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Speaking to the Silences: Black Women's Mediation of Historical Trauma and Healing

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Vassar College

Speaking to the Silences:
Black Women's Mediation of Historical Trauma and Healing



A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree
Bachelor of Arts in Sociology

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Abstract

Black women's trauma, which is largely unclaimed, un-mediated and unrecognized, is transgenerational. The physical, social, and psychological effects of holding on to a racialized history of trauma, caused by systematic and structural racism and sexism, continue to effect the identity formation and social conditions of Black women in the United States today. My thesis is an investigation into the relationships between historical trauma, silence, voice, and political organizing. I aim to analyze Black female agency and the politics of survival and conclude that Black women's trauma and vulnerabilities—although painful and wrought with shame—ultimately serve the deeper purpose of facilitating a space for Black women to speak back to the traumas of violent enslavement, sexual violence, destruction of communal bonds, and infringement on their rights to survive. Thus, Black women's survival is nothing less than sheer brilliance. Their distinct knowledge arises from the navigation of transhistorical histories of trauma and embodies the epitome of modernist projects of survival.

Intro

"I think we have to remember constantly that shaming is one of the deepest tools of imperialist White supremacist capitalist patriarchy because shame produces trauma and trauma produces paralysis...." -bell hooks¹

Growing up, I spent every summer vacation in New York City with my favorite aunt Michelle. Although the process of hailing and riding in yellow taxi cabs proved to be adventure enough for a rural girl like myself, I found riding the subway to be the most thrilling and engaging aspect of city life. I was always astonished by the massive flows of fast-walking people rushing through subway tunnels to catch their trains. While sitting on the subway, I distinctly remember looking around and seeing other Black girls on the train who looked like me. Searching to meet their eyes, my stares were eager. They looked back; hard and sort of angry. I could read the agitation all over their faces. The tough stairs were hard for me to place. Why were they so angry? Responding to aggression through hardness seemed to be the only way these girls connected with each other. I heard angry mumblings in hushed tones throughout the subway car. As I got older and continued to ride the subway, the stares started to signal other things for me. It became clear to me that something was going on with Black women—as individuals and as a collective. These cold, strained interactions seemed to be proof enough that some type of historical anger was affecting Black women and girls.

Black women are not doing well. If we utilize more expansive, and less individualized, framework for understanding Black women social lives, we can see that they are not healthy. Black women and girls are suffering. Increase rates of obesity, stress-related diseases, mental illness, as well as alienation from the labor market tell us that as a social group, Black women are not thriving. The compounded burdens of silence, shame, and fear weigh heavy on the shoulders of Black women in contemporary

society. They've been holding on to the trauma of many generations, never fully allowed to release it and begin to heal. If we are to answer the question of how Black women can heal from historical trauma, we must first establish a few things. We need to know what has happened to Black women that has led them to occupy a current social space of subjection, disempowerment, anger, and trauma. We need to know how institutional rape affected Black women psychically and ideologically. We need to uncover what has caused such a silence around Black women's bodies, sexually, and sexual selfhood. Finally, we need to evaluate the different ways Black women have attempted to heal.

I am writing about trauma because it is a Black feminist issue of the historization of Black women's social conditions. Black male social conditions are topics of much excitement inside and outside of the Black community. Certainly, President Barack Obama's address of Black boys' cultural hardships spurred conversations about contemporary legacies of slavery and institutional racism. However, this pointing to Black male trauma as an issue of national concern seems to suggest that Black women, in comparison, are doing just fine. On the contrary, Black women's trauma continues to be at the forefront of their consciousness and affects their contemporary existence within society. We don't think anything is wrong with them because we are not attuned to looking for manifestations of their trauma within the everyday fibers of social life.

While traditional approaches to trauma studies seek to address trauma on the individual and immediate level, my alternative framework focused on collective historical trauma and seeks to complicate our understanding of memories of trauma and methods of healing. With this, my thesis can be categorized as a project of subversion, troubling, and reclaiming. Subversion of dominant narratives about Black women's

identities which paint them as de-sensitized superhumans or victims for life. Troubling of medicalized, individualized definitions and theories of trauma. And reclaiming of testimony within public space as a Black, female form of liberation and healing. As spoken about by Black feminist scholar Lynette D Myles, I wish to recuperate Black female history²; take it back from the hands of the colonizer and redefine Black women's histories of trauma as collective, transgenerational, and unmediated.

Central Explorations

This thesis research explores the trauma histories, recovery of memory and voice, and collective healing processes of Black women in the United States. My research intersects with the work of feminist scholars, writing about the performance of voice and testimony in healing, and social theorists, writing about the historicization of violence and oppression of minoritized subjects. Sitting at the crossroads of Black feminist thought and modern social theories of violence, trauma, and healing, my thesis research offers new perspectives on collective injury and methods of embodied healing and liberation.

Sprouting from the disciplines of Feminist Studies, Sociology, Affect Studies, and Trauma Studies, my sociological investigation enlists contemporary discussions of trauma in my exploration of Black women's historicized trauma scripts.³ Through my focus on the decimation and exploitation of Black female subjectivity and bodies, I aim to analyze Black women's trauma through an interpretive reading of Black women's rape testimonies of the 1920's and 1930's as well as 21st century writings about Black

women's lives. Similarly, I explore Black women's collective organizing and activism as a public culture capable of mediating trauma.

I enter into this work with questions and experiential knowledge provided by my 21 years of life experience as a black woman. I ask: What prevents us from speaking about black women as traumatized subjects? How does the mask of the 'strong Black women' prevent black women from mediating and healing from their histories of trauma? What's the relationship between bodies, memory, and trauma and how is the memory of traumatic events inscribed within human bodies? Finally, how is consciousness bounded and constrained by trauma and traumatic experiences and what role does truth-telling—through writing and testimony—play in the process of healing outside of heteropatriarchal structures? As a project of recovery, my thesis aims to re-remember the collective trauma suffered by Black women as an injury to their collective consciousness. When we refuse to interact with memory, we usurp its power in the name of amnesic 'healing.' However the memory of trauma that is left in the body denies survivors an opportunity to express the phenomena of that trauma, and simultaneously prevents embodied healing.⁴

As I study the discourses surrounding the acknowledgment and articulation of trauma, I ask myself, what does it mean to look at the "vicinity of trauma rather than just its center?" By this I mean to suggest that I intend to examine specific sites where trauma has been produced as well as the cultures, both private and public, which have formed around the memory of that trauma. It is important to me that the memories of slavery's traumatic relationship with Black women serve a purpose beyond the reification of those traumatic histories. I see the transgressive and revitalizing power in Black women's

speech and testimony, feminist organizing, and personal writings. Through a centering of Black women's histories and experiences with trauma in my analysis, I explore the larger collective injuries and impacts of psychic and bodily trauma. This examination of Black women's trauma will expertly highlight the distinctness of racial trauma, the cost of silence for survivors, and power of reclaiming one's voice to heal. Despite my acute focus on trauma belonging to the lineages of Black women in the United States, my investigation will prove to be valuable for everyone. My research speaks to the trauma of racism, which Toni Morrison notes produces, "...for the racist and the victim, the severe fragmentation of the self..."⁵ Thus, Black women's trauma is everyone's trauma, in the sense that it remains in all our collective memories.

As a goal of my contemporary Black feminist politics and scholarship, I wish to evoke new realities by replacing our culture of violence, oppression and domination, with one of celebration, social justice, and embodied healing. My project is also an aim to decolonize trauma studies. Like many other scholars wishing to add nuance to the discipline of trauma studies, I seek a path to understanding Black women's trauma, through an alternative approach which pivots between homogenizing universalism and nominalist particularism of social trauma.⁶ By this I mean I would like to come to an understanding of Black women's trauma, which avoids the pitfalls of reductionist universalism but could still prove to be applicable for other marginalized female identities.

Our social identities, in Stuart Hall's perspective, come from not a fixed origin but rather a mediated space between the discourses of history and culture.⁷ As scholars, our negotiations with identity—our processes of identity making and destabilization—are

always present in our work as researchers and social theorists. My thesis, about black women and their traumas, is also about me. As someone who identifies as a Black woman, and a feminist, this project is both personal and political. I've borne witness to the suffering of black women within my community. I've felt the struggle to survive, which is so characteristic of the black, female experience. My aim is to understand the deeply rooted social location of Black women in the United States, in an attempt to better understand what healing for the Black female spirit and body could look like. Thus, I hope to use my research to engage with the secrets and sins of historical racism and show how the fracturing of Black women's selves can be mended through a reunion of the body with voice. As I write this thesis, I peruse my ultimate goal of setting black women free. To accomplish this, we must reckon with the past as we push forward, making waves to clear the blockages left in our path from the lingering traumas of yesterdays.

Overview of Chapters

In chapter 1, I broadly address Black women's historical trauma as a collective, psychophysical injury. I explore the production of trauma through anger, hatred, historical ghosts, interracial rape, and silence, thus arguing that trauma is an omni-present modern reality. In chapter 2, I evaluate the relationship between trauma, memory, and voice as I explore how the act of remembering becomes shameful for Black women. Through discussions of visibility, speech, and memory, I locate Black women's testimonies and writings as forums of protest and sites of trauma mediation. Finally, in chapter 3, I explore sites of healing for Black women. Through an analysis of Black

women's public cultures, I aim to affirm the radical, transformative power of women-centered spheres of collectivity.

Chapter One: Trauma, A Structure of Feeling

*I see hatred
I am bathed in it, drowning in it
Since almost the beginning of my life
It has been in the air I breathe
The food I eat, the content of my perceptions;
The single most constant fact of my existence
Is their hatred....
I am too young for my history***

-Audre Lorde *Sister Outsider*

In the fall of 1944, six white men kidnapped and raped Racy Taylor, a twenty-four-year-old mother and sharecropper from Abbeville, Alabama. Her kidnapping and rape also involved the harassment of two others—a young boy and his mother—who accompanied Racy home from church on that Sunday. The attack was violently orchestrated by Herbert Lovett, a twenty-four-year-old private in the U.S Army with a shotgun. Taylor met the six white men's angry words and misogynistic taunting with ferocity—she, scared for her life, wrestled her arm from Lovett's grasp just long enough to bolt to the nearest grove of popular trees. "Stop!" Lovett shouted. He cocked the gun at the back of her head. "I'll kill you if you run."⁸ Taylor, thrown at gunpoint into the back of Lovett's green sedan, was driven to a grove of pecan trees, down a red-clay tractor path off of the main highway. There on the red earth, she was raped repeatedly, by 6 different men, at gunpoint. Her cries of agony—of decimation and terror—were swallowed up by the clear night sky. Racy Taylor could have been my grandmother, my mother, my sister. Racy Taylor could have been me.

Black womanhood/ Black women as a social group

I believe Black women's contemporary social conditions need to be more closely examined. Their troubled affect reveals that there is something going on under the surface, within their psyches, that is deeply affecting their conditions of existence. The stories they tell about their troubles and facts of life remind us that Black women live in dire, complex and often contradictory circumstances.⁹ Their complex humanity links past horrors to present conditions through the ways in which Black women are haunted by the remains of an unaddressed history of social injustice and repression.

Sociologist Avery Gordon posits sociological haunting as a constituent element of modern life. Haunting, for her, is a form of social figuration influenced by the ever presence of history within contemporary life. Many social scientists, like Gordon, are thus interested in the dynamic relationship between what we name as the experience of reality and we count as knowledge of, or about, that social reality. Presented with this crisis of representation, our attention is drawn to the multiple sites of power in which knowledge about our social realities is produced and disseminated.¹⁰

Haunting problematizes the reduction of individuals to mere 'sequences of instantaneous experiences.' Instead, haunting asks us to look to the trances of trauma and past experiences that lie within our everyday experiences of reality. More than a modern social condition, haunting represents real, 'persistent and troubling ghosts' within our reality. If we interpret ghosts to be signs, what are they trying to tell us? I believe these ghosts of experience represent a way of knowing, a particular strand of historical memory. We are haunted—in the best sense of the word. We have been given a site of access to explore the interactions of history, subjectivity, and social life. If we are tuned

in, examining these ghosts of social life will prove to be a deeply transformative experience for all.

Black women are haunted, all the time, by the tragedies of slavery. Slavery's continual success depended upon the sacrifice of their bodies to the terrors of sexual violence and abuse. Yet they survived. Because there is no wide-scale, deep recognition of how slavery affects U.S. citizens' lives today, Black women's *current* affect and socialization can never fully exist within our present reality. We cannot process their pain because we do not yet know, or care to discover, the depth of their trauma.

The pervasive, negative stereotypes about Black women's bodies, identities and sexuality, have led to widespread misunderstandings about who Black women are and how their history of subjugation manifests contemporarily. Black women's sexuality has been historically constructed in binary opposition to white femininity and sexuality. Black women's sexuality has been understood as the embodiment of immorality, impurity, and pathology. Because of this, Black women's bodies have never matter and thus, have never been given the same degree of humanity, agency, and freedom as white, female bodies.

In this sense, one could argue that because of white supremacy and patriarchy, Black women have never been able to be seen as individuals. Instead, Black women are only legible as a collective social group. As damaging as this is, I argue that it works in their favor when it comes to the ideology behind healing from trauma. As Darlene Clark Hine writes, in the face of negative constructions and deployments of Black female sexuality and identity, "it was imperative that they [Black women] collectively create alternative self-images and shield from scrutiny these private, empowering definitions of

self.’¹¹ Thus the collective proves to be the only space within which Black women’s trauma can be mediated holistically. As their subjugation continues to be collective, so must their liberation.

