pessimist provocation that an analysis of labour cannot account for the structure of suffering constituted by slavery. Weaving these two traditions together, the Black optimists argue that Blackness is the capacity for an onto-epistemological rupture of the World and its attendant grammars of being. In other words, summarizing the complex and rich debate as follows, the afro-pessimists ask, “how does it feel to be a problem? –The Black optimists respond *being the problem is the solution*.

What are the terms of this solution and what exactly does it ultimately solve? In its formation, and its deployment as social death, Blackness seems to be the premise for the collation of white ego formation. This is to say that whiteness, as a psychic location and landscape, requires an object of gratuitous violence from which it may emerge as that object’s negation. From an afro-pessimist perspective this project is concerned with the structures of modernism and the “feelings”-affectiveness- of modernism to think through Blackness as solution. I suggest that modernism and its structures are held together by affect (Ahmed 2010; Khanna 2003). Ego formation becomes central because it is the ego that allows for the structures of modernism to be held together. The structures and the affect guide our movements and order our existence. Sara Ahmed (2010) investigates “happy objects.” She theorizes happiness as a politic of good feelings. She notes through happiness that affect is about judgement. If

something makes one happy then we have judged that thing to be good and happy objects are sent around accumulating value as social goods. Affect theorists think about affect as capital and work to show how its connections to the economy allow for certain relations.

Jared Sexton and Saidiya Hartman point to this modern era's structures that order our existence. They argue how they are based on the social death of slaves, a social death that precludes the slave and hence a Black person from being human. Moelefe also asks "what happens to white people without white supremacy?" And he responds: they become truly human. To help move this conversation forward, I re-phrase Moelefe's question using the language of affect and ask what happens when whiteness no longer depends on a thing of enslavement, exchange, etc. for it to emerge as a happy object? If blackness is part of these structures that allow for white supremacy and allow for whiteness to be a happy object, what happens when there are attempts to remove blackness from the project of modernity, what happens to the structures and more importantly for this project, what happens in what I am calling "*the meantime*"? I suggest that we are currently "in the meantime"- the moment where there are attempts to do the work to rid modernity of its reliance on anti-blackness and that "in the meantime", we are faced with a racially motivated melancholia-triggered by the attempted removal of blackness from white ego formation. And in the meantime, white insecurity is mobilized to return to the place where race does matter.

Drawing on Afro-pessimism, whose major impulse is the thinking and articulating of a world whose basic premise is anti-blackness, this project attempts to put melancholia in conversation with race and affect to articulate an analytical framework that allows us to think about possibilities and a future that is not ordered around race. This conversation acknowledges two major differences in the experience of racial melancholia. Ranjana Khanna argues through

Octave Mannoni (1956) that pseudo-melancholy causes people to kill rather than to turn to introspection and suicide. This affect becomes significant in the organization of the contemporary moment. This pseudo-melancholy, I argue, is what makes possible white terror in the “post-racial” moment; thus, we need to think about white terror that is expressed “*in the meantime*”. Fanon notes “man is human only to the extent to which he tries to impose himself on another man in order to be recognized by him” (1967, p. 215). Investment in such an idea generates white melancholia, which causes an outward response in the form of white rage and white terror. This white rage is also represented in the lack of empathy and sympathy expressed by white people toward any type of black injustice. The Black experience of racial melancholia is rather concerned with introspection. This type of introspection causes Black people to be in a constant search, for home, community, nation, and self. To theorize this, I look at the role race plays in ego formation. If the modern era is rooted in anti-blackness and the idea that being human is based on the exclusion of the black slave from this category, then race becomes an essential marker in the formation of ego. Ego formation does not happen in the modern era without an investment in race; however, this investment presents itself differently for black ego formation and white ego formation. It is this hegemonic and dominant type of ego formation that moves people toward melancholy. If Black people are not considered human in the modern thought (ranging from Kant, to Rousseau, to Foucault to Marx) then the idea of black ego formation is null. It does not exist. Thus, I argue that when we speak about ego formation, we are only speaking about white ego formation. In the words of Fanon,

We understand now why the Black man cannot take pleasure in his insularity. For him there is only one way out, and it leads into the white world. Whence his constant preoccupation with attracting the attention of the white man, his concern with being

powerful like the white man, his determined effort to acquire protective qualities—that is, the proportion of being or having that enters into the composition of an ego. As I said earlier, it is from within that the Negro will seek admittance to the white sanctuary. The attitude derives from the intention. Ego-withdrawal as a successful defense mechanism is impossible for the Negro. He requires a white approval (Fanon 1967, p. 36).

Fanon's text above points exactly to this opposition that is set up between whites and the Negro. And the ego as a "successful defense mechanism" is not possible for the Negro. Even around admittance in the white structures he needs a white approval. Thus, the Negro's ego is collapsed and is an extension of the white ego. In this manner Fanon stretches the logics of Anna Freud who argues along with her father that the ego as a structural component of the psyche and the significance of melancholy and affect in structuring social relations. However, this structure seems to only be white extending itself into the flesh of the black non-subject, the black property of the whiteness. If this is the case, then how do we trace this structural formation and its co-constitution of racial difference and social order always co-constitutive of blackness in excess?

Melancholia as a framework allows for the re-coding of racial desire, of happy objects and fear. This re-coding forces us to consider that white enjoyment, pleasure, fear, and fragility are all grounded in anti-blackness. Therefore, if the social energies of life (i.e., blackness) ceases to orient itself toward black, the white ego loses the thing needed to survive. It is through the melancholic framework that I talk about ego-formation to articulate the kinds of tetherings that exist through race. These tetherings represent themselves geopolitically, through time and space and are mediated in violent ways both in the post-colonial and the post-racial moments (that seem to come up from time to time).

Taking seriously the notion of the meantime, I grapple with the refusal of those demands that guarantee white life and its well-being, and liberty by ensuring only certain people's *being* in an oppressive and extractive political structure. I begin rethinking and re-articulating the notion of Blackness and its positionality in political structures as an extension of this debate – thus not as a problem, but rather as a kind of a solution. Molefe asks “what happens to white people without white supremacy?” He responds: “they become truly human” (2016, p. 37). This understanding is a foundational grounding for this project, which seeks to think through what we have come to know as “Black futures” or “Black futurities” using the lens of Afro-pessimism and Black Optimism. In so doing, I examine what Frank Wilderson (2010) has called ‘the insurgent gesture’ in Afro-pessimism, its immanent critique of Humanism and the antiblack world upon which that Humanism is premised, by interplaying its critique of white liberal humanisms with Black Optimism’s insistence on the vitality of Black life, politics, and culture. My intention is not to debate whether Afro-pessimism or Black optimism are right or wrong. Such a debate would force us to adjudicate and identify the “winner” or rush to conclude one approach is right and can provide an answer to our inquiries about racial subjection and the other is wrong and fails to shed light on this violence. I argue that the project of European humanity has already failed, and as such we must face that failure. That failure is the inability to achieve full liberation. Therefore, it is important, I argue to trace the kinds of strategies we deploy in the absence of liberation. This failure must be faced for a possibility of the world and life otherwise. For me, Afro-pessimism as an approach provides us a framework to think through and face the end of the world. Black Optimism insists on the moments/interregnum that allow me to think through the meantime. My contribution is not to resolve the differences among the two, but to offer what is possible if we can stay with the deliberation on blackness (i.e., social death and the

other one blackness as creativity) which they both articulate. I use both as lenses to theorize the meantime.

As Hartman (2008) asks

...how does one recuperate lives entangled with and impossible to differentiate from the terrible utterances that condemned them to death, the account books that identified them as units of value, the invoices that claimed them as property, and the banal chronicles that stripped them of human features (p.3)?

Demonstrating that little has changed in the century since DuBois noted how contemporary structures cannot imagine or think of freedom without slavery. He writes, “most men today cannot conceive of a freedom that does not involve somebody’s slavery” (1968). The Afro-pessimist intellectual tradition continues to be concerned with the articulation of Blackness as a “problem.” Black optimists and in conversation with Afro-pessimism respond by arguing that there is an optimistic will in Blackness that responds to this positing of the violence. They write, to this Black optimism is “an optimistic will born of a pessimistic intellect” (Hart, 2018, p. 17). In other words, Black optimism is immanently entangled within Afro-pessimism – or perhaps more provocatively, Black Optimism is a particular political elaboration of Afro-pessimism. Black optimists, for instance, like Fred Moten (2008) take for granted blackness. The difference is that Afro-optimists argue a focus on social death may miss the vibrancy and creativity that is Black social life. Moten critiques Frank Wilderson arguing that such an insistence on social death overdetermines the position of the political and misses the experience of Blackness. Yet, they both take for granted black life and how it is lived in social death. Also, Black optimism shares in the diagnostic concerning political ontology but merely flips the affective tenor – an

optimism of the will to supplement the pessimism of the intellect. Not apposite to it, as Moten contends, but latent within it. Thus (and to reiterate in different terms), at stake in the genealogical debates between Afro-pessimism and Black optimism is a kind of inside/outside relation to anti-Blackness where Afro-pessimists interrogate the formation of the constitutive inside/outside of the human that produces Blackness (the Black as the outside of the human), while Black Optimists interrogate the latent capacity of this outside position to abolish this dynamic. When Moten states, “In the end, though life and optimism are the terms under which I speak, I agree with Sexton- by way of the slightest most immeasurable reversal emphasis- that Afro-pessimism and Black optimism are not but nothing other than one another. I will continue to prefer the Black optimism of his work just as, I am sure, he will continue to prefer the Afro-pessimism of mine” (Moten, 2013, p. 742), he points to the way that our projects can always be both, at the same time, but the preference is in the eyes of the reader.

Afro-pessimists elaborate the structure of violence and Black optimists stay with that which is in excess of (and irreducible to) that violence. In *Venus in Two Acts*, Hartman (2008) grapples with this impossibility, “[c]an the shock of [such] words, as Foucault writes, 'give rise to a certain effect of beauty mixed with dread?'” (p. 6). Can we, as NourbeSe Philip suggests, “conjur[e] something new from the absence of Africans as humans that is at the heart of the text”? (p. 6) toward what Mbembe thinks of as “transtemporal politics of care: caring for the being and matter of the world one inhabits” (Thompson, 2018, p. 247). And if so, what are the features of this new narrative? Put differently, how does one rewrite the chronicle of a death foretold and anticipated, as a collective biography of dead subjects, as a counter-history of the human, and possibly as a practice of freedom? Mbembe, through his thinking on the politics of care, provides some suggestions. He argues that beyond the individualism of liberalism and

communalism of critical theory and the human and non-human there is a third space which is radically open for a world otherwise. Thompson , reflecting on Mbembe’s politics of care notes,

“By going beyond the modern binary of individualism and communalism, the mind and the body, the human and the non-human, the politics of care at stake here presents a third space that is radically open and thus not confined by the politics of impossibility and closure that underlies liberal democracies on the one hand and racial pessimism on the other” (Thompson, 2018, p. 247),

In order to do this requires us to see the meantime as the space that allows for such transformation. Recently, on a trip to Panama, I experienced a Huelga, the Spanish word for strike. It was *a staying with* that allowed for transformation. The people were holding the Huelga as their site of care for a world otherwise. For several years, the government had been promising to set up a school in the town but they had failed to fulfill this commitment. I came to learn that the people in this town regularly held Huelgas every time something that was supposed to be completed supporting/centering the well-being and care of the town did not happen. They would hold the Huelga until repair or restoration was achieved. The Huelga, shut down the only road that led into and out of this town. Nothing else could happen till the state fulfilled the promise it made to the communities. Everyone was forced to remain in the meantime, regardless how uncomfortable and how disruptive their strikes were. They engaged in Huelga until change happened. The Huelga was a practice for the change they wanted to see. The reasons for Huelgas included things that one might consider minor. For example, during COVID-19 the government was distributing food baskets to different regions. Yet, some of the baskets did not include the bread as it did in some neighboring towns. Huelgas were held to ensure that all towns received their breads in the baskets. Other examples include Huelgas being held to ensure

the completion of hospitals or schools or challenging the contract for the completion of hospitals going to an external company instead of employing local people. Huelgas are not confined by the politics of impossibility (Mbembe p. 247). In fact, they are about what is possible in the meantime. Those engaged in Huelgas are not thinking about transforming the future or moving to a future where the problem faced is somehow solved. They are concerned with the now, with repair in the now, with care in the now. For me, this was an example of the meantime. The community centralized their struggle around demands in the now. Of such politics, Thompson notes:

“The reproduction of the social, cultural and political life of the everyday, reworking what is there within limited means, is part of the reparation of worlds which all can inhabit. This understanding of the politics of care as a politics of reparation is transformational in terms of transforming the world and reinventing justice and democracy anew,” (2018, p. 247)

My project, therefore engages with these approaches and grapples with the concerns of Afro-pessimism and the will of blackness in the theories of Black Optimism to un-tether and unbind the category of race and ego that have trapped us in a striving toward what Sylvia Wynter (2003) would describe as capital “M” “Man.,” because it is not about choosing the one or the other, but the staying with both notions of blackness and notions of violence against black peoples as they are articulated in these two approaches. For me, grappling with these notions allows me to trace how people make demands in the now and how they deploy their own creative energies as a form of care and love. My project proposes intellectual tools or the features of a new narrative for articulating and thinking about the creation of a notion of freedom that does not rely on/in the subjugation of another. In addition, this project asks: what happens in *the*

meantime of the movement toward the Human or toward the post-racial? I suggest that in the present moment, Black³ people are attempting to rid modernity of its reliance on anti-Blackness. However, in the meantime, we are faced with a racially motivated cathectic melancholia, “a kind of psychic fixation or obsession from which the subject is able to organize and orient its desire” (hooks, 2001 p. 5) which is triggered by the attempted ejection of Blackness as a psychic signifier for and from white ego formation. Of course, precisely because the production of Black social death is central to the emergence of white psychic life, this ejection as a completed project is internally psychically impossible. However, precisely because of this impossibility, white psychic drives, unstable and insecure as they structurally are, must constantly and perpetually work to make whiteness through this ejection, wherein ejection itself becomes the kind of mechanism by which whiteness is made if never entirely or perfectly secured. Thus, whiteness operates in a kind of libidinal performative structure, where it is only in its recursive drive to violence that it can give force to its symbolic claim to stability. This violence also symptomatically evinces that security and despite its symbolic claim to structural security, such stable secure grounds are never permanently consolidated. Whiteness itself therefore is marked by a perpetual precarity regarding its constitutive structure. Thus, the consolidation of whiteness is impossible with the violent ejection of Blackness, an ejection that is performed through a capacious obsession that nonetheless leaves the white subject in a state of uncertainty. To stabilize this uncertainty, it must perpetually revivify its willfully violent desires. Blackness becomes the ontologically appropriate object of this violation because it functions as both margin and center in this relation precisely because, as Orlando Patterson (1982) noted decades ago,

³ In this work “we capitalize Black, and not white, when referring to groups in racial, ethnic, or cultural terms. For many people, Black reflects a shared sense of identity and community. White carries a different set of meanings.” <https://www.cjr.org/analysis/capital-b-black-styleguide.php>

“slavery involved two contradictory principles, marginality and integration” (Patterson, p. 46). Thus, the enforced mutuality of proximity and ejection induced by the slave relation psychically archetypes this antagonism and produces this instability. This is the reason Hortense Spillers states “if I were not here, I would need to be invented” (Spillers, 1987, p. 65) because whiteness is the product of an ongoing negation of Black life. And through the scalability of the subject, Blackness is central to the formation of modern order.

Within the field of Black studies, I draw on the theorizations of Sylvia Wynter. Wynter’s project shapes my understanding of Man, modernity, and Time. The move toward Humanism, or the new human as theorized by Fanon (2021) and Wynter (2003), are central to reckoning with ideas around whiteness that reject the idea and formation that to be white is to be human. Wynter’s (2003) notion of genres of man suggests that certain genres are limiting; rather than liberatory, they put different genres of man in opposition with each other. She argues that feminism can be seen as a particular genre that liberates women but at the same time pits women in opposition to men. Her argument is not against feminism, but rather she expands it to theorize the human in ways that do not assume the killing of the life/reproductive mechanisms of slaves and Blacks in an ontological sense. Black studies are a site for understanding the configuration of white supremacy to dismantle it. However, this does not mean that whiteness will not look for another means to ensure its existence. Whiteness is a structural and socially constructed project, it is an axis of power. Its positionality depends on the constitution of another other, creating and positioning itself in opposition to the “black”. Because the only way there is white, is if there is Black (Fanon 1967).

This is a pivotal reason to think about a world based on post-whiteness, post-genres of “human”. What do white people become, or do, when faced with the possibility of living without

white supremacy? (See for example, the phenomenon of Donald Trump's emergence, a move to save whiteness by mobilizing white insecurities). What conceptual slippages are occurring when we project whiteness into a future divorced from white supremacy? If whiteness is a historically contingent category, one that Afro-pessimists and Black optimists alike suggest which is predicated on Black (social) death, then how does the projection of whiteness into the future naturalize this racial taxonomy and the predication of Black death? To be clear, I contend that within the political ontology of slavery, whiteness is only possible because of the constitution and production of Black social death and so there is no possibility for whiteness to exist without all its attendant forms of historical and contemporary violation.

Again, to evoke Sylvia Wynter 2003, are there no other ways of being human or what about the different ways of being human that have always existed? Through Freud's theorization of melancholy and psychoanalytic engagements with cathection more broadly, I ask: how do we understand race through a lens of the melancholic? What is happening in these affective investments in whiteness? Can melancholy provide a framework that allows for us to think about possible futures that might detach from this order of being?

To answer these questions more fully, I draw on the model of ego formation that Fanon (1967) gives in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967). Fanon's states, "[t]he black man wants to be white. The white man slaves to reach a human level (p. 3)," then moves on to say "[w]hat is often called the black soul is a white man's artifact (p. 6)." I go back to Fanon's (1967) statement that "[t]he white man is sealed in his whiteness. The black man in his Blackness. We shall seek to ascertain the directions of this dual narcissism and the motivations that inspire it (p. 3)", and along with him I argue that it is important to point to how the structures of racial melancholy are constituted with a White Supremacy order. I take up melancholy in relation to stuckness of ego

but also stuckness of the subject in time. In trying to explain the development of the ego through this racial modality, which depends on the creation of Blackness, our analytics remain key in structuring the reasons about Black and white people investments or being “sealed in”, as Fanon articulates.

The conflict was that modern Man could only exist on a continuum – one that puts it in opposition to something prehistoric, un-civilized, un-man and un-human, hence the creation of the Black man. This is an argument about ego-formation which is also related to melancholy. The motivations that inspire Black and white people, to cathect race, I theorize, are in fact produced by the melancholic condition that needs the ego to claim humanity. Affect shapes the conversation of the colonial and de-colonial project thereby rendering it an affective modernity. Affect is also pivotal in the way it allows for recognition as embodied and expressed in the Master-Slave dialectic. Both theories and movements (for ex., Black Lives Matter) are important sites of exploration of the emergence of “affect and affective economies” (Ahmed 2010, Bassichis and Spira 2008). Such projects are moments where the “slave” turns away from the master for recognition. This turning away also produces moments of the master looking to the slave to be recognized. More specifically, I am interested in tracing and exposing the processes through which insecurities of whiteness are constituted all in the name of freedom and democracy.

What does affect have to do with race, violence, and possibilities of futures? An engagement with Fanon’s (1967) *Black Skin, White Masks* in the “now” is about understanding the affects that were being circulated in what was called the post-racial moment. I read these theories to grapple with this new emerging expression of whiteness and modernity as well as understanding the ways the “current crisis of whiteness” becomes articulated. In some sense, this

line of enquiry shifts the field of investigation about the constitution of the modern by scaling back down to the level of its psychic infrastructure. Thus, whereas scholars in the Black Radical Tradition such as CLR James and Anthony Bogues have demonstrated the intractable utility of blackness to the formation of racial capitalism in the modern era, this project queries how this intractability plays out at the level of the collective unconscious and the formation of the subject, particularly as it relates to the constitution of the subject in time and the capacity to upend this structure of constitution.

Rather than privileging the psychic over the material, by way of Black optimism, I consider how the material is upheld by an ideological system that is sustained through racialized subjectivity. Blackness is the foundation of white ego formation, precisely because, as David Marriott (2018) demonstrates, negrophobogenesis is the necessary mechanism for the operationalization of a subjective-corporeal schema. The denigration of Blackness through social death, of Black people both historically and in the present, gives whiteness meaning. What would whiteness be without Blackness, without its willful and violent drive to ‘play in the dark’ (Morrison, 1993). Saidiya Hartman (2016) says “the plantation is the belly of the world... the modern world follows the belly”, (p. 166) she is precisely articulating this material symbolic formation and the connections between whiteness and blackness.

Ego Formation and the Post-Racial

In 2010, with the election of Barack Obama, there was a pronouncement of the entrance into the era of the so-called post-racial moment—the notion that, in this society, our lives were no longer structured by race and racism, or that race exists but racism does not. And as such Black progress posed a threat to whiteness because of the rhetoric that “race” no longer mattered. This notion was particularly consolidated through the election of President Barack Obama who

signified for many a formal end to the *longue durée* of racial slavery and its afterlives, the ultimate symbol of Black progress. If race no longer mattered, as the post-racial discourse suggested, then Blackness is no longer “a thing.”⁴ In turn, if Blackness is no longer “a thing,” then whiteness is also no longer a thing—no longer the thing needed to guarantee that one is a Man and that s/he is free.

In his text, *Are We All Post-Racial Yet*, Goldberg (2015) notes public racist expression has become more vicious and viral all in the name of the post-racial. He states the post-racial is the end of race as we know it but not the end of racism. If race is not the same as it used to be, how do we go about formulating theories of thought and explanation that make intelligible this moment that still sees the dehumanization of non-white peoples as the primary possibility of the world? Drawing on Goldberg’s theorisation, of dehumanization who argues that it occurs alongside the backdrop of multiculturalism and Black progress, I introduce the idea of “the meantime” to speak of that moment of the unthinkable. When speaking about current social relations, the assumption is that multi-culturalism and Black progress both indicate that we are no longer a racist society, therefore any dehumanization that happens to individuals is just accidental or is deserved. How do we write about unthinkable moments as they occur in a way that does not foreclose them but makes them intelligible? I answer this by using ideas around the post racial to unpack “the meantime”. The “meantime” allows us to look at the time of these forms of violence in a non-linear fashion. It almost asks us to stop time. Agathangelou and Killian (2016) push for a non-linear understanding of time by engaging both the event and the structures within which this violence happens. They grapple with the limits of the possible by

⁴ Using the verbiage of thing, “this is not a thing” is used intentionally in common language and is intended to be dismissive to the end of pointing towards the ridiculousness of the statement.

rupturing and challenging the event itself. Through this lens it becomes evident that the post in its current understanding suggests an after, post-racialism, post-colonialism, etc. in a linear and circular manner without attending to how historicism and the transcending of time become significant measurements of deciding who exists and does not exist and who is a MAN (Wynter 200) and who is not a human. However, if we understand post as a nonlinear event constituted of multiple temporalities or even as an event that its boundedness requires the death of Black people and slaves then we can understand that the post should be about new ways of knowledge rather than about linear afters. There is a failure that happens when we think about the post as after much like the failure of post-colonialism when we see how old ways epistemologically, ontologically, and methodologically are being re-collated to ensure the re-invention of the postcolonial subject. Yet, these knowledge productions, ontologies, and epistemes are hidden in plain sight behind the post.

Frank Wilderson engages with this notion of the post as well and in relation to the constitution of the subject and white supremacy's order. In an interview with Saidiya Hartman, he states that solidarity amongst white people comes from "a near or far relation to the Black body" (Hartman and Wilderson, 2003, p. 187). In disguising this near or far relation, the post-racial inaugurated a moment where white psyches lost their grounding given that their proximity to Black violation was representationally disappeared (although never materially disappeared).

In response to this problem, I pose the question: what if we took Blackness not as a problem but rather as a kind of a response to the everyday of racial subjugation? I respond to this by arguing that it is pivotal to stay with this racial subjugation and indifference to racial violence (da Silva 2016) centralizing the modes of Black being, their resistance, struggles, revolutionary modalities, and expressions of love as moments of fracturing white supremacy and its contingent

sovereign subjects precisely because white supremacy presupposes Black captivity and death. To do so, I draw on David Marriott's work on the post-racial in *Whither Fanon*. He writes,

Does not the completion of the post-racial vision, for those who announce it, in fact signify racism's full retrieval and repetition in the daily roll call of those shot, maimed, and tortured for the most trifling of reasons? The metaphysical end of race points to the task of its permanent return in the form of the real; what still needs to be thought is the blackness of the body that consumes itself as it burns, a body that is permanently set on fire (Marriott, 2018, p. xviii-xix).

Marriott is clear about this notion of a post-racial vision. For him, this vision retrieves the violence against black bodies always in the name "of the most trifling of reasons." Yet, this call for "the end of race" is rather a leverage for its return in the "form of the real" permanently. For Marriott it is key to focus on the thinking the "blackness of the body as it burns...a body that is permanently set fire." Thus, even within this return of the "form of the real" the blackness of the body is not thought or even relegated to the position of thought. I stretched Marriott's idea of retrieving race as there is no full retrieval of racism ever even at the moment that white supremacy draws on it to secure its stability as a structure. Racism rather acts as a marker for a distinct mode of racecraft, even in and as the Black body remains permanently, atemporally 'set on fire.' Thus, I shift Marriott's theorizations by asking how the Black(ened) body on fire can extend its flame to burn the world itself. I therefore examine the obverse of DuBois who argues that Blackness is a problem, and analytically shift what Moten might describe as its irreducible apposite. I move to trace possible trajectories of race that might result from understanding "Blackness" at certain moments as the solution to the problem of modernity, where modernity is in turn constituted by the political economy of racial capitalism and the libidinal economy of

antiblackness. I therefore insist that racial violence needs to be theorized in a way that paradoxically maintains holding to and staying with and in Blackness as a necessary mechanism to eradicating the colour line. To be clear, I am, drawing from Black optimist work (Moten, Case, Harney), asking about the potential for a latent politics that is disruptive of white supremacy's violence. However, while I position this politics within Blackness, I pose it as a means through which we may all engage in a collective disidentification with race. In engaging with Frantz Fanon and how to read him, Fred Moten argues that Black culture calls into question whiteness. Moten further writes in his call for a reading of Fanon through a Heideggerian naivety for the first time, that blackness is not what it fails to do but rather what it does and that's "the cause for black optimism" (Moten and Case, p.182). Despite the "horror of its [blackness] making' Moten is calling for giving "blackness a hearing" (Marriott, 2016) by "returning representation to its ontological ground" (Marriott, 2016). But such a reading of Blackness maintains what David Marriott argues is a difference between the ontic and the ontological between the "human and racialized being" (Marriott, 2016) which sustains in place a notion of blackness as form of pathogenic capacity (Marriott, 2016).

Building from this insistence, an insistence that is long-standing within the Black Radical tradition, I intervene into extant conversations in Black studies attempting to work through the politics of 'being a problem.' I do not take recourse to the language of fugitivity or marronage (which are, themselves, embedded within antiblack structures of unfreedom), agency (which can trend towards obscuring paradigmatic violence), or redemption (which both consolidates antiblack theodicies and posits a false telos for Black being), and thus I trouble contemporary analyses of resistance (including those of the Black optimists). I offer the meantime as a concept for Black politics by insisting on the need to stay with the paradigmatic violence of

antiblackness, what Christina Sharpe has similarly urged in her call to ‘stay in the wake’ of slavery, as a space to think Blackness anew. Contending, in line with Dionne Brand, that forgetting our genealogy “was a gift” (Brand, 2001, p. 224), which is to say that social death poses a latent politics of creativity, I offer a non-essentialist (Hall, 1993), strategic way to think about the political need to stay with Blackness. Non-essentialist because it is precisely due to the structure of antiblackness that these latent politics emerge. These structures are constructed. And it is necessary to stay with Blackness precisely because, embedded within this politics, is the capacity to end the antiblack World. Thus, the Black Optimist-Afro-pessimist debate allows us to articulate a new discursive terrain upon and through which to imagine and envision the terms of Black liberation. Thus, I read Afro-pessimism and Black Optimism alongside each other as such as reading practice can offer us insights that insist on generativity and intellectual relation. I position theorists alongside one another in order to think them together relationally, rather than comparatively.

