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Lemonade and Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust***

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Diasporic Communion and Textual Exchange in Beyoncé's *Lemonade* and Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*

Jamie Ann Rogers

Abstract

*This article conceptualizes "diasporic communion" as emerging from texts that perform as sites in which intimate connections among historically scattered people are animated toward resistance through an examination of Beyoncé's visual album *Lemonade* (2016) and its conversation with Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* (1991). The works' intertextual exchange, I argue, activate trans-geographic and trans-historic connections through layered citation of shared affective histories with the colonial encounter, slavery, and contemporary anti-Black violence. Highlighting the ways in which place functions as a metaphoric marker of diasporic communion in each of the texts, I contend that landscape both produces and extends geographic specificity through webs of referentiality. These webs of referentiality draw complex maps of African diasporic relations that do not rely on proximity, either temporal or spatial, in the creation of community, allowing for an expansive and fluid theorization of the African diaspora, even while it is attentive to specificity of experience. Such works, I conclude, encourage audiences to link their own diasporic experiences through them, which both cultivates discursive relationships and participates in the creation of living Black archives that are otherwise historically marked by absence.*

A little more than halfway through Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* (1991, United States), Eli Peazant (Adisa Anderson) kneels in wet yellow leaves in his ancestor's graveyard, his face pressed to the earth, grieving. He weeps not for the dead in the graveyard but for the unborn child that grows in his wife's belly, the possible result of her rape by a white man. Nearby, a larger-than-life wooden statue of an Igbo figure floats in the brackish water, covered slightly by moss, hanging from it like green-black tulle. The figurehead, broken off from a slave ship, appears to be as much a part of the landscape as the water and the foliage that surrounds it. An iron collar is clasped around its neck (fig. 1).



Figure 1. An Igbo figurehead floats in the brackish water of Igbo Landing in Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*. Screen grab by author.



Figure 2. Beyoncé embodies the Igbo figurehead as she lies on a Louisiana shore. Screen grab by author.

Twenty-five years after *Daughters of the Dust* was released, the figurehead reappears, embodied. Beached on the mainland of a Louisiana shore, Beyoncé Knowles lies still, arms spread wide, shrouded in black seaweed and tulle, her face a stony replica of the Igbo statue (fig. 2). “Baptize me,” she says, whispering the poetry that is weaved throughout the visuals that accompany the album *Lemonade* (2016), “now that reconciliation is possible. If we’re going to heal, let it be glorious.”

This movement of the statue from *Daughters* to *Lemonade* marks a moment of chronotopic disruption;¹ a moment in which space and time do not meet at a stable point, but rather dip in and out of contact, like water dispersed by an unruly breeze. As the ocean foam gently laps against Beyoncé's still fingers, the story of the Igbo that was first told by someone, somewhere, more than two centuries ago, continues, bearing the trace of its history even as it becomes something new in Beyoncé's performance. Its retelling in the time-space of *Lemonade*, like its retelling in *Daughters* (and in Paule Marshall's novel *Praisesong for a Widow* before that, and in countless other texts even before that) signifies the absorption and transformation of a text without known origin. The story's meaning is deepened through citation, both anonymous and identifiable, such as in the almost verbatim retelling of Marshall's version of the story in *Daughters*, when Eula Peazant (Alva Rogers) speaks of the Africans who took one look at the lands that would come to be known as the Americas, turned around, and walked back home across the sea (fig. 3).

In what follows, I argue that texts such as *Lemonade* and *Daughters* function as trans-historical and trans-geographic sites and performances of what I am calling *diasporic communion*. Diasporic communion might be thought broadly as a process of transmission of stories, histories, and cultural codes via inter- and extratextual exchange that generates intimate relationships across time and space among diasporic subjects, even if those relationships are only imagined. Rather than an imagined *community*, such as Benedict



Figure 3. Eli appears to walk across the water's surface toward an Igbo figurehead in Dash's *Daughters* as Eula tells the story of Africans who took one look at the lands that would come to be known as the Americas and turned around to walk home across the sea. Screen grab by author.

Anderson theorizes, the relationships that emerge through diasporic communion do not require any physical or virtual trace of connection in space or time, nor are they oriented toward nationalism. Instead, they are based on affects produced through contact with textual objects that are loosened from national time-space through their play with form (such as non-linear representations of time and indeterminate representations of geographic space, for example) and diasporic subject matter. While Anderson's imagined community implies a certain degree of assumed proximity—it is imagined, he says, as an “inherently limited and sovereign” space within national borders²—diasporic communion, as I develop it here, is immanent and autonomous; in other words, it is itself unmoored, reflecting the texts' preoccupations with movement, origin, and (un)rootedness.³