The figural and literal rape of Black women has happened through racialized, sexualized, and politicized stereotypes that devalue and constrict Black women.¹² As Black women work towards self-actualization and self-definition—they must shift the cultural representations of Black womanhood. This means they must go back to examine the foundational structures of trauma which make up the Black female experiences in the United States. In an essay entitled "Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred, and Anger," Audre Lorde identifies the trauma, and impact, of anger and hatred among Black women. She conceptualizes Black women’s anger as a fiercely guarded secret, one that is kept closely locked away in silence. Lorde sees her anger as, "...an electric thread woven into the every emotional tapestry upon which I set the essentials of my life—a boiling hot spring likely to erupt at any point, leaping out of my consciousness like a fire on landscape."¹³ For Lorde, anger is a large part of the common, Black female condition. Black women have learned to be at home with cruelty because they have survived so much of it within their lives.¹⁴ As Lorde reminds us, Black women are born into a world of contempt for the Black female presence. This has been deeply scarring for Black women, and has manifested in hatred for each other and ourselves. Using the metabolizing of daily bread as a metaphor for Black women’s passive reception of hatred into their psyches, Lorde argues that this hatred exists because as women—as Black women—we live within structures that seek to destroy us, both inside and out.

I think it is important to look at the difference between anger and hatred. Anger is passion—it is fierce emotion that is not necessarily harmful. Hated, as Lorde theorizes, is an emotional attitude representing the coupling of aversion and ill will.¹⁵ This specified understanding, allows us to see hatred as that which can destroy us; that which has never allows us to see our mother, our sisters, ourselves in their/our own magnificence.¹⁶ This hatred must be weeded out because sadly, it's become foundational to Black women's identities, characters and/or dispositions.

So what happens to all this anger and hatred that surrounds the black woman? It is internalized at the deepest level. The processing of anger, again and again, always within the vicinity of the Black women, takes it toll—it creeps into Black women's most crucial interchanges. The struggle of Black women confronting and decolonizing their views of themselves is an intimate battle with their trauma. This when the trauma gets transmitted and becomes transgenerational. Many Black women have adopted multiple generations of Black women's suffering. This is why returning to the collective for healing is such an essential, and deeply sacred tool of liberation. Lorde writes, “Black women have a history of the use and sharing of power. From the Amazon legions of Dahomey through the Ashanti warrior queen Yaa Asantewwa and the freedom fighter Harriet Tubman...We have a tradition of closeness and mutual care and support...”¹⁷ Lorde reminds us that we have the ability to love our sisters hidden deep beneath the flesh, ‘in our blood’s telling.’¹⁸ Thus, it is possible for us to re-learn how to love. We can choose to come into loving ourselves through loving each other. I stand with Lorde in believing that Black women's need for one another stems from a yearning to collectively vocalize shared knowledge, traditions, and histories. “I was not meant to be alone and without you who

understand,” Lorde writes, highlighting how imperative a return to the collective is for Black women in contemporary society.

The act of being at the margins is full of pain and terror; it is traumatic. Lynette D Myles writes, quoting Carla Peterson, that margins are often uncomfortable places because they remind Black women of how hard it is to survive horrifying pain and unspeakable terror.”¹⁹ Cultural theorist and sociologist Paul Gilroy notes the centrality of survival to the identity formations of the modern subaltern subjects. On the subject of the survival of African diasporic peoples, Gilroy describes how Black women are central figures of modernity because of their ability to survive. He writes:

Modern life begins with slavery....From a women’s point of view, in terms of confronting the problems of where the world is now, Black women had to deal with post-modern problems in the 19th century and earlier...Certain types of madness, deliberately going mad in order....’not to lose your mind. ‘ These strategies for survival made the truly modern person.²⁰

In a sense, Black women are ahead of their time because of the modern techniques of survival that they have employed. Against the odds of enslavement and sexual conquest, Black women are still standing—but this does not mean that they are okay.

In my thesis, I put Black women at the center of my analysis. I hope to explore the techniques Black women have used to push back urges to forget, in order to heal and remember past trauma. The constraints on consciousness due to the accumulation of traumatic experiences effect Black women on many levels—physical though the manifestation of high stress related health issues, and psychically through anxiety and shame surrounding their histories of traumatic experience. In this research, Black women are centered. This new placement shifts the ‘reading’ that must be done in this thesis—by

my readers and myself. Throughout this new 'reading', we should be as attuned to silence, as we are to voice. We should keep in mind that agency is always present, despite the depth of one's trauma. We can no longer naïvely attribute the survival of Black women to essentialized notions of their strength and perseverance. Rather, we need to explore what prevents us from speaking about black women as traumatized subjects. Thus, I wish to conceptualize black women as a collective with a distinctive history of trauma. As a collective, Black women have a particular consciousness that arises from their marginal gender and racial identities. While members of other social groups may be able to also stand as individuals, Black women are always lumped within one group, and are not allowed to exist as diverse peoples. As written about by Durkheim in "The Division of Labor in Society", collective consciousness links successive generations through bonds of shared history. Beliefs, sentiments, and ideologies present within the collective consciousness cement our collective affinities to each other. When this shared history is enveloped in a veil of trauma, intergenerational linkages facilitate connections between individual memories, experiences, and traumas.

Black Female Sexuality

Given the use of rape as a tool of conquest and control over the bodies of women of color, a healing process for Black women must offer them new avenues of embodiment. Black women need to get back into their bodies because for centuries upon centuries, their bodies have not been their own. As Evelyn Hammonds describes it, there is a void associated with black female sexuality.²¹ To me, this void refers to the lack of language and context with which to name the sexual trauma of black women and examine its deep

ties to the historical construction of Black women's sexuality. Historically, the identities of Black women have been systematically dehumanized—their sexuality perverted and hyper sexualized—to justify their abuse by white men. The rape of Black women by white men was designed to terrorize and exploit their bodies for capital production. Additionally, Black women's sexuality has been constructed within a binary, sitting in opposition to whiteness. It is pathologized and rendered invisible and hypervisible at the same time.²²

Bodies

As we lay the foundations for brighter feminist futures, scholars must start with a revisiting—a renewed, deeper engagement—with past horrors and traumas. As unclaimed, unmediated, unrecognized and transgenerational, trauma and traumatic experiences are more than just stories. They are a 'cascade of experiences, eruptions, crevasses',²³ and the disruptions they cause create friction like the uneven sliding of tectonic plates. In the intro to their anthology *This Bridge Called My Back*, Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa write about the embodiment of women of color trauma:

...The exhaustion we feel in our bones at the end of the day, the fire we feel in our hearts when we are insulted, the knife we feel in our backs when we are betrayed, the nausea we feel in our bellies when we are afraid, even the hunger we feel between our hips when we long to be touched..."

Here, Moraga and Anzaldúa localize women's trauma within their bodies. Women's treatment as a result of their social location manifests as pain, exhaustion, and nausea—all embodied emotions which link the spirit, mind, and body. Moraga and Anzaldúa expertly show how women's bodies hold the trauma of racialization through the embodiment of suffering, isolation, and alienation. Since Black women's bodies have

played such a central role in their conquest and exploitation, then they must be present within our address of Black women's trauma. In this same vein, we can't talk about Black women's socialization into abjection, without addressing the history of black women's dispossession of their own bodies. Roberta Culbertson describes wounding as a social act carrying cultural messages and pain linked with social memory. This wounding—this mark of trauma—is violent and thus happens between the poles of body and culture.²⁴ Contemporary society is missing the complex, historically specific analysis needed to speak about this wounding. The historical wounding that is the rape of Black women is an attack on Black female sexuality. Rape, as described by Culbertson, is a circumstance in which trauma becomes a physical marker of 'one's clear permeability, one's flowing into the world, and one's being entered by it.'²⁵

Social constructions of race and gender are inextricable linked to bodies and their material conditions. Hegemony centers whiteness, maleness, and heterosexuality. All populations that stand beyond those categories, along the margins and borderlands, are not only unintelligible but also sentenced to social death.²⁶ As non-subjects—non-beings—their experiences and specific socialization are outside of the national imaginary. In response, I forcibly put these experiences at the center, vying for a closer look at what's going on. By studying the new center—Black women, their trauma, activism, and voices—we can see how the deeply traumatizing effects of systemic racism and patriarchy depend upon the decimation and exploitation of black female bodies. As I discuss Black women's histories and experiences with trauma, I aim to explore the larger collective injuries and impacts of psychic and bodily trauma. An examination of these

traumas will highlight the distinctness of racial trauma, the cost of silence for survivors, and the power of voice in healing.

In *Empire of Trauma*, written by Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman, it is argued that investigating trauma has become a ‘unique way of approaching the traces of history’ and a ‘dominant mode of representing our relationship with the past.’²⁷ Fassin and Rechtman speak to how histories of trauma are kept alive, due to ‘how deeply entrenched the concept of trauma is in our intellectual and emotional world.’²⁸ They write, “The slave, the colonized, the subjugated, the oppressed, the survivor...these are concrete images of the vanquished whose history, far from disappearing...is reborn in the *memory* of subsequent generations.”²⁹ [added emphasis] The idea of leaving history in the past is a fallacy. Long past horror---historical trauma---is ever-present in our contemporary realities, and because it is tied to modern systems of oppression, we must treat this trauma as a modern formation. In fact, Fassin and Rechtman argue that the transmission of traumas across generations is a central element of the politicization of trauma. Trauma, then, can also be conceptualized as a collective imprint on a group of historical experiences that may have occurred decades, generations, or even centuries ago, but has contemporary manifestations³⁰

Using Fassin and Rechtman’s frame of analysis of the politics of trauma, we can read more deeply into the case of Black women’s trauma. Looking specifically at the rape of black women, Fassin and Rechtman’s framework helps us understand how rape becomes an individual and collective basis for suffering and exploitation. As rape, and the threat of rape, continue to be ever-present realities within the psyches of black women, that type of individualized suffering becomes ingrained in the collective

consciousness. Trauma is collective, in that its effects not only psychological structures of the self but also the systems of attachment and meaning that link individual and community.’³¹ Simply stated, the wounding of rape is one of the central aspects of Black women’s collective trauma history.

Sexualized violence and rape

Sexualized violence and rape have been omni-present in the lives of Black women in the United States since their foremothers—powerful African women—were torn from Africa and thrown onto vessels of capitalism, patriarchy, and enslavement. Since the inception of the slave trade, Black women’s bodies have been under attack. From the shores, to the ships, to the slave quarters, to the master’s bedroom, the terror of sexual violence was a reality within Black female experience. Scholar Hazel Carby writes, “...Rape has always involved patriarchal notion of women being, at best, not entirely unwilling accomplices, if not outwardly inviting a sexual attack.” Within popular opinion, Black women could not be raped because they were not fully human and possessed an illicit sexuality. These negative cultural beliefs about black women, and their bodies, birthed during antebellum slavery, had powerful, ideological consequences for the next hundred and fifty years.³² Carby points to the fact the Black women’s psychic status has always depended upon the ideological construction of their womanhood and sexual selfhood. Because rape occupies such a vast amount of ideological space within the historical construction of Black women’s identity, it acts as the central historical trauma, which still to this day, effects Black women’s social lives.

The rape and kidnapping of Racy Taylor is one of millions of accounts of routinized

sexual exploitation and degradation of Black women by white men. For Black women, the threat of rape follows them as they pass through public spaces of street corners, open highways, train stations, and even taxicabs.

Racial Trauma

In order to understand the historical dynamics of Black women's trauma, we need to unpack its long-standing prevalence. Black feminist theorist Darlene Clark Hine's concept of the culture of dissemblance explains how a culture of silence around Black female sexuality has proved to be harmful for Black women's self-expression. Her theorizing provides us with the answer to why healing collectively is the goal. The culture of dissemblance was created out of the necessity for Black women to protect the sanctity of inner aspects of their lives.³³ These aspects represented deeply private and affectual elements of Black women's experiences and were related to their bodies, sexuality, and desires for pleasure. The behavior and attitudes of Black women that create the appearance of openness and transparency, in reality shielded the truth and their vulnerability from their oppressors.³⁴ This culture of dissemblance, which has come about as a survival technique, has not allowed Black women to uncover parts of themselves and their histories. These parts of them, pertaining to their sexuality and loss of bodily integrity have been buried and immobilized by fear. Much trauma has been produced within this culture of dissemblance and Black women have paid a high price.

In choosing to silence their bodies and sexualities, Black women also lost the ability to articulate their sexuality, and desire for sexual autonomy and agency.³⁵ As a social group, Black women have laid outside systems of power, which have denied them the ability to participate as social and cultural agents. They lack the ability to speak

directly to their own experiences. Despite the pressure to silence and compress aspects of their identity, Black women did not reduce their determination to be agents by acquire power and protecting themselves and their communities. It was only by the graces of this secrecy, that Black women could accrue the space they needed to harness the energy to stand on their feet and resist.