I am trying to work through the kinds of tensions that emerge within Afro-pessimist and Black optimist approaches that question the meaning of Blackness and the political possibilities of a position that is ‘over-determined from the outside’(Fanon, 1967, p. 95), which is to say external to the subject itself. Thus, while many Afro-pessimists provocatively argue that Blackness only exists as a position of subjection – and thus possesses no ‘ontological resistance,’ as Fanon would say – the questions I am asking to establish a conversation that thinks differently the capacity of Blackness under conditions of social death. Thus, instead of centralizing Du Bois’ provocation – what does it mean to be a problem – I focus on what does it mean to be a kind of solution. The Afro-pessimist genealogy challenges that Blackness is a problem and instead it orients us to the problem being modernity and its contingent constituted Human itself. I activate

Frank Wilderson’s crucial notion of blackness ‘as the insurgent gesture’ in Afro-pessimism. From the vantage point of Blackness as solution can be imagined to the violence against the blackness of the body. In reframing Du Bois’ classic provocation, we can orient ourselves toward a different kind of epistemological entry into the question of the unthought of blackness and the blackness of the body. In this sense, and as David Marriott (2017) drawing on Ronald Judy one kind blackness (i.e., the “nigga”) can be “seen as a nihilistic infestation—usually by its anti-black representation” (Marriott, 2017, n.p.). From the vantage point of blackness, one can possibly understand Black radical life, a practice of fracturing the world by allowing more heterogeneous readings of operations within the conditions of what I will later describe as ‘the meantime.’

To clarify further, parts of this argument may, at first, seem to rehearse Fanon’s reckoning with Negritude in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967). In this text, Fanon argues that his positive identification with Blackness produces just another tragedy when he understands that this movement too is predicated on a ‘wretched romanticism’ leaving him at ‘the crossroads between nothingness and infinity’ (p. 119). However, I am not arguing that Blackness should be consolidated in a cultural movement (as if such a consolidation is possible when Blackness everywhere exists as dispersal, displacement, and rupture). Thus, I am asking, with Hartman, ‘From the holding cell, was it possible to see beyond the end of the world and to imagine living and breathing again?’ (Hartman, 2008, p. 100). And in response to her query, I am arguing,

perhaps apposite to Marriott, that it is precisely from the non-place of Blackness that something new can be invented.⁵

In the New World, constructing Blackness as a perpetual problem resolved an antagonism at the heart of modernity: an ideology that at once proclaimed freedom to all, and required the un-free labour of Black slaves – what many critics in Black Studies have called the creation of a structure of terror (Hartman, 1997; Wilderson, 2010; Sexton, 2016; Warren 2018). Blackness is a kind of semantic container for crisis at the level of modernity’s ideological structure (Spillers). Just as capitalism deploys a variety of strategies for smoothening its political economic crises, so too does Blackness functions as a semantic space to hold all the ideological contradictions of modernity. It is, in the words of Zakkiah Jackson (2020), a kind of plastic matter that is perpetually made and unmade based on the demands placed on it under an antiblack political and libidinal economy, “everything and nothing at the register of ontology” (p. 48).

Blackness is rendered a violently pliable, flexible, and fungible object, that buttresses not only the capitalist economy through slave labour (if labour, indeed, functions as a meaningful term to describe the economically productive capacities of the slave), but it more profoundly gives form to the subject itself. This extensive capacity prefigures “the whole of [the world’s] semantic field” (Sexton, 2016, p. 593), and so it is only through racial slavery that the world itself becomes an onto-epistemologically legible category (Palmer, 2020). Building from Sexton’s engagement with Spillers, the semantic field is the space through which meaning coheres and from which a notion of the subject might then emerge. Thinking the production of

⁵ This is not to collapse Marriott’s and Hartman’s projects together, but to weave them through one another as I attend to their conspecificity in the meantime – to think them relationally and generatively together.

this field through their interpretation of Sylvia Wynter's work, Tapji Garba and Sara-Maria Sorentino contend:

blackness becomes the substrate through which the world is rendered intelligible. Not one object among others, but the most extensive condition by which we access anything at all, the available language that opens the social reproduction of both violence and possibility, space and time (Garba & Sorentino, 2022, p. 17).

The very production of Blackness depends on a structure of terror that organizes the ontological and Blackness makes this possible through its function in and as its pliability within the extant semantic field. However, this process is not merely psychic. Psychic and ontological production of terror prefigures material and actual death. Or rather, this psycho-ontological structure sets the stage for the 'spectacular event' of violence (Sexton and Martinot, 2003). At stake in the ontology of social death is the imaginability of Black death, which enables "the breathless numbers" (McKittrick, 2014, p. 17). Without this psycho-ontological structure, which is coextensive with the economic motives endemic to racial capital, gratuitous violence would be impossible at the levels of both thinkability and structuralization. Social death in both its episteme and ontology makes possible Black material death.

Thinking this centrality of terror and its libidinal configurations requires our recalibrating of our political analyses of racial slavery and its role in the formation of modernity. Enslaved and captive African labour, forced to make a conquered land productive, underpinned the project of modernity. The emergence of "freedom" as a conceptual and political terrain required the ability to use conquered land and captive labour to secure wealth and leisure. Attending to this intellectual history, Freedom, in its liberal idealist emergence, was exclusive to "Man"—

European landholding men who were the archetype of whiteness. Clearly, then, modernity's categorization of freedom was not only structurally unavailable to Black people at the level of empirical analysis, but also at the level of its foundational logic. This is not to say that there exist modes of differentiation internal to the discourse of the Human (gender and sexuality, for example), but that these modes are, as stated, internal to the Human itself. Wilderson clarifies this distinction in *Red, White, and Black* when he states:

Humanist discourse can only think a subject's relation to violence as a contingency and not as a matrix that positions the subject. Put another way, Humanism has no theory of the slave because it imagines a subject who has been either alienated in language or alienated from his or her cartographic and temporal capacities. It cannot imagine an object who has been positioned by gratuitous violence and who has no cartographic and temporal capacities to lose – a sentient being for whom recognition and incorporation is impossible (pp. 54-55).

This is significant because it helps to illuminate why, how, and for what reasons race broadly and blackness specifically travels or does not travel across historical epochs. If, as multiple historians of the emergence of modernity show (most notably Sylvia Wynter), that idealistic conceptions of Freedom are inextricable from the co-emergence of Man as a conceptual terrain, or rather that Freedom is rendered the ideal that constitutes the Man, then Black people could never ascend to that position. The violence at play is a violence at the level of the constitution of the Human and the modes by which it is intra- and inter- differentiated. Meditating on this violence in a distinctly Afro-pessimist theoretical vein, Calvin Warren (2018) argues:

The *free black* carries tension within its structure; it brings two disparate grammars into collision and produces an ontological catastrophe... our metaphysical conceptions of freedom neglect the ontological horrors of antiblackness by assuming freedom can be attained through political, social, or legal action. This is a humanist fantasy, one that masks subjection in emancipatory rhetoric (Warren, 2018, p. 15).

Warren argues that the “humanist fantasy” depends on and produces an “ontological catastrophe (p.15).” He asks us to think the un-thinkability of Blackness and Freedom. By arguing that the very notion of the *free black* ‘produces an ontological catastrophe,’ Warren urges us to think the gap between the structure of being (ontology) that orders our world and the language that renders that structure unthinkable and incommunicable. There is no such phenomenon as *free black*; rather the “free black carries tension within its structure” (Warren, 2018, p. 15). In bringing two ‘grammars in collision’ with each other it marks a catastrophe because it names an impossibility, one that is perpetually deferred even though it has ostensibly already arrived within the narrative arc of humanist fantasy. Warren prompts us to constantly think through and stay with the constitutive and antiblack limits of not only emancipation as a political project, but also the investments into the maintenance and reproduction of the World more broadly. While his Black nihilism remains apposite to my own political and theoretical goals, which insist on Blackness as solution and thus staying with a kind of Black generativity, through Black ops (Moten 2007; 2008) or the Undercommons (Harney & Moten, 2013), Black optimist approaches which recognize within Blackness the revolutionary potential to upend the terms of order. his theoretical work provides a rich understanding of the structure of terror producing the modern world. Thus, this project departs from Warren’s political claims, remaining with the ‘insurgent gesture’ of Afro-pessimism, rather than embracing the stasis of

Black nihilism, while still accepting the challenges Warren poses in relation to the metaphysical constitution of antiblackness.

This structure of terror undergirds an epistemological system, a system that Sylvia Wynter contends is organized by the over-representation of human as Man. Warren and Wynter make for interesting interlocutors here because of the former's insistence on a Black nihilism and the latter's insistence on a new Humanism. However, while their politico-theoretical projects may possess different trajectories, the onto-epistemological structure of antiblack violence that they are identifying resonate deeply with one another. Warren posits this structure within the structure of metaphysics whereas Wynter blends the theoretical and the material as she investigates the onto-epistemological structures of Man. For Wynter, this structure is inextricable from the system of conquest and genocide that it both authorizes and is emergent from – and so, it is both made possible and makes possible the trade in captive Africans, and the genociding of so-called 'New World 'indigenous people. Wynter (2003) describes how

in the wake of the West's second wave of imperial expansion, *pari passu* with its reinvention of Man now [sic] purely biologized terms, it was to be the peoples of Black African descent who would be constructed as the ultimate referent of the "racially inferior" Human Other, with the range of other colonized dark-skinned peoples, all classified as "natives," now being assimilated to its category—all of these as the ostensible embodiment of the non-evolved backward Others—if to varying degrees and, as such, the negation of the generic "normal humanness," ostensibly expressed by and embodied in the peoples of the West (p. 266).

Wynter contends that a triadic structure allows for the emergence of the category of normal human-ness – a humanness that systematically evicts the Black and the Native from its structure of being. The epistemological scaffolding of the world, and its attendant apotheosis in the form of Man, is only made possible by the structure of conquest (King, 2019): the genocide of Indigenous peoples in the ‘New World, the structure of captivity and racial slavery. However, Wynter’s argument still subtends by a surprisingly Warren-esque conclusion as she notices how the Black African becomes the ‘ultimate referent’ or inferiority. While Wynter traces how Human Others are assimilated into this category, it is particularly the category function of blackness that makes legible this position of degradation. And further, as she notes, this assimilation is to varying degrees thus, positing the ultimate referential position of blackness as the rubric for inferiority in her thought. Thus, it is only through the fantasy of blackness and its degradation that ‘the human ’can maintain its coherence.

Similarly diagnosing a foundational violence central to the epistemological scaffolding of the contemporary world order, Michel Foucault notes that liberalism “entails at its heart a productive/destructive relationship [with] freedom (p. 64)”.⁶ Further, Foucault underscores that liberalism must produce freedom. The production of freedom requires coercion, he argues, limitations and forms of control (p. 64). Achille Mbembe adds to this stating “that the high point, historically, of the destruction of liberty was the enslavement of blacks” (2017, p. 80). If the modernist project claimed to stand for universal equality and freedom for all Men, while Blackness connoted the opposite of freedom and Black people were not Men, modernity constructed Blackness as an unsolvable problem. Creating the unsolvable problem of Blackness

⁶ As Walter D. Mignolo convincingly argues in *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, liberalism and modernity are inextricable from one another, and so, to discuss modernity is always-already to be discussing liberalism and vice-versa.

solved the problem of creating the modern world. In other words, the contradictions immanent to modernity are displaced onto the Black subject, who becomes the vessel intended to hold its attendant semantic and violent excess. Without the Black, modernity would crumble under its own contradictions. Or, as Marriott states: “anti-blackness is the discourse through which a singular experience of the world is constituted” (Marriott, 2018, p. x). The Black makes the world through its ‘ontological plasticity (Jackson, 2020). Indeed, meditating on the profound scale of this structure, Jared Sexton (2016) says

The modern world owes its very existence to slavery... Not only the infrastructure of its global economy but also the architecture of its theological and philosophical discourses, its legal and political institutions, its scientific and technological practices, indeed, the whole of its semantic field (p. 593).

If Blackness is always deployed as a problem, then it always needs to be solved, managed, contained, and containerized, understood, or destroyed. The perpetual social death of Black people—their position as not-Man continues to be the premise for the existence of the world. Thus, Blackness produces the subject through its objecthood, it creates the White through its violation, and the world through its evacuation from it. In marking the structuring function this way, I posit that attending to and theorizing Blackness is also always-already theorizing that which Blackness is positioned against. This is why Marriott states that “anti-blackness is the thing against which the universal, the human, the ideal, etc., is enunciated and created” (Marriott, 2018, p. x). Thus, it is impossible to speak of what Warren calls ‘the ontology of terror’ without simultaneously speaking of White violence.

This is not anything profound and has been offered by many theorists, particularly in Black studies and the Black Radical tradition (Robinson, 2021; Hartman, 1997; Wilderson, 2010; Marriott, 2018). The point here is not to fix Blackness (as if that which elides cultural coherence can ever be fixed) or treat Blackness as prior to the world in the sense of some teleological ontology. Rather instead, I treat it as a series of ‘dark potentialities,’ (Marriott, 2018, p. xix), which offer the immanent capacity to undo modernity but are simultaneously always-already positioned as the structuring foundation to modernity itself – a kind of semantic generator that itself always elides capture or coherent articulation because it is the very mechanism by which that coherence gains form. Solutions do not need to be contained, solutions do not need to be programmatic or prescriptive. Rather Blackness as solution opens us up to the infinite generosity and generativity of what Moten and Harney would call ‘the standpoint of not standpoint,’ which is both ‘unsettled and unsettling’ (Moten & Harney, 2013, p. 130), to what Mbembe points to as reparation through a politics of care, and to what I am doing by bringing these notions together to think about love as and love for revolution. What Blackness offers, or rather why Blackness is modernity’s solution has much to do with the position it occupies. It is the semantic container of modernity’s crises. This provocation is certainly what Aimé Césaire was trying to demonstrate in his *Discourse on Colonialism* (1972). He states that colonialism and slavery were more about the violence of colonizer than about the colonized. Thus, by staging Blackness as solution to modernity, not only do we prefigure the antagonism between Blackness and modernity, but we also open ourselves to the errant, the wayward, the fugitive, and the lost – political and conceptual vocabularies that always-already resist containment. We shift the frame for understanding Black being in the World and how we may apprehend Black political action by

opening ourselves to “a narrative written from nowhere, from the nowhere of the ghetto and the nowhere of utopia” (Hartman, 2019, p. xiii).

In sum, the overall project elaborated in this dissertation explores a large body of thought: Black studies (particularly the Afro-pessimist and Black Optimist approaches), post-colonial studies, affect theory, and psychoanalysis. I put them in conversation with each other. I stage this conversation by staying with what Frank Wilderson would call a Black (studies) ensemble of questions but allowing for cross-disciplinary discourse. In thinking about Blackness as a solution, I reframe the Du Boisian (1968) provocation: “How does it feel to be a problem” and instead begin with whiteness and modernity as the problem. This opens a space to think through the tensions about race and questions of liberation. My dissertation further allows for challenging the dominant notion of race (meaning Blackness here) as an ontological structure and holding to Black affects of joy/resistance/love (the social life in social death as Sexton would say). To do so, I offer ‘the meantime’ as a category to think with the present as it is shaped by the past and oriented toward a yet undetermined future. By centralizing the notion of the meantime, I insist on the now and political struggles around the stickiness of the present. This insistence forces us to think about Black revolution as an always-already ongoing process (and one that must be attended to in the present). What follows is the chapter breakdown of how this work centralizes the meantime to grapple with the ways anti-blackness and its contingent violences dominate our systems of thought, being and power.

Chapter Breakdown

Chapter One introduces my analytical framework which I collate drawing on the key ideas within Afro-pessimism and Black Optimism (positioning them in relation to Black Studies

more broadly), psychoanalysis (particularly its uptake in Black Studies), and postcolonialism. This chapter particularly stages the conversation to address questions concerning how these bodies of thought collectively disclose certain analytics/models for examining the formation of subjectivity and the unconscious mechanisms securing collective antiblack violence. This theoretical scaffolding buttresses the remaining questions and chapters of the dissertation by laying the foundation to work through the maintenance of and reliance on anti-black violence.

Chapter two further nuances my analytical framework by drawing on psychoanalysis. I grapple with the question of loss and melancholia and the order of modernity. For modernity as a structure and edifice to become erected it draws extensively on gratuitous violence against the Black – a violence that circulates libidinally and thus structures the possibility for psychic coherence. When the narrative of this relation is undermined (as has occurred through the frame of the post-racial), the sense of loss triggers a kind of psychic crisis. With this identified loss, we see an emergence of previously sublated anxieties and insecurities, and an attendant incapacity for white people to work through them. There seems to be panic in the idea that these structures should be and ought to be dismantled. This chapter shows that losing of modernist structures that rely on anti-blackness lead to the crisis of the ego, to a melancholia. Chapter two also grapples with melancholy and cathexis and the co-constitution of white subjects and modernity. Drawing on the formation and emergence of the Hegelian ‘unhappy consciousness’, I show the temporal processes through which the Slave is no longer recognizable as Slave to the Master. Political movements of Black self-assertion create in the European ego a “lost object,” destroying the assumptions of Black inferiority upon which their ego has been constructed. In the words of Bhabha (foreword in Fanon 1967, p. xxv), “The Black presence ruins the representative narrative of Western personhood.” The resulting melancholy produces “white rage” and xenophobia (the

fear of the other)—which then may transform into political capital under the right circumstances and with the right catalysts.

Chapter three explains melancholy and cathexis act as expressed through the co-constitution of Black subjects and the “lost object” of Africa. The process of enslavement, loss of land, and destruction of ancestral identity created in Black subjects a longing for an idealized homeland that does not (and never has) exist(ed). The Pan-African movement (which I name aspects of it as a Black Optimist endeavor) in the Diaspora expressed this melancholy and cathexis by trying to recover the lost object, rather than healing the original wound suffered through the loss of dignity and self-determination. I explore heritage tourism initiatives, taken up by Ghana, which I argue, rely on the key foundations of Pan-Africanism, namely the unity of all African people or Black people connected by slavery. Which reinforces the melancholic rut by the ways that we make and remake ourselves within a social and economic structure and the promise of return.

Moving forward in the meantime, I argue, requires that whiteness must grieve its lost status of domination, and that Blackness should grieve the lost object of Africa producing anti-cathexis and solving melancholia. Both group egos must be re-constituted on new premises; and to move in this direction, the collective libidos must find new objects of desire. The Fanonian revolution must be completed for the Human to emerge, to get through the completion of the Master-Slave dialectic in the meantime, to ‘overtake ’time, as Fanon says in the “Introduction” to *Black Skin, White Masks*.

In the conclusion I come back to the reason for undertaking this project, on Black liberation and freedom and therefore centralize the notion of love. The kind of love that has the

ability to transform, naming both pessimistic and optimistic drives as being grounded in love that seeks to transform the condition of anti-Blackness.

Chapter One: Theoretical Perspectives

Methodology and Theoretical Perspectives

Writing Blackness otherwise demands new grammars, a method to “count it all out differently” (McKittrick, 2014, p. 22), and these grammatic choices index a method working toward it differently. There are moments that repeat, words that repeat, formulations and sentences that repeat, as time repeats. Time repeats as we continue to experience the *deja vu* of anti-Blackness. On occasion Time will be spelled with a capital T. This capital-T Time is modernity’s time, the temporal cadence of the Middle Passage, and of the forms of being that proceed from those foundational violences. It is the temporal disjuncture between the stillness of the auction block alongside the count of the auctioneer. The brutal contrapuntal rhythms of non-being. It is the rupture that unmoors the Black from time, an unmooring that then consolidates the temporal orientation of the White. This evocation of capital-T Time is to emphasize that ours is a problem of Time.

Writing with and through these temporal repetitions and parallelisms, I take cues from what I see as a palimpsestic position, using the traces of the things left behind in order to produce something *new*. Layering, then, is also a method, offering me the capacity to think beyond tension and resonance, but instead staying with the possibility to think with the generative elements of thought as they may overlap one another. To layer approaches is not to contend that each approach perfectly fits or balances with one another, but rather to work with the kinds of kaleidoscopic possibilities for reading our social world.

In *Black Optimism/Black Operation*, Fred Moten (2008) writes “... there are some things I want to say about Gould and Cecil Taylor, that will, I hope, allow for an articulation of something in relating each to the other, regarding the political history of the present” (p. 5). The

use of the word something here is particularly useful for the collation of my analytics. It makes clear that our projects are an articulation of “something.” This something can be undefined, disjointed because, in trying to capture a political history of the present, we are writing the very thing we are in and trying to escape or problematize. Furthermore, something indexes an uncertainty, an instability, a cipher, an opacity, secrecy. Opacity and secrecy have been central in Black radical politics from the communication strategies shared to articulate knowledge about the Underground Railroad to contemporary methods for delinking communication practices from the state to the scholarly work of Edouard Glissant. But beyond the pragmatics of this opacity, opacity also opens a generative space to think with what Saidiya Hartman has consistently described as Blackness’s impossibility or as Ola Mohammed thinks about Black no-wheres (2022). *Something (nowhere)* leaves open a space for the impossibility of Blackness, a way to name the unnamable that is in contrapuntal distinction from antiblackness’s semantic field. Thinking through this challenge, when Sawyer (2019) asks, “[w]hat categories of analysis should we use, and what social, economic and institutional structures should we focus on (p. vii)?” makes clear that our frames for analyses need the flexibility to change and be applied... means, because...we do not have all the pieces and even when we think we do, something changes, something else is introduced. This project then is an articulation of something. And is trying to think and write through race, racism, anti-Blackness, being human, all during a pandemic that has taken away all our exits, yet still offers us yet unrealized but inchoate possibilities. The possibility lies in the articulation of “something”.

Afro-pessimism and Black Optimism

The task is, then, to write blackness by ethically honoring but not repeating anti-black violences-which can be done, I suggest below, through reading the mathematics of these

violences as possibilities that are iterations of black life that cannot be contained by black death. (McKittrick, 2014, p. 20)

Indeed, while not always honored, the intellectual project of black studies-with its long history of citing and surviving racial violence in numbers-provides a deliberate commentary on the ways in which blackness works against the violence that defines it (McKittrick, 2014, p. 19)

Afro-pessimism always felt as a space of possibility for me. When I was introduced to this theory, I immediately was interested in understanding its position on the question of liberation. For me, this analytic orient me to engage with anti-Blackness in the present rather than take for granted the teleological inclination and toward a predictable future. At this moment, I was working through a phrase in my own work that was “all blacks are slaves, and all slaves are black”⁷ Amponsah, 2018, n.p). This idea was pushing me to think about how when we hear the word slave, it is often a Black person that comes to mind, even though we know slavery existed in many societies that were non-Black⁸. I was asking myself how and whether Black people contributed to this thinking. Was our investment in Africa through the evoking of trans-Atlantic slavery reminding us, always, that, all blacks are slaves, and all slaves are black? Afro-pessimism gave me tools to think through this. Afro-pessimism allowed me to respond to this

⁷ I coined this phrase to capture a conversation I had where a faculty member used the word “slavish” to describe a situation. While there were other people(non-Black) in the room, she turned to me, the only Black person and apologized for using the word. In thinking through this moment, I was interested why I was the only one who the apology was directed to. Slavery is something we are all offended by but as the only Black person in the room, in that moment, I was the only slave in the room. Mumbletheory (2019) notes “that Blackness has come to signify Slaveness[...] means quite simply is that Black is still enveloped in an “American grammar” which ostensibly re-writes, re-signifies, and re-conceptualizes the Black as Slave/Anti-Human and in each passing epoch after another” (2019, n.p)

⁸ While there is a discourse of modern slavery which aims to divorce the word slave from Black (Kevin Bales 1999, Lyndsey Beutin) it is precisely this genealogy of the term that forces me to stay with and grapple with antiblackness and enslavement not as metaphors but rather as material constitution transmuted in global capital (da Silva 2016). I argue if slave did not conjure Blackness, this need to divorce or specify would not be needed.

question affirmatively. All blacks are slaves because of the way the modern world relies on anti-blackness. This world requires Black people always to be slaves. Even Black people need the slave to be connected to home (Africa), slavery as that which augurs a disavowed Africanity. It also told me, if we could work through this relationship, this need for the slave, we could arrive at a place of liberation. And then I was introduced to black optimism, which also presented itself as a liberation dialectic. For me, Black optimism forced me to focus on possibility in the absence of... in the absence of freedom, there is resistance, in the absence of liberation, what are Black people doing? While Black optimism seemed concerned with what exists in the absence of, auto-persist was concerned with the end that meant we did not need the possibilities. Afro-pessimism and Black optimism were the two theories that orient me to think through anti-blackness and possibilities to liberation. These two approaches are key to my own articulation and collation of an analytic that intervenes in these conversations but also contributes to the Black radical tradition. When Katherine McKittrick states the task is to ethically honour but not repeat anti-blackness, it is these two approaches that allow me to name what needs to be named while honouring what needs to be honoured, toward a praxis of liberation working against the violence that also defines it.

Afro-pessimism's concept of social death within modernity informs my project's framework on modernism, anti-Blackness, collective patterns of ego formation, and white terrorism and white supremacy. This project traces and grapples with the ways race is coded, and the ways this system of modernity and antiblackness is co-constitutive of racial ego formation. Afro-pessimists claim that the condition of freedom and humanness is non-Blackness. And yet, they orient us in acknowledging how representing Blackness as a *solution* disrupts modernity and allows for the eventuation and materialization of different modes of being human. My use of

solution here is not intended to position Blackness as the apotheosis or redemptive mechanisms for the brutal violence of liberal modernity. Rather, by solution, I mean it as a vantage point through which we can think the end of the world or blackness as a problem of modernity. It was Black optimism's insistence on seeing the unseen of blackness that brought me to this idea, to thinking from the position of a blackness solution. For me, then it was key to see whether Black optimism offers something to afro-pessimism that could open up the conversation about anti-blackness and possibilities of freedom in a different way than the focus "on the lived social death of the colonized" (Marriott, 2016, n.p). McKittrick asks:

How then do we think and write and share as decolonial scholars and foster a commitment to acknowledging violence and undoing its persistent frame, rather than simply analytically reprising violence? How do we ethically engage with mathematical and numerical certainties that compile, affirm, and honor bits and pieces of black death? (McKittrick, 2014 p. 18)

In reading Frantz Fanon, Afro-pessimists focus on the social death of the colonized. Drawing extensively on his psychoanalytics, Afro-pessimists emphasize that blackness "is a product of social death" and not that "[nigga] is...the one who is socially dead" (Marriott, 2017, n.p). Afro-pessimists connect this social death to the psychotherapeutics of the colonial body by arguing that the black body is forced to take on all the atmospheric colonial violence:

a body that would assume its affirmation insofar as its injury becomes an unspeakable piece of the real, simultaneously performing delirious disorder and a conserving desire as it undergoes torture, petrification, and the seeming infinitude of total war (Marriott, 2017, n.p).

While David Marriott complicates both the Afro-pessimist position and the Black optimist position by providing a reading of Fanon that challenges this dichotomy he allows us to think through this social death as a more complex site of violence. But for this project, I want to read black optimism as a response to anti-blackness by both naming it and naming beyond it. This naming and naming beyond are articulated by Keguro Macharia, in *Black Negation* (2018) when he states

I am uninterested in investigating, documenting, theorizing, and inhabiting my own negation—black negation. I am uninterested in remaining within the dynamics of oppression and resistance, oppression and agency, as the dominant frames within which black life is to be thought and theorized. I am uninterested in the brief glimpses of something called *black agency* found in colonial archives. (Macharia, 2018, n.p)

In being uninterested in investigation, documenting or theorizing his own negation, Black negation, Macharia names this negation but then moves forward to the naming beyond. For him, the search for black agency in the colonial archives is like searching for methods to secure white supremacy's edifice. As such, Afro-pessimism's naming of the co-constitution of the social death and the psychoanalytics that sustain it in place, as well as Black Optimism's idea that "blackness is a form of fugitive sublimity" (Moten, 2008, p.182) name and name beyond. And it is important to engage both so that we do not risk being stuck within the naming or stuck without the naming. Hart argues that the two perspective are foundationally related, stating the "two perspective[s] afro-pessimism and black optimism 's]...conceptual roots are the same, the flowers different [...] afro-pessimism and black optimism represent competing responses to anti-blackness. They have a common patrimony" (2018, p. 16). For her these two are foundationally related as a result of anti-blackness and racial subjugation. David Marriott provides even a more

provocative insight to the relationship of these two. While diverging in orientation being closer to David Marriott's provocative insight that the two are incompatible but co-exist in the same individual: "There is virtually no compatibility between the optimist's language and the pessimist's (they frequently coexist in one and the same individual)" (2016, n.p), I also hear the call and response of the two perspectives.