Much like the oral tradition, the intertextuality of diasporic communion privileges a communal and immanent form of textual production, rather than an individual, transcendent one. At the narrative level, diasporic communion emerges through deliberate intertextual references to previous works, as well as through less deliberate weaving of cultural texts into narratives, something akin to what Julia Kristeva calls the “absorption” of previous texts into the fabric of the text at hand,⁴ or what Roland Barthes describes as the “anonymous, irrecoverable, and yet already read” aspect of a text.⁵ Toni Cade Bambara has described practices of citationality as particularly characteristic of African American women filmmakers and artists, who, in recognizing the tremendous struggle of their predecessors, tend to pay tribute to Black “womanish” mentors and artists through both direct homage, and indirect quoting (Bambara herself attributes this observation to filmmaker Zeinabu irene Davis).⁶ At the extratextual level, diasporic communion emerges through exchanges and reproductions of texts in everyday conversation, digital platforms and blogs, entertainment and academic journals, etc., as well as through references to extratextual details, such as information about authors' or actors' biographies, or texts' production histories, that draw the texts out from their mediated borders and into the living presents of their creators and consumers.

Inter- and extratextual exchange clearly is not limited to African diasporic texts—Mikhail Bakhtin and Kristeva, who are credited as early theorists of intertextuality, both analyze it by way of Russian and Western European modernist novels, for example. Nor does the existence of this type of exchange necessarily mark what I am calling communion. Rather, I argue that diasporic communion emerges through intertextual and extratextual exchange specifically among African diasporic texts and among African diasporic subjects by developing webs of referentiality that link texts and subjects who have otherwise been scattered through histories of violent disruption, dislocation, and disrooting, or what Orlando Patterson

has described as “natal alienation.”⁷ Texts such as *Lemonade* and *Daughters of the Dust* attend to this alienation through a two-fold process of intertextual exchange of Black artistic productions within the works, on one hand, and extratextual exchange around the works, on the other. The process both documents histories of Black artistic productions through intertextual citation and invites audiences to link their own diasporic experiences through them. The discursive relations cultivated in and around the texts, then, contribute to the creation of a *living* or ongoing archive of the Black diaspora—an archive that is otherwise historically marked by absence.⁸

I characterize the convergence of discursive relations and archive making among diasporic subjects and texts as *communion* to stress its affective dimension. This dimension resonates particularly with Black feminist theorizing of the political significance of emotive and precognitive registers of knowledge that are devalued within white supremacist hegemonic patriarchy.⁹ Black women, especially, have described the affect that is mobilized through contact with texts such as *Daughters of the Dust* and *Lemonade* (even when they are critical of some aspects of them) as akin to something spiritual as much as political in the ways that the affect moves them.¹⁰ The sheer vastness of emotionally charged experiences of connection and recognition reported as generated through contact with these texts reflect the variety of intersectional experiences of trans-generational and contemporary struggles and traumas experienced by Black women and Black LGBTQ+ folks. The texts, in other words, speak to those who have come into consciousness in a world in which the category Blackness is, like the archive, constructed as representing absence: absence of history, absence of white markers of beauty, absence of the intellectual capacities that characterize the modern human. Intertextual and extratextual exchange within diasporic texts draw counter narratives to these dominant discourses of absence, inviting spectators to envision the fullness of Black emotional, social, and political life within a mediascape that so often refuses precisely that.

Diasporic communion, then, emerges from texts that perform as sites in which intimate connections among historically scattered people have the potential to be animated toward resistance through the affective work of intertextual and extratextual exchange. Such work, I argue, encourages participation in something like what Saidiya Hartman has described as the always “incomplete project of freedom.”¹¹ This project, according to Hartman, understands the *now* as always interrupted by discourses of the past, and an imagined free state as the status not of a time *before* captivity, but rather as an anticipated future always *to come*—a register of time that I identify as operative in diasporic texts’ inter- and extratextual exchange.¹² By naming this aspect of such a freedom project “diasporic communion,” I hope to theorize one standpoint from which to interrogate its emotional, political, and artistic

labor, labor that is often carried out by women in the invocation of kinship at geographical and historical distance.

Imagined Interiorities and the Intimacy of Place

To claim *Lemonade* as participating in a project toward a liberated future might appear a bit hyperbolic. The album is, after all, a product of the mainstream capitalist tour de force that is Beyoncé and the “BeyHive,” and the intimate, confessional nature in which Beyoncé laments the infidelity of a cheating husband can easily be read as an exploitative and carefully controlled marketing technique. As Alicia Wallace points out in a special Close-Up section on Beyoncé in the Fall 2017 issue of *Black Camera*:

People struggle to limn the distinction between the person and the brand, and this confusion may be her greatest success as it feeds intrigue and enthusiasm. . . . The magic is in the invisibility of the line between performer and person. We do not know where one ends and the other begins, or if they are one and the same. . . . Does [Beyoncé] endure the same struggles as many of her fans, or is she only using them to forge a deeper bond?¹³

Wallace, along with bell hooks, Mako Fitts Ward, and others, conclude that *Lemonade* problematically reproduces capitalist ideology, commodifies Black struggle, and displays symptoms of colorist racial politics, all while exploiting the sense of intimacy that the album garners among fans, ultimately undermining its feminist liberatory potential. In the same Close-Up, Ward notes:

[Beyoncé’s] performance is rooted in the glamour of radicalism, not its actual implementation. While there is deep cultural longing for what she represents to thrive amidst a mediascape that historically has demonized Black women, Beyoncé’s fetishized Black feminist radicalism has transformed the politics of social movements into a set of commodities that ultimately sustain her personal empire.¹⁴

For Wallace, “It is unfortunate that people are so starved for relatable and aspirational content that they are prepared to buy in, literally, to capitalist brands of social justice.”¹⁵ *Lemonade* certainly is ultimately but a commodity—and one that exploits images of radical Black feminism for capital gain at that. However, to read it outside the question of Beyoncé’s personal commitment to radical politics and instead in terms of its dialogue with a constellation of texts that foreground Black women’s interiority, heterogeneity, strength, and vulnerability, draws attention to a project in which Blackness signifies

possibilities of narratives that are *other than* the master narratives of Western epistemology and its concomitant teleology of the commodity. hooks, even in her critique, notes that

the construction of a powerfully symbolic black female sisterhood that resists invisibility, that refuses to be silent . . . in and of itself is no small feat—it shifts the gaze of white mainstream culture. It challenges us all to look anew, to radically revision how we see the black female body.¹⁶

The symbolic construction of Black female sisterhood in *Lemonade* is made all the more prescient by the discursive relationships that emerged extratextually around it, and that reemerged around Dash's *Daughters* after its release, as sites of diasporic communion.

The cult of the BeyHive that has materialized within the digital world of Beyoncé fandom over the course of the past two decades exploded once again when the visual album dropped in February 2016, just after her performance of “Formation” at that year’s Super Bowl announced her alignment with Black Panther imagery and the contemporary Movement for Black Lives (this, at a time when overt white supremacist movements were being buoyed by a then-presidential candidate who, as president, refuses to disavow, let alone condemn, white supremacist movements). Due in part to the album’s candidness, Beyoncé fans were immediately enamored with what they felt was an intimate exploration of the pop star’s “inner life.” One *New Yorker* article, for example, declares that the album is “a window into the soul of an icon whose inner life has always seemed just out of reach.”¹⁷ Laying bare struggles in her relationship with her husband, JAY-Z, the article goes on to say, “*Lemonade* declares that misogyny is at its most potent and complex within the bonds of love.” To be sure, the album represents on the surface a reckoning between a woman scorned and the man she nevertheless continues to love. The initial “chapter” of *Lemonade*, “Intuition,” foreshadows the story of love and betrayal to come, with each subsequent chapter title being reminiscent of various stages of grief and healing, from “Anger” all the way to “Redemption.”¹⁸ The allusions to Beyoncé’s own life are not particularly veiled: she tosses a wedding ring at the camera early in the album during the ferocious “Don’t Hurt Yourself” while home footage of the couple’s wedding and appearances of a loving JAY-Z toward the end of the album chronicle the marriage’s trajectory toward reconciliation.

The “truth” of autobiography of the album, however, is somewhat beside—and even distracting from—the point. The complex allegory that *Lemonade* weaves through reference to (what may or may not be the truth of) Beyoncé’s personal life functions as an aesthetic technique (even if also a marketing technique) that performs stories of imagined interiorities of

multitudes of Black women of the diaspora. This intimate performance might be read not so much as personal confession, but rather as something akin to what Uri McMillan calls performing as “avatar.” The Black women performers McMillan describes “wield performance art—and their ‘ambiguous status’ as both real persons and ‘theatrical representation(s)’—as an elastic means to create new racial and gender epistemologies.”¹⁹ Beyoncé’s performance of the betrayed woman, while mapped on to her personal life and marriage to JAY-Z, is less about Beyoncé the person, and more about “Beyoncé” the avatar who wields her ambiguous status as both untouchable celebrity and as close confidant in order to expose a variety of stories of Black life in America in a way that speaks to fans on intimate terms while at the same time maintains their fantasies about her.

The performance, however, registers a contradiction that is at the heart of many of the critiques of the album; while the “exposure” of stories of Black life refuses anti-Black rhetoric that denies Black people—and Black women in particular—the capacity for interiority, it also reproduces anti-Black narratives that structure that denial through the commodification of Black women’s lives and bodies for (white) viewing pleasure. On one hand, the confessional quality of the album, which is most explicit in the album’s lyrics and through its repeated use of Knowles/Carter family photos and home videos, reifies an easily commodifiable heteronormative narrative about Black women’s betrayal, self-healing, and redemptive forgiveness within the bonds of marital love, and clearly functions to drive massive sales. On the other hand, the intertextual referentiality of the filmic elements operates fundamentally differently. Here, revelation is not for the sake of a dominant spectatorial gaze and the procurement of sales, but rather it acts to expand upon the counter narratives and living archives that are created within and between diasporic texts, and thus imbricates the avatar Beyoncé within a genealogy of Black women who refuse simple liberatory narratives and their disavowal of prevailing structures of anti-Blackness.