As we can imagine, 21st century trauma studies are frozen within Euro-American conceptual and historical frameworks.³⁶ The inability—or perhaps refusal—of trauma studies to examine the trans-Atlantic slave trade as a generational genesis of trauma forces scholars like myself to probe the articulation of race and space, uncanny historicity and gendered dynamics of colonial violence, intergenerational transmission of trauma, and unequal recognition of disparate traumatic histories.³⁷ In *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*, Ann Cvetkovich writes towards a widening of trauma studies, pushing for it to become more interdisciplinary through an acknowledgement of racialized legacies of trauma within the United States. Everyday forms of racism, many of which are institutional or casual and thus don't always appear visible except to those who are attuned to them, are among the effects of longer histories of racial trauma,

Systemic forms of race and gender based oppression have left traces of trauma upon the physical, social, psychological, and psychic landscapes of Black women. Black women lack the space with which to process and release this trauma, thus causing a widespread suppression of cultural memories associated with their suffering. The affective elements of our consciousness---our thoughts and feelings that structure our

perceptions of the past and present—construct what Raymond Williams in 1977 coined as structures of feeling. In *Marxism and Literature*, Williams writes:

The strongest barrier to the recognition of human cultural activity is this immediate and regular conversion of experience into finished products... relationships, institutions and formations in which we are still actively involved are converted, by this procedural mode, into formed wholes rather than forming and formative processes (p.128).

I am primarily concerned with the issue Williams raises about the compulsion to think of life experiences as contained and finished. This restriction placed on the temporality of life experiences makes it harder to illuminate the connections between past traumas and present pain and suffering. Like Williams, I believe that reducing the historicity and long-lasting significance of experiences of trauma, violence, and oppression fails to take into account the weight and residue of past experiences within everyday living.

Trauma has been phrased by many social and cultural theorists such as Ann Cvetkovich, Cathy Caruth, Nicholas Abraham, and Jennifer Griffiths as an unclaimed experience, motioning to the insidiousness and unknowability of trauma to its survivors. Contemporary trauma novelists write against the event-based model of trauma, which has been typically utilized for the past 15 years. They advocate for a model of trauma that accounts for ongoing, everyday forms of traumatizing violence; a model which keeps in focus the ambiguity and hybridity of trauma and its surrounding discourses³⁸. I am interested in how these definitions of trauma acknowledge trauma's bodily and psychic manifestations. This bifurcated understanding of trauma expands our reasoning as to how trauma can reverberate throughout multiple generations. Scholar Ann Cvetkovich treats trauma as a social and cultural discourse that emerges in response to the demands of grappling with the psychic consequences of historical events. She uses

trauma to look at the “intersections of emotional and social processes alongside the intersections of memory and history.”³⁹ The most important element of her analysis is her attention to the balance of history and structures of affect in the commemoration of trauma. This closer look at the tethers between past and present helps us see that trauma has a history; a history that stands beyond the limits of our understanding. In *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*, Jenny Edkins claims that to talk about trauma, we must first fully recognize the relationship between temporality and trauma. There is a temporal dimension of how we face trauma, of how we remember, memorialize, and witness it.⁴⁰ Time becomes unstable when we locate trauma because we don’t want to acknowledge the traumatic real; it disturbs our social reality.⁴¹ Further, to examine the traumatic real, from a revisiting of a past, is unpopular because of what it reveals about undisturbed legacies of colonization within the United States. Like scholar Dominick LaCapra, Edkins proposes an approach of looking at trauma that is ‘historically, socially, and politically specific.’⁴² This seems to suggest a new desire to understand the historicity of social trauma and its origins. Thus, *trauma time* is used to describe a specific framing of traumatic time in our modern era. Edkins presents this specified time-scale of trauma as a way to describe the climate within which modernity attempts to ‘reconstruct memory.’ The framing of trauma time allows us to conceptualize trauma outside of dominant, linear time narratives, thus making it easier to view trauma as an omni-present aspect of modernity. Within this space of trauma time, there is new space opened up to process what has happened and make trauma meaningful, according to Edkins. In pushing this further, I suggest that our temporal framing of trauma should go beyond making trauma

‘meaningful’. We should desire a framework that meditates trauma, allowing it to unfold from its roots through polytonal and public accounts of testimony.

Trauma theorist Cathy Caruth argues that trauma, or unclaimed experience with structural un-knowability, stands at the limits of our understanding and thus possesses a unique epistemological challenge: it leaves survivors and witnesses at the crossroads of knowing and not knowing. For Black women, there exists a secondary set of challenges preventing them from being able to lay claim to their experiences of trauma. The racialized and gendered dimension of their oppression have been so foundational to their subversion, that Black women are not even seen as survivors, let alone allowed the privilege of not knowing their own trauma. When Mark Seltzer writes trauma discourse, “challenges distinctions between the mental and physical,’ he located how trauma as a complex social phenomena, blurs the lines between the psychic and social, and asks us to look internally and externally for sources of cultural pain.⁴³

Traumatic experiences—whether interpersonal or institutional—should not only be read as ongoing and un-finished, but also transhistorical. Spanning across multiple temporal spaces, legacies of slavery do not exist in some distant vacuums—isolated from changing currents of history. Instead, these scarring legacies are embodied in the consciousness and psychic landscapes of African Americans in the United States today. James Clifford’s discussion of diasporas is useful for our understanding of the transgenerational impact of slavery. He argues that, “...enslavement and its aftermaths—displaced, repeated structures of racialization and exploitation—constitute a pattern of Black experience inextricably woven in the fabric of hegemonic modernity.” In this sense, we can say that it is modernity, which has facilitated the void of Black women’s

experiences of trauma. We should seek to understand these traumas as ‘space[s] of death’ within the Black female imaginary. The memories of slavery, along with the memories of torture and rape, must be spoken about. The terror of their experiences should be in the collective consciousness. However difficult, this exposing of terror casts a much needed shadow on all modernist progressivism, allowing us to more deeply understand cultural trauma’s function.”⁴⁴

Central to my re-orientating of trauma discourse is the argument that women of color, and more specifically, Black women, exist within a space which interacts with history differently because of their raced and gendered marginal status. They, unlike white men, are able to access the knowledge gained from past trauma. From that deep place of knowledge comes a new way in which to see trauma. The trauma of removal from ancestral homelands, the trauma of the middle passage, and the trauma of enslavement have bodily, psychic, and affective impacts on Black women today. These impacts have much to teach us about the history of oppression and present opportunities for collective healing.

Contemporary trauma theorists have asked how trauma, in bodily memory and narrative, reproduces its own conditions and traps individuals in painful silence. For individuals with trauma histories, how do they represent the unbearable weight of the testimony across generations? Given the subordination of Black women in the social order, Black women’s historical traumas are even more taboo and appear illegible to the greater public. Just as Black female subjectivities are immobilized and rendered flat by the Black/White and male/female binaries, their experiences with trauma become wedged

within the victim/perpetrator agent/non-agent binary script of post-traumatic experiences.⁴⁵

The transgenerational nature of trauma, as a discourse, has a history. Examining the construction of racial categories and markers of difference in the United States reveals that the history of ‘making’ race is wrought with trauma. The many traumas of American history—genocide, sexual conquest, and centuries of enslavement—are the founding of this nation itself. In our current ‘post-racial’ era, color-blind rhetoric is tactfully used to urge subjects to forget—exemplifying the concept of organized forgetting. Through forgetting, it becomes harder and harder to come to a collective understanding of how the horrors of slavery still haunt the bodies and minds of Black people in the United States today.

Scholar Jennifer Griffiths argues that an investigation of Black women’s trauma must be situated with a larger ‘historico-racial schema,’ as phrased by Frantz Fanon, which takes into account the price of the cultural inscription of the dominant narrative onto marginal bodies. As trauma is socially produced, the psychic damage caused by societal indifference to suffering, or failure to act as a witness to that suffering, causes a delay in the registering of an event as traumatic and consciousness altering.⁴⁶ Trauma thus involves a delay in response. The memory of a traumatic experience, or memory of bearing witness over and over again in a traumatic experience, becomes embedded without a direct link to the ‘story’ of the original experience. In a sense the traumatic memory divides itself into two distinct forms: “the relentless recurring image, stereotyped and static, and the unconscious bodily response to conditions that bear resemblance to the original experience.”⁴⁷

The truth of the matter—the exact pain and fear that lives at the nexus of traumatic sexual and racial oppression—has acquired the weight of several lifetimes of silence and yet still remains ungraspable.⁴⁸ In effect, there is no space within contemporary society for Black women’s trauma. As women’s self-concept’ and emotional self have been overlooked, ignored, and excluded by most sectors of society, they have not been afforded the physical or psychic space to mediate their trauma. The ways in which forms of suffering are deemed worthy of national public attention, while others are left for individuals to tend to on their own, are stratified by race and by gender.⁴⁹ Often times, sexual trauma fails to make it into the realm of national trauma. Although there is a price for holding on to that trauma—isolation and separation from their selves and their communities—this trauma is also a source of radical knowledge for Black women.

Memory

For my discussion of trauma, I find it important to address the relationships between trauma and modern conceptions of memory. The linear, progressivist’ and revisionist notions and narratives of modernity plague society, making it impossible to imagine an occupation of a different temporality. By occupying, I mean a taking up of new boundaries of time and new ideas about continual processing of trauma. What could a rejection of linear progress offer to modern subjects? Most importantly, I think, is a new lens with which to look at the past, as well as a new language to talk about the recentness of memory.

The depth often attributed to experiences of trauma can dually describes the depth

of memory as a cultural faculty. Charlott Delbo calls deep memory ‘the persistence of the past in its own perpetual present,’⁵⁰ suggesting that our memory is always present within our social realities. It is embodied within an individual’s, and a collective’s identity constructions. Our memory is made in the space where our bodies mediate the spatial and psychic planes of existence.⁵¹ And like Connerton, I believe that memory is always collective. Collective memory as a social necessity provides an experiential framework for looking more closely at modern life. This framework honors historicity and helps bind the past, present, and future together.⁵²

The idea of post memory, coined by Marianne Hirsch, helps define the structure of historical memory and highlights trauma’s ability to interrupt memory. These ‘ruptures and radical breaks’ represent how trauma enters into our social world—through catastrophe and trans-generational inheritance.⁵³ The *post* of post memory attempts to define both a specifically *inter*- and *trans*-generational act of transfer of trauma moving us to see the present, affective force of memory, even generations beyond the inception of the trauma.⁵⁴ Essentially, Hirsch argues that trauma can be transmitted so deeply and affectively that it seems to constitute an actual memory.⁵⁵

Comparative research reveals that discussions of trauma are enhanced greatly when put in conversation with notions of memory. Memory becomes a valuable historical resource within public cultures attempting to address histories of trauma. As scholar Diana Taylor writes in *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, we must be concerned with whose memories and trauma become lost—sacrificed to the passing of time---when the formal archive is privileged over collections of embodied experiences and knowledges.⁵⁶ There exists a disparity in the legitimization

and authentication of forms of knowledge. Some forms of knowledge, like Black women's intellectual traditions of resistance, have not been acknowledged as truths of experience. As archived forms of knowledge become the standard for what should be valorized and legitimized as knowledge and cultural production, embodied experience and 'home-grown' knowledge is devalued. When the subaltern speaks, protests, or intrudes into the unsuspecting social body, their memories of violence, oppression, and trauma become dangerous tools used to disrupt neat historical narratives. For Taylor, "approaches to memory and trauma that privilege the individual subject fail to do justice to the cumulative and collective nature of the trauma suffered by illiterate and literate communities alike."⁵⁷ However, when given an addressable audience, this denied memory can be transmitted through embodied performances.

Much of my research presents a definition of trauma as something that ruptures of an individual's division between internal and external worlds. Trauma leaves behind a trace, a legacy, and within psychoanalytic definitions of trauma, this legacy shatters and distorts memory. I believe this distortion can be attributed to our compulsion to forget and desire for a harmonious past. It is within this sense, that trauma causes truth to go underground.⁵⁸ Roberta Culbertson describes this sense as trauma's inability to make the leap into words.⁵⁹ For Culbertson, trauma is a bodily dilemma, held and contested within the flesh, within material conditions of identity formations. The body has a knowledge of the past held within it. She writes:

We lose sight of the bodies' own recall of its response to threat and pain, and of the ways in which it 'speaks' this pain, because this wordless language is unintelligible to one whose body is not similarly affected...it is not know in words, but in the body.⁶⁰

Culbertson refutes the idea that history lays dormant, behind us. History as 'memory-

knowledge' is never located in the past. This reasoning gives me further assurance that what is needed is a new language of specificity, a new discourse with which to talk about Black women's trauma, as it exists transhistorically.

Forgetting

Modernity's problem with forgetting is not as benign of a problem as some may believe. There exists a specific type of forgetting which is structural, and specific to the culture of modernity within the United States.⁶¹ Cultural amnesia, as it has been called, limits the visibility and intelligibility of certain social groups. With particular social groups' historical experiences erased, the strength of their collective memory is weakened, since social groups' historical experiences become sites of collective memory.⁶² Since there are not spaces within that culture in which, one can remember the past, *that* memory is all the more vulnerable. Central to Connerton's exploration of the roots of cultural forgetting is the question of what is the effect of the produced spaces of contemporary culture on the transmission of memory about the nation-state?⁶³ He argues that the spatial framework of a culture plays a critical role in how cultural memory is circumscribed. I find these insights lend themselves to a deeper understanding of why spaces of testimony are so vital to the public acknowledgment of trauma. Devoting physical and auditory space to testimony that addresses trauma, helps dissolve cultural amnesia. When trauma is presented through the public forum of testimony, it can be held in the collective consciousness.