In music, call-and-response is a compositional technique that works similarly to a conversation. A "phrase" of music serves as the "call," and is "answered" by a different phrase of music. [...] Call-and-response has its roots in traditional African music, which largely employed a vocal version. If you think of gospel music, for example, you will immediately recognize the technique: it's when the pastor or song leader calls out or sings a line, and the congregation or choir responds. In other styles of music, call-and-response is used as a form of experimentation, as well as a way to speak directly to the listener. In live performances, for example, some performers use call-and-response as a way to connect with their audience. (MasterClass, 2020)

Between Afro-pessimism and Black optimism lies this call and response. Taking seriously that both these perspectives are rooted in the same song, a song that has belonged to a much older symphony of Black political thought, they are providing contrasting lines to the conversation. They speak on different registers, offering different perspectives to the same thing, and they orient themselves towards the same song, a kind of contrapuntal politics. I take contrapuntal here to mean a method of analyzing colonial and postcolonial writings that reads multiple texts, both those of the colonizers alongside those of the colonized, thus examining opposite and intertwined histories. In his work *Culture and Imperialism*, published in 1993, Edward Said exposes how great canonical novels either consciously or subconsciously depict

imperialist attitudes which, according to him, are part of the present. Reading contrapuntally two texts in *Culture and Imperialism*, that are contemporary in time and space, Said points to the contrast in colonial experience between colonizer and colonized. Acknowledging Said's argument that imperialism or in our case anti-blackness still lingers in the modern world, I propose that through a reading of Afro-pessimism and Black optimism next to each other allows us to see the nuances on the question of violence and anti-blackness. Afro-pessimism offers the bass sound, the superstructure upon which the sonic field is built, and Black optimism riffing on the treble, offering lines of flight in excess of the violence that precedes and subtends it.

Afro-pessimism first emerged in the Francophone African scholarly world through the writings of Sony Labou Tansi (1990). In the Anglophone world, the concept genealogically originates with Frank Wilderson III, who writes that:

the Afro-pessimists are theorists of Black positionality who share Fanon's insistence that, though Blacks are indeed sentient beings, the structure of the entire world's semantic field...is sutured by anti-Black solidarity (Wilderson, 2010, p. 59).

Black Optimism, the other orientation to this anti-Black solidarity, is explained by Fred Moten. Optimism, he tells us, functions as a desire to stay with the social life in social death – to take notice of its radical demands. As Moten articulates:

In addition to the notion of a black operation I am also interested in something I would like to call black optimism, something that will illuminate the convergence of the condition of possibility and the end of politics (something James would think as "the future in the present," something King would discuss under the rubric of the "fierce

urgency of now" where fierce urgency denotes not only pain but also pleasure... (2008, p. 5).

However, Moten does not present this optimism in opposition to pessimism. Rather instead he says that they are asymptomatic. In his "Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh)," he writes,

Black optimism and Afro-pessimism are asymptomatic. Which one is the curve and which one is the line? Which is the kernel, which is the shell? Which one is rational, which one is mystical? It doesn't matter. Let's just say that their nonmeeting is part of an ongoing manic-depressive episode called black radicalism/black social life is it just a minor internal conflict, this intimate nonmeeting, this impossibility of touching in mutual radiation a permeation? Can pessimists and optimists be friends? I hope so (Moten, 2013, p.778).

Moten argues that his understanding of optimism demonstrates the desire to engage pessimism in the Afro-pessimism – what he later calls a bipolarity that he seeks to stay with and in:

optimism always lives, which is to say escapes, in the assertion of a right to refuse, which is, as Gayatri Spivak says, the first right: an instantiation of a collective negative tendency to differ, to resist the regulative powers that resistance, that differing, call into being. To think resistance as ordinary is to say, in a sense, that we have what we need, that we can get there from here, that there's nothing wrong with us or even, in this regard, with here (2008, p. 4).

Thus, both the Afro-pessimist and the Black optimist agree on the ontological foundation of anti-blackness (and its attendant structure of social death, gratuitous violence, and generalized dishonour). They simply disagree on what we do with this. Do we look for joy despite the terror and violence or do we blow up the whole world?

Central to both schools of thought is social death. This notion underwent a transformation in Orlando Patterson's (1982) work *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*, where Patterson linked it to the heritage of African chattel slavery in the United States. However, citing Patterson's words that "[t]here is no intrinsic value in survival, no virtue in the reflexes of the cornered rat," Sexton (2011) characterizes Patterson's conception of social death as part of a "universal tendency to debasement in the sphere of analysis" (p. 20). Sexton therefore insists against the romanticization of this position – contending that such a romanticization only obscures the structure of suffering that it evinces. Sexton's unflinching assessments of Patterson's work demand that we attend with more care precisely by apprehending how the attribution of positive valence to Blackness simply becomes another mechanism by which the violence of slavery is disappeared. Anything less than this apprehension reproduces a phobogenic aversion to Blackness as social death (which, ironically, reproduces the conditions of social death).

Extending and abstracting Patterson's insights, Sexton continues:

[W]hat is most stunning is the fact that the concept of social death cannot be generalized. It is indexed to slavery and it does not travel. That is, there are problems in the formulation of the relation of power from which slavery arises and there are problems in

the formulation of the relation of this relation of power to other relations of power (2011, p. 21).

Sexton's framework, nonetheless, sees value in marshalling the concept of social death to contextually understand Blackness as the New World constructed it. In his description, of Afro-pessimism he posits Blackness as social death rooted in slavery, conditioned by the status of legal "freedom" which is directly linked to economic valuation processes in the New World. Sexton writes,

[S]ocial death might be thought of as another name for slavery and an attempt to think about what it comprises....Though slavery is an ancient institution with provenance in nearly every major form of human society, we are concerned here with the more specific emergence of freedom—as economic value, political category, legal right, cultural practice, lived experience—from the modern transformation of slavery into what Robin Blackburn terms the "Great Captivity" of the New World: the convergence of the private property regime and the invention of racial blackness (which is to say the invention of anti-blackness in the invention of whiteness, which cannot but become immediately a more generalized nonblackness) (Sexton, 2011, p. 17)

Threaded between Black optimism and Afro-pessimism is the 'language of difference' — "the language of this difference between inside and out — and what will turn out to be a series of differences including life and death, pessimism and optimism, subject and object, object and thing, thing and case, blacks and blackness, beings and being, and so on..." (Sexton, 2011, p. 9). This language of difference mirrors and mimics each of these schools of thought.

These are not oppositional projects. There exists a ‘minor internal conflict’ that gestures to a difference in orientation structured by a shared understanding of domination. Both Black optimists and Afro-pessimists engage in the call and response, each retorting back at one another, highlighting a language of difference, but one intertwined in a single song marked by complementary registers. Afro-pessimism as coined by Frank Wilderson calls out, and Black optimism as coined by Fred Moten retorts back. Within this call and response, I attempt to map a path through this debate that does not reframe the theoretical questions each school asks, but instead offers a site and analytics to think both together. By insisting on Blackness as solution, I stage a space between optimism and pessimism, a space that allows for new politics to arise in the meantime, that neither naturalizes the structure of suffering nor assumes liberation as a given in the excess of that suffering. So, where Moten asks, “can pessimists and optimists be friends? I hope so” (Moten, 2013, p. 778), I believe the response is affirmative. In taking seriously that afro-pessimists and black optimists as already being friends, this section seeks to utilize afro-pessimism and black optimism’s “friendship” to understand black and white ego formation’s production of melancholia within modernity. I want to do this because of noticeable ontological shifts toward engaging Afro-pessimism and Black optimism. This shift can be understood through mumble theory (2019) citing Wilderson, who says “And then, move into a conversation about what is to be done, realizing that our language and our concepts (post-colonial, Marxist discourse) are so much a part of other peoples’ problems, problems that can be solved, that we’ll really never get to the thing that solves our problem — because it’s already there in Fanon: the end of the world” (2019, n.p). While these shifts are happening, Black studies

scholars are being made to choose a side⁹. I refuse to choose a side and instead am curious about what can happen when we chose both. In this project, I then argue this is not a question of the one or the other. Rather, it is a question of engaging them in conjunction to each other to understand how these two frames offer a response to the present that seems to have trapped us in time. Examining the two for their series of convergences or crossroads allows for a generative critique of the macroscopic structure of antiblack violence and white supremacy.

From an Afro-pessimist/Black Optimist perspective, this project is concerned with the structures and “feelings” — affectiveness — of modernity. Most recently, Afro-pessimism has rigorously engaged the questions of affective fields, most notably the work of Tyrone Palmer, who examines Blackness as a lacuna in affect theory’s understandings of the subject. Thus, Palmer – as well as their progenitors (Wilderson, Sexton, Terreffe, etc.) – contend that the subject becomes the scalar site upon which modernity is organized. I stretch these analytics and zoom on the subject’s ego formation.

This ego formation is central to understanding the constructions of Blackness and whiteness as the ego holds the structures of modernity together. I suggest that modernity and its structures are held together by affects that organize the emergence of the ego. This is to say that I

⁹ Mumbletheory goes on further to note, “It has been said that, if the purpose of the Social Sciences are to locate solutions to problems, then the purpose of the Humanities is rightly that of discovering why these problems arrive and continue to persist at all. Yet, recently, there has emerged – against the tidal wave of diatribes on liberal support for diversity, multiculturalism and social progress narratives – an intellectual disturbance, murmuring out of the corner of the Academy”. They go on further to say “Indeed, this specter – the specter of Afro-pessimism – haunts not only the field of Black Studies, but the entire coherence of the Social Sciences and the Humanities’ as such. For this specter is a specter of black chanting, of black utterance, of black enunciation in which the chants enchants anagrammatical signification: a portal to no-where and no-thing, “the failure of words and concepts to hold in and on Black flesh, and the tortured threat of impossibility” (2019, n.p). We see this specter in the various ways that those who are naming new grammars, who are concerned with black chanting, black enunciation, and the failure of words and concepts are “dismissed” by being place in or not dismissed but placed into the category of Afro-pessimism, even when they do not name themselves as such (for example Christina Sharpe). The meantime offers us an opportunity to delve deeper into this ontological shift, rather than, at some point in the future, we look back to trace it.

contend with a pre-existing matrix of affective circulations, that prefigures and enables the emergence of the ego. This emergence of the ego for whiteness allows whiteness to be and it is grounded in the social and literal death of Black people. Our social order/ modernity has a need for affective circulations which first operate by establishing anti-blackness, then move as affective reminders of anti-blackness.

The collation and circulation of anti-Black brutality is enacted through various technologies of violence such as “brutal aesthetics”. Hunter-Young (2022) defines these brutal aesthetics as follows: “The following project draws on the framework of aesthetics to bring into view the practiced though unspoken instructions of an anti-Black image-world” (p. 8). I want to focus on how these aesthetics act as affective reminders and it’s the reminder that continues to inform/form white ego formation.

While these killings are not new, for some- due to the recent wave of recordings that capture police brutality, in addition to being on the rise, these killings are now being recorded, and becoming the subject and impetus of mobilizations. There was also a time in the past when lynchings of Black people in the South in the United States were “recorded” on post-cards, spurring similar mobilizations (Gray, 2015). These post-cards reinforced the social death of Black people in the same way that these videos capturing current state violence do (Marriott, 2007). The videos today, the post-cards and images historically (Brutal aesthetics), constitute meaning-making and construct the value of whiteness as a happy object. White people can be and are happy that they are not the maimed bodies that appear in either one of these technologies of violence (Hartman, 1997; Wilderson, 2010). Brutal aesthetics, such as the postcard, the videos, the images. . . becomes

the poor man's phantasm: for a few pennies, display racks full of dreams. The postcard is everywhere, covering all the colonial space. . . . It produces stereotypes in the manner of great seabirds producing guano. It is the fertilizer of the colonial vision . . . [and] the comic strip of colonial morality (Alloula, 1986, p. 4).

Thus, in naturalizing and reminding/conjuring the condition of violence against Black people, the visual matrix of slavery re-affirms the disposability and fungibility of the Black as an object of gratuitous violence, and therefore reaffirms an economy of value that affords pleasure to the white by way of brutalizing and generating pain on the black body. Furthermore, white people may take pleasure in the spectacle *and spectacularization of* the dead and dying Black body – a pleasure that circulates on a libidinal register (Marriot, 2000), locking Black people 'bound to appear' 'through slavery's regime of power (Copeland, 2013) and cathecting whiteness to Black death. This is the "terror of pleasure... and the pleasure of terror", the ways in which "suffering was transformed into wholesome pleasures" (Hartman, 1997, p. 32).

Thinking on affect and its relation to the subject, Sara Ahmed (2010) investigates "happy objects." She theorizes happiness as a politic of good feelings, noting that affect is about judgement. If something makes one happy, then we have judged that thing to be good, and we send happy objects around accumulating value as social goods. Affect theorists think about affect as emotional capital, showing how its connections to the economy allow for certain kinds of social relations. Happy objects, or objects that make us happy, are constructed as sites of social capital and are also connected to the structures of modernity: they are directly connected to the social death of bodies that are othered or unhappy objects and this is the economy and edifice of violence.

White people may be sympathetic to these videos, and such online records also raise awareness of state violence and racism – and as Hartman similarly notes, the white abolitionist of the early 19th Century believed firmly in the image of the debased slave’s power to rally support for enslaved Black people. However, what these videos more importantly do is participate in the re-production of ideas of white value and whiteness and spectacularize Black death in a way that renders the mundanity of anti-Blackness imperceptible. In other words, in narrowing understandings of antiblackness to the most brutal and spectacularized iterations of it, the totalizing force of anti-blackness is concealed. The event bleeds into the quotidian and the everyday and helps to reconstitute the very apprehension of the ordinary, and so slavery as an ongoing regime of power remains invisible in the hyper-visible circulation and exceptionalization of these videos. Meaning making in the modern world is made through the state with the slave world. The creation and maintenance of the slave world is necessary for the modern world to exist, and the slave/Blackness is necessary for the human, for someone to be unconditionally free.

Considering the foregoing, I re-phrase Molefe’s question using the language of affect: what happens when whiteness no longer exists as a happy object? The system of whiteness is a system of rewards and punishments. The closer you are in terms of accessing power to white structures the more rewards you receive, the further away the more punishments, making it indeed a happy object, or an unhappy object, depending on your location – a continuum of affective accumulations and dispossessions. If Blackness, as social death, is part of the structures that permit white supremacy to emerge, allowing whiteness to become a happy object, what happens to these structures when Blackness evades, escapes, or confronts the project of

modernity? Or, if as Palmer (2016) says, “Black death is the World’s condition of possibility,” (p. 39) what happens to the World when its prime mover disappears?

Precisely because Blackness is foundational to the production and maintenance of white psychic life (Fanon, 1967 Marriott, 2018), I am querying how, positioned differently, Blackness might unravel the affective afterlives of its social death. If the notion of Whiteness and its collation as a happy object requires Black death, then how might Black resistance pose a foundational challenge to this notion called Whiteness as a position of affective security. I am contending with what I allude to earlier as the inherent instability of the white psyche, and its predication on Black social death and suffering, querying what might follow when Black people challenge the given-ness of social death. The point here is not that these challenges end the paradigm of antiblackness (or even that they possess that potential), but rather that in their articulation they destabilize the foundation of the (white) subject. If whiteness is stabilized through recourse to a violence that manifests in response to its own instability, then Blackness poses the capacity to tarry in that instability, to the ‘dislocation at the heart of modern sovereignty’ (Marriott, 2018, p. 227).

Mourning and Melancholia as a framework for understanding Afro-pessimism and Black Optimism

Freud (1907) defines melancholy as different to mourning: one enables a kind of moving on, while the other does not. In his *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia* Freud (1917) describes mourning and melancholy as two different conditions. He states,

mourning is regularly a reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as country, liberty, an ideal, and so on. In some

people the same loss produces melancholia instead of mourning...and we consequently suspect them of a pathological disposition. (p. 243)

Anna Cheng (2000) calls this to be a disease of the ego. In this context, the ego becomes diseased, even sick, because it has attached itself and its identity to the object or thing that is lost. Freud further notes: in yet other cases one feels justified in maintaining the belief that a loss of this kind occurred, but one cannot see clearly what has been lost. It becomes more reasonable to suppose that the patient cannot consciously perceive what he has lost either.

According to Freud, mourning differs from melancholia because of the pathological characteristic; Cheng (2000) stretches this conceptualization and uses the word disease to describe the melancholy of race. We can understand melancholy as a disease of the ego. The ego becomes diseased because it has attached itself/its identity to the object/thing that is lost. Yet the thing/object is fictional or is gone, therefore there is a false attachment to this object/thing. Freud (1917) notes:

in yet other cases one feels justified in maintaining the belief that a loss of this kind occurred, but one cannot see clearly what it is that has been lost and it is all the more reasonable to suppose that the patient cannot consciously perceive what he has lost either. This indeed, might be so even if the patient is aware of the loss which has given rise to the melancholia, but only in the sense he knows whom he has lost but not what he has lost in him (p. 245).

In the above text, we see how the subject may feel justified in what s/he lost even if the patient is not clear what s/he lost. Thus, melancholia emphasizes being stuck. The melancholic can move but cannot move on. Hence, the stuck-ness does not indicate a lack of movement, but

rather an inability to move from being structured, or being in structures, to being structureless. It is not that desire itself becomes fixed (such an organization would belie a cathectic and not a melancholic reaction), but rather instead that desire is unmoored from the regulatory functions of our psychic apparatus. Bogue (2012) notes

...we seem to be in a moment in critical thought where we are so melancholic that we construct absences; where we embrace loss, so that human life seems like a huge cemetery in which the names of the majority of the tombs are erased and can no longer be read. Melancholy has turned our attention to ruins and many scholars have become consumed by ruin (p. 31).

Bogue's reading allows us to challenge this notion of melancholy and rather think with him about this reorientation and what it serves. Bogue wants us to move beyond these melancholic ruins stating:

there is an intellectual tradition which has emerged out of the historical human experiences of Africans and the African Diaspora. This tradition, which can be called "a black intellectual tradition," is not one that is "nativist" or "essentialist"; rather, it is one that has produced a specific series of questions about human life precisely because of a set of human experiences and historical circumstances. Intellectual traditions are formulated by the questions that trouble us as we live as humans (2012, p. 34).

Bogue's brilliant intervention moves us to focus on the intellectual tradition which is based on the experiences of Africans and the African diaspora challenges easy readings also of melancholia and the notion of loss. He reorients us to the queries and inquiries about existence. For him, the African and African diaspora tradition reopens up the conversation to the "questions

that trouble us” (p 34) instead of on the mind that pushes for constructions of losses and absences. For him, this melancholy is a plight of today’s world. I draw on the Afro-pessimist foundation — suggesting life with no Blackness means no modern life at all which in turn triggers a melancholic reaction in white people.

Layering my reading of mourning and melancholia, I read mourning and melancholia through afro-pessimist and black optimist lens, with thinkers who we might contend are pointing us to this mourning and stuckness state of melancholia, who examine the divergent ways melancholia is produced across race (and its differential function for the maintenance of global anti-blackness). Further, I read Afro-pessimism as a call to mourn and Black optimism as melancholic and attempt to bring these two frames together to refuse what Hartman describes as the process of ‘making the narrative of defeat an opportunity for celebration ’(Hartman & Wilderson, 2003, p. 185). In our Black optimist attempts to hold onto the so-called possibility, we are inevitably and inexorably holding onto the violence that produces that very possibility for the good – what Jared Sexton refers to as the social death that contains social life. This disavowal of social death in search for life perpetually refigures the loss of the selfhood as ungrievable because it becomes unimaginable. If melancholia marks the condition of a grief for a loss that is beyond comprehension, a grief that is only felt at the level of the subconscious, then the desire to identify social life marks the ongoing repression of that unimaginable loss, the loss of self that is Blackness. Thus, even in the positing of the narrative of resistance as redeemable, we know slavery has (and thus maybe blackness has) no redeemable “qualities” which is why there is the experience of melancholy which seeks to reach backward to Africa for a resolution.

Melancholy and Post-Coloniality-or Slavery as the Unthought of Postcolonialism

The melancholy of whiteness can be rooted in an internal condition which Césaire (1972) would tell us is created by a “thingification” created through the projects of colonialism and modernity. Here whiteness internalized its value in relation to not being Black. Therefore, if the social energies of life (i.e., Blackness) cease to orient themselves toward becoming Black, the white ego loses the thing needed to survive.

In a *Dialogue About Racial Melancholia*, Eng, and Han (2008) argue that melancholia might be thought of as underpinning our everyday conflicts and struggles with racialization, assimilation, and immigration. They describe melancholia as mourning without end, where the melancholic cannot work out the loss to invest in new objects. Fanon’s model of ego formation in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967) provides us with some key insights. Fanon asks these two questions: “what does Man want? (p. 1)” and “what does the black man want? (p. 1)” — formulating an argument about ego formation that tells us that whiteness and Blackness demand different things for the purpose of being human. He states, “[t]he black man wants to be white. The white man slaves to reach a human level” (p. 3), then moves on to say “[w]hat is often called the black soul is a white man’s artifact” (p. 6).

In writing about Blackness, Fanon also provides us with ideas on racial ego formation that are rooted in the white man’s artifact, or creation, which is Blackness or the Black soul. There is no ego as Fanon states. There is always a racial ego whose edifice requires the co-constitution of an uncivilized other. Indeed, both the architectures of whiteness and modernity depend on this key constitution. Fanon explains this concisely stating, “[h]is [the Black man’s] metaphysics, or less pretentiously, his customs and the sources on which they were based, were

wiped out because they were in conflict with a civilization that he did not know and that imposed itself on him”(p. 82). The conflict was that modern man could only exist on a continuum – one that puts it in opposition to something prehistoric, un-civilized, un-man and un-human, hence the creation of the Black man. “White civilization and European culture have imposed an existential devaluation on the black man...” (p. xiii).

In the text above, Fanon argues that the founding of the ego of the White man and in a broader sense White civilization depended on the creation of the black man as well as his devaluation. When Fanon states, “The white man is sealed in his whiteness, the black man in his blackness. We shall seek to ascertain the directions of this dual narcissism and the motivations that inspire it,” he is pointing to the racial melancholy that I am concerned with in this project. The motivations that inspire both Black and white people, I theorize, are in fact produced by the melancholic condition—which needs a certain notion and structure of an ego to claim humanity. Again, if as Mannoni notes, there is a kind of melancholy that causes people to kill as a way to externalize an inner pain rather than resolve it, I am interested in these externalizations and how we move toward resolution.

More simply, here is the development of the ego through the creation of Blackness, which is why both Black and white people are still invested or “sealed in” in this notion. I focus on this model of ego-formation to understand this “sealing in” and to point to orientations that can “self-combust” as Fanon reminds us. The structures of Man as articulated and practiced through modernity do not allow for a truly human emergence but rather depend on a structure of Man whose escape into racial melancholy disenable a truly combusive possibility. If, we take seriously the different expressions of melancholy, in order to work through it to a place of liberation, I revisit Fanon and Mannoni. If, as Fanon says to “self-combust” or as Mannoni notes

to kill, then we can become interested in another option when one is not sealed in. Meaning, if there is the ability to reconcile and repair, then another option is possible, and for me that option is liberation.

However, what we see is not an ability or will to repair but rather the sealedness of white subjects coupled with the desire to survive. This results in the Manonni expression of melancholia, the desire to kill. Insisting on the political implications that inhere in the enslaved as the unthought of the postcolonial, this project traces how white fragility becomes collated and expresses itself through white rage. In *Scenes of Subjection* (1997), Saidiya Hartman outlines how whiteness has used white terrorism to produce the internal whip in Black people, so that Black people learned to police themselves—and more importantly, learn and re-learn their place in the modernist project. The existence of whiteness is premised upon violence, and Blackness is defined by social death, these categories do not exist outside of time: they had a beginning, they each have beginnings. There was a battle for recognition in the creation of these categories, and the turning away of the slave from the master's gaze is the precursor to a renewed battle. This master's awareness of losing power, in the sense that he is losing total dominative capacity within the struggle is the source of contemporary white melancholy, which produces white rage in turn. In other words, contemporary whiteness is only stable in as much as it can maintain a structure of desire – a libidinal economy – that cathects its racial taxonomy, keeping Black people affixed on its white supremacist order. In the words of Fanon, ‘the white man is sealed in his whiteness... the Black man his blackness’ (p. 11). Thus, manifestations of white brutality indicate not the over-arching superstructure of domination but rather instead highlight the precarity of this superstructure's libidinal hold. To be clear, I do not mean that the superstructure is not, by nature of its form, totalizing or overarching (of course, it is). What I mean is that these

symptomatic irruptions should not be read as demonstrations of its transcendental purchase, but rather instead as evidence of potential fracture. Or, as Sexton and Martinot say: “Whatever mythic content it [white supremacy] pretends to claim is a priori empty. Its secret is that it has no depth” (The Avant-Garde of White Supremacy, 2010, p. 175). Thus, I argue that it is precisely in the most hyper-explicit rending’s of anti-Black domination that we can apprehend the precarity of its hold on the collective unconscious. The physical lash is only necessary when the slave has not interiorized the psychic one, which leads us to moments in history and our contemporary moment, where so called Black progress triggers the need to return to the physical lash or reminders of the physical lash.

Whiteness as Racial Order and Slavery as Ongoing Regime of Power

Black Studies scholarship has debated the continuities of white supremacy within (global) liberal racial orders. This conversation acknowledges two major differences in the experience of racial melancholia. Khanna quotes Octave Mannoni (1956) and thinks about pseudo-melancholy, which Mannoni says causes people to kill rather than to turn to introspection and suicide. This pseudo-melancholy allows us, in the so called post-racial moment, to think about white terror that is expressed '*in the meantime.*' Fanon (1957) notes how “man is human only to the extent to which he tries to impose himself on another man in order to be recognized by him” (p. 215). This is the experience of white melancholia (pseudo-melancholy), which causes an outward response in the form of white rage and white terror. This white rage, an expression of pseudo-melancholy, is also represented in the lack of empathy and sympathy expressed by white people toward any type of injustice toward Black people. The Black experience of racial melancholia, by contrast, is rather concerned with introspection. This type of introspection causes Black people to be in a constant search: search for home, community,

nation, and self. If the modern era is rooted in anti-Blackness and being human is based on the exclusion of the Black slave from this category, then race becomes an essential marker in the formation of ego. Ego formation does not happen in the modern era without an investment in race; however, this investment presents itself differently for Black ego formation and white ego formation. It is this hegemonic and dominant type of ego formation that moves people toward melancholy

“The Meantime”

I had never read a *Venus in Two Acts*. I was unaware that Hartman had grappled with the mean time before me. The closest thing that could help me think this was Christina Sharpe’s *In The Wake*. Yet there was something that *In the Wake* was not saying that the mean time was saying to me. *In The Wake* seemed to ask us to be in the wake, in the suffering, like mourning. Saidiya Hartman stretches this further. In speaking about the girl in the *Venus in Two Acts* she asks,

But in the meantime, in the space of the interval, between too late and too early, between the no longer and the not yet, our lives are coeval with the girl’s in the as-yet-incomplete project of freedom. In the meantime, it is clear that her life and ours hang in the balance (Hartman 2016 p. 159)

She continues,

So what does one do in the meantime? What are the stories one tells in dark times? How can a narrative of defeat enable a place for the living or envision an alternative future? Michel de Certeau notes that there are at least two ways the historiographical operation can make a place for the living: one is attending to and recruiting the past for the sake of the living, establishing who we are in relation to who we have been; and the second

entails interrogating the production of our knowledge about the past (Hartman 2016 p. 159).

The meantime for Hartman seems to be a station of narration. For her, how is a narrative of violence going to enable “a place for the living” or even more pivotally allow for inquiring into our knowledge about the past to “make a place for the living” (p. 159).

The meantime, for me, the interregnum, was more of a social and political space. Thinking about the meantime made me see it everywhere in black studies texts. Sometimes it referred to waiting, sometimes suspension, sometimes transition (such as Christina Sharpe’s emphasis on residence time (2016) of the wake, or Wilderson’s emphasis on the temporality of political ontology (2009)). But in the meantime, is a temporal notion. It orients the reader to the question of time and its significance in the production of blackness and black studies. It is in a sense a call for us to think more critically the enduring legacies of chattel slavery as well as how these imperative demands of us to invent in a Fanonian sense the meantime attending to the multiple temporalities of Black people — and their feelings — and understanding the ontological conditions of blackness.

I write in the meantime for a better future. I use “in, the meantime” intentionally to contextualize and give meaning to this project and to situate where the reclamation of time occurs. Naming it is an epistemo-political act, which helps to perceived and produce suspensions and transitions central to the ongoing re-articulation of Blackness. More broadly, however, the meantime forces us to reckon with the thorny constellation of past, present, and future within from where we all move and within which we are all constrained, based on our differential relations to that past, present, and future. The meantime is a capacious frame for thinking about the space time of antiblack domination and the spacetime of liberation. It is through the

melancholic framework that I talk about ego-formation to articulate the kinds of tetherings that exist through race. These tetherings represent themselves geopolitically, through Time and space, and are mediated in violent ways both in the post-colonial and post-racial moments — or “in the meantime’s”

“In, the meantime” as an ethos and method prompts us to think about what happens when we are constantly thinking about what’s next and draws our attention to a latent possibility, that is in between. This can be connected to the pitfalls of the notion of “post” (in the sense of “post-racial,” “post-colonial,” “post-modern,” etc.). Merely talking about a “post,” or declaring that it exists, does not mean there is an actual “post.” Here I am not trying to erase or minimize the many liberation movements that ushered in a post-colonial/independence status, but I argue that the elements of those structures remain, though are reconfigured, and are governed by different faces and therefore still have the same impacts, even after the “post” phase has begun. The “post” in many ways is merely a continuation of what occurred prior. Reckoning with the politics of this continuation is why Dionne Brand states in *Land to Light On* “I don’t want no fucking country, here or there and all the way back, I don’t like it, none of it” (p. 48). Emphasizing this ‘none of it, Brand moves us to think about how no element of nation is redeemable. How, as she says in *Map*, the Door of No Return opens all nationalisms up to their ‘imaginative void.’