Oneka LaBennett suggests that rather than thinking of the visual album’s intimacy as autobiographical, it might better be framed as auto-*ethnographic*. In the tradition of *Daughters* and in the tradition of Zora Neale Hurston, the counter narratives created in *Lemonade* are gleaned from Beyoncé’s own experiences in her cultural milieu and the milieu of the South, and are linked to wider understandings of Black girlhood and Black womanhood through inter- and extratextual exchange.²⁰ Reference to Beyoncé’s personal life and cultural experiences can again be read as allegorical, weaved into cohesion through the combination of music and images and their intertextual associations, as well as through the words of London-based, Somali-born, Kenyan poet Warsan Shire, whose poetry Beyoncé speaks during interstitial moments of the visual album. The effect is to link the album’s chapters and to draw

together the story of Beyoncé as “real person” and Beyoncé as “performer of stories” into an expansive whole. Early in the album, for example, Beyoncé recites: “You remind me of my father, a magician . . . able to exist in two places at once. In the tradition of men in my blood, you come home at three a.m. and lie to me. What are you hiding?” The specter of the cheating husband/father is paired with fraught images that evoke a sense of trans-geographic and trans-temporal experience, rather than the singularity of Beyoncé’s personal life: plantations and forts occupied by Black women, some of whose ancestors could be the very slaves who built them; the Superdome, empty of the people who sought refuge there when the levees broke, but found only trauma instead; and mothers holding photographs of dead sons: Sybrina Fulton, Gwen Carr, Lezley McSpadden (fig. 4).²¹ These expressions of devastation wrought by state-sanctioned violence and structural neglect, alienation, rape, and familial rupture are juxtaposed with intermittent shots of long open spaces. Trees with moss dripping from their branches, like the tulle of the women’s dresses, evoke the cruel beauty of the Antebellum South—the landscape at which the Igbo took one glance, and turned to walk back across the sea—while Black women dressed in elaborate Southern gothic gowns posed on plantation porches and within a fort’s cannon tunnels stare back at the camera, evoking the resilience and resistance of characters in *Daughters* and speaking to the *now* as always interrupted by discourses of the past.²²

References to the cultural milieu of the South, to the flow of bodies from Africa to the Americas, and to contemporary and historical anti-Black violence through the evocation of intimate interiority elicit histories that take on new meaning as they are placed in different spaces and time periods. Intertextual references to spaces and landscapes in *Lemonade*, for example, extend the excavation begun in previous texts of histories in which the interior lives of the enslaved and their descendants are otherwise written out through violence, silence, and the production of shame. Geographically, *Lemonade* links New Orleans, where it was mostly shot, to Saint Helena Island through its reference to *Daughters*, where the latter was mostly shot. This then links Saint Helena’s historical position as one of the last stops along the slave trade route to contemporary instances of anti-Black structural neglect in New Orleans, including that which led to the absolute catastrophe of Hurricane Katrina. Further, *Daughters* links Saint Helena Island to the Southern Sea Islands more generally, which are off the coast of South Carolina and Georgia, by way of its double relocating of Igbo Landing: First away from its historical site on St. Simons Island, and second from its literary site of the fictional Tatem Island in Marshall’s *Praisesong*. *Praisesong* further widens the spatio-temporal frame, as protagonist Avey travels between Caribbean islands, dreams of the Middle Passage, and experiences a spiritual and political awakening through ancestral communion. As LaBennett



Figure 4. *From top to bottom:* (a) Sybrina Fulton, mother of Trayvon Martin; (b) Gwen Carr, mother of Eric Garner; and (c) Lezley McSpadden, mother of Michael Brown. These “Mothers of the Movement” hold photos of their sons, all murdered in instances of state-sanctioned violence. Screen grabs by author.

notes, *Lemonade*'s cross-pollination of musical traditions also connects the Caribbean to the US South and to Black urban spaces. The avatar Beyoncé serves as the symbolic link, with her own personal biography also drawing together a variety of cultural and geographic locations when she sings, "My daddy Alabama, momma Louisiana/You mix that negro with that Creole, make a Texas bama" in "Formation."

These geographic webs of referentiality draw a map of diasporic relations that theorizes African American and African diasporic identity as expansive and fluid, even while remaining attentive to the specificity of individual experience. The historical and geographic transposition within and among the texts destabilizes identity as enclosure and posits instead the production of history and identity as a form of immanence that is autonomous from fixed, nation-based formations. Black diasporic media consumers, whose personal cultural milieu are affectively linked to the allegorical and auto-ethnographic, trans-geographical, and trans-historical stories of the texts, are in turn invited into the expansive exploration of African diasporic identity that the texts perform.