Within our society, cultural amnesia is not a phenomenon, but rather a produced effect; linked to our systems of capitalist production. As 'non-things' like silicon chips, and laser beams surround us are called information--knowledge--humanity becomes

under the domain of those who hold the power of this type of information: ‘the construction of atomic power stations, weapons, genetic engineering.’⁶⁴ Thus, ‘the lack of solidarity of the culture from which things are increasingly absent is becoming our daily experience.’ Disconnection from products and processes production—whether the clothes we wear or the memories of a specific social group—is becoming a common place, and normalized, phenomena. This ‘cultural amnesia’ intrinsically erases bodily experiences within its life spaces.⁶⁵

With the case of Black female trauma, there exists a challenge of articulating post-traumatic experience. As instances of trauma build up and move across generational and geographical borders, the residue of ancestral experience lingers. We as a culture need to gain an understanding of trauma as “foundational to national histories and passed down through multiple generations.” In *Archive of Feeling*, Ann Cvetkovich describes the history of race in the United States as, “...a history that is inescapably marked by trauma.” She names genocide, slavery, and many other traumas of “American” history as integral part of the nation-state’s founding that have, ‘often been ignored and forgotten, especially as trauma.’⁶⁶ Thus, we need a more critical examination of how history and historical forgetting affect what we ‘know’ about Black women’s trauma in the United States. A history of Black people, told through capitalist, heteropatriarchal discourses of power, will have a particular orientation towards forgetting and silence. Thus, the questioning of power and resistance must be central to our process of revisiting trauma histories and healing through remembrance, not forgetting.

Intentional discussions of trauma open up space for accounts of pain as ‘psychic, not just physical.’ Experiences of socially situated political violence reverberate through

the moments of everyday life for centuries beyond the originating point of traumatic offense. Those whose experiences are born in the vicinity of trauma are marked by it. I, like scholar Ann Cvetkovich, want to situate moments of extreme trauma alongside moments of commonplace emotional distress, which are often the only sign that trauma's effects are still being felt.⁶⁷ Feminist interventions into the field of trauma studies take this issue into account while focusing on the importance of legitimizing personal memory as historical record. Additionally, the project of analyzing racial histories and hierarchies should be a part of interdisciplinary Trauma Studies. To this point Cvetkovich remarks:

Everyday forms of racism, many of which are intuitional or casual and thus don't always appear visible except to those who are attuned to them, are among the effects of longer histories of racial trauma....I find that the demands of thinking about race in its relation to trauma converge with those of thinking about sexuality because both require a method that is alert to the idiosyncrasies of emotional life.⁶⁸

Cvetkovich sees our ability to talk about trauma as an issue of societal attunement to silenced histories of racialized oppression. In an attempt to attune herself, Cvetkovich employs oral history and feminist methodologies in her effort to queer techniques of listening and documenting trauma within the lesbian community.⁶⁹ Feminist scholarship on trauma seeks to—in a sense—familiarize trauma, removing it from the realm of taboo and centering it in the affectual construction of personhood. As links are made between trauma and everyday violent operation of oppressive structures, it is easier to see how specific instances of trauma must be conceptualized within a larger culture of trauma and injury.

The societal silence surrounding Black women's trauma can also be analyzed as an attempt of intentional, cultural forgetting. And what does the threat of collective

forgetting suggest? As described by Paul Connerton in his text *How Modernity Forgets*, systemic forgetting indicates, "...first, that, the collective representations...[hold] knowledge...and second, that the knowledge...[has been] progressively lost." ⁷⁰ He goes on to describe how the generating of a systemic form of cultural forgetting, can be traced to the specific temporality created, and enforced, by our capitalistic society. ⁷¹ Systems of capitalism breed forgetting through alienation. As the labor process born of industrial capitalism becomes obscured, we can pinpoint the capitalist process of production as constituted by a loss of its memory. Connerton points to this as an 'organized structure of misrecognition,' blocking recollection of past processes, and oppressions, associated with those processes. These processes of production erect and maintain modernity. Since processes of labour are rendered cryptic and unintelligible, the principal memories associated with how our society came into being---through conquest, genocide, and erasure of bodies and systems of subaltern knowledge---are 'made unavailable to consciousness.' ⁷² Why does this pose a problem to uncovering trauma? To uncover trauma would be to examine the connections between historical social abuse and contemporary violence. Instead of leaning into the memory of past oppressions, we are trained to block these urges and repress our desire to remember.

The Strong Black Woman

I wish to explore how the trope of the strong Black woman has been used as a hegemonic tool of control and repression of Black women's psyches, social practices, and methods of self-definition. A stereotypical and common representation of Black women is the caricature of the strong Black woman. The Strong Black Women, who is often

deployed as a truthful and even celebratory embodiment of Black femininity, is not only an act of obscurity—hiding Black Women’s experiences of suffering, acts of desperation, and anger—but more importantly, represents an incomplete narrative about Black womanhood.⁷³ This narrative prevents us from talking about trauma and Black women’s vulnerabilities. The Strong Black Women caricature supports redemptive narratives of race, gender, and class and asserts that personal actions and agency trump all manners of social abuses.⁷⁴ The underlying quality of this stereotype—strength—is deployed stealthily to rearticulate sexist and racist conceptions of Black womanhood as positive, innate, and valorizing qualities. Here, strength is a mystique and has been constructed as an essential Black female quality in the societal imagination. The expectation of strength envelops Black women in a void of silence and stoicism. If Black women are strong, then they must also be immune to trauma and injury. This strategic positioning silences Black women’s voices—and in fact encourages them to self-silence—and dismisses their historical and contemporary trauma as mere conditions of their existence and foundations of their identity. The utility of this trope is that it enforces Black Women’s’ silences and does not allow them the same human, vulnerable qualities attributed to other women, and people in general.

This myth of the Strong Black Woman helps us to understand one manifestation of the erasure of Black women’s trauma. The Strong Black Woman occupies a particular discursive and material space; its narratives portray a Black female success story as dependent upon her ability to submerge her own pain and terror. Deploying the trope of the Strong Black Women has been one of the only ways in which Black women’s narratives could be validated as ‘true’ and ‘authentic’ representations of their lives. This

troupe suggests that if Black women simply fight back their trauma with bravery and unbridled strength, they will be immune to victimization. Despite the seductive nature of this claim, we know that the trauma facing Black women is cultural, and thus too deep and too unmediated to be stomped underground, without consequence. This myth of the Strong Black Woman is evidence that Black women are not okay. It points to the fact that the positioning of Black women in contemporary society leaves little room for diverse, and nuanced modes of identification. However, this myth is important and useful in that it shows us to see how that society seeks to flatten and submerge groups' histories of trauma and limit individuals' space of expression in fundamental and irrevocable ways.

A closer look at the trope of the Strong Black women reveals its connections to the caricature of the Mammy. The mammy was the happy-go-lucky, jolly, Black female domestic worker who served white folks with much pleasure and excitement. She was asexual and although a product of slavery, loved white people. She lived to look after white children and proved to be loyal to the family, despite her oppressed position. The Mammy served as an acceptable black female identity—like the Strong Black Woman—because she failed to threaten the power structure and succeeded in eclipsing Black women's trauma. Thus, the Strong Black Women as a myth—although often represented as the embodiment of Black women's power, strength, and ingenuity—is a threat to Black women—their psychic livelihood and emotional health. Because this myth is an incomplete narrative that allows us to be inattentive to Black women pain, it prevents us from speaking about their traumas. Lastly, the violence done to Black women by monolithic myths like the Strong Black Women comes in the forms of denying the multiplicity of Black female experiences, erasing significant experiential and material

knowledges among women, and underplaying the complexity of oppression.⁷⁵

Black women's softness, the product of a deep affectual rendering of their worlds, has been historically constructed as weakness. Black women have had to stave off feelings, suppress them, push them down below the surface. Constrictingly narrow constructions of Black womanhood, like the Strong Black Woman, mean Black women must cordon off their emotion, couch it in unapproachable politeness. (167) They must hold each other separate from each other—breeding harshness where their should lie understanding and compassion. That softness is a condition of our historically experiences, it should not be the price Black women pay for their power.

As a social group—though marginal—Black women are agents. Even as Black women were held hostage by system of sexual violence, their desire to survive never diminished. What we lack is a deeper frame of analysis for Black women's lives and their histories of trauma. Black women are in need of ways to mediate this trauma. The mediation of trauma looks like a subject, or subjects, examining their painful histories, moving through the terror of their marginal experiences, and realizing the possibility of transformation and transcendence. The mediating of trauma will also lead to a reclaiming of the Black female body. Our goal should be to make room for Black women to talk, cry, yell, and organize around their traumas. This room lets new truths be heard as intimate histories are recovered. To be free, black women need self-definition. As black women reclaim their bodies and their histories, they will start a revolution. This of course, must start with a radical cleansing of the self-hatred, and internalized racism that disrupts any healing or recovery.⁷⁶

Chapter Two: Silence, Voice, and Writing

Whatever the temporal relation to the event....whatever the medium...and whatever the degrees of emotional involvement; we bear witness individually for ourselves, our own sake, but always in relation to others... In that processes, the act of testimony also becomes a speech act and draws meaning from its effects on the listener.

Extremities

In *The Erotic Life of Racism* (2012), Sharon Patricia Holland poses the question of how, considering the everyday nature of racial oppression, racism remains so powerful yet masks its very presence. To this question, I resolve that in order for hetero-patriarchy and foundational white supremacy to function seamlessly, while simultaneously concealing the mechanics of their operation, the collective must stay silent and find solace through forgetting. For people of color, the terrors of slavery and institutionalized racism and sexism become festering sites of shame and trauma, forever inherited by each passing generation. Consequently, the act of remembering becomes shameful and it becomes harder and harder to harness one's ability to produce speech acts. No one talks

about the intimate nature of their trauma. Evidence exists as family secrets, whispered down long, storied hallways. It is near impossible to talk about, yet alone consciously mediate, histories of trauma within the Black community. Women of color, and especially Black women, are forced to silently bear witness to their experiences of subjugation and exploitation, ultimately denying themselves the privilege of an embodied experience of selfhood. This trauma is insidious; subtly and treacherously through memory and narrative, trauma reproduces its own conditions allowing the body and spirit to remain trapped within a painful, debilitating silence.⁷⁷

Visibility

Author Lisa Walker locates the demand for visibility as a principal of late-twentieth-century identity politics. As such, visibility matters; it holds the capacity to facilitate the radical expansion of possibilities for marginalized subjects. This is why it is important to understand visibility's connection to Black women's experiences. Are Black women truly seen in society? Are their modernist conditions present in our consciousness? If not, as I argue, then what has allowed for this? "Visibility is a complex system of permission and prohibition, of presence and absence, punctuated alternately by apparition and hysterical blindness." Don DeLillo's comments on the conditions of visibility make clear the give and take that happens whilst gaining visibility. The nature of seeing—in a sociological sense, manifests in the tensions between presence and absence, which are mediated within complex relations of power. In this way, to be seen—to be recognized with a measure of authenticity and clarity—is a privilege reserved for very few. Black women are not seen; they lay outside the imaginary. We are blind to their social condition. In working towards a more dialectical way of seeing, we must confront this historical blindness, which DeLillo speaks of. The cultural condition of

hypervisibility compels us to believe that everything can be seen and made available for our consumption. We have been disciplined not to see repression, in either its active and dormant forms. All around us are historical ghosts, yet we are not taught to see them as influencing contemporary spaces.

Speaking in Tongues

Voice constitutes the essence of selfhood. Subsequently, speaking and writing about one's self is within the Black intellectual and political tradition of survival.⁷⁸ In the vocal articulation of ones' memory of being—of existing within a social sphere of interaction—how should one account for trauma? How is an individual's relationship to their voice severed by trauma or traumatic experiences and what are methods that Black women have used to recover and reclaim their voices in the face of trauma? For Black women living in the United States, what roles does fear and repression play in the compromising of their memories of trauma? How can Black women feel freed in telling their truths, while knowing that their identities as narrators have already been constricted through a narrow historio-racial-schema? For Black women, it is not just their own individual trauma which they must account for, but rather the layered, compounded dynamics of traumatic encounters experienced by their ancestors—ancestors who continue to be silenced by the weight of history. For the Black female subject, who shall bear witness to her trauma? Who shall make room for the transgenerational memories of pain and suffering within the collective consciousness? What happens when we start to think about trauma s a testimony? In this chapter I aim to uncover the place of voice in trauma and discover how the deep seeded traditions of orality within Black communities have allowed Black women to 'write and speak themselves into subject hood.'⁷⁹

I will begin this chapter by establishing a theoretical framework for understanding why speech acts are so important to Black Women's voices and the address of their

trauma. Drawing from contemporary discussion of memory, forgetting, and silence, I argue that testimony, as truth telling within the public sphere, is a tool for healing and mediating trauma. I will dually explore why the act of bearing witness is a necessity for a processional mediating of Black women's trauma. Drawing on the testimonies of Black women's 1930's rape trials and the writing of women like Audre Lorde, I perceive a central goal of trauma work⁸⁰ to be the creation of a public⁸¹ within which to speak about trauma. My work of writing about Black women's trauma is an attempt to take from that which is private, and individual, and put it into a public, thus creating a collective audience for Black women's trauma. Rather than 'consigning its representation to therapeutic contexts.,' trauma can be seen in the space of a collective audience.⁸²

There is something inherently healing about making talk of trauma public. Trauma, which puts pressure on 'conventional forms of documentation, representation, and commemoration,' clears the way and helps facilitate new fields of expression, one of which is testimony. As more public forms of address are created through monuments, rituals, and performances, society will be able to witness trauma through a collective, and most importantly public, medium.⁸³ "Trauma...is not simply the consequence of unbearable experiences, but also in itself, a testimony—a testimony to what has happened to the human." Trauma is then both the 'product of an experience of inhumanity and the proof of the humanity of those who have endured.'⁸⁴ I find Jenny Edkins words so powerfully convey the connection between trauma and testimony. For so many years, Black women have been struggling to produce speech,⁸⁵ struggling to restore a sense of connection within the symbolic order fractured by trauma.⁸⁶ They have been symbolically starved—their voices withheld from them. Thus testimonies work towards a recuperation of voice as they articulate a shareable experience through identification with fear, pain, oppression, and helplessness.