Therefore, I use “in, the meantime” as the device that challenges the abstraction of the distinction the past and the present of the nation and instead point to the continuities between the two periods. Using the meantime as a device forces us to think about what’s happening now and then...simultaneously. It is a way to mark the possibility not just for ‘sitting in the room with history (Brand, 2001), but overtaking that history to insist on a new present. In language, we use “in, the meantime” to move from now to future, skipping past the space or transition of the

present that leads to the future. A focus on “in, the meantime” asks what is being foreclosed when we focus on future(s).

The meantime allows us to read for interruption as well as about the process of dismantling and the form society would take after the process is completed. The in-betweenness is ridden with fears, anxieties, violence but also a sense of indeterminacy. But this in the meantime is also characterized with the potential for a reclamation. The meantime is time suspended that could move us to an end. What happens in that space and moment, however, requires interrogation, one that is narrated throughout this work. We must be cognizant of the meantime as the space where we rupture the Human (Jackson 2020) to reclaim a different mode of becoming human (Wynter 2003). If we understand the historical to contemporary timeline as the past, present, “in the meantime” and post-racial future, then we must ask: “what do we foreclose when we skip the “meantime””? What becomes foreclosed are the conditions that allow for “possibility of restitution, reparation, and justice” (Mbembe, 2013 p. 179), which Mbembe goes on further to note are the conditions for the collective resurgence of humanity (p.179). This foreclosure, I argue, prevents a truly post-racial future since we have already started to imagine this future, attempting to create something different without dismantling the structures as they exist today, without staying with and in the meantime, without working on and in the meantime, without reclaiming the meantime.

As implied earlier, the meantime emerges symptomatically in a variety of scholarly projects in Black Studies, particularly as a kind of floating signifier to express the violence of the present and the immediate and urgent need to intervene into its unbearable conditions. This ethical and political quagmire is most brought to the fore by Hartman (2008) in “Venus in Two Acts” when she concludes:

But in the meantime, in the space of the interval, between too late and too early, between the no longer and the not yet, our lives are... in the as-yet incomplete project of freedom. In the meantime, it is clear that... our [lives] hang in the balance (Hartman, p. 14).

Positioning contemporary Black life in coequality with chattel slavery (what she has elsewhere referred to as 'the time of slavery') produces for Hartman a kind of paradox for political and ethical action. If, as she asserts in *Scenes* that resistance to slavery takes the form of a 'politics without a locus' (p. 51) because the violence of enslavement ruptures the very space of the political, then politics in the present, in the now, the interval, the meantime, is most certainly a problem for thought. This vexed position leads to her following question in "Venus," "So what does one do in the meantime" (p. 14). Caught within the 'too late and the too early,' Hartman is left with nothing but the 'conjunction of hope and defeat' (p. 14). The problem Hartman poses, and the question she asks, are demanding. And this demand emerges precisely because of her willingness to stay with the meantime as a problem for thought, and in this way, she comes closest to the kind of theoretical questions I am pursuing.

Thinking the meantime then as the problem for action in the interval, we might then read multiple Black scholars working through the problem Hartman poses in *Scenes* (1997), the possibility for a politics without a locus. Christina Sharpe's work in *In the Wake* performs a similar task, as she tries to think through the 'atemporal' structure of the terror and disaster of slavery, a structure of violence that is 'never present' and 'always present' (Sharpe, p. 5). Building on Trouillot's work in *Silencing the Past* (1995) where he contends with a past that is not past, Sharpe tries to think care as a solution to this position of totalizing violence. Care becomes a kind of lateral, intramural tactic mediating state violence, while simultaneously

insisting Black life into being despite the tremendous violence that always-already threatens its interdiction. As a kind of practice of durational survival, Sharpe's turn to care offers a strategy for enduring the meantime, a response to Hartman's question: what is to be done? But her response simultaneously indexes the impossibility of response, of the constraints placed on all endeavours to 'insist life' under the brutal conditions of the (mean)Time.

Can we, by which I mean Black people, care our way out of violence? Might care, as crucial and important as it is for our affective lives, also be a way to avoid confronting the conditions of the present with the kind of revolutionary antagonism necessary to truly upend the structures of antiblackness, of racial capitalism, of imperialism, colonialism, and domination? Thus, even in and as Sharpe rightfully demands we 'stay in the wake' (what I am calling the meantime), to inhabit a 'Blackened consciousness' (p. 21), I am less interested in the forms of intramural filiation that bind us under these conditions than I am interested in cultivating a theory for living that is antagonistic to those very conditions. This is not, in my own work, about endurance (as crucial and necessary a project as that is), but about revolution and liberation.

Revolution and liberation, of course, pulls me back and back again to the Black Radical Tradition. The way something akin to the meantime might figure in those scholarly and revolutionary traditions is almost always in service of a call to political action. In *Black Marxism*, Cedric Robinson articulates the Black Radical Tradition as "the continuing development of a collective consciousness informed by the historical struggles for liberation and motivated by the shared sense of obligation to preserve the collective being, the ontological totality" (p. 168), and central to this tradition is the formation of a political consciousness in opposition to the structure of domination because it is as "emergent African people and not as slaves that Black men and women had opposed enslavement" (p. 170). Thus, Robinson refuses a

kind of melancholic attachment to the past, to ‘overtake the present, as Fanon would say. In the Black Marxist tradition broadly, and for Robinson in particular, the present can always be acted on and against, particularly through a kind of dialectical mediation. However, while the dialectical approach to history presumes a kind of determinate model thesis-antithesis-synthesis, the demand of the meantime calls us to stay with and resist a present that does not result in a synthetic future, upon which that present, and past are constitutive. I draw on T. Mars McDougall’s work in their essay “‘The Water is Waiting....’”. They argue that the dialectical model of history and resistance cannot resolve the violence of slavery (McDougall p. 50). I consider this a mode of refusal, a refusal that interrupts the sublation of the past and present inherent to dialectical temporality and seek a kind of politics of temporal destruction that acts on and against the present, without reproducing the conditions of the present. While such a project may be impossible to map at the scale of the micropolitical (as it is always-already laden with the macroscopic violence that structures its emergence), it indexes the hope for a return to revolutionary animus that seizes the terms of the present for liberation.

In putting in conversation, Hartman, Sharpe, and Robinson, we can encapsulate the paradoxical politics of the meantime. The impossibility of formal politics under the conditions of antiblackness and the simultaneous need to move forward through a conjunction of hope and defeat (Hartman 2008); the demand to stay with and within the problem of the meantime (or the wake) and to identify possibilities for action that do not reproduce the conditions of the present (Sharpe 2016); and the demand for a politics that confronts the violence of the present not through recourse to a melancholic attachment to the past, but through the configuration of a new form of political subjectivity (Robinson 2021), one that is not ‘in excess’ (as Moten would say) of antiblackness, but foundationally opposite to it.

If, as I suggest, the paradigm of post-racism indexed an impossibility for accurately thinking race in our contemporary period (and here, accurately thinking race marks not the literal capacity to think of race but rather to comprehend its scale, formation, structure, and political ontology), then how might the meantime offer a method and a strategy for refusing the transformation of political action into a history that mediates it through silence. Trouillot states:

Silences enter the process of historical production at four crucial moments: the moment of fact creation (the making of *sources*); the moment of fact assembly (the making of *archives*); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of *narratives*); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of *history* in the final instance. (1995, p. 26)

Thinking with the multiple silences that enter the archive, Trouillot draws our attention to how the construction of *narrative* is already preceded by two orders of silence, but also produces its own. If this is true, then ‘the moment of fact retrieval’ in the production of history is never capable of apprehending the structure of antiblack violence. Thus, resisting the mediation of history that already produces Black suffering as unthinkable mediates this unthinkability through the contemporary lens of post-racism. Thus, we must stay ‘in, the meantime’ because any desire to think the post-racial future is really a desire to resolve the narrative crisis that Blackness imposes on the world. The meantime then is a kind of injunction to stay with that which will be inexorably silenced by the temporal drives of modernity’s archive; it is a refusal to try to name that loss of the capacity to name loss itself (Sexton, 2016, p. 591). It is though also a call to orient ourselves to suspension.

Chapter Two – “I ran from it but still was in it”... the need for Brutal reminders

What white people have to do, is try and find out in their own hearts why it was necessary to have a nigger in the first place, because I'm not a nigger, I'm a man, but if you think I'm a nigger, it means you need it. And you've got to find out why. And the future of the country depends on that. Whether or not it's able to ask that question. (Baldwin 2016, p. 21)

The above epigraph notes that whiteness (the embodied and structural formation of white people) needs a “nigger”, and that the nigger is created due to the need for the nigger. Baldwin is telling us “the nigger” does not already exist but is created because of the need for it. Thinking with Baldwin, this chapter is interested in the white ego’s need for blackness. This chapter grapples with why the white ego needs blackness and how the white ego created and recreates the “nigger” for the sake of its ego. I build particularly on these psychoanalytic questions of the why (does whiteness need Blackness) and how this happens through the question of loss and melancholia and the order of modernity. For modernity, as a structure and edifice, to become erected it draws extensively on gratuitous violence against Blackness. When the narrative of this relation is undermined the sense of loss triggers a kind of psychic crisis. With this identified loss, we see an emergence of previously sublated anxieties and insecurities, and an attendant incapacity for white people to work through them. There seems to be panic in the idea that these structures should be and ought to be dismantled. This chapter shows that the imagined loss of “Blackness” as degraded position, as what Orlando Patterson refers to as generalized dishonor, leads to a crisis in the very constitution of the white ego. This crisis, in turn, leads to a melancholia for the White ego which struggles to cope with the loss of the thing needed (denigration of Blackness), for whiteness to have meaning. Once this melancholia is triggered, the white ego searches for this meaning again and ultimately sates its search using the visual. To capture this, I rely on *Brutal Aesthetics* as defined by Nataleah Hunter-Young (2022). Hunter-

Young states brutal aesthetics is the “visual economy [that] is a globalizing endeavour and a US state-corporate imperial project to which the whole networked world is subject” (p. 7). She further notes “I argue against the newness of this genre, naming it instead as a brutally aesthetic conditioning of Euro-American sociocultural life that figures anti-Black state violence as integral to the maintenance of a white supremacist body politic (p. 7) and “the circulating image of anti-Black state violence is an aesthetic component of Euro-American social life. Put another way, the Euro-American aesthetic—determining of meaning-making for social life through hegemonic discursive symbolic regulation—understands the brutalizing of Black peoples as normal, as autopoietic affirmation (p. 15).

Brutal aesthetics prompts me to not only think about ‘the brutalizing of Black peoples as normal’ but also how they function as a technology of violence that *reminds* Black people what can be done to us, while *reminding* non-Black people, particularly white people, what cannot and does not happen to them. Hunter-Young states “the following project draws on the framework of aesthetics to bring into view the practiced though unspoken instructions of an anti-Black image-world” (p. 8), I add to and think with Hunter Young, to underscore, the importance of the instructions but also the reminders of the application of instructions. While instructions are important it is the white ego’s need to apply/put into practice the instructions.

To think through this, I take up the white ego’s investment in race and elaborate the originating drama that grounds its schematic. Race is, to draw from Lauren Berlant (2011), one of those initial structures of cruel optimism (when something one desires, is a barrier to your ability to flourish) and as I would extend, the first structure of cruel optimism within which we are all interpellated. We are co-constituted with race and ego so when our understanding of race seems to change, melancholy is triggered as the evacuation of race from our ego is psychically

understood as a loss of the self. Katherine McKittrick contends that: “The slave’s status as object-commodity, or purely economic cargo, reveals that a black archival presence not only enumerates the dead and dying, but also acts as an origin story” (McKittrick, 2014, p. 17). Thus, McKittrick points us to a source of originating metaphors for the production and circulation of Blackness and racial formation.

I torque this story to orient the reader to see it as a kind of psychoanalytic origination, one that fuels and animates the white ego as well as the Black subject. By contending with the origin story of blackness as illustrated by Katherine McKittrick, I reveal a kind of psychic crisis that unfolds at the level of collective and individual (white) unconscious when confronted with the apothotic Black mimic, the mimic who performs their function as copy-cat so well they call into question the status of the original. When a Black person or Black people appear to disturb their sedimented status within the libidinal economy as object-commodity (through a mimicry of whiteness that unsettles rather than stabilizes the fixity of the racial order), then whiteness appeals to modes and forms of violence that repeat the originating violence, ‘the origin story,’ to reaffirm the extant racial hierarchy and their own internally integrated psyche. Through the circulation of ‘brutal aesthetics’ (Hunter-Young), the generalized dishonour of the position of the Black is re-established and confirmed.

For this, I focus on the fallout of the Obama administration, a Black mimic par excellence who, in ascending to the imagined ultimate position of authority (the presidency), offered a psychic vision for Black progress internal to the liberal terms of order that unsettled the white collective unconscious upon which those terms are set. Theorizing the reception and aftermath of this presidency, I demonstrate how the seemingly dialectical pattern between progress-regress internal to liberal modernity is subtended by a stable libidinal economy that demands this

simultaneously backward-forward movement. This is not an argument against the possibility for liberation. It is an argument concerning the cosmetic function and utility of progress for the stabilization of liberalism and racial capital. To be clear, I am not saying that this libidinal economic arrangement is, itself, unchangeable, but that without direct confrontation with it, the structure of antiblackness remains stable while its manifest empirical configuration might be re-arranged. I conclude by suggesting the meantime as a method to think beyond the back and forth of liberal progress, and present routes for escape that are grounded in confronting the libidinal and political economy of racial capitalism in the now.

The Origin

The slave's status as object-commodity, or purely economic cargo, reveals that a black archival presence not only enumerates the dead and dying, but also acts as an origin story. This is where we begin, this is where historic blackness comes from... (McKittrick, 2014, p. 17).

This passage occurs near the beginning of McKittrick's essay "Mathematics Black Life," and is oft cited and engaged in Black Studies work, especially work that attends to the question of the archive and the historical formation of Blackness. The essay seeks to diagnose a kind of archival violence that refracts (rather than produces) the originating violence of Blackness more broadly, and so both intensifies conditions of deathliness while symptomatically revealing the kind of epistemic-ontological category to which Blackness is so consistently abjected. The essay therefore contends with the problem established in my introduction of the kind of stable temporal lock within which Blackness is positioned, and which I have formulated by way of my engagement with Black Time – All Black Time is 1441.

McKittrick's decision to describe this position as an origin story invites questions pertaining to the mythical structure of both Blackness and modernity, and deeper still, invites us

to consider the structure and function of the phantasmatic in the elaboration of ‘the list, the breathless numbers, the absolutely economic, the mathematics of unliving’ (McKittrick, p. 17). Torquing her analysis alongside this invitation, the chapter is subtended by a kind of Black psychoanalytic intervention, particularly the work of Frantz Fanon. In Fanon’s words, “The white man is sealed in his whiteness, the black man in his blackness” (1967, p. 3). He labels this a “dual narcissism,” where “[t]he black man wants to be white. The white man slaves to reach a human level” (p. 3). Thinking with Fanon and McKittrick, I want to press the questions of loss, narcissism, and racial formation into one another, to weave together an analysis of the always-already conditioned state of melancholia that perpetually constitutes the Black psychic subject. Thus, my reading of Fanon’s return to the concept of narcissism reveals how Fanon begins reconstituting the Human from a foundation of absence, or at least starts from the notion of the *tabula rasa* (Fanon 1967; Agathangelou and Killian 2016). Such a reading mirrors and extends the contemporary focus on Fanon’s psycho-political work rather than reading him purely within a Marxist phenomenological tradition (Marriott, 2018).

In the transformation from chattel slavery to man or from chattel to human, the Black person/slave is understood to be a person who is engaged in a natural progression to modernity. In the present moment, this produces a particular form of white rage as it ruptures the notion of modernity because the Black person who can mimic is simultaneously perceived as modern and primitive, human, and animal, Master, and Slave. The mimic and specifically for this project, the Black mimic, becomes central to the modern project because the mimic is a reminder of the exceptionality of whiteness. The white ego needs the mimic because the mimic demonstrates the value of whiteness. It is only through Black mimicry that whiteness can stably imagine itself as the nexus of desire.

More than this, Trouillot tells us,

the Enlightenment, nevertheless, brought a change of perspective, the idea of progress, now confirmed, suggested that men were perfectible. Therefore, sub-humans could be, theoretically at least perfectible... The Westernized other looked increasingly more profitable to the West, especially if he could become a free laborer. (p. 80)

Hence the Black person can be and was incorporated into the schema but never with the intention of full access. Trouillot says, “[t]he benefit of doubt did not extend very far: westernized (or more properly, “westernizable” humans, natives of Africa or of the Americas, were imagined and always positioned at the lowest level of this nomenclature (p. 76) and were meant to stay there. “In essence” Trouillot says, “Man could also be westernized man,” as long as they were “the complacent colonized (p. 76).” Here arises the tension between the complacent colonized, who is also a mimic, who in the post-Antebellum era is human but not Man.

Hartman (1997) attempts to trace this transition by thinking through former slave proclamations of being human. She says, “the flesh, existence defined at its most elemental level, alone entitled one to liberty”, yet “the discourse of humanism, at the very least, was double-edged since the life and liberty... were racial entitlements formerly denied to them (p. 5)” during slavery. Hartman points to the ways in which being human meant something very different from being Man.

Socio-legal discourses of whiteness have selectively folded the formerly enslaved into the category of the human in a way that functions only to dissimulate further violence. In this genealogy, the dissimulation signifying the function of Blackness as a constitutive outside to the human has blurred. To be clear then, “recognition of humanity and individuality acted to tether, bind and oppress” (Hartman 1997 p. 5). Granting access to this co-constitutive category of Man

and a social order intertwined with notions of progress, liberty, and modernity which meant that some could never follow the universal orientation of time. Hartman argues that Reconstruction failed, as it excluded or violently limited blacks from emancipation. In her words,

the failure of Reconstruction not simply as a matter of policy or as evidence of a flagging commitment to black rights, which is undeniably the case, but also in terms of the limits of emancipation, the ambiguous legacy of universalism, the exclusions constitutive of liberalism and the blameworthiness of the freed individual (1997 p. 6).

This failure in Reconstruction highlights the limits of emancipation, the ambiguity of universalism and the required exclusions that were to constitute liberalism and the “freed individual.” However, this failure opened a space for a kind of mimicry that can be used against whiteness on a libidinal level. Both Hartman and Bhabha signal to the ways the mimic, recognizable other, slave or post-slave Black people were accounted for in particular ways. That these people could be human in the western liberal man sense but not in the sense of Man what Sylvia Wynter would call the over-representation of Man as human, presented a conflict that was never intended to be reconciled. Modernity and progress have been available to white people and white people only. Their progress presupposed and, indeed, enforced the debilitation of others. Others (including Black, Indigenous racialized people) could progress, but they could not catch up and or be the same.

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon states, “and of course, just as the Jew who is lavish with his money is suspect, so the black man who quotes Montesquieu must be watched” (p. 18). “To speak,” says Fanon, “means being able to use a certain syntax and possessing the morphology of such and such a language but it means above all assuming a culture and bearing the weight of a civilization” (p. 2). The mimic, therefore, was taught to speak the language of the

colonizer, but she can never inherit ‘the weight of civilization.’” While the black Antillean assimilate[ing] to French language meant becoming whiter and therefore closer to being truly human” (p. 2), it did not mean becoming Man. However, when this same colonized quoted Montesquieu, he needed to be watched because the line between human and Man was being blurred. The colonial mimic blurs the line that separates the colonized from the colonizer, and it is in this way that Bhabha says the mimic is subversive. This brings us to the contemporary moment that has seen this line not only blurred but also seemingly erased, producing white rage. And so, to be clear, the discourse of post-racial progress – historically rooted and germinating in the Emancipation proclamations – holds within it the seeds of its own demise, because white people libidinally cannot abide by the liberal multicultural rhetoric which they themselves develop.

Black Progress, White Rage

In the moments when Black people are imagined by white spectators to be moving progressively towards *something*, white people rage. Anderson (2014; 2017) points to the moments after the American civil war, *Brown v. Board of Education* and the election of President Barack Obama as key examples of the advancement of Black people in the United States. However, for Anderson, this advancement comes to be associated with “a reaction” and a “backlash” in a sense, a kind of rage by white people. The use of the word “advancement” by Anderson evokes particular forms of liberalism, freedom, equality, and power that are equated with “whiteness”. She assumes the fact that the president of the United States is a Black man representative of Black progress/advancement, and maybe it is however, what is more important about Barack Obama – as the embodiment of Black progress – is that his election ushered

seemingly the country and the rest of the world into a post-racial era. However, this post-racial era was not met with any redress for the racial violence of the past (and present). Obama's term was marked by mimicry par excellence. While Black people are expected to mimic whiteness, perform as the Black mimic, central to the ruse of mimicry is precisely the performative failure of its project. The Black mimic cannot be white.

This function is well demonstrated particularly in the evolution of the stereotype of the (Uncle) Tom. Originally a figure for the completely subservient enslaved man, the (Uncle) Tom modulates in the post-Reconstruction era to mark a kind of civilized docility – most often through the figure of the Butler. Precisely because the Tom's humanity is only imagined by the white psyche as materializing through his relation to and his capacity as an extension of his white Master (and Master remains the language of the profession), his mimicry is only acknowledged to the extent that it contributes to the intensification of his subjection. To apply the insights of Hartman (1997), he is only human in as much as that humanness marks a dissimulation of the violence of antiblackness. Thus, as the travesty of Reconstruction unfolds, what is at stake is not merely the reconfiguration of the political economy of antiblack subjection but also the consolidation of its semantic field.

However, the material force of these dissimulations aside, these blurrings impact the white imaginary that refuses to cede humanity – in whatever form – to anything other than whiteness. To be civilized means to be white and being white essentially means being civilized. Through its immunity to external reproduction and the impossibility of its performance, whiteness is special; it is a commodity, and it is rare. Blackness attaining whiteness makes whiteness no longer special, minimizing its value. This is due to ways in which Blackness has

come to be understood, as both being about Black progress and about Black people accessing spaces, we were never supposed to be part of, and by spaces, I mean spaces of power.

Blackness, which is constructed to be “abject, threatening, servile, dangerous, dependent, irrational and infectious” (Hartman, p. 110), needs to be understood as a construction that legitimizes whiteness. The legitimization of whiteness is part of a binary that is equal to “because I am not black, I am white”. Blackness is not only the opposite of whiteness, but it is the opposite of progress, of modernity; it is backward, and it is regressive. It incorporates such subjects with the goal of transformation into whiteness as Fanon states “[t]he more he rejects his blackness and the bush, the whiter he will become” (pp. 2-3). However, this transformation – from Black to white, from mimic to authentic, from human to man – needs to be contained. Once this transformation seems to be uncontainable/unmanageable, it becomes a threat, hence the threat of Black progress that triggers white rage. The task then becomes to demonstrate how white rage is indeed a response rooted in racism and by way of it being a reaction to Black progress; white rage also demonstrates that Black progress is a myth. First theorized in 2014 in an article and further taken up in her book *White Rage* (2016), Carol Anderson tells us, white rage recurs in American history. It exploded after the Civil War, erupted again to undermine the Supreme Court’s *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, and took on its latest incarnation with Barack Obama’s ascent to the White House. For every action of African American advancement, there’s a reaction, a backlash. (Anderson, 2014, par. 3). By tracing white people’s reactions, through what Anderson characterizes as white rage to what white people view as Black progress, she demonstrates the ways white rage functions as a technology of violence (Anderson, 2014, 2016). Though we know, Black progress is a myth and a fallacy, it is used by to cohere the white psyche and to justify whiteness’ rage. I employ Angela Davis’ (1983) conceptualization of the myth of

the Black male rapist to demonstrate the myth of Black progress. Davis links the construction of the Black male rapist to a historical moment that saw the myth arise as “a distinctly political invention” (p. 184). She tells us that the lawless killing of Black people was most often described as a preventative measure to deter the Black masses from uprising and revolt (p. 185). She goes on to further say, “at the time the political function of mob murders was uncamouflaged. Lynching was undisguised counterinsurgency, a guarantee that Black people would not be able to achieve their goals of citizenship and economic equality” (p. 185). Davis notes that when it was evident that the conspiracies of Black uprising and revolt were fabrications that never materialized, the popular justification for lynching was modified. With the rise of groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, Davis notes that the new pretext for lynching was as a measure to prevent Black supremacy over white people (p. 186). However, “after the betrayal of reconstruction and the accompanying disenfranchisement of Black people, the specter of Black political supremacy became outmoded” (p. 186). This moment, the failure of reconstruction (Hartman, 1997) or the betrayal of reconstruction put white people at ease (Davis 1983). Accordingly, the myth of the Black male rapist was created. Davis demonstrates that at that historical moment, white people had been fearing Black supremacy, but when this supremacy was rendered no longer a threat, Black people still needed to be managed, which she attributes to the fact that Black people did not want to accept their position as inferior. “If black people,” Davis says, “had simply accepted a status of economic and political inferiority, the mob murders would probably have subsided” (p. 190). This tells us two things: 1. There was and is a fear of Black progress, which questions what whiteness assumes as natural and given, and 2. there was a way in which whiteness becomes disrupted and therefore evokes anger to reinforce and ensure that Black people understand and accept their position as inferior, gesturing to how progress and notions of racial

superiority are intertwined. Davis' work allows me to demonstrate that though whiteness's place in modernity is taken as a given, there has always been a fear that whiteness can lose that place and therefore various technologies of violence need to be employed to maintain that particular social order.

There are complex emotional systems that are attached to racial superiority and so evoke white rage, ones that promise white privilege through white supremacy. The libidinal economy that posits what Hartman has called "The terror of pleasure... and the pleasure of terror" (Hartman, 1997, p. 32) produces a series of affective rewards and incentives from the violation of the Black body. Hartman herself reads her project as "thinking about the dynamics of enjoyment in terms of the material relations of slavery" (Hartman and Wilderson, 2003, p. 188), and so we should consider these pleasures and terrors to circulate within a particular affective matrix that is subtended by enslavement. Reading Hartman as an affect theorist, we can apprehend how slavery's libidinal structure is kept intact by complex emotional systems that reward ritualistic antiblack violence. These complex emotional systems are inherently tied to the ways in which white people cathect race and the process of ego formation through the degradation of the Black body. Whiteness, as a kind of ontological coordinate that marks the ultimate subject of civil society, offers through its interpellation a position within a community marked for capital, state protection, and global domination. Therefore, when these ideas of racial superiority are disrupted, moments of "humiliation" and "insecurity" are triggered, which lead to white rage. White rage works with the mimic to allow the "Other" to dream about whiteness and even almost touch it, if they do this in a way that *remains* in the confines of white superiority.

However, when the Black mimic mimics too well, white rage emerges also as a quick response. Rather than Blackness successfully mimicking whiteness and being understood as

Black uplift, Blackness is understood as tainting or regressing whiteness. If the post-racial marked a repression of this crisis, a repression that was glossed through the redemptive gesture of liberal multiculturalism, then as the ongoing psychic fracturing of the white subject demonstrates, this repression is structurally incapable of sublimating its desires and configuring itself in relation to this repression. If the post-racial depends upon a repression of the symbolic (not political material) economy of antiblackness, then the white racist's responses to this framework demonstrate that perhaps the scene of subjection is irrepressible. The explicit demand for Black death is the constitutive condition for White psychic coherence, or, as Wilderson states: "Policing – policing Blackness – is what keeps everyone else sane" (Wilderson, 2014, p. 7).

Strange Fruit: Tracing the Hyper-danger of Black progress

[Times] have changed [...] and the Negro's accusers have found it necessary to change with them. (Douglas, 1894, p. 7)

A historical grounding that demonstrates white rage, as part of a system that attempts to manage Black people in their efforts to progress, is useful for understanding the present moment. Frederick Douglass notes that the Negroes' accusers must change with time, indicating that the management of Black people is a fluid process that responds to and shifts at necessary moments. In *The Myth of Black Progress*, Pinkney (1984) writes,

it is ironic that a Time when there appeared to be some minor progress in improving the citizenship status of Black people in the United States, and some official commitment to racial equality, the national mood shifted rather abruptly to one of the continued subjugation and racial oppression (p. 1).