Boundary Crossing and Narrative Disruption

The reclaiming of genealogy or kinship through expansive stories and voices of women in diasporic texts that evoke diasporic communion offers a discourse of community and belonging that is alternative to discourses in which identity is tied to a certain place-based essentialism or nationalism. Carole Boyce Davies argues for a reading practice that situates Black women's writing as "a series of boundary crossings and not as a fixed, geographical, ethnically or nationally bound category of writing" in order to redefine Black women's identity "away from exclusion and marginality."²³ Such a practice, when expanded to include Black women's artistic productions more generally, opens for consideration Black women's texts as spaces in which to theorize alternative practices of history and community making. The movement of female bodies across time and space in *Daughters*, *Lemonade*, and *Praisesong*, for example, can be read for its privileging of boundary crossing and fluidity as fundamental to identity experience, and to history and community as detached from any fixed place or time.

Boundary crossing in *Daughters* is rendered through Dash's retelling of the story of the Igbo in the context of the Peasant family drama. In *Lemonade*, it is rendered through visual references to both Dash's and Marshall's telling of the story, which are then layered with symbolic images of hoodies, chains, and plantations, and shots of Black women's powerful oppositional gazes.²⁴ The associations between the texts encourage readings of Black cultural

productions that extend beyond textual borders, as well as beyond determinant locations in space and time. In these examples, violences committed against Black bodies *and* absolute resistances to these violences are represented as both indeterminate and boundless practices. Such representations disrupt epistemologies based in Western linear narratives in which “culture” or “civilization” is understood as emanating from the West, and increasingly “progressing” across space and time. As Anne McClintock has described, linear narratives of progress are foundational to the colonial project and the implementation of chattel slavery, and are operative through their coding of Blackness as close to nature (i.e., dirt, waste, and disorder), and thus “backward” in time. The prerogative of Western imperial progression, McClintock argues, is to transform nature/Blackness into culture/commodity by way of racialized hierarchies that support, first, the logic of slavery, and, then, the logic of commodity fetishism in which Black subjects are hailed into movement from darkness (the “dark continent” of Africa/nature) to lightness (Western enlightenment/consumer capitalism).²⁵ Black diasporic texts such as *Lemonade* and *Daughters* disrupt these racialized narratives of progress through the counter narratives and archives each individual text produces, and through the expansive, intertextual associations that disturb the linearity of time and discreteness of space by way of their rhizomatic relations.

These narrative disruptions participate in diasporic communion by indicating the interconnectedness of diasporic experiences in ways that do not assume generational or place-based identity as necessarily constitutive of community. The disruptions are deepened when intertextual relations are read in connection with the extratextual life of a work as well. Extratextual elements of *Daughters*, for example, include its position as the first feature-length film directed by a Black woman to be distributed in theaters. The webs of referentiality that tie *Lemonade* to *Daughters* then also tie the visual album to genealogies of Black women’s independent filmmaking practices—practices that themselves frequently call into question normative Western epistemologies and the gendered and raced narratives of progress they entail. Michelle M. Wright argues that these narratives of progress are so foundational to Western knowledge production that contemporary deployments of the category “Blackness” are themselves underpinned by them. US Black studies, she argues, has tended to locate Black identity as emerging from a specified point in time through the transatlantic slave trade, and then moving West to the Americas. This “Middle Passage epistemology,” as Wright describes it, is frequently reproduced in media representations of Blackness, and neglects the *phenomenology* of Blackness: “that is, *when* and *where* it is being imagined, defined, and performed and in what locations, both figurative and literal.”²⁶ The tendency to locate Blackness within a geographic linear narrative is followed by a tendency to locate it within a historical linear

narrative as well, which is characterized by stories of overcoming obstacles through struggle, and focuses primarily on slavery, colonialism, and the dominance of ancient African civilizations.²⁷ Such tendencies, Wright argues, necessarily exclude Black identities that do not fit within a transatlantic geographic and sociopolitical timeline, or within heteronormative, masculinist narratives that characterize histories of uplift.²⁸

European and US Black Africans (particularly refugees and migrants) and their offspring, and US or European Blacks of recent white or Caribbean descent, according to Wright, are written out of contemporary narratives of Blackness, as are Black people whose identities do not fit within a particular moment's normative definition of Black progress. Queer Black agents of resistance rarely figure in Middle Passage epistemologies or in canonical Black texts, Wright notes, and Black women "are memorably present, just not as agents of progress; they are victims of racism whom the Middle Passage Black man is sworn to try to rescue or protect."²⁹ The inter- and extratextual relationship of texts such as *Daughters* and *Lemonade*, however, encourage readings of Blackness that are phenomenological even as they are expansive in time and space; that is, they foreground the *when* and *where* that Blackness is being imagined, defined, and performed through the very disturbance of the sedimentation of space and time that their relationships produce. For example, while *Daughters* and *Lemonade*'s inter- and extratextual references are in many ways specific to histories of US Black filmmaking and US Black Americans whose ancestries trace to the Atlantic slave trade, their focus on Black women and their inclusion of Black queer images and voices nevertheless subverts heteronormative nationalist narratives of racial uplift. *Daughters*' focus on folk life of the Gullah people emphasizes a cultural formation that is distinct from popular representations of Blackness in the United States, and these representations are complicated further by *Lemonade*'s relocating of them to the Louisiana Bayou. Further, *Lemonade*'s highlighting of poetry written by a Somali woman who was born in Kenya, immigrated to England as a child, and has resided in the United States refigures global Blackness and disrupts assumptions of Blackness in the United States as necessarily emerging from lineages directly connected to American slavery. So, too, do multiple cameos in *Lemonade* by Michaela DePrince, a ballet dancer who was adopted by a US family from Sierra Leone after her parents were killed during the civil war there, and Winnie Harlow, a Canadian model of Jamaican descent. Instead, they connect the construction of Blackness to multiple intersections of identities and to contemporary migration patterns that stem from intertwined economic and environmental crises, famine, civil war, and international military interventionism in the Global South.