Speaking to Power through testimony

There were a series of trials that took place during the 1930's and 1940's, where Black women testified to the brutalization of their bodies by their rapists. This serves as a poignant case for examining the place of testimony in trauma. Speaking to the all white courtrooms, these women were forced to be public—to openly talk about their rape. In seeking justice for their bodies and communities, they put their bodies and safety on the line. Speaking up led them to be targets on many lists. These women who stood on trial risked re-victimization through the court system via cross examinations and long drawn-out trials without witness protection. These women risked the backlash of white terror, as well as disapproval among other Black community members who in exemplifying the culture of dissemblance, disapproved of talking about the Black community in connection to issues of rape and sexual violence in public space. The media, as well, played a role. It cast Black women as unworthy of empathy and even unable of being raped.⁸⁷ When Black women spoke up, they occupied the most marginal, most oppressed, most at risk social location.

Testimony is desperately needed to mediate the trauma of Black women within public. The public collective provides space for testimony and truth telling that is not only therapeutic but political! The shifting temporal dynamics of testimony allow us to redefine memory as sacred, memory as necessary for healing. Within these types of publics, individuals and whole communities can re-form their relationship to the act of remembering. Ann Cvetkovich writes that testimony, memorial spaces, and rituals can acknowledge traumatic past as a way of constructing new visions for the future. They make room for emotional and sexual histories⁸⁸ and function as weapons against white supremacy and patriarchy, all while reestablishing the self. Thus telling becomes a process of demystifying memory⁸⁹ and reclaiming power. When we look at how things would translate into Black women's experience, it does not fully stand up. It is not that

Black women are mystified by their memory. On the contrary, Black women's memory is clear and fresh and above all, part of a living archive. Instead, the central issue is that Black women's memory has been systemically delegitimized as a source of knowledge. However, testimony as a ritual of recovery, is still essential to Black women's healing.

Bodies and memory

The recovery of social memory addresses social identity and historical memory simultaneously. There is tension between what the lived body undergoes and what verbal knowledge is produced by agents. Just as narratives serve as cultural memory, bodies too are vessel that holds the truths of cultural memory. Cultural memory takes place on the body; culture is what the body lives. Part of what is so important about the narration of remembered trauma is that it creates a platform for public truth telling which accesses unarchived memories of trauma.⁹⁰ The reopening of memories, within an amnesic forgetful society, is a radical action. Exemplifying an openness to engage with that which haunts us, Black women have used testimony to give voice to the unspeakable horrors of Black female experience within the United States. This act in itself, is so hard because of the way that memory is treated within our Modern age. There is a specific type of modern memory that is birthed in our contemporary moment. It represents how our practices of memory have changed, shifting how we embody remembrance. It has been argued that we live in a historic moment of crisis of memory.

According to Pierre Nora, there are many paradoxes attributed to memory within postmodernity. Nora's points to France during the 1980's and 1990's as a time of 'memory crisis' in which society began to devalue local, traditional cultures, and impose capitalist value system upon society. Memory and history are two different things, as Edkins sees it. Memory is sacred and alive. It is always evolving and being negotiated. Memory *belongs* to the present and even to particular social groups.⁹¹ On the other hand,

history as a reconstruction of the past, is always suspect. I believe memory is distrusted and not acknowledged as a valuable source of knowledge and guidance because it is affectual. Edkins attributes this to modernity. She lays out three distinct characteristics of modern memory. First, modern memory is archival in that it is an effort to store material vestiges and amass a collection, which can be recalled upon. Second, modern memory has been transformed into a private affair, thus illustrating the individualism that plagues this era. Thirdly, modern memory is alienated memory because ‘it disconnects past from present rather than emphasizing their inseparability.’⁹² With this important distinction comes a new conceptual framing for how memory can become forgotten within a culture. This forgetting, this erasure of the collective roots of memory created societies’ need for special ‘site of memory.’⁹³

Roberta Culbertson writes that the body creates a certain type of protective memory when it comes to terror and trauma. This is a memory to be told. It is not a memory to be analyzed, but rather a memory to be used for the purpose of survival.” Thus, the case can be made that body memories are primary, in that they come before the creation of any narrative. What is the power in this? It illuminates how body memories, have the capacity to ‘pass beyond knowledge.’⁹⁴

Central to Paul Connerton’s analysis of memory is the idea that the control of a societies’ memory largely conditions the hierarchy of power.⁹⁵ How then is the memory of groups conveyed and sustained? To address this question, one must keep both recollection and bodies in focus, seeking to tease out the relationship between the two.⁹⁶ If it is true that past injustice continues to shape the structure of a society’s present arrangements of power, then organized forgetting⁹⁷ poses the greatest threat to modernity’s attempt to reckon with trauma. As citizens struggle against powers of the state, they must struggle against forced forgetting, not ‘only to save themselves, but to survive as witnesses to later generations, to become relentless recorders,’ of a history

which the state wishes to erase.⁹⁸ This desire to preserve memory across generations is about survival. Many times these histories pose a threat to the state because of the legacies of trauma that they reveal as embedded within society. When these histories are acknowledged, the systemic dynamics of racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression are revealed. These memories of trauma are held at the level of the body, making the body a source of knowledge of things past. This explains the difficulty that arises when we try to extract our past from our present. This is not simply because present factors tend to influence our recollecting of the past, but also because the past can influence and distort our experience of the present. The detangling of present from past is impossible. Of course historical framing is essential, but it is just as important to understand how multiple historical frames fit together across time.

Our experience of reality comes to life between the interactions of our bodies with memory. We can then see memory as the property of the mind *and* body. This comes even closer to home for Black women because their collective, historical traumas are bodily. After centuries of institutionalized rape, the decimation of Black female bodies—the torture, the dismemberment, the exploitative use—has become a ritual within the American cultural landscape. This continual, colonial domination of Black women's bodies calls for a public healing of the cultural image their bodies. In this sense, memory is performative and as an essential aspect of social memory bodily memory collects 'knowledges of the past,' sustained and passed down through ritual performance. If it is true that body and memory are bounded together, then pointing to interlocking state apparatuses as sites of physical and psychic oppression and destruction, could prove to be a way to reveal *how* Black women have been systemically deprived of their memory.⁹⁹

Silence—what a shame

This discussion of historical forgetting has much to do with silence. Scholar

Evelynn Hammonds argues in her article, “Toward a Genealogy of Black Female Sexuality: The Problematic of Silence” that silence is a multigenerational price to pay for an acceptance that never came, regarding Black women in the United States. Hammonds argues for the historicization of the ways in which power has prevented Black women from staking a claim to language and the ability to speak¹⁰⁰ about their experiences. Hammonds references the politics of silence, coined by historian Evelyn Higginbotham, as a political strategy that was once used by black women reformers who hoped their silence would deface the lie of black women’s immoral sexuality.¹⁰¹ This embodiment of a super morality was an escape for Black women, whose bodies were always a site of policing and exploitation. More silence, and shame, were byproducts of this culture. As Black women’s wounding is culturally silenced, there is less and less space for their testimonies. Our society almost requires one’s silence, one’s voicelessness. This interpersonal and systemic silencing breeds an internal silencing, an unconscious response of the body and psyche to mute experiences of threat and harm, not allowing the self to remember them.

Writing wrongs, writing trauma

In thinking about the relationship between trauma, healing, and writing, what role does writing about Black women’s experiences of trauma play within contemporary society? Rather, how does writing one’s body into the canon mediate trauma? How have Black female voices acted as sites of queer identity making and offered new spaces of home through writing? I believe writing is a medium for legitimizing the existence and experiences of Black women. Black women’s writing reflects their experiences in life and can be thought of as social theory. Their writing explores the subjective experiences of Black womanhood and exists to honor their emotions. By writing the Black female self into subjectivity, Black female texts detail what survival looks like for Black women

in the contemporary era.

Authors Jose Munoz and Gloria Anzaldúa's writings on identity construction and performativity speak to the powerful role that the Black female writers play in mediating trauma. As queer subjects¹⁰², Black women stand outside normative definitions of gender and sexuality, remix possibilities of kinship¹⁰³, and counter hegemonic notions of womanhood and femininity. For Munoz, minoritarian, or subaltern, performances (foot note—writing is a performance) contain the seeds of hope for brighter, revolutionary futures. The 'world-making potentialities contained in the performances of minoritarian citizen-subjects,' transforms public space and transports the collective 'across symbolic space, inserting [it] in a conterminous time when we witness new formations within the present and the future.' The power of this type of queerness lays in its ability to surpass regulation by one single temporality. Instead, subaltern performers insist on 'the minoritarian subject's status as world-historical entity.' The sites of Black women's queer performance that I wish to explore are their written texts.¹⁰⁴

Writing for black women, is something Farah Griffin calls textual healing. The writing itself performs a healing, deriving from a deep identification of our pain and contextualization of how it effects or collective presence. When Black women read texts about Black female experience,, they are able to locate and historicize notions of internalized racism and hatred for themselves while dually 'constructing maps for healing.¹⁰⁵ These maps are both roots and routes of/to liberation. In this sense, Black women's writing has transformative, pedagogical potential. The attention to individual and collective bodies in Black women's writing is an "...attention to the taboos, to the private...[that can lead] to radical redefinition of wellness and health."¹⁰⁶ It is a calling out to the collective; an asking for a common connection to the story of what has happened to us.

Black women writing about their lives lead to a pluralistic lens with which to

analyze subject-hood.¹⁰⁷ In quoting Mae Gwendolyan Henderson, Myles writes, “..as gendered and racial subjects black women speak/write in multiple voices--not all simultaneously or with equal weight, but with various and changing degrees of intensity, privileging one parole and then another.” It is within the dynamics of these voices, that the compressing of our weighted trauma can start to be sorted through. Thus Black women’s writing and speaking is a movement towards enabling more expansive self-actualization, serving as a way for women to come into their knowledge.¹⁰⁸ We can thus think of writing as a internal birthing of protest for ‘outer terrains.’ As such, writing is the first site which manifest social change. Gloria Anzaldúa remarks that writing is about creation, and thus is a liberatory practice. Women of color’s writing take up space in a critical way, by pushing back at all the ways women of color expressions are suppressed. This self-definition is what pushes Anzaldúa to writes, she says:

Why am I compelled to write?... Because the world I create in the writing compensates for what the real world does not give me. By writing I put order in the world, give it a handle so I can grasp it. I write because life does not appease my appetites and anger.¹⁰⁹

To write is to order the world. The ‘work’ of writing is carving out space for reflections on how it feels to be a woman of color in our contemporary moment. Writing is powerful for Anzaldúa because it allows her to become more intimate with herself and the larger community of women of color. Anzaldúa writes to:

...Become more intimate with myself and you. To discover myself, to preserve myself, to make myself, to achieve self-autonomy. To dispel the myths that I am a mad prophet or a poor suffering soul. To convince myself that I am worthy and that what I have to say is not a pile of shit... Finally I write because I'm scared of writing, but I'm more scared of not writing.¹¹⁰

Here we see that writing, for women of color is a must. To put this more extremely, women of color do not have the privilege to refrain from writing; their survival depends upon their ability to produce a narrative. Author Ann E. Reuman highlights the danger

that Black women face and conquer as writers. Reuman writes, “The risks of being a woman (particularly a woman of color) are little different from those faced for speaking against violence done to one as a woman: being battered, lynched, raped, sterilized, sold into prostitution.”¹¹¹ For Black women to speak so openly about slavery’s legacy, institutional rape, sexual abuse, exploitation and oppression of Black male dominance, through their writing, is an incredible feat. Their literature talks back, constituting an act of resistance and political gesture that challenges the politics of domination rendering Black women nameless and voiceless.