Pinkney's analysis cites moments including *Brown v. Board of Education* as indicators of a commitment to equality for Black Americans. Pinkney then asks, "how is it possible that after a few years of apparent commitment to the full equality of black people, the mood of American people could shift so drastically?" (1984, p. 1). Pinkney further states,

the situation in the present is painfully reminiscent of what happened to black people after the civil war. The abolitionists assumed that the end of slavery meant equality for the newly freed blacks... After reconstruction many whites outside the South who had initially opposed slavery and supported the cause of blacks, ultimately adopted the southern view of race relations, assuming that blacks had been responsible for the failure of reconstruction. (1984, p. 6)

Rhetoric that characterizes unarmed Black men who are killed by police or civilians as "thugs" as "dangerous" or as "threats" echo Pinkney's sentiments. The myth of Black progress, much like the myth of post-racial society, works to blame the victim, because it contradistinguishes 'good,' 'respectable,' 'upstanding,' (coded: bourgeois) Black people as empirical proof that demonstrates the immateriality of racial suffering. Obama, as the Black mimic par excellence, doubles this kind of structure of blameworthiness by acting as a kind of imago of success through which all Black people can be compared (against). Pinkney further explains,

several works have appeared in recent years by sociologists and other social scientists alleging that race is no longer an important variable in American society. Others have maintained that black Americans of comparable educational achievement have reached income parity with white Americans. There are even those who maintain that black

people in the United States now enjoy some advantages over white people, particularly in education and employment and that more than half of all black families have achieved middle class status (1984, p. 7).

Pickney writes this in 1984. The ways that these statements apply to the present moment are evocative, to say the least. The difference in the Time that lapses force us to think about ways in which we have assumed to continue this racial “progress” – particularly if we consider the time when there was a Black president of the United States. Pickney says, “with the supposed citizenship rights there was the notion that things were equal and if black people were not succeeding it was due to their own doing” and similarly, if they are being killed, while unarmed, by cops, that is of their own doing as well.

I return to Hartman to think this through. One of the concepts Hartman (1997) utilizes is the idea of the whip as a kind of psycho-symbolic object. She says “[t]he whip was not to be abandoned; rather, it was to be internalized” (p. 140). Hartman prompts us to think about the type of outward, overt violence that was evoked to manage Black people, always already recast as flesh, and how that violence eventually became the thing that Black people learned to fear, thus producing the internal whip, which functions so that Black people use it to police themselves to avoid external violence. Wilderson explains that Lacanian psychoanalysis does not have the theoretical capacity to understand violence against Black people because it cannot comprehend a subject who experiences violence at the level of the real (it can only comprehend a subject who experiences violence at the level of the symbolic). To this, I would add that the symbolic is still saturated with antiblack violence, in the form of Hartman’s whip.

Hartman connects the evocation of the external whip to moments where Black people even thought about asserting their equality. Two examples used by Hartman are as follows: “If

dey hear you talking they say you talkin bout equalization. They whoop up” and “Tom Holland said that people were afraid to go out and assert their freedom because they’d ride up by Negro and shoot him just ’like a wild hog and a word never said or done ‘bout it” (p. 140). The process of internalizing the whip must be unpacked in relation to the mimic. Black people are sold the idea of progress, told that if they speak like, act like, dress like, work like white people, they too can reap the benefits of whiteness; it is these promises that produce the mimic. However, the threat of the mimic (i.e., the mimic being too close to real) is managed through the internalized psycho-symbolic whip, which ensures Black people do not get out of line in thinking that they can attain whiteness.

There is a confusion that arises from the free individual who is Black. As Warren (2018) says: “The term *free black* carries a tension within its structure; it brings two disparate grammars into collusion and produces an ontological catastrophe” (p. 15). This person is free, human, and should therefore be man, but their race denies what Bhabha calls "reformed recognizable other[s]" that are "subject[s] of difference that is almost the same" via the fact that they are presented as progressive Blacks/the exceptional negro, "but not quite" because they are still slaves. The mimic then produces a particular bundle of silences. This (Black) mimic is locked in its Blackness. They are assumed to be free in their engagement with progressive ideals, which foreclose possibilities of Black subjectivity.

The Contemporary Mimic, White Rage, and the Post-Racial Moment

What is the goal of understanding the mimic? Hartman (1997) rightly tells us that:

the point is not simply to expose what is disavowed by this construction of free will or to engage in the oft-repeated critique of possessive individualism but rather to explore the

tension between the cultivation of liberal individualism, with its emphasis on will, mastery, autonomy, and volition, and the emphasis on submission, docility, fear and trembling. (p. 141)

We can understand white rage as a production of this tension. We are to mimic but not perfect our mimicry so that we pose no threat to whiteness and no risk of achieving the “American dream.” This begs the question though, what happens when the Black person who mimics attempts to shift, or shifts, from the position of mimic to being beyond the assigned position? This question becomes crucial particularly in a period that has witnessed the presidency of Barack Obama, triggering a particularly profound type of white rage. Obama’s historical position as the first Black president of the United States is meaningful for many reasons, yet his position signals the completion of Black people’s ability to mimic. We have now seen a Black man become one of the most powerful people in the world. Obama’s rise to power signals a shift in the way Black people see themselves. Carol Anderson (n.p) writes of this shift:

A little more than half a century after *Brown*, the election of Obama gave hope to the country and the world that a new racial climate had emerged in America, or that it would. But such audacious hopes would be short-lived. A rash of voter-suppression legislation, a series of unfathomable Supreme Court decisions, the rise of stand-your-ground laws and continuing police brutality make clear that Obama’s election and reelection have unleashed yet another wave of fear and anger.

We can understand the current white rage against Black people because of what Obama symbolizes. Obama symbolizes transcending the internal whip – even if his actual presidency marks no change in the antiblack structure of the presidency or the United States more broadly – and as a result, he has triggered white rage that needs to enact violence and control over Black

people to remind them not to get out of line. Obama not only told the world “Yes we can,” but his presence was also a signifier of this, and white rage responded with “no you can’t.”

This contemporary post-racial moment is 2008-2016, marked by the inauguration of the Obama era (and, like all Time, given from by 1441). In the last five years we have seen a complete reversal of what some had even imagined to be post-racial (and, like all Time, given from once more, by 1441). The shift from Obama to Trump is exemplary of white rage and demonstrates how the post-racial sublates racial violence rather than erase it. Terror has a signifying function in the stabilization of white psychic life-sustaining processes. In the words of Hartman:

in considering the metamorphosis of chattel into man catalyzed by the abolition of slavery, I think it is important to consider the failure of Reconstruction not simply as a matter of policy or as evidence of a flagging commitment to black rights, which is undeniably the case, but also in terms of the limits of emancipation, the ambiguous legacy of universalism, the exclusions constitutive of liberalism, and the blameworthiness of the freed individual. Therefore, I examine the role of rights in facilitating relations of domination, the new forms of bondage enabled by proprietorial notions of the self, and the pedagogical and legislative efforts aimed at transforming the formerly enslaved into rational, acquisitive, and responsible individuals. From this vantage point, emancipation appears less the grand event of liberation than a point of transition between modes of servitude and racial subjection. As well, it leads us to question whether the rights of man and citizen are realizable or whether the appellation "human" can be borne equally by all (1997, p. 6).

Here Hartman highlights some key points about Humanity and the political project of reconstruction pointing or rupturing the metaphysical moves from slave to man to the freed individual. She argues that the universal human, as expressed in liberalism, is not only limiting but rather imprisoning and begins when humans surrender to the truth that the objects through which whiteness and Blackness have constructed their meaning are meaningless: and therefore, what they lack in substance, they compensate in a form of social capital, affect. The ‘exclusions constitutive liberalism’ here evokes Man as human (Wynter), and what the non-event of emancipation marks is not the inauguration of a new kind of humanist subject, but rather instead a continuation – and at times intensification – of the violence of chattel slavery’s subjectivities. Therefore, enslavement was and presently remains a structuring matrix for psychic coherence. Hartman thus points to the relationship humanism – and its specious claims to the universal – has with the formation of psyche within slavery and its afterlife, and the types of melancholic attachments that such a regime of power insists upon.

Melancholic Whiteness: Stabilizing Subjection

Vengeance figures in multiple forms within this melancholic relation. This return to vengeance speaks profoundly to the affective scale of loss at stake in the false liberal universal and the forms of political violence that respond to this loss. It is precisely within the melancholic loss of what Marriott (by way of Fanon) calls the *n’est pas* (Marriott, 2018) that an engine for political violence, reproach, shame, humiliation, anger, and rage congeal. In other words, in identifying what the object is not (the subject), and in yearning for that subjecthood, the object is overdetermined by a negative that produces a matrix of psychic impossibilities – I want to be what I am not; I need to be what I can never be. The inevitable outcome of this structure of psychic brutalization is violence. Identifying the object as subject only further intensifies the

violence, as that recognition is always potentially interdicted. In other words, as Fanon learns on his trip to France, it does not matter how skilled he is with the language, how effective he is at performing civilization, because he is "overdetermined from without" (Fanon, 1968, p. 87) There will always be a child shouting 'Look! A Negro!' In response, the human species shares a primal conception of resistance to oppression as simple retaliation. This flawed understanding locks its subjects into a dynamic of melancholic behaviour that encompasses the omnipresent maladies of the meantime.

As Fanon explains, the conditions of colonization do not permit the expression of this human impulse to retaliate. The colonizer's display of power (police, armies, courts, angry political rallies) repeats the message that the penalty of resistance is death. Thus, the impulse for revenge, formed out of the acknowledgement of one's own essential humanity, takes on disguises. For instance, it hides within lateral violence, as Fanon explains in *The Wretched of the Earth*:

The settler-native relationship is a mass relationship. The settler pits brute force against the weight of numbers. He is an exhibitionist. His preoccupation with security makes him remind the native out loud that there he alone is master. The settler keeps alive in the native an anger which he deprives of outlet; the native is trapped in the tight links of the chains of colonialism. But we have seen that inwardly the settler can only achieve a pseudo petrification. The native's muscular tension finds outlet regularly in bloodthirsty explosions – in tribal warfare, in feuds between septs, and in quarrels between individuals (pp. 52-53).

Thus, the meantime for the colonized is marked by intra-racial violence – a violence that is overdetermined by the colonial structure itself. Locked within a melancholic attachment to a promissory humanity that is always-already foreclosed from actual cultural meaning, the colonized instead turn inward on themselves and their compatriots. The revenge that Fanon articulates is mediated on a libidinal level to focalize that violence against the white/colonizer. The colonized also attempt to replicate and reproduce the social position of colonizer. In other words, through its techniques of domination, colonization creates a certain personality type among the colonized, the “mimic men,” as found Bhabha’s (1984) postcolonial scholarship:

Then the great tradition of European humanism seems capable only of ironizing itself. At the intersection of European learning and colonial power, Macaulay can conceive of nothing other than ‘a class of interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern – a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect’ – in other words a mimic man raised ‘through our English School,’ as a missionary educationist wrote in 1819, ‘to form a corps of translators and be employed in different departments of Labour.’...He is the effect of a flawed colonial mimesis, in which to be Anglicized, is *emphatically* not to be English. (p. 128)

I would like to position this mimicry in relation to Fanonian psychoanalysis to better articulate its complexity. As Fanon would challenge, this mimicry does not curtail the desire for revenge. In the introduction to *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon prefaces his chapter “The Fact of Blackness”:

[The] Negro who wants to go to bed with a white woman...[displays] clearly a wish to be white. A lust for revenge, in any case....White civilization and European culture have

forced an existential deviation on the Negro. I shall demonstrate elsewhere that what is often called the black soul is a white man's artifact. (p. 6)

Here, mimicry and assimilation, as expressed through sexual desire, and congeal a short-sighted attack on white domination that the colonizer recognizes for what it is – and which lies at the root of many of barely-repressed libidinal anxieties about the loss of Blackness-as-inferiority. The “libidinal economy of modernity ... achieves its structure of unconscious exchange by way of a ‘thanatology’ in which Blackness overdetermines the embodiment of impossibility, incoherence, and incapacity” (Wilderson, 2010, p. 44). Thus, without Blackness as the object, the semantic container, that sustains the subject through its own degradation, the white subject loses its own coherence. To extend Marriott's work, we might say that if the Black covers over the abyssal, then the loss of the libidinal comfort that Blackness-as-inferiority offers the white results in a destabilization of the white through its own forced confrontation of the abyssal – a look into the void that stares back.

Thus, Fanon forces us to think through how mimicry itself is embedded within a libidinal economy. In the case of the Black male negro who wishes to have sex with the white woman, this sex is a marker of vengeance and violation. While some white feminist critics may take issue with the fact that this vengeance is staged on the bodies of white women, such a critique would occlude the structure of power which Fanon is articulating where, as Spillers (1987) would say, "gender is a territory of political maneuver" (p. 67). What is being staged in this antagonism is a violation of whiteness within a heterosexual imaginary – not an invasion of womanhood – and Fanon articulates it as such precisely because he is gesturing toward the affective investments within mimicry (p. 38).

However, this violence is not unique to colonized and Black position. Assimilation, like lateral violence, merely channels the desire for revenge in which the colonizer's violence is met with its mirror image as Sartre put in his preface to *Wretched of the Earth* (2004). Sartre elaborates how the violent challenge to the colonizer's ego is the bedrock of this violence:

Can he not here recognize his own cruelty turned against himself? In the savagery of these oppressed peasants, does he not find his own settler's savagery, which they have absorbed through every pore and for which there is no cure? The reason is simple; this imperious being, crazed by his absolute power and by the fear of losing it, no longer remembers clearly that he was once a man; he takes himself for a horsewhip or a gun...But in this he leaves out of account the human memory and the ineffaceable marks left upon it; and then, above all there is something which perhaps he has never known: we only become what we are by the radical and deep-seated refusal of that which others have made of us...Make no mistake about it; by this mad fury, by this bitterness and spleen, by their ever present desire to kill us, by the permanent tensing of powerful muscles which are afraid to relax, they have become men. (p. 16)

Thus, the violence of the colonized is merely the libidinal drive of violence that already organizes the colonizer's subjectivities. Therefore, without the creation of new objects on which to find the ego, the revolution itself will result in new forms of domination. Fanon (1967) describes how after the anti-colonial revolution; the lateral violence of yesteryear takes on the forms of violent struggle for a piece of the post-colonial pie:

We observe a permanent seesaw between African unity, which fades quicker and quicker into the mists of oblivion, and a heartbreaking return to chauvinism in its most bitter and

detestable form.... African unity, that vague formula, yet one to which the men and women of Africa were passionately attached, and whose operative value served to bring immense pressure to bear on colonialism, African unity takes off the mask, and crumbles into regionalism inside the hollow shell of nationality itself. The national bourgeoisie, since it is strung up to defend its immediate interests, and sees no further than the end of its nose, reveals itself incapable of simply bringing national unity into being, or of building up the nation on a stable and productive basis. The national front which has forced colonialism to withdraw cracks up, and wastes the victory it has gained. (pp.156-159)

Thus, in Fanon's teleology, the *tabula rasa* of common humanity leads directly to the desire for revenge and the melancholic rut that colonial force produces. Where it does break out into genuine anti-colonial revolution – and this revolution is successful – the postcolonial human invents new antagonisms that serve a global, European-dominated system of capital. Absent new objects of desire, the revolution merely empowers the “mimic men” of the newly independent state: “To them, nationalization quite simply means the transfer into native hands of those unfair advantages which are a legacy of the colonial period” (p. 151).

I share these examples to demonstrate that “modernity is a social and economic disaster in which we try to survive” (Robin DG Kelly in conversation with Fred Moten, 2017). The problem is not and has never been Blackness, for even when Black people and colonized people try to be white or colonizers, it does not work – the performative reproduction can only go so far. The modern project is a disaster where:

we survive-pending revolution. The meantime is a space that seeks to expose and undermine the idea that we can find solutions if we somehow become human, like white

people. It seeks to reinforce the point that the language of Man can only reproduce the conditions of Man – “The Master’s tools will never dismantle the Master’s house (Lorde, 1979, p. 27).

Internal whip, external reminders

Can historical narratives convey plots that are unthinkable in the world within which these narratives take place? How does one write a history of the unthinkable (Trouillot, 1995, p 73)

In our present moment, it is impossible to miss any of the numerous incidents of police brutality, often resulting in the death of Black people of all genders and ages. More and more, these incidents are being caught on tape and shared over social media. People are, in effect, witnessing these moments through videos and these moments are more than just stories or hearsay; they are visual accounts of what is taking place. The videos trigger commentary as people react to violence that is excessive, unwarranted, and racially motivated. It is not just that police are violent. It is that there is a different kind of violence that is reserved only for Black people, what Wilderson would call gratuitous violence – a violence that has no beginning, middle, or end, but is instead totalizing, uninterrupted, and without finality.

The racial aspects of these moments are, in fact, contradictory to the narrative that has been popularized in the last few decades of a post-racial world, one that entails a former president of the United States being a Black man and the White House having been occupied by a Black family. If a country such as the United States of America, with its racial past that includes slavery, lynchings, and segregation can elect a Black man as the head of state, then

surely the world has moved into a new phase that would make Martin Luther King Jr. *beam with joy*.

To be clear, I am not stating that the category of post-racial is homogeneously understood or even internally conceptually coherent – particularly during our arguably new moment where antiblackness is ‘avowed’ as police budgets are increased. Rather, instead, what I am suggesting is that post-racism as a liberal paradigm differentially inflects and mediates the narrativization of racial violence and does so in ways that renders Black suffering imperceptible, even when the specificity of Black suffering is named. In other words, post-racism and the post-racial ushers in a new conceptual framework, (in the post racial moment, there is no such thing as racist acts, there are acts that are about other things, but not race/racism.) that now precedes the apperception, narrativization, and documentation of racial violence, and so over-determines our capacity to apprehend their violence. Although the advent of the Trump administration seemingly destabilized the myth of the post-racial, the dream and promise of the post-racial still haunts contemporary imaginaries of Western democracy (as evidenced by the critique of Trump, by Republican political figures like George Bush, for his racism – a critique that in turn disavows the deep and unimaginable scale of racial violence and genocide the Bush regime actualized through a post-racial veneer).

However, it is not simply this process of rendering Black suffering imperceptible that animates my critique of the post-racial. Rather, I contend that it is precisely because the white supremacy structures and the white psyche presuppose Blackness as an object of gratuitousness of violence that the imperceptibility of Black suffering, inaugurated by the post-racial (despite the material ongoing-ness of this suffering). Blackness unsettles the stability of the white subject (as a psychic field of libidinal investments) and so enables a kind of white reactionary formation

that strengthens the explicitness of its demands for *visible* Black death and suffering. Thus, the circulation of a visual field articulating tremendous violence stabilizes the libidinal economy of the collective unconscious. In her dissertation, “Brutal Aesthetics and the Visual Economy of Digital Black Death,” Hunter-Young contends that the imaging and circulation of Black death is “a globalizing endeavour... that figures anti-Black state violence as integral to the maintenance of a white supremacist body politic” (p. 7). Hunter-Young argues that this visual field auto poetically institutes the regime of the Human, and so contends that a visual symbolic matrix constitutes the structure of antiblack suffering.

The symbolic matrix of antiblackness troubles a political economic analysis of 21st century neoliberalism. Despite the intensified state of Black suffering – indeed, the ongoing accumulation of Black death – the liberal redemptive arc of inclusion still provokes white violence. This is not a rational political economic relation, nor can it merely be described through the conceptual vocabulary of ideology, precisely because ideologically capitalism has cultivated a narrative of redemptive inclusion. Rather, the libidinal economy, over and against the ideological drives of neoliberal capital, suspend so-called progress because that progress was always-already dependent upon the machinations of explicit Black suffering and death. The contradictions of political economy and ideology are subtended by the drive toward the accumulation of (socially and materially) dead Black bodies.

This is evident even in the interpretation of and institutional response to events such as the storming of the US Capitol by Trump supporters versus the response to Black Lives Matter protests by Trump and American institutions. These differing responses are examples of how our ready-made categories are the only way we can understand these events. For Black people and anyone with some sort of race analysis or understanding of white supremacy, the storming of the

Capitol was inevitable. Because we read white people's behaviour, from the mundane, day-to-day racial gaslighting ("Why do we only focus on Black people, I love all people, all lives matter, we are all the human race") to the overt (calling the police on Black people whenever you can, bearing weapons on your lawn to scare protestors) whiteness is a danger to society, to us. This post-racial paradigm clearly inhibits understanding of the complex reach and structural effects of whiteness given that many found the storming of the capital surprising – and we might pause to ask what surprise does within this context and who surprise protects.

These 'surprised' liberals were unable to understand the differential treatment of the pro-Trump occupation of the Capitol by police officers in contradistinction to the protestors organizing around Black Lives Matter only months prior. Such inability to understand these occurrences demonstrate a reading of these events with the readymade categories of the post-racial that implicitly posit white people and whiteness as always good, always redemptive, always redeemed. What else could subtend the idea that white violence is a surprise and that white protestors occupying the highest symbol of national governance needed protection? The implications of this are seen when white men are acquitted for the murder of Black people or police officers not being indicted for the murder and brutalization of unarmed teens. The post-racial category does not allow us to understand these moments of racial violence as racially motivated because the latter racially motivated actions are "impossible" within the post-racial. Even when race is avowed, the specter of the post-racial imbues within these categories' normative structures of meaning, so that the white lash is read as regression, deviation, and deformation rather than ongoing iterations of the very content of whiteness itself. Thus, the post-racial recasts violent whiteness as a past that holds on against temporal progression, rather than a consistent form of white supremacist presence. If, as I have suggested, linear progress moves by

way of Black death, then far from marking an outdated or anti-modern position, the white supremacists storming the capitol are instead a focal point, the most embodied literalization, of modernity's temporal unfolding. White violence is what makes the clock tick. It is, in state of fact, the clock's very mechanics.

The need to disprove the post-racial consumes us with oscillating between articulating the 'language of difference' and articulating the political ontology of race more broadly. In so doing, we necessarily cathect the structure of race in our efforts to oppose it. Thus, the dominant response to post-racism, which is done through making clear the brutal facticity of race, also often accidentally serves to consolidate race even as there exists a desire to contest it. The question then arises as to how was the conclusion of a post-racial ever arrived at, what metrics suggested such a state? And given the failure of the post-racial, is it really where we want to go? A post-racial society? What happens when we accept the post-racial as a paradigm worth engaging – which happens in our tacit consent to debate it – and how does this inflect the political imaginaries with which we engage race?

Some of the evidence that seemingly suggested we were post-racial was the notion of Black progress and beyond the abolition of slavery, the segregation of schools, Jim Crow laws, and civil rights. Black progress became the evidence, the *sin qua non* that signaled we lived in a post-racial society. Instead of people measuring the post-racial in relation to racism and anti-Black sentiments – the more anti-Black behavior there is, the less likely we are post-racial – the measure became Black progress – the Blacks seem to be doing well, they have access to jobs, to exceptional positions that were only set up for white people, therefore, anti-Blackness is not the reason for the state-sanctioned murder of Black people; it must be something else becomes the

narrative. This is the opposite position of what Hartman has described as the "burdened individuality of freedom" that emerges out of Emancipation. She calls it burdened individuality:

“in order to underline the double bind of freedom: being freed from slavery and free of resources, emancipated and subordinated, self-possessed and indebted, equal an inferior, liberated and encumbered, sovereign and dominated, citizen and subject” (p. 117).

Thus, although we know most Black people were double burdened by the political and symbolic economy of Emancipation, the valences of this freedom that could contribute towards progress become over-represented and divorced from the material conditions and their constraints. Thus, the Black position is imagined as liberated but not encumbered, sovereign but not dominated, citizen but not subject, and the exceptional cases that mark progress become over-represented so that the political economy of antiblack violence that continues to operate is rendered invisible and imperceptible.¹⁰

The solution to the problem of Black progress was solved by white people supposedly letting us progress. This so-called progression then silences or transitions white rage from being about Black people and our being Black to our actions. I recall here the notion that the master gets upset when he realizes his happiness and power relies on the labour of the slave. It is not the slave himself that angers the master but the slave's labour. Similarly, white people claim not to be triggered by Black people themselves (“I have Black friends”) but are triggered by our actions (“why didn't he just comply?”). But we know this claim is a fallacy; it is not just our actions, because there is no phenomenological nor even noumenal capacity to disentangle Black being

¹⁰ Ironically, this emphasis on a difference in material conditions between Black people as a marker for success or progress is also not historically novel – there have always been differing material conditions between Black people – including between enslaved Black people. This move then disavows what is central to the violence of antiblackness, a structure of terror, and narrows its imagination of it do a condition of exploitation under a particular capitalist economic system.

from Black people. In Fanon's famous invocation of "Look! A negro!," Fanon makes clear that the gaze reduces and captures his being. Everything he is and does is reducible to that carceral regard.

Returning to Trouillot for a moment, I suggest that what we are witnessing is an unthinkable present, one which creates blockages that impede our conceptualizations of what is taking place. In the meantime, neither white people nor Black people can fully conceptualize what is taking place. The ego prevents an awakening to reality through a misappropriation of cathexis, where both groups invest the energy of their egos in response to needs arising from within the id – those of safety and stability. This causes people to accept the narrative that everything is okay, that things have progressed to a degree that is palatable but different in perspective to both groups. There is an obvious contradiction between racism and Black progress, where if racism still existed Black people could not "progress;" therefore an erasure is created. What I am getting at is how, in line with Saidiya Hartman's work in *Scenes*, progress itself presupposes antiblackness. Returning to the introduction, all Black Time is 1441, and each

year that follows is made from the horrors, terror, and violence of that year. It is the locking of Black people within 1441 that allows for the progress of the modern and capitalist structure unfold. I make intelligible the current wave of violence against Black people by working through this blockage. This is to say that I am interested, at the current juncture, to explain further that modernity continues to fail us – or rather, that modernity itself is the problem precisely because its success, its temporal progression, is predicated on Black death. Even though things should change, even though liberal humanist discourse maintains that it is invested in this change, that it will come with Time, it does not.

History is used to explain the present (Bhabha, 1984; Davis, 1983; Fanon, 1952; Hartman, 1998). Stretching these theories in relation to Black progress and white rage orients the reader to focus on contemporary moment as a form of melancholic ruins, as postulated by Bogue (2012). Thus, the white subject too is locked within a particular kind of melancholy, because in losing the unchallenged claim to domination that the libidinal economy positing Blackness-as-inferiority offers, their own subjectivity is shattered.

This process necessarily operates on a libidinal level, as the white subject is subjected to the Hegelian unhappy consciousness. This is to say then that there is something about the idea of Black progress that poses a particular threat to whiteness and white psychic imaginaries, but how do we un-erase race to account for the violence we see today? Part of the argument is that we do not live in a post-racial society, and the other part is that there is a way in which Blackness – which was never meant to be accounted for in modernity as human (and still is not), even as it is avowed (by some) to belong to that category – forecloses possibilities of Blackness while producing the double bind of whiteness. This double bind marks its ongoing interpellation into the category of the human as Man, which presupposes Black exclusions even in and as liberal gestures to the universal paradoxically claim to include the Black in our contemporary moment. Thus, whiteness must reckon with the ways Black people may occupy the space of whiteness, if not materially then phantasmagorically. The myth of Black progress (Pinkney, 1984), particularly as it is taken up within white psychic imaginaries, which indicates that Black people are reaching whiteness, produces a rupture, where Black progress ruptures whiteness because Blackness, according to antiblack racial logics, taints whiteness. Black people cannot be in power in the same way white people are because this is a disruption of the whole project of modernity – at least at the level of modernity’s fantasy. Therefore, the presence of Black

imperialists like Barack Obama inspires such rage in white reactionary subjects, despite the material, anti-black violence of his politics. That Obama and Harris, the Black democratic elite that they represent, are paradigmatically and politically the agents of a white supremacist order is irrelevant to the construction of the fantasy as it is imagined at the libidinal level. I am not working through this problem, issue/question, in any way, to recover Black imperialists or argue for the politics latent within their 'representative' positions. Rather, I am arguing that in the paranoiac response to their presences, the scale of libidinal investments into white domination are revealed precisely because these Black politicians are the agents of white supremacist interests.

Chapter Three - “I ran from it and still was in it”: Melancholia of the Pan-African

Movement

Pan African Movement

If Pan-Africanism has been animated by the desire for a “unity of sentiment and action” between Africa and the diaspora, a return to ancestral land, an abiding nostalgia, and unmet and perhaps unrealizable longings for solidarity throughout the black world, then this desire has been engendered by captivity, deportation, and death (Saidiya Hartman, 2002, p.759).