Shire, DePrince, and Harlow's transnational biographical backgrounds are, of course, not central to the narrative of *Lemonade*, or even necessarily

known to the casual viewer. However, like *Lemonade*'s strategic deployment of Beyoncé's personal life as allegory, biographies of other players in the visual album act as extratextual components of the text's dialogic conversation; uncovering artists' biographical backgrounds (facilitated in the twenty-first century by social media and easily accessible online sources) and linking them to their work is part of the pleasure derived from pop culture, as the BeyHive's response to *Lemonade* attests. Further, if *Lemonade* is thought of as auto-ethnography, as LaBennett suggests, extratextual scrutiny of biography helps to weave together a heterogeneous ethnography of Black life in the Americas with a nod toward experiential knowledge. It is, in fact, the expression of experience as knowledge and inclusion of queer voices that put *Lemonade* in transnational conversation with Black feminisms, LaBennett argues, which she says have "some roots in the South but . . . channel[s] throughout the globe."³⁰ The album's "sonic reverberations" with a wide range of musicians and genres, including the Caribbean influences in the track "Hold Up," and collaboration with The Weeknd, who is Canadian of Ethiopian descent, on the track "6-inch Heels," also puts *Lemonade* in dialogue with the broader African diaspora, LaBennett says.³¹ Other African-inspired elements of the album, including body art by the Nigerian artist Laolu Senbanjo and references to Yoruba deities, connect the diasporic elements to the African continent as well. The transnationalism of *Lemonade*'s extratextuality, then, situates the visual album's allegorical representation of Black life in the United States as both related to and other-than Middle Passage epistemology.

Colorism, Commodity, and the Impossible Condition of Blackness

None of what is argued above is to say that transnational and non-heteronormative gestures in *Lemonade* negate the criticisms of its commodity function. Certain aspects of the narrative, in fact, stand out precisely for their re-inscription of capitalist narratives of linear progress. Incorporating revolutionary imagery, such as symbols of Black Power, into a celebration of capital accumulation (Beyoncé unabashedly promotes various brands and businesses, including hers and her husband's, throughout the album) serves to commodify and "civilize" that imagery, appropriating it into the very socioeconomic fabric it ostensibly seeks to overturn. The power of Bey and her dancers appearing in Black Panther berets at Super Bowl 50 (during a time when players were following Colin Kaepernick's lead by refusing to stand during the National Anthem), for example, is largely undermined by the final lyric of "Formation" in which Beyoncé advises: "always stay gracious, best revenge is your paper."³² By reinscribing capitalist ideology in which the

accumulation of wealth, at the expense of resistance, is considered the best “revenge,” the track largely empties the Black Panther iconography of its revolutionary socialist ideology and its emphasis on the intersections of racial and class oppression, and replaces it instead with a politics of capitalist accumulation and individualist, rather than collective, progress.

The aestheticization of the Black female body in *Lemonade* also risks inscribing commodity culture into otherwise radical imagery that celebrates the heterogeneity of Black beauty and rejects racialized normative standards of beauty.³³ Tennis star Serena Williams, for example, makes a cameo in the visual album, “twerking” with confidence down the elaborate hallway of the Madewood Plantation House. Clad in a black leotard, her muscular physique defies the appeal to white, normative femininity that values a waif-like figure. Images of DePrince moving gracefully across the grandstand of the Destrehan Plantation, of Harlow posed among the trees, and of both holding photographs of Black men are stunning not only in their composition within the background of the plantation estates, but also in their aesthetic rendering of the skin condition, vitiligo, that marks both of their bodies with large patches of skin that are void of pigmentation. Harlow’s success in the fashion industry has drawn endless commentary, prompting many to declare the present a new age of inclusivity in the notoriously closed field. However, such expansive “inclusivity” points to the limits of the politics of inclusion given its commodity function. If, as McClintock argues, the prerogative of Western imperial progression is the transformation of nature into culture through commerce, then the aesthetic rendering of “alternative” forms of beauty draw it into the very consumer culture that radical art seeks to critique. More than evidence of liberatory moves toward inclusion, then, such renderings are evidence of capital endlessly reinventing itself, and, as hooks commented nearly three decades ago about appropriative commodity culture, serve as the “‘spice’ . . . that can liven up the dull dish that is white culture.”³⁴ Close-up images of Harlow’s face, mouth encircled by loss of pigmentation, and arms, marked with long strips of white, are often the focus of her poses, aesthetically exoticizing her non-normative “ethnic” beauty (vitiligo is most noticeable in people who have darker skin) in such a way as to make it easily consumable to mainstream popular culture.