As the Black female writer makes her trauma visible to those at the center, she dually calls out for identification with those who exist on the margins. Texts encourage readers to take up the critical subject category of the black woman. Writing the body can be a means used by Black women to convey to the public, a deeper understanding of that trauma through mediation. On writing, Roberta Culbertson pronounces:

Narrative...is processual, an active and continuous denial and reassertion of memory, in a slow process of building a story of loss and recovery, of placing body and mind in a cultural narrative that recognizes certain things as truth, and the body’s language as always in need of translation.¹¹²

As narratives unfold they speak to the missing pieces. As Nancy Miller suggests, the culture for first-person writing must to be understood in relation to a desire for common ground, a desire for a shareable experience through identification.¹¹³ She believes that by definition, a memoir, poem, or piece of autobiographical fiction is devoted to life lived in ‘extremities’ and therefore tells a story about trauma from the first person perspective.¹¹⁴ These forms of personal testimony expand the boundaries of identity construction and the contours of the self as they outline potential territories of community. The act of writing a personal narrative singular evolves the single ‘me’ into a plural ‘us’ as the lines between author and reader blend.¹¹⁵ Miller goes on to argue that stories that challenge the limits of exemplification and transmission resonate mostly because they ‘chronicle experience that

has yet to be incorporated within the popular imagination.’¹¹⁶ Here I believe Miller suggests that to some degree, all narratives wish to be included with the cultural script or as she phrases it popular imagination. However the question of whose narrative will make it into the imaginary in depends upon the relationship between their narrative and the state. How threatening is that narrative to the nation-state, or its mechanism of forgetting? If there proves to be an adversarial connection between narrative to the nation-state, part of the narrative’s power is held in its potential to tell us more about society and white male hegemony than Black women. Thus, writing of wrongs as Miller suggests, is the refusal to keep ‘private, solitary suffering locked away.’ Instead, stories of trauma are inserted into the public domain, and their narratives are inserted in a discourse that makes it shareable with others.¹¹⁷

Deirdre Lashgari’s text *Violence, Silence, and Anger: Women's Writing as Transgression* frames women’s writing, and the writings of women of color more specifically, as transgressive in that they violate the master’s boundaries.¹¹⁸ In her book she poses the question: what is the role of silence and anger in the literary production of women? For women who write from the margins, their acceptance into the literary mainstream often means they must sacrifice their voice and stay silent, thus their work often clashes with Eurocentric culture and literary production.¹¹⁹ Those women’s’ writing participates in a type of decentering. Lashgari names these types of narratives as dialogical because of the polyvalent nature of that which interrupts dominant histories. As a confrontative process, wrought with rifts, diversions and discrepancies, the unfolding of these narratives unearths truth. Sometimes this process is angry, which is constructive because anger has the power to move us from passivity into clarity.¹²⁰ At the end of this telling comes *travesia*: the moment of crossing over into a new understanding. We are gifted with a new orientation and discourse with which to re-read narratives. *Travesia* is the essence of transgression. It is about questioning the other as well as what

is familiar, it is about attuning the ear to the silences. This process has been essential to postcolonial literary practice and discourse. The process of making the margins the new center—the newest point of convergence with which to frame our theoretical assumptions and standpoints—is a process of displacement. It pushes against a monolithic discourse and shifts the vantage point of the subject allowing invisible violences and traumas to reveal themselves to readers.¹²¹ This embodies Heteroglossia¹²² and frees monologues from their ‘constricting knots.’¹²³ As a multitude of voices enter the discourse, allowing the margins to talk back, a previous binary structure of insiders and outsiders begins to unravel. The space secured for individual woman, through writing, is not enough. The collective cannot access this individualized space. If trauma is to only be addressed on an individual level, the full weight of Black women’s trauma will never be investigated.

Writing embodies a fluid process of Black female identity making. Writing becomes a site of transfer of intimate memories about the traumas of Black womanhood. Within the space of writing, a back and forth happens between recording and interpreting social life which produces new forms of self-knowledge.¹²⁴ Writing by Black women creates spaces of safety and home for other Black women—inviting further transformation and rejuvenation. Within this new space, writing moves towards greater consciousness and personal transformation. If Black women don't define, or write about, Black womanhood they run the risk of white femininity becoming the ‘unquestioned authority’ on women’s experiences.¹²⁵ In this sense, Black women’s writing is protest. As agents who spoke directly to the pain and sweetness of life from a distinctly Black, and subaltern positionality, Black women who write about their social location use texts to mediate the collective injuries of psychic and bodily trauma.

Looking ahead

Writing has often been used to reclaim and reconnect with an ancestral past in an

attempt to heal a damaged psyche.¹²⁶ Writing and speaking in this way, does address shame and trauma through therapeutic methods. However, it is not enough. Speaking and writing are individualized, and class-bound, methods of telling. It is often the case, as scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins have argued, that Black women's writing and theories of their lives don't reach enough Black women and girls to spur a shift in collective thinking and/or experience. The private nature of reading doesn't allow the simple reading of a text to fully undo the shame that Black women have internalized. If we are to address shame and trauma, we need to make them into a public matters. In the next chapter I will explore how the method of collective testimony, through political organizing, brings a public dimension to the act of speech. As unified voices are placed into a public sphere, they can help contextualize and given meaning to cultural, *collective* trauma.

Chapter 3: Trauma goes public: Black Feminist healing through Organizing

So far in my thesis, I have discussed the intricacies of Black women's trauma. In chapter one, I grounded my understanding of Black women's trauma through historical, interpretative readings of Black women's systemic shame, silence, and subversion as products of their traumatized histories. In chapter two, I analyzed the roles of testimony and writing in Black women's liberation from that trauma. I concluded that chapter by arguing that although voice can be used as a powerful weapon against the cultural forgetting of racial trauma, the production of testimony and writing are not enough. Testimony as a form of confession facilitates a healing of individual but not collective trauma. It may offer individual Black women opportunities to free themselves of internalized hate and shame, but it does not necessarily do this for the entire collective. Writing as well, is too individualized and class-bound to stand on its own as an utopian healing method. In this chapter I discuss the connections between Black female publics, like Black feminist organizations, and the collective mediation of trauma. Through the creation of public cultures, seeking to unearth truths silenced by patriarchal codes of forgetting, trauma can enter the public area, setting free the voices of those at the margins.

Collective Trauma

In *The Empire of Trauma: An Inquiry into the Condition of Victimhood*, co-authors Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman reminds us of just how deeply individuals, and their trauma, are connected to the collective. In their discussion of what they call the politics of trauma, they argue that the connection between what's going on at the individual level and what happens at the collective level signals a deep relationship between the culture and the psyche. As a 'collective event supplies the substance of the trauma,' its affects will be articulated within individual experiences. Rather, the affinity for events can be shared by many individuals within a social group. And these affinities are as varied and nuanced as the individuals within the group.

A shared sense of self could also prove to support a share sense of injury, like in the case of Black women's collective shame and trauma. The dynamics of Black women's organizing and writing provide a vital mediation of the shame surrounding Black women's histories and images of self. Because one's memory is a part of an interconnected set of collective narratives, feelings of shame based in histories of racialized, gendered trauma embed themselves within group identity formations.¹²⁷ This shared historical condition, provides for intergenerational transmission of memories. In this cyclical way, 'individual suffering bears witness to the traumatic aspect of the collective drama.'¹²⁸

When a community, a collective, is under attack, people try to survive. Individual's sense of themselves, as well as the collective's consciousness, is deeply effected by traumatic experience. Mediating trauma is political. Just think: how do people combat forgetting and through what praxis can they fight erasure and silence through memorialization? Additionally, I believe the act of being someone is impossible without dually accounting for one's being somewhere.¹²⁹ Thus, we must examine the motivations

and spatial dimensions of Black women's political activism. Why do black women organize and what makes them and their communities take action? Black feminist organizations, whose work centers on an address of Black women's trauma, create spaces of transgression and healing. How does this work of collective healing compare to more mainstream methods of healing, such as talk therapy or isolated periods of self-care? When Black women's subjectivity is trapped within hegemonic spaces of domination, their erotism, sexuality, and overall presence is seen as dangerous, but when Black women step into a spaces of recovery, they find strength through shared identification and resistance and are able to draw on their trauma in creative and transformative ways.

Women-centered collectives, or public cultures, offer unique opportunities for healing and transformation to Black women. Modern frameworks for dealing with pain and trauma in our lives seem to suggest that problems of any nature can be solved if one simply utilizes talk therapy and psychotherapeutic modalities. Despite these methods being costly and scarcely available within communities of color, they also require an individual to leave their community—depart from the collective—in order to heal themselves. The ideology of 'healing through isolation' is emblematic of the way whiteness functions to extrapolate people from collectivized environments of connection, healing, and processing.

Power of solidarity

Judith Lewis Herman writes in her text *Trauma and Recovery* that the solidarity within a group can provide not just protection against terror and despair, but also the strongest antidote to traumatic experience. It has been among Black feminist collectives, that this has rung the truest—solidarity is what keeps everyone afloat. Trauma has a tendency to isolate and fracture an individual's sense of self. These effects may be mirrored by a collective that shares its sources of oppression. The power of the collective

to address this lies within the dynamics of the organization, and its ability to restore a sense of belonging among people with intimate, trauma histories. Herman argues that while trauma shames and stigmatizes, the group can bear witness and affirm individual and collective power. If it is trauma that degrades the victim, the group can exalt her. As trauma seeks to dehumanize the victim, the group takes on its duty to restore her humanity.¹³⁰ Thus healing within a collective offers the most liberatory and effective path to mediated trauma and self-love.

Public Cultures

The central goal of the creation of trauma public cultures is the formation of a public, or collective of addressable others, around trauma that doesn't involve medical diagnoses or victims. Borrowing from the writings of Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, a public, "supports forms of affective, erotic, and personal living' that are public in the sense of accessibility and availability to memory."¹³¹ When talk of trauma is made public, and sustained through collective activity, there exists a healing potential and possibility of mediation. By taking what has traditionally been conceptualized as a private, individual issue, and bringing it into a wider, de-individualized forum, a collective audience for trauma will be created. This work of transplanting the private into the public allows people to address trauma without shame and guilt, but also actively combats the haunting of trauma that appears in the textures of everyday emotional life, but doesn't fit into the model of PTSD.¹³² As affective experiences provide the basis for new cultures, trauma itself can put pressure on orthodox forms of documentation, representation, and commemoration and give rise to new gestures of expression of autonomy such as testimony and forums for political action.¹³³ I am concerned with how cultural production that emerges around trauma enables new practices and publics and, "expands the category of the therapeutic beyond the confines of the narrowly medicalized

or privatized encounter between clinical professional and client.”¹³⁴ I believe trauma cultures can do the work of therapy. When trauma can be a foundation for creating counterpublics spheres rather than evacuating them, trauma can become unhinged from its borderland position between systemic structures of exploitation and oppression and the felt experience of these systems.¹³⁵ Through cultivating conversations about traumatic histories in public spheres, we can use accounts of affective experience to transform our sense of what constitutes a public sphere and public issue. I see the ultimate goal of trauma public cultures to be the acquisition of an understanding of trauma as “foundational to national histories and passed down through multiple generations.”¹³⁶

So what constitutes a public? Borrowing from Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, a public is that which supports forms of affective, erotic, and personal living that are public in the sense of their accessibility, availability to memory, and sustainability through collective action. If its true that publics support collective healing and living, we can imagine the strong affinities between the foundation of publics and historical trauma. Trauma can be a foundation for creating ‘counterpublic spheres,’ where instead of abandoning trauma, we could rescue it from obscurity. It is important to remember that traumatic events have the power and ability to trigger the political. Politics tells us not to forget; they tell us to confront, acknowledge, and mediate the trauma of our social realities.¹³⁷

For Black women, Black female centered spaces are essential for spiritual and physical survival. Black women have been seeking these spaces of freedom for centuries. During the era of emancipation, African Americans grappled with the constraints and conditions of their newfound freedom. The movement from chattel slavery to indentured servitude and sharecropping did nothing to remove the oppression, fear, and terror that plagued, and still plagues, the lives of African Americans living in the United States. The rise of Jim Crow apartheid illuminated the legal and extralegal measure taken to

immobilize African Americans and label them as not just second-class citizen, but subhuman subjects. This struggle had an added dimension of sexual oppression and exploitation for Black women. Black women living in the United States have always been struggling for space for the bodies, minds, and voices within dominant culture. Forces of patriarchy, sexism, and heteronormativity aim to subvert Black women's power and wisdom. This subversion lies deep within the intersections of their identities. Space for Black women has always represented a site of physical, psychological, metaphorical struggle. Such liminal spaces have been locations where Black women have crossed, and been crossed, by binding, constricting boundaries. Within that crossing, Black women have redefined their lives, outside the structures that render them invisible, sexual objects.

Feminist theorist Lynette Myles argues that safe Black female spaces can be found in the movement at the margin or boundary. They then occupy a space at a radical edge. This is the space of altering consciousness.¹³⁸ In thinking about this radical edge, this space of contention and pushing back, I turn to Black women's organizing collectives as spaces where radical edges allow Black women collective powers of address and mediation. Between the lack of space within 'Black agenda' for women's issues—which can be attributed to heteropatriarchy and the everlasting, ever-present crisis of masculinity—and the suffocating whiteness of most liberal feminist spaces and organizations, Black women are left with nowhere to go. Although marginalized with both Black and feminist spaces, Black women refused to be immobilized by a passive acceptance of their 2nd class status. Their exploitation became the basis for their coming together in organizing collectives.