This ethnography charts the role of slavery and race through two areas: a national historical narrative of a redemptive Pan-Africanism and the claim to racial and cultural kinship with diaspora Blacks. How is this state-sponsored Pan-Africanism different from earlier forms, what does it mean for transatlantic Black dialogue, and in what ways does it impact the Ghanaian social and political fields? (Jemima Pierre, 2013, p.128)

In this chapter, I identify a melancholy that manifests itself both on the level of nation and individual as it is expressed in the deployments of pan-Africanism for heritage tourism in Ghana. I introduce and take up melancholy and loss as a lens to unpack the Pan-African trajectory, with an attempt to locate projects of return and repatriation, to think about it as a “new moment in history” which sees “the transfer to collectivities attributes that [the] dominant North Atlantic discourse had hitherto assigned to the liberal subject” (Trouillot, 2000, p. 181). Specifically, I trace the most recent endeavour of Ghana, *Beyond the Return to the Joseph Project*, which relies on the melancholy and loss from the pan-African movement to position itself in the heart and minds of diaspora. I am further interested in Trouillot’s (2000) concept of

the “soul of nations”, which I extend to speak of the soul of the 1960 Pan-African collectivity. The Pan-African soul seeks apology, it seeks redress through recognition as a repatriated, continental African subject; however, there is an inability for it to be fulfilled because of the nature of the subjects involved (Trouillot, 2000, p.184). This Pan-African soul that seeks apology and redress will be explored in this section. By exploring the movement with melancholy as my lens, I attempt to make a contemporary connection. Trouillot notes this wave (of collective apologies) is “unique to our times, which both reveal and impel new stakes in the construction of collective subject positions and identities and therefore new takes on historicity” (2000, p. 173). Subsequently, Falola and Essien (2014) argue “the way in which African institutions are *mobilizing returnees* ... offer a new alternative approach for exploring Pan-African ideology in the 21st century” (2014, p. 2). Eventually, I contend that included in this alternative approach needs to be an understanding of what I am calling the melancholic Pan-African soul to open space to imagine new projects of Black liberation.

With an understanding that there are various formations of Pan-Africanism, from Garveyism to Rastafarism and everything in between, I am concerned with the emerging relationship to Africa that is ultimately at the heart of all Pan-African ideology that happens through the pan-African congresses. The Pan-African movement that started with the Pan-African congresses (which I trace in this chapter), historically and conceptually is an endeavor of the diaspora (Kanu, 2013 p.113). I recognize that there were Africans who were heavily involved in the movement, however this was after 5 congresses (Kanu, 2013 p.113). Continental African participation does not negate the ways in which the overall conceptualization and organization of the Pan-African movement has been seeded from a diasporic intellectual

tradition¹¹. The Pan-African movement and its ideas of African/Black unity are necessitated within a desire to reconcile home amongst dispersed peoples. By postulating the unity under a notion of Africa, Pan-Africanism began the process of grieving the fragmented African, that is the African who was made fragmented by trans-Atlantic slavery. Kanu notes

The Pan-African movement, as a unique cultural and spiritual movement for the promotion of the black race, was dedicated to the establishment of independence for African nations and cultivating unity among black people throughout the world. It encourages the solidarity of Africans, based on the belief that unity is vital to economic, social, and political growth and that the fates of all African peoples and countries are intertwined, they share not merely a common history but common destiny. (Kanu, 2013 p.113

For me, pan-Africanism grapples with the tension between grief and grievance, looking for grievance in the contemporary moment to deal with the grief of African people both on the continent and in the diaspora- through the projects of apology, repatriation, and ritualized forms of memorialization which I will further explore in the pages to follow. To do this, the notion/language of “African” has been deployed as a capacious identifier that homogenizes those internal to the continent and travels far beyond it to encapsulate any member of the Black diaspora. For this deployment, the assumption is that being of Africa or African descent would be sufficient for organizing and for action under the umbrella of African unity. Earlier, I noted the notion “all blacks are slaves, and all slaves are black” (Amponsah, 2018) and how that underpins the African diasporic relationship. I argue that the relationship that is at the heart of

¹¹ African leaders (Kwame Nkrumah, Jomo Kenyatta) who were apart of the congress, attending the 6th conference, were educated in the West which influenced their organizing of and how they were thinking about Pan-Africanism.

Pan-African movements, is rooted in melancholy and attempt to create and/or constitute a revolutionary self through an “imagined” relationship of Africa and Blackness, which simultaneously disavowed (even when it may have named) the newly formed “Black” that came out of the Middle Passage, colonialism and the New Worlds.¹² By disavowed, I do not mean that it failed to name the break of racial slavery, but rather that, even in naming it, this naming served to obscure its ontological structure in a global structure of white supremacy. To be clear then, my point is not that Pan-Africanists did not elaborate Middle Passage as a violence for Black people in the New World, but rather instead that through recourse to the language of return, they ultimately disavowed the foundational rupture that inaugurates the creation of the Black and thus leaving unaddressed the premise of the enslaved position. These premises are outlined by Hartman in *Lose Your Mother* and *The Time of Slavery* (2002). In both works, she demonstrates the contradictions of return. In the absence of the mother (kin, country), “the dungeon was a womb” (Hartman, 2006, p. 111), and so the Black/slave marks a new type of human, one for whom nation is an unavailability. To say it differently, and perhaps to shift the scale, if, as Dionne Brand contends, racial slavery marks “a tear in the world... a rupture in history” (Brand, 2001, pp. 4-5), then there is no capacity for Pan-African return to address the violence of antiblackness. The return identifies the empirical transit as the act of violation rather than the “loss of any self that could experience such loss [of language, lineage, land, or labor]” (Sexton, 2016, p. 591). Indeed, this is precisely why Brand states unequivocally: “the sense of return in the Door of No Return is one of irrecoverable losses of those very things which make returning possible” (Brand, 2001, p. 24). Thus, as I will expand throughout this chapter, modern day Pan-

¹² Remember here that, along with the Afro-pessimists, I theorize Blackness as coterminous with slaveness. Without racial slavery, there is no global libidinal economy prefiguring Black death and positioning the Black as the expression of (social) death.

Africanism, grounded in capitalist desires that exploit feelings of home, return and loss can offer no reprieve for the subject who cannot bear Africa as lost.

For the Pan-African subject, a return to the homeland, the “lost mother” is found. Pan-Africanists (see the Pan-African movement conferences as described below) proposed that all Black people had an inherent connection to Africa, naturalizing the continent as homeland and obscuring the fact that, as Hartman demonstrates, it is the dungeon, not the homeland, that is the birthplace of Blackness. Thus, the Pan-African soul was attached to Africa, needing “Africa” to exist. I argue that pan-Africanists could not see themselves- as Black without the recuperation of Africa. Legum writes about the movement, “to have lost their homeland [...] with this loss came persecution, inferiority, discrimination and dependency. It involved a loss of independence, freedom and dignity. To regain dignity is the mainspring of all their actions” (Legum, 1965, p.15).

What does this theoretical provocation mean within the context of Pan-Africanism as a political movement? The identity established through Pan-Africanism has given and continues to provide Black people, regardless of spatial and temporal locations, the possibility of a common identity that has political implications, such as the right to return or make claims to citizenship in African states such as Ghana. Today, such post-colonial interactions of Blackness continue to drive Pan-Africanism into our present, prompting us to think about the ways in which the afterlives of slavery are manifesting themselves through the political and the sovereign. The occupation regarding Pan-Africanism among Black people stems from the intertwined roots of Black Optimism and Afro-pessimism – that Africa is the site of resistance and reclamation and that Africa is seen as the site of where social death began and was extended through the Middle Passage. Or, to say it differently, that Africa is both a site of cathexis and fixation while also

marking an irreparable ontological wounding. What does it mean to cathect a loss so profound it marks the impossibility of return (Brand, 2001), recovery, or reparability (Hartman, 2006)? What does it mean to exist within the psychic space Hartman describes when she states: “My pessimism was stronger than my longing. In my heart I knew my losses were irreparable” (Hartman, 2008, p. 54)? Or, more simply, what structures of melancholia subtend the subject who has always and already lost their mother? Anna Cheng argues that “[i]n the landscape of grief, the boundary between subject and object, the loser and the thing lost, poses a constant problem” (Cheng, 2000). In the landscape of grief there is no clear direction where best to invest energy to resolve that grief. In this chapter, I am grappling with spatiality and introspection and their relations to the legacies of enslavement and diaspora. My point of inquiry suggests that the space created by the violent removal of African peoples through the trans-Atlantic slave trade “poses a constant problem” (Cheng, 2000) both economically, psychically, and socially.

Thus, in this chapter, I identify a melancholy that manifests itself both on the level of nation and individual. I focus on ‘The Joseph Project’ (2007) and ‘The Year of Return’ (2019) both located in Ghana; and Saidiya Hartman’s text *Lose Your Mother* and *The Time for Slavery*, as sites of inquiry to examine how Ghana and Hartman, are trying to solve Black problems, trying to redress the problem of belonging. Through the rupture of the Atlantic, Africa - as it existed - was lost to Black people, those who were enslaved and their descendants, and since then, there has been a need and impossibility to recuperate this loss. The mediation on the problem that both Ghana and Hartman offer are embedded within a complex political ontology that poses a structure of incommunicability – which is the breach of the Atlantic and the ‘break in the world’ it produces. Or, as Jared Sexton famously articulates, if “[s]lavery is not a loss that the self-experiences – of language, lineage, land, or labor – but rather the loss of any self that

could experience such loss” (p. 591), then how might Ghana and Hartman ever arrive at a notion of how to belong in political community with one another?

Conjuncting loss and melancholia, the loss ensured that the Pan-African libido (libido, as it is described by Freud) was attached to Africa and needed Africa for the ego to exist— meaning Pan-Africanists and members of the African diaspora could not see themselves- as Black without the recuperation of Africa and the narratives that connected us to each other as Legum reminds us the “intellectual superstructure [of Pan-Africanism] has meaning only if one constantly reminds oneself that at its roots lie these deep feelings of dispossession, oppression, persecution and rejection” (1965, p.15). Legum (1965) goes on further to refer to the position of members as “the alien and the exile” and explains

“the emotional impetus for its concepts [pan-Africanism] flowed from the experience of a widely-dispersed people—those of African stock—who felt themselves either physically through dispossession or slavery, or socially, economically, politically and mentally through colonialism, to have lost their homeland; with this loss came persecution, inferiority, discrimination and dependency. It involved a loss of independence, freedom and dignity. To regain dignity is the mainspring of all their actions” (Legum, 1965, p.15)

Further, there was an idea/ideal that post-colonial Africa, independent from its colonizers, would be able to recuperate the fragmented “slave-babies” (Hartman, 2007), through notions of citizenship and repatriation. Michelle Ann Stephens (2005) notes “in Garvey’s black transnational versus national imaginary, where not just the community but the state itself is still only virtual and imagined, the Black state becomes a fetish, the object of desire” (p. 83). If we think about the Black state and therefore Blackness as an object of desire, that is fetishized, attached to the Pan-African/diasporic libido, it allows us to further stretch the work of Hartman.

In her *Lose Your Mother* (2006), she argues that it is impossible to go back to a place before slavery or a time. She writes, “[t]here was no going back to a time or place before slavery, and going beyond it, no doubt would entail nothing less momentous than yet another revolution” (p. 210). As one of the major theorists who articulate Afro-pessimism, Hartman prompts thinking about Black geography that is centered on a set of imaginaries and melancholic connections to Africa. It is through this space that I attempt to unpack Black introspection and cathexis in a way that allows us to think of a new liberation project. Black people are being mobilized through concrete national projects, grounded in both commonalities of African identities/fantasies and through the conceptualization of multiple, competing diasporic identities. In so doing, I argue that there is the possibility of creating the space for individuals to exist both here and there, as this and as that without the challenge of locating and placing an emphasis on distant and temporal self, without being trapped in Time. Thus, thinking of the possibilities for being when we no longer orient ourselves to the liberal vocabularies and temporalities of redress, a discourse that is always unavailable to Blacks, and instead identify new possibilities to “stay in the wake” (Sharpe, 2016) or in the meantime.

Historian and anthropologist, Michel-Rolph Trouillot in *Abortive Rituals: Historical Apologies in the Global Era* (2000) takes up the ongoing trend of collective apologies. While Trouillot’s concern is with “the historical and conceptual constituents” (p. 173) of the trend of collective apologies, and how this trend is abortive, the way he uses time, history and transition provides a useful framework for the “meantime” within the context of repatriation and redress. I will spend some time here analyzing Trouillot’s process with the intention of borrowing the aspects that speak to ways we use moments, actions, and ritual to mark temporal shifts, specifically when a wrong has been identified.

In *Abortive Rituals: Historical Apologies in the Global Era*, Trouillot (idem) notes:

[C]ollective historical apologies are increasing worldwide. Navigating ambiguously between moral, historical and legal grounds, these rituals of apology create pastness by connecting existing collectivities to past ones that either perpetuated wrongs or were victimized. This assumed continuity projects onto these collectivities aspects of ahistorical, liberal subjects, who must now not only address historical wrongs in pragmatic terms (such as compensation) but repent on the global stage. (p. 171)

Trouillot further notes,

[a]s transformative rituals, apologies always involve Time... they mark a temporal transition: wrong done in time marked as a past is recognized as such, and this acknowledgment itself creates or verifies a new temporal plane and a present oriented toward the future...[m]y apology sets a temporal marker between those things and the past which they belong- and a present characterized by my new relation to my interlocutor.” (2000, p. 147).

Trouillot is interested in the ways particular actions hold the power of movement and transition: in this case, how apologies (noun), always function to address (verb) historical wrongs in that they entail movement. Again, he states “[i]t (apologies) creates a new era: I repent, let us now be friends. Or it registers that a new era has indeed been launched.” Indeed, for Trouillot apologies become important markers of future and of past. “In short, apologies are premised on the assumption that the situation to which they refer does not or should not obtain in the present of the actors involved. In claiming a past, they create pastness” (p. 174). In claiming pastness as in the past and therefore a world with no material consequences in the present, the possibility for

transformation is denied. In this way, we lose the capacity to understand the contents of the past as ‘an event that is ongoing’ (Sharpe p. 20). “Thus collective apologies are meant not to succeed—not because of the possible hypocrisy of some of the actors but because their very conditions of emergence deny the possibility of a transformation. They are abortive rituals” (Trouillot, 2000 p. 185). The conditions of emergence that deny the possibility of transformation are a key component to Trouillot’s argument as it is to mine. The conditions of emergence ask us to think about what needs to happen, who needs to be involved, how they need to be involved for, in this case, apologies to be meaningful. When trying to solve the problem of race through the utilization of future thinking we “deny the possibility of transformation” since transformation is only meaningful if it occurs in the present. The conditions of emergence are at once, outside of Time, that universal notion that reconfigures the current structures of violence. The moment we talk about race, melancholy, and ego we are confronted with another question: what does a meaningful reckoning look like in the present? In this sense, a query about Time is key to thinking about reckoning, race, melancholy, and ego. If any kind of reckoning about enslavement will arrive at a later moment, sometime in the future misses the struggles that are ongoing in the “the meantime.” Without a focus on the meantime, the practices of refusal, insurgencies, idleness, protests, shirking become “fallen from view” (Hartman 2020). The violence of the state which presents itself “as a punishing force, a force for the brutal containment and violation and regulation and eradication of Black life” is erased (Hartman 2020) and in the process, the radical thought expressed in the meantime itself is eradicated.

Since the early 90’s, some West African countries, the main hub of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, have/are participating in the collective historical apology wave that Trouillot points to as stated above. To name a few, Benin, Ghana, Nigeria, and Cameroon, are currently

undergoing processes of reconciliation through heritage tourism with an emphasis on return and remembrance. Benin, Nigeria, and Cameroons' programs have mostly consisted of heritage tours tracing slave routes and touring and reconstructing historical structures connected to the trade while Ghana's program is more elaborate in scope with an invite of Return positioned to diasporic African peoples. These nations are apologizing, on behalf of their ancestors, to a diaspora that was sold to the West, with the hope that such an apology will generate possibilities of connectivity and projects geared towards "freedom and liberation", to connect with those who believe in notions of Black optimism and resistance; but mainly to inspire new forms of capital investment for those invested in apology. Of the Joseph project, Jemima Pierre (2013) notes, The Joseph Project seemed to be an effort by that administration [NPP] to puts its own stamp on a long-established state project of deploying Pan-Africanism and the politics of diaspora kinship to harness resources for development (p. 131). This becomes especially true because "NPP has historically been known as ideologically opposed to the ideals of Pan-Africanism" (Pierre, p.132). Taking these reflections into consideration, we see that Ghana is selectively utilizing the notions of Pan-Africanism that support their neo-liberal endeavours.

Within these projects of reconciliation lie many tensions that need to be unpacked. One of them is the idea that Africa was lost as a homeland to the diaspora which now needs to be recovered and returned to. In expressing the extent to which heritage tours emphasize these ideas, Hartman makes vivid how recovery and return is centered in these experiences with the following:

'You are back!' We are encouraged to see ourselves as the vessels for the captive's return; we stand in the ancestor's shoes. We imaginatively witness the crimes of the past

and cry for those victimized—the enslaved, the ravaged, and the slaughtered... propel(ing) us to make recourse to stories of origin, unshakable explanatory narratives, and sites of injury—the land where our blood has been spilt—as if some essential ingredient of ourselves can be recovered at the castles and forts that dot the western coast of Africa, (Hartman 2002, p. 767)

In the above text, Hartman puts pressure on the question of recovery and thus, on the question of a linear and universal notion of Time. It puts pressures on how one goes back and of course, remembers “origin stories” and “sites of injury” to recover some “essential ingredient of ourselves” (Hartman 2002, p. 767). In hearing an apology from the Ghanaian state about the violence that ensured slavery does not erase the geopolitical possessive investment in white supremacy or its ongoing expressions in the form of recolonization or violences against Africa and diaspora, as [t]he state’s deployment of Pan-Africanist history and politics occurs within the context of the liberalization of the global political economy and the attendant restructuring of Ghana’s economic policies from the early 1980s. The potential economic benefits of heritage tourism— and the late entry of African nations into this arena of wealth generation—are also important factors to consider in this analysis (Pierre 127).

A divestment from these structures also demands divestments from the dominant structures of Time which divest Black people of wealth, resources and ultimately life through carceral worlds. And yet, this ongoing investment in the white supremacist structures and its structural relation of language and time (Agathangelou and Killian 2016; Marriott 2011) comes in the form of Ghana’s National Joseph Project. In 2007 an apology was made by the nation of Ghana to ancestors of trans-Atlantic slaves. Along with this apology came the Joseph Project – Ghana’s attempt to reconcile and provide reparations to the slave diaspora. The name of this

project is borrowed from the biblical Joseph—who was sold into slavery by his envious brothers. Ghana attempted to evoke its own Josephs (*descendants of the enslaved*) to embark on a journey of recovery, reconciliation and (re) connection. Simultaneously, there was also an appeal by the Ghanaian state to the responsibility these ancestors have to their former “homeland”, to return, invest, and support the brothers and sisters who once “sold them” into slavery. The Joseph Project and the Year of Return and other heritage tourism endeavours are made possible by mobilising and appropriating certain narratives established through the struggles and Pan-African movements. This becomes evident if we examine the leaning and focus of the current projects on diaspora rather than on continental African unity. Kwame Nkrumah’s Pan-Africanism as described in *Africa Unites* is interested in the unification of independent African countries and not their relation to the West. However, this is not the “version” of pan-Africanism that Ghana is currently interested in. As noted by Pierre and Shipley (2003)

Since the concern with “development” is a key feature of postcolonial Africa’s reality, we can also read the Ghanaian government’s deployment of Pan-Africanism as one of the ways in which it is working to address its economic marginalization in an unequal and extremely racialized global political terrain. Indeed, the Pan-African movement itself was, and continues to be, “structured by the history of global racial inequality (127).

Ghana is not interested in Nkrumah’s Pan-Africanism because this is not the version of Pan-Africanism that propels Ghana into modernity or achieves their capitalist goals.

These heritage tourism endeavours rely on bringing back Time or bringing us back to a time to affectively conjure feelings of liberation that are then commodified, bringing Ghana into modernity, modern and capitalism’s Time. Fragments of the Pan-African movement are then

moved into the present, as part of this process. While, this is supposed to inspire joy, return, and redress, this is not done without the notion of the slave in the neoliberal restructurings (Pierre 2012). They are part and parcel of each other.

Re-collecting the Pan-African Movement

The first Pan-African congress took place in 1901 in London and had “no deep roots in Africa itself...” stated Dubois as he addressed the attendees (Padmore, 1963, p. 13). Of the fifty-seven delegates from fifteen countries, nine were African with a total of twelve delegates. The other delegates came from the United States, which sent sixteen, and the West Indies with twenty-one (Padmore, 1963, p. 15)¹³. In the first congress, there was an over-representation of English-speaking diasporic leaders which “lead[s] one to ask why Pan-Africanism was to remain principally a matter for people living in the English-speaking areas” (Geiss, 1974 p. 12). Based solely on the fact that the majority of those who attended the conference were from the United States and the West Indies, one can conclude that the conversations at that time were not centralized around the experiences of continental Africans or the capture of slaves within Africa itself and their forced displacements. There is also a clear connection to the British empire, which explains why Francophone Africans were not central to this conversation either.

Mathurin (1976) describes the opening address of the congress saying, - “Walters opening address, described as a ‘model of forensic deliverance’ dealt thoughtfully with ‘the trials and tribulations of the colored race in America’” and set the tone of the conference (1976, p. 63). The conference was then followed by the first paper which C.W French of St. Kitts read. It

¹³ Here, it is interesting to note that even when African thinkers such as Kwame Nkrumah began writing and thinking about Pan-Africanism, it was not about a global “Africanness” or Blackness, but more so the unity of the continent of Africa as we see in *Africa Must Unite* (1963). While Nkrumah did participate in the later congresses, he took these ideas to Africa in an attempt to mobilize Independent African nations.

claimed, “equality for Blacks” asking also for “conditions favouring a High Standard of African Humanity” (1974, p. 64). This paper exposed the inequities accorded to Black people living under British rule and demanded equality for Black people (1976, p. 64). The opening address and the first paper are clear indications that delegates were addressing the need for the emergence of a Pan-African movement to address the conditions of Black people, directly connecting these conditions to people of African descent living outside the continent while also living under colonial rule. To address these concerns, the congresses, one through five, produced and re-produced a list of demands, demands that can be captured by a sentiment expressed by DuBois that “the negro race of Africa [be given a chance to] develop unhindered by other races” (Padmore, 1976, p.15).

Sylvester Williams a West Indian, Trinidadian is credited with starting the Pan-African movement (Padmore, 1976, p. 13). DuBois supported this movement by arguing that there is a need for one Africa. In his words, “[t]he idea of one Africa uniting the thought and ideals of the dark continent belongs to the twentieth century and stems naturally from the West Indies and the United States. Here various groups of Africans, quite separate in origin, became so united in experience, and so exposed to the impact of a new culture, that they began to think about Africa as one idea and one land” (Padmore, 1976, p. 14). Dubois was referring to the ways the experience of racial inferiority was key in uniting Africans from the US and the Caribbean because it was the common experience of Africans in the diaspora, something that was further expressed by Aimé Césaire (Baldwin, 1998) at the congress of Black writers. He writes,

[n]o one is suggesting that there is such a thing as a pure race, or that culture is a racial product. We are not Negroes by our own desire, but, in effect, because of Europe. What unites all Negroes is the injustices they have suffered at European hands” (p. 168).

These injustices were the basis for African unification. Yet, and at this conference there were questions about what unites Africans with the African diaspora. In the contemporary moment, Minabere Ibelema (2014) asks “[t]here are questions as to whether, indeed, Africans and the African Diaspora have enough in common to make Pan-Africanism a meaningful ideology or basis for policy and action” (p. 52). This same concern was expressed by James Baldwin (1998) when he asks, “what is a culture?” He writes,

...it was a question which was helplessly at the mercy of another one. And the second question was this: is it possible to describe as culture what may simply be, after all, a history of oppression? That is, is this history and these present facts which involve so many millions of people who are divided from each other by so many million miles of the globe which operates and has operated under such different conditions, to such different sub- histories, problems, traditions, possibilities, aspirations, assumptions, languages, hybrids—is this history enough to have made of earth’s black populations anything that can legitimately be described as a culture? For what, beyond the fact that all black men at one time or another left Africa or have remained there, do they really have in common? (p. 152).

Baldwin answers these questions. He argues that there is something common and it is the “precarious” and “unutterably painful relation to the white world” and the need for remaking their own vision of the world rather than taking for granted white supremacy’s vision. In his own words,

What they held in common was their precarious, their unutterably painful relation to the white world. What they held in common was the necessity to remake the world in their

own image, to impose this image on the world, and no longer be controlled by the vision of the world and of themselves held by other people. What in sum black men held in common was their ache to come into the world as men, and this ache united people who might otherwise have been divided as to what a man should be (p. 153 underlined emphasis mine).

In the above text Baldwin highlights that there are connections. For him, a pivotal aspect of this commonality is the desire, the “ache” as he writes for “black men” to “come into the world as men” instead of divided as “what a man should be.” Baldwin in a sense draws on the radical tradition of Black thought, starting with the Haitian revolution which highlights Blacks are men. The division as to what men should be seems to be secondary in his writing.

The vision held with the Pan Africanist movement was of an African continental family or a stable race standing shoulder to shoulder to those born by captives, exiles, and orphans and who dwelled in the aftermath of the Atlantic slave trade (Hartman 2007, p. 6). Racial solidarity was expressed in the language of kinship because it both evidenced the wound and attempts to heal it. The slave and the ex-slave wanted what had been severed: kin.

In locating the Pan-African movement and its ideas of African unity in the diaspora allows us to trace this intellectual tradition as belonging to the diaspora. Thus, and through this genealogy, I suggest that melancholy about a lost object, site and time is a collation of the violent attempt of White Supremacy’s desire to position the diaspora in its Temporal structures of modernity, an origin (a beginning time), a present (the attempts to fix a past in an origin story of enslavement and in Africa) and the future (i.e., to redress once and for all the demands and claims of the African diaspora). Perhaps, one can say here that the attempts to do so by the

Ghanaian state are cathectically fixed in this structure which trumpets desire and loss without ever grappling with what this “injury” entails in the meantime and the resources to redress it.

In reading some of the key authors who grappled with Pan-Africanism during the congresses (Legum, DuBois, Walters) and its movement/s to disrupt these structures of violence we find the resources to challenge this cathectic fixation. Pan-Africanism then is a movement to gain one’s bearings in a structure that restructures itself displacing these losses. The presentation of Africa or homeland as a ‘lost object’ in the Pan-Africanist movement has the most crucial position as its presence can make possible the “restoration of the ego” or dignity as Legum tells us. The ideas of a global family, as Hartman tells us, was “born by captives, by exiles, and orphans.” It was born by those who had/have a standpoint of no standpoint, as Moten and Harney might put it.

In this search though one cannot ignore or erase the political economy of trans-Atlantic slavery. The erection of a capitalist structure and the extraction of the raw materials and life of African slaves now restructured in the *configuration of capitalism* is central to the intellectual movement of Pan-Africanism; however, again I am reminded of Legum’s thought that the “intellectual superstructure has meaning only if one constantly reminds oneself that at its roots lie these deep feelings of dispossession, oppression, persecution and rejection” (1965, p.15). It is the complex feelings Legum writes, that are now in the form of a global wound, that Pan-Africanism attempted to heal through kinship. This would manifest itself in the diasporic imagination through a global imagining/production of what it meant to be both Black and belong to Africa, thus producing a performance of race in the global sense and on the global scale (Stephens, 2005, p. 80). The global performance of race could only be successful through the commonality which was Africa. It needed Africa to be this site and in a way that moved past

national boundaries/nationalisms. Stephens (2005) makes this clear in her analysis of Marcus Garvey, stating,

Garvey's performances of black nationality were always diasporic, constituted out of the race's desire for a future black nation. Those performances would then require both the invention of a cohesive race and vision of that imagined community's potential for future statehood (p. 82).

This, I suggest is not only true of Garveyism but is at the heart of Pan-African ideology which informs many Pan-African movements – an ideology that imagined and created a sense of historical commonalities, present-day cohesiveness and future co-operation rooted in Africa, and so, as I argue, invests in a particular fixation on future-ness that occludes the possibilities latent within the meantime and reconsolidates race as a structure even as it seeks to redress it.