Multiple cameos by the young model Ava Clarke, who was diagnosed with albinism as a toddler, more precisely exemplifies the circular process of commodification of difference and its relationship to linear narratives of progress. For example, while natural afro-style hair is celebrated in *Lemonade* as an homage to resistant Black culture (“I like my baby hair with baby hair and afros,” Beyoncé playfully croons to images of her daughter and Clarke, both sporting natural hair, frolicking through the plantations), the exotic whiteness of Clarke’s appearance is what is often highlighted as a sign of her

beauty. A publicity Web page (which was taken down sometime in 2017), for example, stated that when Clarke was born, it was clear that she had “a gift”: “Despite her parents’ brown eyes and African-American decent, Ava appeared fair skinned, with blue-green eyes and bright pink lips. Although her hair was barely there, it was clearly blonde. Ava was breathtakingly beautiful!”³⁵ Nicole Fleetwood has noted that colorism such as that implicit here, fixes “a scale of blackness based on dominant structuring principles of the field of vision” that “mark and decipher difference and value” based on gender and racial hierarchies.³⁶ McClintock’s argument that Western imperialism’s narratives of progression codes Blackness as “backward” in linear time corresponds with the colorist privileging of light skin over dark, straight hair over natural, waif thin figures over full bodied—what McClintock describes as “the iconography of evolutionary progress from ape to angel.”³⁷ The promotion of the visibility of Clarke’s proximity to whiteness engages this iconography, marking her difference as value within the economy of Western imperialism.

If, however, we again consider *Lemonade* as part of a constellation of texts that encourage the engagement of diasporic communion, its display of the body as commodity can be read as the continuation of a history of its strategic use as agent of resistance as much as it can be read as capitulating to commodity culture and reinscribing linear narratives of progress. Perhaps most salient are *Lemonade*’s many references to the character Yellow Mary (Barbara O.) in *Daughters*, whose own strategic deployment of her proximity to whiteness gains her some freedom of movement and control over her own body. *Daughters* features a Gullah family, the Peazants, at a picnic in 1902 on the day before many of the family members are set to migrate north to the mainland. The major conflict in *Daughters* is the tension between family members desiring to enter the world of “progress” by leaving Saint Helena Island and its connections to Africa behind, and those who wish to remain, bear witness to that history, and continue practicing Gullah tradition. Yellow Mary perhaps best encompasses the tension between the desire to mend natal rupture by attending to lost ancestors and cultural traditions, on one hand, and the desire to enter the life of “culture” and the relative material comforts that are promised by modern narratives of progress, on the other. She also best represents the impossibility of either.

As the wayward member of the Peazant family, Yellow Mary left the island when she was a young woman, and is described by her family as “ruin” because she is a prostitute and brothel owner. Returning to the island with her lover Trula (Trula Hoosier), we learn in the film that Yellow Mary became a prostitute after having been taken to Cuba as a wet nurse. Desperate to return home, she “fix the titty” in order to dry up her milk. The novel *Daughters of the Dust* (also by Dash and published one year after the film was released)

picks up twenty years after the reunion, and tells the story in more detail: The master of the house repeatedly raped Yellow Mary before the mistress gave her money to make her disappear. It was with this money that she bought the brothel and began charging white men for Black women's services (which, as Yellow Mary points out, they were taking for free anyway).

Caroline Streeter notes that "mulatta" characters in African American fiction such as Yellow Mary have long represented access to class mobility and the possibility of escaping the "stigma" of Blackness.³⁸ Yellow Mary, named as such because of her lighter skin, has access in Savannah to consumer culture through the peddling of bodies that represent exoticism for white clients, on one hand, and through her own proximity to whiteness, on the other hand. At the same time, she risks losing access to her African cultural roots through alienation from her family and tradition. The "yellow" of Mary's skin is met with both envy and anger by women of the Peasant family, summed up by Cousin Viola's (Cheryl Lynn Bruce) muttered phrase, "All that yellow, wasted." Quoting Harryette Mullen, Streeter notes that this cryptic phrase

speaks to the Peasant women's ambivalence about the constellation of traumatic associations invoked by Yellow Mary and Trula—including rape, incest, miscegenation, racial passing, homosexuality, and prostitution—"when these experiences are perceived to be threats to collective identities as well as to the constructed continuity of tradition itself."³⁹

Yellow Mary's arrival on the eve of the family's departure north, which Viola notes is the family's "first steps towards progress . . . [and] the culture, education and wealth of the mainland," brings a sense of foreboding to Viola's straight-laced Christian sensibilities, and taints her optimistic gaze toward the future. Yellow Mary, in other words, signifies for Viola the threatening undercurrents of "progress," when progress is marked by the Western imperial teleology of the commodity.