Political organizations

Political organizations appear to be the perfect site for mediating trauma. Within these spaces, the collective can provide the possibility of not only ‘mutually rewarding relationships but also of collective empowerment.’¹³⁹ Black women’s political organizations can serve as examples of public cultures that explore and mediate trauma. As public cultures, what does Black women’s political organizing do for Black women’s trauma? How does political organizing that emerges from and/or around trauma enable new practices and politics? Ann Cvetkovich studies lesbian activism as a *distinct* public culture in her text *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*. More specifically, she looks to sites of lesbian public cultures a liberatory space that treats trauma and sexuality in conjunction. These prove to be transformative publics which are capable of finding traces of trauma in daily life, and seizing control of it from medical experts, thus forging creative responses to that trauma. Often these responses outstrip culturally accepted therapeutic solutions and fall outside of white supremacist logic of healing and salvation.¹⁴⁰

I frame Black women’s political organizations and collective activism as public cultures that treat the trauma, pain, and shame of Black female experience. Political organizations built intentionally as female-identified spaces, make space to process trauma and transform its meaning for Black women. These public cultures forge a response to trauma, pushing through the pain, terror, and coercive forgetting that characterizes our modern epoch. It has been mostly within these spaces of Black female collectivity, that Black women have been able to create the psychic space needed to gather their resources to resist, and survive. A political movement does not come simply out of words, as Adrienne Rich reminds us. In an interview with David Montenegro, she remarks that there must be a willingness to witness trauma in the work of liberation. Rich says, “I’m thinking about grassroots women’s organizations and activist who have sat

through hundreds of interviews with battered or raped women telling what happened to them, and helping to empower them, and who have a knowledge about these things which is not metaphorical.” This work that Rich speaks of becomes, for her, the foundational motivation for Black feminist organizing., Rich speaks to the power of public cultures to re-center and hold trauma of the collective in order to deploy techniques of healing, collectively. When public cultures are formed around collective testimonies of trauma, the suffering and silencing of women’s realities comes into focus. Through listening and witnessing, the voices of those who have been excluded by public discourse are made audible in the public area. ¹⁴¹

Organizing a body politics

As sexual violence is used to enforce a racial and economic hierarchy¹⁴², it becomes the core of white supremacy.¹⁴³ Thus, one of the major silences around Black women’s trauma is the history of the rape of their bodies. Despite the destruction of the Black female subject which ensued, ritual rapes of Black women within black communities contributed to the creation of new spaces, new publics, within which Black women could share their stories and build a community among allies, advocates, and other survivors. New social spaces of healing were opened up as black women, despite the threat of death and sexual terrorism, began to speak of their traumas of sexual violence in open and public ways.¹⁴⁴ Organizing around bodily sovereignty is one lens with which to study Black women’s political organizations and collectives. This lens of examination reveals that reclaiming the Black female body, as an autonomous and sacred site, was a central organizing tenant of many Black feminist organizations.

In this third section of my thesis I frame Black women’s activism as a public culture, which practices politics of liberation and provide a platform to address historical, cultural trauma. Black women’s organizing is the assertion of a black female selfhood. I have come to understand selfhood as the state of having an identity, which can stake a

claim to voice. Ownership of space is essential to Black women's redefinition and articulation of selfhood. Within the spaces of their organizations, Black women can collectively define Black womanhood, feminist agency, empowerment, and healing for themselves. The presence of truth telling within Black women's organizational structures is used to support and mobilize women. In the telling their truths, a new foundational collective memory can be constructed.

Case Study: The National Association of Colored Women

The National Association of Colored Women (NACW) was founded in 1896 in Washington, D.C by Mary Church Terrell, a prominent scholar and activist. Terrell, born in 1863, was the daughter of former slaves and in 1884 became the first Black woman to receive a bachelor's degree in the United States after graduating from Oberlin College. The organization's founders included some of the most renowned African-American women educators, community leaders, and civil-rights activists in America, including: Harriet Tubman, Frances E.W. Harper, Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, Margaret Murray Washington, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, and Mary Church Terrell, who was the organization's first president. Founding members of the NACW felt they had been silenced under unjust and unholy charges as Black women living in the era of emancipation and Jim Crow segregation.¹⁴⁵ Members envisioned creating a women's organization, based in shared sisterhood, which would 'save' Black women through protecting their bodily integrity and right to protest. Exploring the breadth and many articulations of Black womanhood was a central goal of the NACW. They conceptualized fighting for all people's freedom as their primary duty within the Black community.

The National Association of Colored Women provided an escape for Black women from the subjugation of their identities and devaluing of their knowledge. As an

organization that directly addressed historical and contemporary trauma, the NACW was concerned with mending relationships between Black women, promoting education within the Black community, and speaking out against the horrors of poverty and disenfranchisement. They sought to cultivate healing and empowerment through expressing the commonalities between Black women's experiences of oppression and resistance. By helping Black women unearth self-hatred and shame through collectivized action, the women of the National Association Of Colored Women articulated a radical, spatial solidarity among Black women by dually embracing past struggles and future hopes.

Communal spaces at the margins of healing

It is important to consider what female-centered spaces offer to Black women. These spaces prove to be key locations where Black women can process their trauma because their spatial dynamics catered to the historical constructions of Black womanhood and femininity. Black women's very present, historical trauma is not shared with other social groups. It is in this sense that Black women are not like everyone else; their subordinate racial status coupled with their oppressed and exploited position as women, has led to their particular socialization under hegemonic power. They have been subjugated, silenced—ultimately traumatized—as a group. Thus, the only way for Black women to heal is within spaces of connection to other Black women, and women of color.

The historical violence and trauma committed against Black women warrants the creation of new spaces for them to flourish within. As Black women cross boundaries moving from the margins, inward, towards each other, they create spaces of radical change. These spaces are demarcated through politics of resistance and spatial entitlement. In her book *Spaces of Conflict, Sounds of Solidarity*, Gaye Theresa Johnson

explores the dynamics of Black and Brown coalition organizing in Los Angeles. She argues that self-definition and spatial entitlement became available avenues to empowerment for Black and Brown people in LA during the 1930's and 1940's. I believe this theoretical framework of spatial-political mobilization can offer a unique way of analyzing how and why Black women create women-centered spaces.

Seeking a departure from toxic spaces of society, Black women have created spaces of collectivity through new articulations of Black womanhood, citizenship, and sustained livelihoods. These spaces of discursive cultural production challenge boundaries of race, gender, eroticism, and representation, as they rethink methods of healing through liberation. Despite deep immobilization—stemming from their raced and gendered identities—Black women are set free when their voices articulate a spatial solidarity through dually embracing past struggles and future hopes. Within this radical openness, new notions of cultural identity are affirmed and new social locations are birthed.

The movement into these spaces exemplifies a physical and discursive escape from imprisoning structures of white supremacy. These structures which disrupt Black women's development of womanhood and female wholeness dually seek to discipline Black women's subjectivities. Remaining in oppressive spaces prevents Black women from acting as agents and restricts their abilities to effect change. Moving to transformative, woman-identified spaces is an act of psychological, spiritual, and political solidarity building. It also provides a radical cleansing from whiteness for Black women.

These new spaces of transformation break open new landscapes of change for Black women. Thus, they should not be conceptualized as static homes for Black women to exist within. Instead, Myles posits that queerer notions of home must be needed to understand the power of fluidity within the structures of female-centered space. In author Lynette Myles' opinion, no unitary site can be 'home' for Black women because of the

temporal dynamics of the recovery and transformation they need to survive. Homi L. Bhabha's concept of Third Space has helped me understand the vital functions of these new spaces of solidarity. Third Space is understood as a space of complete self-definition; an intervening space which exposes the overlapping of terrains of contemporary culture and historical memory (46). In comparison to spaces produced through rigidity and order, these spaces create alternative narratives of sexual/racial selfhood, push against institutions of racial and sexual normalization, and discrediting white supremacist logics of healing.

Conclusion

As I have located within the past three chapters, it is history—and more specifically the history of racialized and gendered trauma—that haunts the lives of Black women in the United States. It is not the case that these histories of terror and suffering are unknown. Researchers, artists, novelists, and poets alike have chronicled the historical relationships between Black women, slavery, institutionalized rape, and sexual violence. Rather, the central issue is the suppression of these histories of subjugation. Thus, conjuring up Black Women's historical trauma with the public sphere ruptures the balance of remembrance and forgetting within our social reality, offering a radically different lens with which to view Black female experience.

The persistent troubling of Black women, by unmediated trauma, speaks to the limitations and failings of many prevalent modes of social science inquiry. It is imperative to generate a widespread understanding of trauma as trans-historical phenomena. Additionally, contextualizing assumptions about Black women's current social condition within a framework seeking to excavate historical, cultural trauma allows us to trace the ghosts of slavery within contemporary existence. We should examine the historicity of Black women's trauma, agency, and healing in an effort to facilitate a nuanced, historical understanding of Black women's fight for self-definition, bodily

integrity, and freedom. It is only then, that we will be able to see the shortcomings of our methods for analyzing Black women's social conditions.

My analysis of Black women's genealogy of trauma as well as my interpretive reading of Black women's rape testimonies and writing helps guide an understanding of occurrences of trauma within the lives of black women. I attempted to discursively, and literally, employ a politic of listening to emphasize the political nature of speaking about trauma, as well as the silence surrounding Black women's narrative, histories, and intellectual traditions. My goal, if anything, was to make room for varied narratives about Black female experience in the field of trauma studies.

Chapter one laid out a framework for understanding trauma as cultural, historic, and transgenerational. Chapter two analyzed speech and writing as Black feminist methods of mediating and healing trauma. Chapter three analyzed methodological processes of transforming and rejuvenating the black female psyche through activism and highlighted the significance of Black women's collectives as political sites of healing, pleasure, and resistance.

I have also discovered Black women's need for embodiment before empowerment. Black women's fight for embodiment is a pressing social and racial justice issue. Embodied healing modalities, like dance and yoga, can honor the space of struggle and mourning while working to restore the mental health of Black women within the larger community of color. When we publicly acknowledge the effects of trauma, we stand a better chance of reestablishing the connection between individuals and the collective.

What would empowerment for Black women look like? What space would it take place within? Empowerment must go beyond a dialogue about black women's beauty and brilliance. Beauty, nor intelligence, need not be the foundation of our self-love and communal acceptance. Rather, to reclaim ourselves, we must scratch at the superficial layer of our identities and look more closely at history's effect on how we relate to

ourselves and each other. We must practice being soft with each other—we need to love her—ourselves, our sisters—“in the light as well as in the darkness.” The more we Black women speak the polytonal realities of our existences; the deeper they will be internalized and transformed into inalienable truths.

Black women’s survival is nothing less than sheer brilliance. Their distinct knowledges arose from the crossings and navigation of transhistorical histories of trauma. Black women’s contemporary existence embodies the epitome of modernist projects of survival. Their writing and personal testimonies show us the distinctiveness of Black women’s trauma. Cathy Caruth argues that sharing traumatic experience with others is a precondition for the restitution of a sense meaning within our social worlds.

Some of you may be curious as to how I came to such a place of empowerment after spending months researching the horrors, anguish, and traumas of Black female experience. I resolve that I have found the power within the traumatic. By this I mean to suggest that instead of depressing my emotions and curbing my dreams, studying trauma has helped me understand a few things. I now understand that sites where our pain manifests can exist in our minds and in our bodies. I have also learned to more closely scrutinize retellings of Black female experience by outsiders.

Many of these insights have facilitated my deepened thinking about blackness, abjection, and the traumatic. Abject, in relationship to blackness, has come to represent a history of humiliating defeat, deemed useless, and thought of as something to overcome and reach beyond. This way of seeing renders the past’s abjection as useless. This conceptualization of the past as an obstacle to empowerment and coalition building, does not allow adequate space to explore what else downtrodden history of blackness can offer to Black people. Scholar Dariek Scott aims to tease out of the relationships between abjection and blackness as he explores the political and intellectual legacies of blackness within the present. The deepest aspects of blackness which lay coiled at its ‘historical

heart,' are echoed as the collusion of 'historically produced circumstances and the practices of our collective habituated perceptions.' To examine the relationship of blackness and abject, Scott assesses the ways blackness is rendered the 'exemplar of nonnormative genders and sexualities' and how explores how this rendering cements negative aspects of blackness deep within the cultural consciousness. Scott questions how racialization-through-abjection came to be a historical legacy? In turn I ask, what do these legacies of trauma tell us about the transformative quality of blackness? We should be thinking of the raw experiences of abjection as 'resource[s] for the political present;' rather, a route to a more nuanced understanding of blackness, Black pain, and black people. The trauma of Black experience should serve to enrich, rather than limit, breadth of human condition.

Leaning into the productive power of powerlessness asks us to re-examine what we think we know about blackness and the psychic and physical manifestations of its trauma of defeat. Rather, the horror and trauma of Black subjects' experiences of racialization can be a tool with which to deconstruct internalized structures of hate. As I have suggested, we should look at this trauma—stare at it right in the face as a collective—and will it to transform within the deep recesses of our consciousness. In effect, we should look to Black power as theorizing from, instead of against, the trauma of blackness. This 'counterintuitive black power,' as Scott expertly reads it, will reveal to us innumerable possibilities for collective transformation. This Black power will help us to confront, not bury, history and, as Scott theorizes, gift us with the power to know what we thought of as lost as actually present and within our possession. Considering that we are racialized through domination and objection, is it possible to look at that pain and see what our trauma has produced for us? Delineating blackness and abstraction reveals that this blackness—the powerful, unstoppable blackness—is not only a resource, but an 'liberating escape.' Through this temporal escape, the paradoxes of trauma—those which

allow for people to be able to literarily recall the events of their trauma but prevents them from integrating all the time/space pieces into their consciousness—no longer hold us back from examining trauma for its traces of liberation. It is in these traces that we are reminded that Black, female, embodied subject hood is possible.

In many instances, the sharing of Black women's trials, tribulations, and traumas through speech acts and writing overpowers anxiety and shame while forming affinities within the marginalized, yet incredibly creative and resilient women of color community. Black women's trauma and vulnerabilities—although painful and wrought with shame—ultimately served the deeper purpose of facilitating a space for Black women, and the larger community of color, to share and speak back to the traumas of violent enslavement, sexual violence, destruction of communal bonds, and infringement on their rights to survival. From the reservoirs of self-love and understanding will spring forth liberation for the Black female subject.

Endnotes

¹ *Conversation between Bell Hooks and Melissa Harris-Perry*. Perf. Bell Hooks and Melissa Harris-Perry. NYU, 2013. Film Screening.