It is the organizing out of this commonality that I suggest produces melancholy, an organizing that we can understand as cathexis, a fixation on the notion of recuperation through Africa. Of course, the painful irony of this fixation is that Africa is treated as the site of recuperation through the Pan-Africanist discourse when it is, to paraphrase Dionne Brand's words, the site of the wound (A Map to the Door of No Return). To mobilize out of painful relation to the white world which included the loss of Africa, forced Pan-Africanists to seek Africa again, as a kind of Black operation. To imagine a world where their relationship to Africa could be restored in a particular way or where the desire for Africa would/could be made real. Stephens (2005) states, "it is in this narrative and global vision of the race that the desire for the state can be seen as fetishistic, with a state itself becoming a fetish, symbolized in the image of the masculine, phallogentric male sovereign" (p. 82). The state was constructed as an imagined

object of desire for the African diaspora, invested in the freedom that Africa seemed to offer, therefore producing a structure of cathection toward Africa. However, as quoted by hooks “we must not confuse cathecting with loving”. Cathecting is rooted purely in an investment, while love is about will, which implies choice (hooks, 2000 p. 5). If Pan-Africanists needed Africa, that does not speak to choice necessarily. This need is guided by a notion of a relationship of force born out of a drive to return to the site of loss. Such a return may mean the possible inauguration of a new sociality under the sign of that loss which may restore what has been taken. The love may happen, if the investment is materialized, but I suggest, the investment into Africa can never materialize. hooks notes “we all know how often individuals feeling connected to someone through the process of cathecting insist that they love the other person even if they are hurting or neglecting them” (p. 5). Cathection is at the root of heritage tourism. Both inviters (Ghanaian state) and invitees (returnees) are cathecting one another. The Ghanaian state looks to diaspora, to returnees as an investment opportunity and are willing to give parts of Ghana (citizenship, land, opportunities) to benefit from this relationship. Invitees (diaspora) give their resources in exchange for homeland. I read this relationship in this way to bring light to the harm that is being overlooked for this relationship to exist. If invitees feel like Ghana owes them, one must ask who is paying that debt? If Ghana is “using” returnees, how is that manifesting at their expense or at the expense of others? Here I think about how more and more local Ghanaians are moving out of Accra due to the cost-of-living skyrocketing. Talking to a local friend, she noted ‘the year of returnees have made it impossible to live in Accra’. Social media accounts of such returnee’s brag about paying 10-15 dollars USD for hairstyles that in North America would cost over 200 dollars. They talk about having house girls and houseboys (maids, cooks, nannies), things they would never be able to afford back home in North America as the reasons why ‘they will never

leave Ghana'. "Every Black person needs to come to Ghana," they say. Ghana is desired and initially it is because of a need for homeland (the first stop for many returnees are the castles in Cape Coast and Elmina, the naming ceremonies etc.) but that desire becomes about what is possible when one has Western privileges. Of course, I am not arguing that it is because of the returnees that many Ghanaian peoples are marginalized but rather how the postcolonial state can now easily appropriate the loss and the wound as well as the radicalness of Pan Africanism all in the name of a co-constitution of a project of kinship and a white supremacist order.

The investment into slavery via heritage tourism parallels the impulse within the transatlantic slave trade that is the commodifying of Black death and trauma. The desire to reconcile through reconnection is still marked by the trappings of Black denigration; a cycle of bounding and tethering all slaves to blackness and projecting all blackness onto slaves. African elites of the postcolonial spaces hosting these venues of reconciliation are still situated as buyers and sellers of the Atlantic, commercializing apology and African heritage at the demand of Pan-Africanist consumption. Yet these transactions are limited in their capacity to transcend the markings of Blackness, as these states are left still to reckon with the ways in which enslavement has been engendered upon themselves and with the transnational entanglements of colonial powers and their idea of conquering life and stealing people. As Hartman puts it:

Yet, what does it bode for our relationship to the past when atrocity becomes a commodity for transnational consumption, and this history of defeat comes to be narrated as a story of progress and triumph? If restaging scenes of captivity and enslavement elide the distinction between sensationalism and witnessing, risk sobriety for spectacle, and occlude the violence they set out to represent; they also create a memory of what one has not witnessed. The re-enactment of the event of captivity contrives an enduring, visceral,

and personal memory of the unimaginable. These fabricated and belated encounters with slavery enable a revisiting of the past only fleetingly visible in the unabashed contemporaneity of Africa, recovering origins in the context of commercial transactions and exchanges, and experiencing the wonder and welcome made possible by the narratives of return (Hartman, 2002 p. 760)

Here, it is evident how the packaging of Diaspora within these return ventures has translated the story of race into one of love and betrayal (Saidiya Hartman, 2007, p. 6) for the palate of Pan-Africanism without its radicalness. Of a certain Pan-Africanism—that now wants to be read as tethered to capitalism.

"Facing the Future in Unity"

Pan-Africanists desired and invested in Africa in several ways. One of the ways in which this desire investment manifested was through a demand for recognized citizenship. The 7th PAC was titled *Facing the Future in Unity, Social Progress and Democracy*, (1996)¹⁴ singling a firm commitment to the idea that the Pan-African struggle was “one struggle, many fronts.” The report on the 7th PAC tells us:

The largest delegation in the congress was the North American delegation from the United States and Canada. The Canadian representatives, like the representatives from Germany, France and Britain, spoke to the increased racist attacks against Africans and the fact that African governments and the OAU are silent on this intensified racism in the

¹⁴ This was the 7th congress of 8 that were held between 1919 and 2014. The congresses were held in various places including in Africa (Dar es Salaam, Kampala, Johannesburg), in Europe (Paris, London, Brussels, Manchester) in the United States (New York City)

aftermath of the cold war. Many of the delegates raised the issue of the treatment of asylum seekers in Europe and [the] need for African governments to give dual citizenship to all Africans in the diaspora (Pan African Congress, 1994, p. 4).

The push or the need for African governments to give dual citizenship to members of the diaspora brings questions of citizenship to the forefront but also forces us to take seriously the thing that Pan-Africans felt they had lost - Africa or homeland. The fact that these diasporans felt that it is the responsibility of African governments to give dual citizenship presents the paradox of African responsibility – and points to the idea that dual citizenship conversations were brought up in relation to intensified racism being experienced outside the continent, which indicates that diasporans were looking toward Africa as a safe haven from the structures of white supremacy and racism.¹⁵ I am not saying that Pan-Africanists deny that Europeans are responsible for slavery. I am suggesting that certain readings of Pan-African ideas by returnees and how certain states are now attempting to read this violence ridding the white supremacy structures of their responsibility to understand the world in this geopolitical and transnational entangled manner. This reading allows certain claims to be made of these African countries. This reading suggests that there is a particular narrative about the diaspora’s imagined relationship to Africa that would lead them to believe that the way in which they would “belong” to Africa would be free of forms of racism/discrimination. This narrative is still relevant in the contemporary moment with many proclaiming via social media that “everyone needs to visit Ghana and experience true Black love”.

¹⁵ Ironically, it also mirrors the white supremacist project of deporting Black diasporans within the United States that followed in the wake of emancipation and the establishment and operationalization of Black African colonies.

The conclusions of the 7th PAC are what signaled “the gradual shift from Pan-African discourse to an emphasis on diaspora and reverse migrations” (Falola and Essien, 2014, p. 2) also emptying Pan Africanism of its radicalness that focused on independence, self-determination unity and liberation, highlighting that all Africans have a vision of their own beyond the vision of the modern state structure and white supremacy’s structures. The congress concluded with what can be identified as 21st century or contemporary concerns. It looked to debate and clarify its views on the continent and the present leadership in Africa, on the struggles against racism in Europe and America, impacts of GATT and NAFTA, to think about the role of youth and children, the role of women, and grapple with questions around citizenship. The conclusions of the 7th PAC allow us to see how the congresses and the Pan-African movement returned to where they started- in the diaspora and its look to newly empowered African states to make their desires real.

Melancholy and Such – the need for Africa

As previously stated, Freud (1917) notes mourning and melancholy as two different conditions. He states,

mourning is regularly a reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as country, liberty, an ideal, and so on. In some people the same influences produce melancholia instead of mourning... and we consequently suspect them of a pathological disposition (p. 243).

Through the need to acknowledge the ongoing violences of white supremacist demands the erasure of the vision and humanity of blacks, the orientation to a claim to an Africa that could rupture these violences, the Pan-African movement seemed to be orienting us to an Africa that

was lost but seemingly did not account for what the loss meant in terms of African positionality and subjectivity or what it meant to be African. Gates (2010) expresses this through Kenneth Clarke and Melville Herskovits ideas on the middle passage, stating:

they saw the middle passage as an event so traumatic as to make the people who emerged from the nightmare of the slave ships a new kind of black person, a tabula rasa, Africa erased from their culture, their traditions, their language, their belief systems, their consciousness, like chalk erases works and symbols on a chalkboard¹⁶ (p. 9)

The people who arose from the slave ships in the new worlds were a new kind of (African/Black) person. What took place on the slave ships and the middle passage— including the mixing/destruction of tribes, languages, families, the violent removal from home resulting in the inability to retrace steps, to map and find one's way home completed the process of reducing humans to chattel. Further, to this Africa was also being changed not only through slavery but also through the subsequent colonial order. As Césaire tells us, different civilizations in contact with each other is an excellent thing. Yet, for him, the constitution of and the blending of different worlds (p. 33) was more complicated. The colonial order produced the “thingification” of the colonized (p. 42), with the native left with an inferiority complex, its economies disrupted, and cultures maimed. In reading Césaire, we can see how transformation is always in the now. Transforming now, happened in the space of the slave ships, was not a future thinking.

To get at the matrix of violence I am elaborating here, I am setting a conversation with Wilderson who contradistinguishes this violence in relation to the Shoah. Wilderson states:

¹⁶ While, this reading of a "tabula rasa" of enslaved Africans has been long debunked, including by Gates more recent engagements with antiblackness and decolonization reanimates this notion of tabula rasa through Fanon (see David Marriott 2018).

“Jews went into Auschwitz and came out as Jews. Africans went into the ships and came out as Blacks. The former is a Human holocaust; the latter is a Human *and* metaphysical holocaust” (2010, p. 38). While Wilderson demonstrates the semantic field of violence that gives form to the renaming of African to Black, this semantic field of violence is sustained by a material infrastructure (passage and the ship itself) that demonstrates the terror and capacity for transformation in the meantime. It is precisely between ports – the gold cost to the New World (in the dominant transit) – that this transformation occurs. This is not to create a hierarchy of victimhood (this is not a hierarchy where anyone would want to be at the top), however to demonstrate the way “Black” and the totality of Blackness is defined by this “process”.

Africa - the constituted object by Pan-Africanists - was lost to the enslaved, maimed as described above yet there was something about the subject and its co-constitution with the violent formations of global capital and white supremacy that was not confronted or mourned because the transformation had already happened, thus creating something different. The emergence of the new subject, the Black, is produced by way of the loss of Africa, a loss that is repressed through the renaming of captivity through the racial schematic. Blackness therefore names the unnamed repression of the loss, and so masquerades as a positive identity in the world when its nominal designation only serves to veil the fissure of its emergence.

Baldwin tells us:

[w]hat had this colonial experience made of them and what were they now to do with it?

For they were all, now, whether they liked it or not, related to Europe, stained by European visions and standards, and their relation to themselves, and to each other and to their past had changed (p. 157).

Europe had stained both Africa and Africans. Africans or those turned slaves turned black were not in a relation of mutual exchange but underwent a violent terror traumatic experience that continues for 400 years. What does it mean to posit this violence as a space of shared communicability and mediation? How does envisioning recuperation from this breach disavow the profound structuring function of the breach itself in the making of the African, the Black, and the modern world? Although these questions may appear rhetorical, I am interested in how melancholia as a cultural diagnostic might illumine the pathological relation between Blackness and Africa. Melancholia, as a form of unconscious mourning that fixates on a loss beyond the subject's comprehension, scales up to provide an account of the cognitive schema of Black diasporic life more broadly.

In line with this provocation, if melancholia marks a mourning for a loss that is beyond comprehension, then how might this certain notion of Pan-Africanism emptied of its radicalness represent a desire to forget and sublimate this mourning through an avowal of its break that cannot help but constrain an understanding of its scale?

Freud (1917) notes that in melancholy the ego attaches itself or its survival to something lost that creates pathology. When one mourns the ego becomes free, unattached, or completely forgets about the thing lost (Freud, p. 245). What this attachment requires for healing or change is to "mourn properly" or linearly if you will. Yet, such a mourning is not even possible as violence and its terror like structures do not linearly function or orient themselves even if they so say. Cheng tells us, [i]n order for proper mourning to take place one would already somehow have to be over the object" (p. 245). The acceptance that the object/the "thing" is gone and cannot return is crucial to the mourning process and it is through this process that "the work of

mourning is and the ego becomes free and uninhibited again” (p. 245), “mourning implies the second killing of the object”.

There is a temporal mirroring between the political ontological critique leveraged by Afro-pessimism and the egoic structure of melancholia. Both are subtended by an absence of linear temporal movement. Just as the melancholic is stuck on the lost object beyond apprehension, unable to move on, so too does Afro-pessimism contend that blackness is, to evince Spillers, suspended in the oceanic. To be clear, this is not to imply that Afro-pessimism is, itself, subtended by a melancholic attachment, but to demonstrate how a similar temporal scaffolding might reveal a resonance between the psychic infrastructure of loss indexed by Afro-pessimism through recourse to a psychoanalytic study. However, whereas the Afro-pessimist poses no solution can resolve the problem of antiblackness, within the psychoanalytic diagnostic, melancholia merely requires a therapeutic intervention. In this way, psychoanalysis envisions a return to temporal linearity and egoic movement as the resolution of the melancholic affect. In contradistinction to this, and by placing this intervention in conversation with Afro-pessimist analyses of Pan-Africanism, I contend that Pan-Africanism is, itself, a kind of therapeutic response that functions by way of further suppressing the primal loss that slavery indexes. A Therapeutics could, within this context, only ever further repress or sublimate the impossibility of that within – particularly if it does not engage with the demands of the meantime.

I argue that Pan-Africanism did not accept the project of going back and recovering a certain “Africa” that was lost in the Middle passage; instead, they tethered and bound themselves to both Africa and the possibility of it.

Ideas of identity – to be or not to be African, ideas of citizenship and government, all relied on this notion of Africa. Of course, citizenship itself is a white structure of governance that is mapped onto Africa through colonization and remains after the period of so-called decolonization (in the desire for the post of colonialism, the structure of geopolitical fragmentation that it produced remains). Thus, not only is the desire to recover Africa unity impossible because of the enormity of the breach, but that recovery is implicitly imagined and mediated through the logics of white governmentality. What is citizenship to the subject of non-sovereignty?

Furthermore, Freud notes “[r]eality-testing has shown that the loved object no longer exists, and it proceeds to demand that all libidos shall be withdrawn from its attachment to the object” (Freud, p. 244), allowing for the libido to be invested in something else. In the way, we read Pan-Africanism we end up participating in the understandings and dominant imaginaries of a white supremacist notion of a movement that completely attaches its libido (as in desire) to Africa both as place and as a consolidated identity. We see the realization of this in a few places, however. One of the prevalent places is through the language that comes out of the Pan-African congresses. In the section “The Challenge to the Colonial Powers” in *History of the Pan-African Congress*, delegates from the fifth annual Pan-African congress write, “[y]et if the Western world is still determined to rule mankind by force, then *Africans*, as a last resort, may have to appeal to force in the effort to achieve Freedom, even if force destroys them and the world. (p. 5)” and “[w]e demand for *Black Africa* autonomy and independence, so far and no further than it is possible in this "One World" for groups and peoples to rule themselves subject to inevitable world unity and federation” and “The organisation of the Pan-African Congress has not been wholly representative, but it has far-reaching and increasing influence among Negroes and has

helped to bring persons of Negro descent in the Americas in sympathy and co-operation with their African brethren” (Padmore, 1947).

To be clear, the purpose of this reading is not to moralize over the Pan-African movement, which sought in many of its differential articulations to weave together a global diasporic politics, but instead to apprehend the impulses of its drives and thus locate within them a critique of the conditions of their emergence¹⁷. The desire to suture the wound of racial slavery by way of the deployment of imagined community is symptomatic then of both a therapeutic response to the primal loss and a simultaneous attempt at coalition building in an antiblack imperialist world. The language that was being used connected all Black people to Africa. One cannot dismiss the Pan-African movement. It provided a sense of unity and identity while allowing pan-Africanists to forward the anti-colonial agenda. However, aspects of the movement express a melancholic activity that attempted to create/constitute self through an imagined relationship of Africa and Blackness precisely because it was oriented around a loss that was structured permanently at the libidinal level (the loss of the mother). Yet, such a reading may displace the actual violence of that loss by imagining it as the abduction from Africa rather than the invention of the slave, the Black to remember Wilderson here. To be clear, in positing return to Africa as a site of political wholeness, as ‘unity’ as Nkrumah so often called it, the invention of Blackness is subsumed into a discourse of lost land and lost indigeneity. Thus, Pan-Africanism positioned Black people on both sides of the Atlantic as oriented around the same

¹⁷ While there are differences and nuances among the movement, for this project I take them to have some key commonalities that come to mind when one speaks of “Pan-Africanism.” It is also these commonalities that allow the appropriation by the Ghanaian state to deploy Pan-Africanism to diverse diasporic Black peoples and be successful in mobilization.

melancholic loss - the loss of a united Africa – with those on the west side of the Atlantic losing it to racial slavery and those on the east side losing it to colonialism.

By postulating the unity under the notion of Africa, Pan-Africanism began the process of grieving the fragmented African without necessarily allowing for grief. As Cheng (2000) describes in *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation and Hidden Grief*:

we are a nation at ease with grievance but not with grief. It is reassuring (and requires less patience, as Frost says) to believe in the efficacy of grievance in redressing grief. Yet if grievance is understood to be the social and legal articulation of grief, then it has also been incapable of addressing those aspects of grief that speak in a different language—a language that may seem inchoate because it is not fully reconcilable to the vocabulary of social formulation of ideology but that nonetheless cuts a formative pattern (p. X)

This theorization is equally important when reading and thinking about the African nation or Pan-Africanism. Though Cheng is writing specifically about the American nation, Pan-Africanism also grappled with the tension between grief and grievance, looking for grievance in the contemporary moment, to deal with the grief of African people both on the continent and in the diaspora- through the projects of apology, demands for citizenship etc. Thus, as Trouillot notes, apology becomes a form by which the past is related to and its crises symbolically relieved. To do this the notion/language of “African” was deployed. This can be seen as Cheng’s “different language” that may seem “inchoate”. This language was different, in that it sought to establish “African” as a category for both unity and rights to citizenship, yet it was inchoate because this category was assumed to be homogenous and not as indeterminate as it was. It assumed that being of Africa or of African descent would be sufficient for organizing, for

unifying and for action. However, as we see in the post-colonial moment, this language was unable to sustain a political homogeneous African people as a meaningful ideology or basis for policy and action, producing African post-colonial melancholia. Thus, continental Africans are constantly losing the imagined community of continental Africa by way of the geopolitical failures of the pan-African gesture.

Losing Mother: Pan-African realized through Ghana's Josephs'

As I said previously, in 2007, an apology was made by the nation of Ghana to ancestors of trans-Atlantic slaves. Along with this apology came the Joseph Project – Ghana's attempt to reconcile and provide reparations to the slave babies to evoke Hartman. As stated above, Ghana attempted to evoke its own Josephs to embark on a journey of reconciliation and (re) connection. The Ghanaian state articulated this project in terms of responsibility of the diaspora to its African ancestors as well as to the "homeland". Ghana made several calls to the diaspora to return, invest and support their brothers and sisters. Such collective apologies have necessarily proven to be phenomena of the 20th-21st centuries. Ghana's 2007 apology and the Joseph Project are riddled with contradictions. Not only do they conceal the historical relations which allowed the trans-Atlantic slave trade to flourish but it also appropriates the radicalness of the Pan-African movement to ensure investments.

The Joseph Project embodies post-colonial melancholy on two registers: how one remembers and how one reconstructs history. Of the past, Cheng (2000) states, it "...is not dead; it is not even past. Rather than prescribing how we as a nation might go about 'getting over' that history, it is useful to ask what it means for the social, political, and subjective beings *to grieve*" (p. 7). In its attempts to get over the past, Ghana puts forth an apology that ties together grievance with

grief, through a particular construction of the role “Ghana” played in slavery. Of course, in these constructions, “[s]pecifically, the performances work to construct a particular narrative of slavery that reclaims racial affiliation through the convergence of continental African and diaspora experience around this historical phenomenon” (Pierre, 2013, p.143). Blackness remains profoundly out of Time.

Ghana as a nation-state did not exist during the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and so Ghana projects nation-statehood backwards in this apology that consolidates the violent imposition of the nation-state on Africa. Thus, the apology naturalizes the nation-state geography of Africa, which only takes shape in the post-1884 scramble and is therefore only coherent by way of both racial slavery and imperialism. To clarify, my point is not only that Ghana’s emergence within the global international community is new (independence from the United Kingdom is achieved in 1960 – however we might understand this independence within a global political economy that continually interdicts Africa), but rather more profoundly that it serves to localize the problem both temporally and geopolitically and so ‘ratchets down the scale of abstraction’ (Wilderson, 2014) by which we should understand the violence of racial slavery, restaging the apology as a site to consolidate and naturalize nation-statehood (already an imperial structure). In other words, if racial slavery gives the modern world its very form, if Black death is the condition of possibility for liberal progress, then the emergence of Ghana as nation-state is always-already overdetermined by that sovereign narrative of anti-Black violence and white supremacy.

How can ‘Ghana’ redress the violence that preceded it and ultimately gave form to it? What would the West Coast of Africa be or mean if the violence of enslavement were interrupted? To be clear, these questions are not offered to displace accountability, but rather instead to demand an account for redress that engages the globality of the trade in captive

Africans and attends to the violation of racial slavery as a constitutive mechanism for the production and maintenance of the global world and its attendant functions on both sides of the Atlantic (both colonisation and slavery). How do Portugal, England, France, the United States, etc. contend with the material structure and afterlife of slavery in present-day Ghana, which they are inextricably bound with?

The Joseph Project is a relevant site for investigation because it brings the past to the present, but works against time in its attempt “to reconcile and unite African peoples so that their positive spirit and strengths are released in a focused manner to elevate Africa and Africans worldwide” (Ghana Tourism Authority, 2008) therefore solving a Black problem. What are the political and social implications for these so-called “Josephs”? I conclude that the Joseph Project is a materialization of Ghana’s post-colonial melancholy, which sought to mobilize/unite the diaspora. Yet the limitations of this project can be understood as part of the wave of collective apologies that Trouillot (2000) deems abortive, stating of the apologies, “they are meant not to succeed” (p. 185). For Trouillot, collective apologies rooted in past wrongdoings are unable to produce substantive transformation (i.e., ridding the world of enslavement and colonisation) because of the nature of the subjects involved (p. 184). The nature of the subjects involved becomes central as it brings to the forefront the identity of collectives. Trouillot (2000) states that:

Apologies can be read as rituals in the strictly anthropological sense of a regulated, stylized, routinized and repetitive performance that tends to have both demonstrative and transformative aspects. The transformative aspect depends fundamentally on a dual identity relation across temporal planes, easily met on pragmatic grounds in individual apologies. Yet in collective apologies, identity is always questionable (pp. 184-185)

The identities of the individuals involved are not the identities that are questionable. It is the identity of the collective and the formation of this identity - both on the part of the victims and perpetrators that gets called into question. An apology is made to a group of individuals by a representative of the past, which requires a temporal shift. Trouillot calls this “a dual identity relation across temporal planes” (p. 184). This relation is more easily met with individual apologies – one individual doing another individual wrong. Whereas wrongs of the past involving collectives and nation-states differ in that they require this relation to happen from past actors to current victims through current actors and current victims. Trouillot asks,

beyond the matter of Mr. Clinton’s own sincerity, a common point of discussion in the debate of his near apology for plantation slavery was whether or not he had the power to apologize for it. Or even commiserate. To whom? And, especially, in whose name? (p. 185)

On this same register, I question if the Ghanaian state has the power to apologize for “selling its brothers and sisters into slavery” and if they do have this power, who are they apologizing to and who is accepting this apology? Though Ghana attempted to reconcile this in the Joseph Project by having actual Ashanti Chiefs and Queen Mothers present, there is a particular imaginary and performance being deployed here. Trouillot (1995) tells us “human beings participate in history as both actors and narrators (p. 2).” Ghana is collating and drawing on some notion of the past with this apology to also inform and shape the current moment and its political power in the world. The brothers and sisters to whom Ghana apologizes are the descendants of enslaved people. In this way, the Ghanaian state hopes to participate in the shifting of power relations. It plays a role in the definition of a certain vision about the world, to remember Baldwin here, and its apologies are ways to contribute toward the transformation of

the present sovereign relations but also subjectivities. Though sometimes this apology is being read through a constituted past, fictional nevertheless, drawing a line from the enslavement moment to the current moment. Yet, this idea presumes a monolithic African emergence and more through the vantage point of a Ghanaian sovereign configuration of subject and state as well as citizenship.

One may wonder why Ghana and why now? Elsewhere I suggest Ghana's modernizing project or modern project depends on a drawing of a linear historical temporal line between itself and enslavement as well as connecting that to the decedents of slaves by making claim to them as diasporic people. In *Lose Your Mother*, Hartman performs melancholy. The performance of melancholy is more than the feeling but includes the endeavours one takes to hold on the object that is lost. She journeys to this place that she believes was taken from her, that she has "lost" to recover the loss. From the beginning we see this through the title of the book *Lose Your Mother*. Mother for Hartman is about family and country/tribe/place/identity/kin. She uses the loss of mother to capture/theorize what happened to people who were taken as slaves. To find a mother, Hartman (2007) takes a journey to Ghana. Hartman tells us that local Ghanaians called her "Obruni". She states "[o]bruni forced me to acknowledge that I didn't belong anyplace... I was born in another country, where I also felt like an alien and which in part determined why I had come to Ghana" (2007, p. 4). Complaining to another expat living in Accra, Hartman was asked, "When you go to Chicago, do you expect black folks there to welcome you because you're from New York? Why would it be any different here?" (p. 5). The expat's question is telling of the relationship most "slave babies" (Hartman 2007) formulate with Africa, one of welcoming, healing and family. Hartman would not expect someone in Chicago to accept her in the same way she expected someone to do so in Ghana. The surprise, betrayal, and anger that Hartman

experiences from being called Obruni speaks to how she constructed who she is in relation to Africa. Being Black and having a particular relationship to Ghana as a “slave baby” she automatically assumed she would be accepted into the African nation. The way in which she constructs this relationship to Africa tells us that she did not realize Africa was lost. Through her reception by the locals as “obruni,” which translates to stranger or white person, we see that she was lost to Africa, but Africa was not lost to her, inciting this melancholic relationship with this place.

Hartman was invested in this imagined relationship. She believed that she had lost something even though she had never been to Ghana and did not necessarily have any lineage that connected her to Ghana either. Hartman realized that playing the fantasy of Africa was not enough and that one of the key principles of the Pan-African ideology of being brother and sister/kin would only be useful if it moved into material recognition. To be clear, this material recognition is about the cultivation of new models for reciprocal exchange for the purposes of building a community together. It is a building a Pan Africanism as a kind of movement which allows for being in greater debt with one another and in solidarity. Debt here refers to “a principle of elaboration,” where debt becomes “something generative” (Moten & Harney, 2013, p. 150). Perhaps, for Hartman this visit is about disrupting the dominant principles that come with the notion of “debt.” It is about the possibility of generating something with Ghanaians beyond the Western metaphysics and its ontologies and epistemologies.

If Ghana is deploying an apology as a tourism project which is then framed as repatriation and reconciliation, how can this be shifted or reimagined so that the exchange is not about the political economic, is not about paying back a debt, but about moving into something else. As Moten and Harney (2013) state: “There has to be a way in which... debt becomes a

principle of elaboration” (p. 63). The point is then to come into greater debt with one another as a method for building inter-dependence and solidarity rather than trying to restore the balance sheet, the logic of the ledger that produced the breach in the first instance.

Hartman’s relationship to Ghana also prompts the question how one loses something they never had – to return to Sexton, ‘the loss of loss itself.’ To answer this question, I return to Freud, who notes that in melancholia “one cannot clearly see what it is that has been lost” and “cannot consciously perceive what he has lost either” (1917, p. 245). This aspect of melancholia is important and is relevant in the ways imagination becomes configured. Both the relationship to the object and the lost exists in the imagination, yet the imagination has material consequences. A major part of Pan-Africanism and diaspora was based on imagined relationships and constructions of Africa, what it meant to be African and African futures. Trouillot captures this best when he states “it requires a particular kind of historicity, notably the possibility of freezing chunks of an alleged unified past, as in the storage model of memory and history (2000, p. 181).

Trouillot is suggesting that memory is constructed in a particular way for these collective apologies to be possible. Essentially leading us to the questions, what is remembered and why is it remembered, what is brought into the present and for what purpose? What is being accomplished in the meantime? Or how is the meantime generative of possibilities with reorientations beyond this melancholia? And beyond a deployment of a certain history, a construction of a past that allows for the diaspora to be lumped as a collective in the present? I have attempted to demonstrate that it is in these constructions that we found ourselves in the trap of melancholy and unable to cathect towards something else – a something else that can only be discovered by staying in the meantime.

Melancholy, Sankofa and The Year of Return

The akan word “Sankofa”, also an adinkra symbol is one of the most popular among the Black Diaspora. It has become a popular phrase in justifying the return of the African Diaspora to the African continent and was also adopted as one of the main philosophies of the “Year of Return” organized in Ghana. The “Sankofa bird” has been used as a totem of Blackness in contemporary representation of Black people and organizations in the Black diaspora. “Sankofa” is an Adinkra symbol, used by the Akan people of Ghana and expresses ideas, philosophy, and proverbs. It is represented by a bird whose head is turned backwards and attempting to take an egg off its back. The transliterated word means “San (Return)- Ko (Go)-Fa (Take) – which figuratively essentially means that one must learn from the past, the past should serve as a guide to the future and must not be forgotten.

The Year of Return does not emerge out of nowhere but is part of a history that has connected Ghana with the diaspora, specifically African Americans. John Campbell (2020) notes

The connection between African Americans and Ghana is not new. In 1957, Ghana became an inspiration for African Americans when it became the first sub-Saharan African country to win independence from a colonial power. Ghana’s independence also gave momentum to the Pan African movement, which, among other things, encourages solidarity among all African diaspora ethnic groups to obtain political and economic power. Martin Luther King traveled to Ghana to celebrate its defeat of colonization, and Malcolm X and Maya Angelou worked in Ghana during the presidency of Kwame Nkrumah. W.E.B. Dubois died in Ghana as a Ghanaian national and today, there is the W.E.B. Du Bois Memorial Center for Pan-African Culture in Accra. Marcus Garvey, the

famed Jamaican Pan-Africanist, advocated for the return of African Americans to Africa. He founded the Black Star Line to help blacks return to Africa, which is the origin of the black star on the Ghanaian flag and for name of the national football team.

<https://www.cfr.org/blog/ghana-looks-long-relationship-african-americans-investment>

On the official website for the Year of Return, the initiative is described as:

a major landmark spiritual and birth-right journey inviting the Global African family, home and abroad, to mark 400 years of the arrival of the first enslaved Africans in Jamestown, Virginia. The arrival of enslaved Africans marked a sordid and sad period, when our kith and kin were forcefully taken away from Africa into years of deprivation, humiliation, and torture. While August 2019 marks 400 years since enslaved Africans arrived in the United States, “The Year of Return, Ghana 2019” celebrates the cumulative resilience of all the victims of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade who were scattered and displaced through the world in North America, South America, the Caribbean, Europe and Asia (Ghana Tourism Authority, 2019).

The Year of Return was intended by the Ghanaian government to function as a tourism initiative as well as a business and investment strategy, to allow for Ghana to become a choice destination for travel and business for the African diaspora. It was also one of the major ways Ghana sought to materialize “Ghana beyond Aid”, an initiative that aimed to “make Ghana less reliant on aid by drawing on, among other things, business and investment from African Americans” (Campbell 2020), with the President of Ghana stating “According to us Ghana does not need foreign aid; instead, it needs the African diaspora to return, build, and invest” (Campbell 2020). The Year of Return initiative deploys and advocates for a certain conception of

Blackness making a linear connection between descent and ancestry with its origin point the transatlantic slavery. It is also an attempt to solve what has been identified in modernity as a problem or Blacks as a problem (Wilderson 2011). The call for ‘a return’ is a reference towards reconciliation for the Black diaspora and it relies on a physical return to land; an encouragement from the Ghanaian state towards those whose ancestors were sold into slavery to return and occupy land, a call to indigenize. This indigenization process doesn’t account for displacement and realities of the local indigenous born Black peoples who face displacement and become fungible in the face of development because they do not offer the state the same developmental capacity that slave descended repatriates coming from the diaspora are imagined and thought to offer.

Ghana’s approach to ‘return’, does not seem to critically challenge the normative renderings of Africa or Blackness, it instead mobilizes the discourse around Blackness through a cathecting around grievance aiming towards capital accumulation from the Black diaspora. This display is a caricature, one that presumes mimicry and impersonation; the state is assuming an understating and experience of grief that is not centred on the perspective of those like themselves who did not endure the middle passage, and not centred on those Ghanaians? Or West Africans themselves who sold their brothers into slavery.

This is the subject of the film *Sankofa* by Haile Gerima (1993). In *Sankofa*, the protagonist Mona, a Black African model who is participating in a photography shoot in Elmina Castle, is forcefully sent back in time to be enslaved within the castle, held captive across the Atlantic, and worked in a plantation. Mona, who takes on the name Shola when thrown back in Time, is increasingly subjected to the most brutal and explicit forms of violence from enslavement, before she finally revolts and dies in the revolution. As a reward for her struggles,

she returns to the West coast alive, with a new Pan-African consciousness and understanding of how her past informs her present.

Gerima's film was intended to inspire a Pan-Africanism in his American audiences, who are supposed to see themselves in the character of Mona/Shola – recognizing in her reckoning with enslavement and return to Africa a kind of revolutionary consciousness that they could access and participate in. Yet, the film also points to the constitutive limits of the Pan-African approach even as it offers it as a rejoinder to the rupture produced by Middle Passage. In her critique of *Sankofa*, Kara Keeling (2007) notes that the “film presents slavery as that which must be exorcised in order for the African to continue the process of his historical progress, which was interrupted by slavery” (p. 60). Thus, in the transit from revolutionary death Pan-African political consciousness, the enslaved are constitutively disappeared. The futurity *Sankofa* elaborates requires a disavowal of the meantime – slavery as an ongoing regime of power – its transmutation in global capital and the ethical stakes of reconciliation. Why must Mona/Shola endure chattel slavery, experience martyr-level violence, to enter a political coalition on African soil? Just as repatriation organizes blame for enslavement disproportionately on African nations, so too does Gerima's *Sankofa* illustrates how the insistence on return disproportionately burdens the enslaved and their descendants. What means of coalition and communicability might be possible if instead we stayed within the meantime or saw the meantime as an ethos and a method orienting us toward new paths for relation?

Based on the philosophy of *Sankofa*, the Black diaspora can believe that it is imperative for Black people to trace their routes to the motherland and explore their past. At the same Time, African countries such as Ghana, create this platform by selling the idea of the “Year of Return”

which gives the Black Diaspora the opportunity to indeed come “home” to explore this said past. This is a problem of Time.

The conversation about the shift from Pan-Africanism to Black internationalism is key to allowing insights to productions of loss objects on a global register as well as acknowledging that modernity and universal time are global. The new emphasis on diaspora and reverse migrations (p. 2) as identified by Falola and Essien (2014) point to this conversation. They state, “if Pan-African movements or radicalism was the fuel that pumped Black diasporic consciousness in the twentieth century, we view reverse migrations as the bridge for transatlantic linkages in the twenty-first century” (p. 2). Reverse migrations allow “diasporian returnees to perform the fantasy of a homeland in Africa as well as Pan-African citizenship and identity of different shades based on mutual interests” (Falola and Essien, 2013 p. 2). In this way, reverse migrations, through “the aid of various cultural and economic incentives as dual citizenship for diasporans to support socio economic reforms in Africa offers a new alternative approach for exploring Pan-African ideology in the twenty-first century” (Falola and Essien, 2013 p.2).

Diasporans are being mobilized through concrete national projects, grounded in both commonalities of African identities/fantasies but also through the conceptualization of multiple, competing diasporic identities, creating the space for individuals to exist both here and there, as this and as that, without challenging the construction, the locating, and the placing of a self on that linear trajectory of history. This works to move individuals away from melancholy because, rather than engaging in a search for something lost, it focuses on new formations of identity that came out of the loss. I am not suggesting that people have given up their identities or connections to Africa. Rather, I am reorienting this dominant thinking about the diasporians being encouraged to explore their new subjectivities and positionalities.

Pan-African ideology is essential to these linkages. Falola and Essien (2013) tell us that “...although the founding fathers or the trailblazers for Pan-Africanism were successful in mobilizing the Black populace on a major theme of “race” and “racism”, this scheme could not sustain Pan-Africanism after the demise of colonialism, segregation, and apartheid” (p. 1). It is at this juncture that I make this interruption with a focus on post-colonial melancholy in terms of possibilities for understanding or even recognizing the aspects of Pan-Africanism that are a meaningful resource, both in terms of knowledge and historical articulation with consequences in the way we think and understand and make claims at this moment. I am concerned with projects of reconciliation and apology that have been taken up by post-colonial Africa, mainly Ghana, with the hope of suggesting a way to think and make possible a certain unity among the Black populace on a global scale.

Bogues (2011), asks the question “can rights only be reposed through citizenship?” (p. 485). This question concretizes the notion of belonging and directs our attention to the ways in which belonging and participation in the nation become configured. Presuming the same categories such as blackness and slave and taking them for granted does not necessarily force nations to take seriously diasporic demands for material recognition such as citizenship, passports, land rights. Rather, these demands become redirected in an ideological recognition architecture. I am also asking along with Bogues to consider how in making these demands and claims we reorient ourselves into a melancholic attachment matrix through materiality. Access to citizenship will mean I am of Africa and Africa is of me or finding the Africa that was taken from me. This points to how some African nations, post-independence, understand their positions in world politics. They draw on a linear genealogical connection between African sites and African descendants to make certain claims on these subjects. Simultaneously, we are seeing

an increased demand by these same people on Africa/African nations. Instead, of seeing these claims by African nations and mostly US citizens making demands by drawing on enslavement I suggest that we see them as demands bound in and melancholy.

The identity established through Pan-Africanism gave and continues to give Black people, regardless of spatial and temporal location, a common identity, which has political implications, such as the right to return or claims to citizenship. I am interested in the ways these political implications are unfolding in the contemporary moment. I ask how these implications are being mediated on/through the bodies of post-slavery subjects or members of the diaspora. Such post-colonial interactions of Blackness move Pan-Africanism into our present while also prompting us to think about the way in which the afterlives of slavery are manifesting themselves through the political and the sovereign.

Conclusion: “I ran from it and still was in it”, the Meantime, and a Conclusion

What would it mean to break the hold of 1441 from which 2022 and beyond unevenly proceeds? Would this not destroy time as we know it? What is time without Black death? This work was a complex reclamation of time, creating our own time, so that we are not out of time. In this dissertation I grappled with meantime, as that interval, and temporal space that is in between and allows for different possibilities. If we are to reclaim time, we must be cognizant of the meantime as the space where we reclaim humanity and humanness – the meantime as an uncertain space to liberate ourselves from the violence of time. We must move with the understanding that the originary violence, what Anthony Farley (2021) calls ‘the primal scene of accumulation,’ (p. 91) is structurally present, over-determinative of the temporal horizon, so that we may better understand the political stakes of time and the urgency immanent to its re-articulation.

Temporality has always been central to Black political theory, whether it be through W.E.B. DuBois’s commentary on slavery’s disfiguration of the promises of Reconstruction, Assata Shakur’s insistence on slavery’s ongoing function for U.S. empire, or Cedric Robinson’s reading of the *longue durée* of racial capitalism. Most recently, however, temporality has been a central analytic for a strand of Black critical theory, Afro-pessimism, which seeks to elaborate the political ontology of antiblackness. Building on the critical historiographical work of both Hortense Spillers and Saidiya Hartman, Afro-pessimism uncovers the libidinal scaffolding of the iterative re-articulations of antiblack violence. Rather than simply examining desire in its particularity, it positions it within an economy of feeling from which an overarching antiblack architecture can be illuminated. In clear terms, Jared Sexton lays out the temporal orientation as

such when he clarifies how durational progression does not shift the structural form of racial slavery and its afterlife. He states:

“Racial slavery does not simply persist in attenuated form as a legacy or aftermath demanding continued vigilance. Neither does it persist in vacated form post-emancipation as slavery without slaves. Those would be problems enough. Rather, it persists as a problem compounded by every effort to eliminate it while preserving the fabric of the very modern world it brought into being, not only its prevailing economic system”
(Sexton, *Don’t Call it a Comeback*, 2015)

So, for Sexton in particular and afro-pessimism in general, the point is not that slavery simply shapes the present from its historic location, but that it remains a fundamental mechanism through which modernity is secured.¹⁸ As Sexton notes, it ‘compounds’ into the present, such that its present form takes on the accumulated (not dissipated) weight of its historic formations.

For Sexton, this is a problem of political ontology and not, for example, the empirical arrangements of Black life under any particular set of conditions given that the ontoepistemological architecture of the world is antiblack. This creates a temporal problem, as it breaks from linear (Enlightenment) notions of time and progress and instead forces us to contend with the scaffolding that makes possible the imagining of linear time as such. Rather than taking linear time for granted, Sexton (and Afro-pessimism writ large) problematize the notion that time’s movement inheres any meaning at all within a political and libidinal economic environment predicated on antiblack violence and brutality. Extending Sexton’s analysis, and

¹⁸ By modernity, I mean to refer to the onto-epistemological system Wynter delineates that was inaugurated in 1441 – the overrepresentation of Man as the human. Modernity is, within this genealogy, largely a series of discourses and material practices constellated around the question of the human.

pulling the temporal politics of his interventions explicitly into view, Taija McDougall writes in their essay “The Water is Waiting” that “There is no way for the ‘enormity of the breach instituted by slavery and the magnitude of domination’ to remain behind the temporal walls of the past... the past breaks through the walls claiming to confine it to do work in the present” (McDougall, n.d., p. 51). McDougall weaves other Black philosophical analytics (such as tidalectics) alongside Afro-pessimist political ontology to identify how, as Calvin Warren states, “Time rebounds upon itself in a space of ontological terror” (Warren, 2018, p. 23). For McDougall, the temporal closure of the past cannot possibly contain a rupture at the scale of racial slavery. The deployment of linear historico-methods occludes rather than clarifies the temporal relation between the past and the present and forecloses materialist readings of the mechanisms by which slavery remains a contemporary dominant arrangement of power.

Theorizing the temporal politics enforced by such a system of violence, Warren states that all that awaits the Black is “‘black time,’ the abyss and fracturing of temporality. In black time, existence is predicated on perpetual waiting” (Warren, 2018, p. 98) – awaiting the deferred horizon of freedom. A horizon that, structurally, must remain deferred in as much as the comparative freedom for the non-Black is to be secured. Therefore, Afro-pessimists and their theoretical interlocutors read against the linearity of time or the status of the historical in relation to slavery’s theorization. Pushing past notions of the event of emancipation, it offers in contrast a political ontological analysis of the ever-unfolding catastrophe of modernity vis-à-vis a reading of the form and function of racial slavery. It is not then that time does not pass linearly for some, but that this linearity is, in turn, built upon the static uniformity, indeed temporal homogeneity, of antiblackness.

To be Black means to be out of time, and not cognizant of time (1441), and

therefore, our claims to humanness are limited. This work explored the many things, the something, that has created a barrier between Black and Time (1441). This work tries to think Blackness as atemporal or anateporeal – as a site where temporal meanings break down. It tries to think Blackness as the site from which modernity’s temporality secures its meaning.

Accepting the Afro-pessimist diagnosis of the political ontology of antiblackness but arguing instead that antiblackness is not the totality of Blackness itself, Black optimists like Fred Moten see blackness as escaping from time, or as simultaneously captive to and fugitive from it – a theoretical accounting of multiple temporalities. For Moten, blackness is something “fugitive.” As he puts it—an ongoing refusal of standards imposed from elsewhere. In “Stolen Life,” he writes, “Fugitivity, then, is a desire for and a spirit of escape and transgression of the proper and the proposed. It’s a desire for the outside, for a playing or being outside, an outlaw edge proper to the now always already improper voice or instrument” (Wallace, 2018 par. 7). For the Black optimist, it is not that Blackness is not, ontologically speaking, captive to the temporal. But rather that simultaneous to this captivity is the capacity for resistance against it and a social life apposite to it. Blackness is both the underside of time and radically exterior to it. Moten contends that, internal to this exteriority, is the pathogen for temporality itself, and so the out-of-time-ness that is Blackness is always already also the latent potential for rupture of time as a political ontological weapon of white supremacy. The Black optimists therefore agree with reading against the linearity of time. They also simultaneously offer what they understand to be an affectively positive political project through temporality’s unravelling. Central to this political-theoretic is an investment in that which escapes the paradigm of antiblackness, that which survives and precedes the paradigm of antiblackness, and that which charts new horizons against the paradigm of antiblackness. Thus, both Afro-pessimism and Black optimism share in

their analysis of the political ontological structure of antiblackness, and its attendant problematization of temporal progress, but while the Afro-pessimist emphasizes the diagnostic of this structure of brutality, the Black optimist seeks to elaborate the resource of Black social life within this protracted, durational form of death.

All Black time is 1441. It is a witnessing of the cracks and a breaking of the barrier that created and placed Black people out of time without emplotting Black people within the narrative arc of Enlightenment's temporality. This project, says time is the problem. Black as that position of dislocated-ness from time, a dislocated-ness that is constitutive of the unfolding of time for all other subjects, or rather *the* Subject, also possesses the capacity to unravel Time and its ontological predication on social death. To expand further, both Wilderson and Hartman (2003) demonstrate that the capacity to emplot the Black within narrative (and so within a temporal arc) is impossible. Furthermore, they demonstrate that the desire for narrative coherence is, at its thrust, an antiblack desire. What then would it mean to break the hold of 1441 from which 2021 unevenly proceeds? Would this not destroy time as we know it? What is time without Black death?

This work is therefore a complex reclamation of notions of time, so that we are not out of time. During the meantime, we can become cognizant of time, meaning – cognizant of the first “wound” (1441). Fanon similarly speaks of his own project. In *Black Skin, White Masks* he states that his work is ‘grounded in temporality’ (Fanon, p. xvi). Just as Fanon proclaims the present as ‘something to be overtaken’ (p. xvii), so too must we reclaim our time, and so we must be cognizant of the meantime as the space where we reclaim our humanity – the meantime as a space to liberate ourselves from the violence of modernity's temporality – the temporality

instituted in contemporary historiography, economy, and desire. The time of Man and its overrepresentation. The time of political ontology.

This is a problem that has been central to the field of Black studies since its inauguration, given that it has treated the abolition of the colour line as a primary object of political and theoretical enquiry (Sexton, 2016). As such, it is one of the most capacious registers to interrogate the complex affective relation we hold to race. But whatever we have heard has almost always been about a future, if not explicitly then implicitly. What about as Moten asks, “a political history of the present”? Not as a mechanism to anachronistically map the present onto the past but rather to understand the present’s very constitution from it. Can we articulate how we escape the now? Such a temporal shift defers liberation projects and thus keeps Blackness stuck in time – all Black time is 1441.

We therefore see that “[t]o be Black and a victim of a series of interlocking time-fracturing technologies” like the Judeo-Christian tradition, with its attendant eschatology of ‘thy kingdom come,’ Police Brutality, with its attendant scenes of subjection, and the Carceral State, with its attendant political ontology of sovereign domination, is to be out of time” (Sawyer, 2019, p. vii). Time is not our friend. Time is weaponized against us. Time happens to us. Time does not actually move us forward and as history repeats itself - we are trapped in time, in a discontinuous parallelism (Garba and Sorentino, 2022). We are captive to 1441. All Black time is 1441. We are held in and under the spell of 1441. As Sylvia Wynter (1995) shows and Tiffany King (2019) reminds us, 1441 marks the beginning of the modern as the Portuguese land on the West Coast, beginning the trade in captive Africans. While modernity unfolds from 1441, Blackness is found and yet perpetually (dis)placed within 1441. Blackness is captive within hold/held time. How does temporality retain meaning in the context of the hold – where held

time marks both the suspension of time and the temporality of capture and captivity? What is time to the enslaved? What is time to the colonized?

All Black Time is 1441.

Christina Sharpe (2016) asks:

How might we stay in the wake with and as those whom the state positions to die un-grievable deaths and live lives meant to be unlivable? These are questions of temporality, the *longue durée*, the residence and hold Time of the wake. (p.21-22)

I pause here to note what are Black problems and who are Black problem solvers... Black problems are in fact not Black problems but have been framed as such to suggest there is no solution. For example, as Black people continue to experience state violence and the grief cycle, we go through is normalized, this crisis is presented as a Black problem when it is a problem of the State, Capital, and Modernity. In its positioning as “Black problem” killings are made to be only of concern to Black people, which then allows not only for these murders to be justified by on-lookers, classified as unsolvable, but more importantly, given up on. To be a Black problem solver, and I use this to mean both a Black person who solves problems and a Black person who solves *Black* problems, problems that stay with what Frank Wilderson (2010) would describe as a Black ensemble of questions, is to consistently and constantly be writing, thinking, responding, and solving with no time, against time and out of time.

I saw myself as writing a dissertation to redress a problem. To redress the question: what does it mean as Black people to be a problem? As I was writing the notion of love kept coming back to me. Love has been something I was interested in for a long time. A long time ago, I read

a quote by Che Guevara that stated “At the risk of seeming ridiculous, let me say that the true revolutionary is guided by a great feeling of love. It is impossible to think of a genuine revolutionary lacking this quality.” (Guevara, 1965, n.p)

For me, this quote along with bell hooks inspired a tattoo I have that reads “love&revolution”. The thing that I wanted to articulate has always been with me. It started off as something about this “problem” called by white supremacists’ blackness. It started as a journey to understand how certain people and subjects comes to be registering as “socially dead” (Patterson 1982; Agathangelou 2009). In the process of researching and engaging the notion of melancholy and blackness I have come to realize that love is misplaced in the modern world. This world has undervalued love’s ability to transform and this happens in the meantime.

Black optimism and afro-pessimism as analytics and as approaches to life are about love. These writings, these genres are about Black people as love. Many have critiqued the afro-pessimists as being on the side of death (Marriott 2016) as they are speaking about the end of the world as we know it. Black optimist writers are read to be on the side of life as they claim that it is important to give blackness or the 'case' of blackness “a hearing, to register the optimism of its outpouring despite the 'horror of its making', or the horror from which it was made.” (Moten cited in Marriott, 2016).

Their calls, pessimists, or optimists are a conversation about love. Is it not love that inspires the afro-pessimists to name Blackness as social death? Is it not love that inspires the Black optimist to search for Black joy? As Moten (2007) says in his explanation of black optimism “The fugitive escapes but she does not escape. Escape is not accomplished but is a thing(liness) we love. Seeking out the state is a kind of piety (2007, p. 6)”.

Love is central to the project of freedom.

Selamawit Terrefe (2020) notes the similar thread found in Wilderson's understanding of afro-pessimism. She notes that "the ethical stakes of Wilderson's theoretical and literary project" are "love and war" (n.p), Understanding love and war as apposite – as both Wilderson and Terrefe do – opens a new terrain for thinking about pessimism and affect. If you love Black people, war against the state, capital and antiblackness are the only response. And in this war, love is the only affective mechanism that can sustain us. When we can love we don't cathect, we aren't stuck, it's the extending of ourselves. bell hooks states "love allows us to enter paradise", not create but to enter. hooks' scholarship began at the starting point of the unfinished Fanonian revolution.

How does hooks' very political prescriptions for a "love ethic" avoid this trap? What does this love ethic look like in terms of social structures, media representations, political forms, and tactics to achieve liberation? Towards what objects does the truly Human libido direct itself? If it is not to achieve Manhood by dominating another group of human beings, what are the means by which the Human ego satisfies desires and fulfills needs? How is the ego of those visiting, returning, going to Ghana being satisfied? If, as I suggest this ego is being satisfied through heritage tourism that relies on western privilege, can we move to interrogating the dominance this is producing? To ensure that one form of melancholic affect should not be replaced by another that better conceals its function of attachment to lost objects, the objects to which the Human ego develops secure and stable attachments must have content and substance. This project attempted to weave together an analysis of the modern world, constituted by the post-racial, which is, in turn, constituted through the accumulation of Black (social) death.

I undertook this analysis by tracing the presumptive lost object to the slave, their kin, and their mother which in a sense problematizes Freud vis-a-vis his developmental ego and also vis a vis Africa, the mother as Hartman grapples with by speaking about losing her mother both materially and figuratively. This loss though cannot be conflated with race and love or ultimately with the death drive as a necessity. Rather, what these authors and I do by critiquing the call back to Africa by Ghana the import of both time and mother in black studies challenges and disrupts the easy readings of “death” as a form of value in the configuration of the state and the sovereign, in the configuration of African countries in the matrix of global power by enabling an equivalization of blackness with “death” of blackness with investment and capital.

I have turned to Black studies here because of its unflinching critique of the violence making possible our catastrophic present, and its meditations on the deadlocks that impede liberation. In this way, Black studies makes visible the meantime, and all the latent possibilities for rupture and action. Instead of suturing life and death, which reinserts the causal trajectory of linear time through the loss of kin and mother and the violence of enslavement, Black studies opens this question of temporal politics by demonstrating the loss evinced by the ontologically melancholic can redirect us towards an understanding of the production of the social, of capital, of value. The meantime as an ethos, a device, and a method therefore provides, at its best, a programmatic through which we might deconstruct and reconstruct the terms of the present, the order of things.

Taking up this programmatic, I read through literatures on Afro-pessimism and Black optimism, psychoanalysis, and global politics to approach an understanding of what I have called the meantime – the condition of possibility for temporal unfolding and a suspended state of latent possibility. In so doing, I hoped to help clarify some of the extant debates for the purpose of

identifying a shared political ground and terrain for action. Such a project is offered in service not only of heuristic explication, but the elaboration of new modes of intellectual work that promote nothing short of sedition. Shared between the Black Optimists, the Afro-pessimists, and the Black Radical tradition, broadly conceived, is a collective disarticulation of Blackness from the state and communal endeavoring toward a world in excess of racial capital's violence. Rather than remaining caught in the minor stakes of what Spillers would consider intramural debate (not to downplay the seriousness of internal disagreement), I want to build against that which we all agree cannot hold, that which must be done away with for a new world to emerge.

I am stuck meditating with Spillers in one of her more recent essays, "The Idea of Black Culture," where she states:

And here is the paradox: as black culture in its current avatar unfolds, it moves ever closer toward the posture that complements both democratic principles, at least on the face of it, and the imperatives of neoliberalist practices. As the "American Dream" is also a gleam in its eye, we experience black social formation today increasingly stressed and strutted toward "civilization" and those intellectual technologies, growing discredited and moribund... what is the price of "Americanization" when one of the last bastions of critique falls away? When the imagined moral credibility of black now translates into an enablement of the most repressive practices among world democracies today? In a sense, if there is no black culture, or no longer black culture (because it has "succeeded"), then we need it now; and if that is true, then perhaps black culture—as the reclamation of the critical edge, as one of those vantages from which it might be spied, and no longer predicated on "race"—has yet to come. (Spillers, 2006, p.26).

Along with Spillers, what I want to argue is for the post-deconstruction, a politics oriented around a blackness that cannot be done away with, not because it is essential in the transhistorical sense, but because it is essentially precisely in the revolutionary one. Spillers does not want us to be enamored by the whiteness of Americanization and I will say in the globalization of the Americanization, but rather she asks us to see how we can disrupt and fracture once and for all the structures of violence through a critical edge that is no longer predicated on race. Being subjected to such forms of violence, of racialized otherings is like “kneel[ing] to indifferent power,” (Moten, p. 762) a form of terror and brutality. Blackness as social death is not only a condemned position, but offers the rubric for another way of being, not in or of the world, but against it. In the journey for a political otherwise, Blackness has always wandered to find a home, a journey that is perpetually dislocated and deferred. Blackness is thus on both sides of the Atlantic filled with queries and critiques of the sovereign because of the lost-love-object that is Africa, the motherland. Those who were oriented temporally towards death because of the loss of their motherland they end up in search of the motherland to disrupt this death boundness. And, as Macharia evinces, the frottage of this journey creates the possibility for a new form of sociality, a locus of political action where formal politics as such cannot hold. A politics that can only be made possible by love.

This addendum might feel strange. But although I have been giving a reading of time, it was always also an interrogation of relation – both the violence of relation and the brief possibilities of respite and reprieve it might offer. While I have mostly stayed with suffering, I end with this turn to hooks to grapple with the meantime to ask what kinds of models of affective yearning might transform our relation to its hold.

Such a transformation is unthinkable in our current epistemological context – transformation requires struggle – and so while it might feel open-ended, I can conclude with nothing but questions, and I am left questioning what about (and all about) love. Where does the question of love fall into these forms of relation? Maybe love requires a kind of unmooring, unsovereign position that asks for a different way of relating to one another? Might love offer an avenue to think and act politically in a way that is necessarily de-individuated? And can we get here, through melancholy as a framework? What my reading has enabled me to do is to think about ways to embrace a collective relational position that requires something of us to give up in order to enter into a relation that isn't predicated on notions of liberal exchange. Might love just be another word for revolution, I ask, and might revolution be another word for love? How do we hold each other in the meantime? How do we love each other in the meantime? How do we make and unmake and remake each other in the meantime and how might staying with our love for another require us to stay in the meantime as process, as shift, as flux, as change? As Mbembe concludes in his *Critique of Black Reason* “Restitution and reparation, then, are at the heart of the very possibility of the construction of a common consciousness of the world, which is the basis for the fulfillment of universal justice” (p.182). If there is a beauty to be found in the desire to seek answers to the possibilities for relations, restitution, and repair or otherwise, it may be found in the knowledge that we have nothing but (mean)Time.

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