² Myles, Lynette D.. *Female subjectivity in African American women's narratives of enslavement: beyond borders*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. Print. Page 5.

- ³ My use of the language ‘historicized trauma scripts’ aims to move towards a more nuanced phrasing of ‘people with trauma histories’ in order to (1) better reflect collective agency in negotiating trauma; (2) bring attention to how neither identity nor history are static terms and have shifting discourses which mutually construct them; and (3) allow people/the collective to exist independently of modifying adjectives such as “traumatized,” “suffering.”

⁴ Griffiths, Jennifer L.. *Traumatic possessions the body and memory in African American women's writing and performance*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009. Print.

⁵ Lashgari, Deirdre. *Violence, silence, and anger: women's writing as transgression*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995. Print. Page 11.

⁶ Michael Rothberg. "Decolonizing Trauma Studies: A Response." *Studies in the Novel* 40.1-2 (2008): 224-234. Print. Page 230.

⁷ Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: a Reader*. Ed. Patrick Williams and Chrisman. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994. 392-401. Page 226.

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⁸ McGuire, Danielle L.. *At the dark end of the street: black women, rape, and resistance- a new history of the civil rights movement from Rosa Parks to the rise of black power*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010. Print. Page XVI.

⁹ Gordon, Avery. *Ghostly matters haunting and the sociological imagination*. New University of Minnesota Press ed. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008. Print. Page 4

¹⁰ *ibid.*, page 11.

¹¹ Hine, Darlene Clark. "Rape And The Inner Lives Of Black Women In The Middle West." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 14.4 (1989): 912. Print. Page 916.

¹² Myles, Lynette D.. *Female subjectivity in African American women's narratives of enslavement: beyond borders*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. Print. Page 25.

¹³ Lorde, Audre. "Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred, and Anger ." *Sister outsider: essays and speeches*. Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984. 145-176. Print. Page 145.

¹⁴ Lorde, *op. cit.*, page 146.

¹⁵ Lorde, *op. cit.*, page 152.

¹⁶ Lorde, *op. cit.*, page 165.

¹⁷ Lorde, *loc. cit.*

¹⁸ Doe, *loc. cit.*

¹⁹ Myles, *op. cit.*, page 167.

²⁰ Clifford, *loc. cit.*

²¹ Hammonds, *loc. cit.*

²² Hammonds *op. cit.*, page 95.

²³ Griffiths, Jennifer L.. Traumatic possessions the body and memory in African American women's writing and performance. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009. Print. Page 18.

²⁴ Culbertson *op. cit.*, page 4.

²⁵ Culbertson *op. cit.*, page 3.

²⁶ [Footnote about social death using BW as an example]

²⁷ Fassin, Didier, and Richard Rechtman. *The empire of trauma: an inquiry into the condition of victimhood*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009. Print. Page 15.

²⁸ *ibid.*, page XI.

²⁹ Fassin *op. cit.*, page 16.

³⁰ Fassin *op. cit.*, page XI.

³¹ Herman, Judith Lewis. Trauma and recovery. New York, N.Y.: BasicBooks, 1992. Print. Page 51.

³² Hine, Darlene Clark. "Rape And The Inner Lives Of Black Women In The Middle West." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 14.4 (1989): 912. Print. Page 912.

³³ Hine, *op. cit.*, page 915.

³⁴ Hine, *op. cit.*, page 912.

³⁵ Hammonds *op. cit.*, page 97.

³⁶ *ibid.*, page 225.

³⁷ Rothberg, *op. cit.*, page 226.

³⁸ Rothberg, *loc. cit.*

³⁹ Cvetkovich, Ann. An archive of feelings: trauma, sexuality, and lesbian public cultures. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003. Print. Page 17.

⁴⁰ Edkins, Jenny. *Trauma and the memory of politics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003. Print. Page 15.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, Page 14.

⁴² Edkins *op. cit.*, Page 19.

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- ⁴³ Cvetkovich, Ann. *An archive of feelings: trauma, sexuality, and lesbian public cultures*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003. Print. Page 17-18.
- ⁴⁴ Clifford, James. "Diasporas." *Cultural Anthropology* 9.3 (1994): 302-338. Print. Page 318.
- ⁴⁵ *ibid.*, Page 17.
- ⁴⁶ Griffiths, *op. cit.*, Page 47.
- ⁴⁷ *ibid.*, Page 48.
- ⁴⁸ Griffiths, *op. cit.*, Page 11.
- ⁴⁹ Greenberg *op. cit.*, Page 61..
- ⁵⁰ Culbertson *op. cit.*, page 2.
- ⁵¹ Connerton, Paul. *How societies remember*. Cambridge [England: Cambridge University Press, 1989. Print. Page 1.
- ⁵² *ibid.*, page 6.
- ⁵³ Hirsch, Marianne . "The Generation Of Postmemory." *Poetics Today* 29.1 (2008): 103-128. Print. Page 111.
- ⁵⁴ *ibid.*, page 106.
- ⁵⁵ Hirsch *op. cit.*, 107.
- ⁵⁶ Taylor, Diana. *The archive and the repertoire: performing cultural memory in the Americas*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003. Print.
- ⁵⁷ *ibid.*, page 193.
- ⁵⁸ *ibid.*, page 10.
- ⁵⁹ Culbertson, Roberta. "Embodied Memory, Transcendence, and Telling: Recounting Trauma, Re-establishing the Self." *New Literary History* 26.1 (1995): 169-195. Print. Page 1.
- ⁶⁰ *ibid.*, page 2.
- ⁶¹ Connerton *op. cit.*, page 2.
- ⁶² Connerton *op. cit.*, page 9.
- ⁶³ Connerton *op. cit.*, page 99.
- ⁶⁴ Connerton *op. cit.*, page 124.
- ⁶⁵ Connerton *op. cit.*, page 125.

⁶⁶ Cvetkovich, Ann. *An archive of feelings: trauma, sexuality, and lesbian public cultures*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003. Print. Page 6.

⁶⁷ Page 3

⁶⁸ Cvetkovich, Ann. *An archive of feelings: trauma, sexuality, and lesbian public cultures*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003. Print. Page 7.

⁶⁹ Griffiths, *op. cit.*, Page 63.

⁷⁰ Connerton, Paul. *How modernity forgets*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Print. Page 47.

⁷¹ *ibid.*, page 40.

⁷² Connerton *op. cit.*, page 43.

⁷³ Lafontant, Tamara. *Behind the mask of the strong black woman voice and the embodiment of a costly performance*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009. Print. Page 2.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, page 3.

⁷⁵ , Lafontant *op. cit.*, page 23.

⁷⁶ Myles, *op. cit.*, page 29.

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⁷⁷ Griffiths, Jennifer L.. *Traumatic possessions: the body and memory in African American women's writing and performance*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009. Print. Page 13

⁷⁸ Myles, Lynette D.. *Female subjectivity in African American women's narratives of enslavement: beyond borders*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. Print. Page 41.

⁷⁹ Myles, *op. cit.*, page 41.

⁸⁰ With this phrase work I mean to suggest any attempts to address trauma, whither it be through academic scholarship, activist organizing, personal narrative writing, group therapy, or dance and other forms of performance arts.

⁸¹ I define as public a space (physical and discursive) of interactional, social relations outside of the private sphere.

⁸² Cvetkovich, Ann. *An archive of feelings: trauma, sexuality, and lesbian public cultures*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003. Print. Page 5.

⁸³ *ibid.*, Page 7.

⁸⁴ Edkins, Jenny. *Trauma and the memory of politics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003. Print. Page 20.

⁸⁵ Hammonds, Evelyn M. "Toward a Genealogy of Black Female Sexuality: The Problematic of Silence." *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*, edited by Janet Price and Margaret Shildrick. New York: Routledge, 1997. 249-59. Page 100.

⁸⁶ Griffiths, Jennifer L.. *Traumatic possessions the body and memory in African American women's writing and performance*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009. Print. Page 10.

⁸⁷ McGuire, *op. cit.*, page 37.

⁸⁸ Cvetkovich, *op. cit.*, page 14.

⁸⁹ Culbertson, *op. cit.*, page 8.

⁹⁰ Connerton, Paul. *The spirit of mourning: history, memory and the body*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011. Print. Page 33.

⁹¹ Edkins, Jenny. *Trauma and the memory of politics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003. Print. Page 13.

⁹² Edkins, *loc. cit.*

⁹³ *ibid.*, Page 31.

⁹⁴ Culbertson, Roberta. "Embodied Memory, Transcendence, and Telling: Recounting Trauma, Re-establishing the Self." *New Literary History* 26.1 (1995): 169-195. Print. Page 7.

⁹⁵ Connerton, Paul. *How societies remember*. Cambridge [England: Cambridge University Press, 1989. Print. Page 1.

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, Page 4.

⁹⁷ "The mental enslavement of the subjects of a totalitarian regime begins when their memories are taken away. When a large power wants to deprive a small country of its national consciousness it uses the method of organized forgetting." (Connerton 14)

⁹⁸ Connerton, *op. cit.*, page 15.

⁹⁹ Connerton, *op. cit.*, page 14.

¹⁰⁰ Hammonds, Evelyn M. "Toward a Genealogy of Black Female Sexuality: The Problematic of Silence." *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*, edited by Janet Price and Margaret Shildrick. New York: Routledge, 1997. 93-104. Page 99.

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*, page 96.

¹⁰² Within this context, I am thinking about queerness as a descent from normality, and approaching of fluid reality. Queerness is an 'in-between' radical style of living that defies ridged, heteropatriarchal structures of time, production, and community.

¹⁰³ Richardson, Matt. "Listening to the Archives." Introduction. *The Queer Limit of Black Memory: Black Lesbian Literature and Irresolution*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2013. N. Print. Page 2.

¹⁰⁴ Muñoz, José Esteban. *Cruising utopia: the then and there of queer futurity*. New York: New York University Press, 2009. Print. Page 56.

¹⁰⁵ Griffin, Farah Jasmine. "Textual Healing: Claiming Black Women's Bodies, the Erotic and Resistance in Contemporary Novels of Slavery." *Callaloo* 19.2 (1996): 519-536. Print. Page 3.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*, Page 5.

¹⁰⁷ Myles, Lynette D.. *Female subjectivity in African American women's narratives of enslavement: beyond borders*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. Print. Page 8.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*, Page 7.

¹⁰⁹ "Gloria E. Anzaldúa Quotes." Goodreads. N.p., n.d. Web. 1 Apr. 2014. <https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/516921.Gloria_E_Anzald_a>.

¹¹⁰ Anzaldúa, *loc. cit.*

¹¹¹ Lashgari, Deirdre. *Violence, silence, and anger: women's writing as transgression*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995. Print. Page 306.

¹¹² Culbertson, *op. cit.*, page 17.

¹¹³ Miller, Nancy K., and Jason Daniel Tougaw. *Extremities: trauma, testimony, and community*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002. Print. Page 2.

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*, Page 6.

¹¹⁵ Miller, *op. cit.*, page 3.

¹¹⁶ Miller, *op. cit.*, page 19.

¹¹⁷ Miller, *op. cit.*, page 14.

¹¹⁸ Lashgari, Deirdre. Violence, silence, and anger: women's writing as transgression. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995. Print. Page 12.

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*, Page 2.

¹²⁰ Lashgari, *op. cit.*, page 7.

¹²¹ Lashgari, *op. cit.*, page 3.

¹²² "The existence of two or more voices within a text, esp. conflicting discourses within a linguistic activity as between the narrative voice and the characters in a novel."

¹²³ Lashgari, *op. cit.*, page 3.

¹²⁴ Myles, *op. cit.*, page 6.

¹²⁵ Myles, *op. cit.*, page 29.

¹²⁶ Myles, *op. cit.*, page 118.

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¹²⁷ Connerton, *op. cit.*, page 21.

¹²⁸ Fassin, Didier, and Richard Rechtman. *The empire of trauma: an inquiry into the condition of victimhood*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009. Print.

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¹²⁹ Vogel, Shane. The scene of Harlem cabaret: race, sexuality, performance. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009. Print. Page 172, Page 172)

¹³⁰ Herman, Judith Lewis. Trauma and recovery. New York, N.Y.: BasicBooks, 1992. Print. Page 214.

¹³¹ Griffiths, *op. cit.*, Page 63.

¹³² *ibid.*, page 6.

¹³³ Cvetkovich, *loc. cit.*

¹³⁴ *ibid.*, page 10.

¹³⁵ Doe, *loc. cit.*

¹³⁶ Cvetkovich, *op. cit.*, Page 16,20.

¹³⁷ Edkins, Jenny. *Trauma and the memory of politics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003. Print. Page 12.

¹³⁸ Myles, Lynette D.. Female subjectivity in African American women's narratives of enslavement: beyond borders. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. Print. Page 12.

¹³⁹ *ibid.*, page 216.

¹⁴⁰ Cvetkovich, Ann. *An archive of feelings: trauma, sexuality, and lesbian public cultures*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003. Print. Page 3.

¹⁴¹ Lashgari, Deirdre. *Violence, silence, and anger: women's writing as transgression*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995. Print. Page 26, 27.

¹⁴² McGuire, *op. cit.*, page 35.

¹⁴³ McGuire, *op. cit.*, page 67.

¹⁴⁴ McGuire, *op. cit.*, page 33.

¹⁴⁵ Wormser, Richard. "The National Association of Colored Women." PBS. PBS, n.d. Web. 10 Apr. 2014.

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