Later in the film, Trula sits with Myown, one of the younger Peasant women, looking at a Sears Roebuck catalog, or "wish book." In one of her few spoken lines, Trula points at images in the catalog and says, "I wish I had this doll . . . I wish I had this doll . . . I wish I had this to go inside my house." Myown laughingly replies, "You don't have a house!" Dash's shooting script indicates that Trula responds back "like a little girl." "I wish I did. If I did, I'd put this bed inside my house. Then I wish I had a rabbit." The simple gesture of desire to possess, to own objects, speaks to a history of dispossession or what Orlando Patterson notes is a particular quality of "social death": the juridical denial of the right to own.⁴⁰ Yellow Mary's resistant stance toward such social death—her means to ownership—emerges in the murky space of the commodified body.

Lemonade's "6 Inch Heels" tells a more ominous version of Yellow Mary's story. The past and the future merge again here, this time with a focus on movement between a futuristic city setting in which darkness and pulsing red light brings Beyoncé and her entourage in and out of focus in various settings—in cars, on stages, in rooms of a brothel that are reminiscent of a plantation estate—wearing turn-of-the-century Texas gothic gowns. The various images, juxtaposed with street scenes taken from Beyoncé's point of view in a limousine that linger over men loitering on city sidewalks at night, emphasize the complex relationship between Black women's autonomous working bodies and sexual and labor exploitation. About midway through the song, the last line of the chorus, "She don't gotta give it up, she professional," melts to a stop on the word "professional," refusing it the final syllable. In the brief moment of silence that follows, a series of images flash across the screen: A woman's hands creating a frame within a frame around a far off photo of man in a cowboy hat standing near a staircase in the brothel (eerily reminiscent of images representing Beyoncé's own late father in other scenes throughout the album); Beyoncé in a car lit by city lights; the same man in a cowboy hat walking down the brothel hallway; his shadow while a woman's hands reach out to him; then, more rapidly, the hallway lit in red, the word "LOSS," and an out-of-focus red cross. The music begins again just as the hallway pay phone bursts into flames. Fire then engulfs the ornate plantation brothel while Beyoncé and her dancers stand stone-faced on the porch. Faint sounds of birds chirping begin the next segment. A long, deep shot of a swampy marshland cuts to the profile of a pristine estate.

The juxtaposition of the images of a brothel burning down and the beauty of the estate, which in the video is now inhabited by Black women, like the character Yellow Mary and the avatar Beyoncé, represent the impossible condition of Blackness—the condition of being both commodity *and* creative agent of resistance. The gleeful devastation Beyoncé unleashes on cars and storefronts, brothels and plantations throughout the album, brings to mind images of looting during uprisings and natural disasters that represent a momentary breach of the reign of property. This, paired with the album's otherwise consistent celebration of commodity culture, illustrates the position of "in-betweenness" that Yellow Mary's character also represents. That is, it illustrates the emotionally taxing and contradictory desire to be admitted *as subject* into the world of capital exchange, when that is the very world that sets the conditions of Black women's abjection from subjectivity in the first place. The intertextual exchange between the two texts, then, opens a space for the labor of diasporic communion; that is, it opens space for diasporic subjects to perform (within the texts) and to interrogate (in extratextual exchanges around the texts) the duality of the very terms of subjectivity within structures of anti-Black capitalist patriarchy.

“We are the daughters of those old dusty things”: Familial Reconciliation and the Archive of Wounds

Patricia J. Williams notes the psychic trauma wrought by processes of becoming subject within a social and political space that disavows Black subjectivity: “Reclaiming that from which one has been disinherited is a good thing. Self-possession in the full sense of that expression is the companion to self-knowledge. Yet claiming for myself a heritage the weft of whose genesis is my own disinheritance is a profoundly troubling paradox.”⁴¹ For Yellow Mary, the claim to material comforts in a world from which she is disinherited—that is, her claim to a position of relative privilege within the duality of subjectivity in an anti-Black world—rests in large part on her lighter skin color, itself a product of the history of violent sexual encounter between white men and Black women. Beyoncé, too, has been accused of capitalizing on her “high yellow skin” in her entry into the world of pop stardom. Wallace argues, in fact, that *Lemonade* reproduces the privileging of light skin and “good hair,” despite Beyoncé’s own gesture toward a rejection of colorist hierarchies in her now-famous reference to “Becky with the good hair” at the end of the track “Sorry.” Referring to the previously mentioned line, “My daddy Alabama, momma Louisiana / You mix that negro with that Creole, make a Texas bama” in “Formation,” Wallace says:

In a world where many black people work toward whiteness, try to find familial connections to whiteness, and internalize racism in ways that require alterations in language, cadence of speech, body, hair texture, and complexion, it is troubling to draw attention to anything that may neutralize blackness or make it more palatable. Can you celebrate your blackness, and call on other black people to celebrate with you, while drawing a line between your father’s blackness and your mother’s creole identity?⁴²

For Wallace, the separation of Creole identity within what is supposed to be a pro-Black space not only hints at colorist hierarchies that celebrate whitening of the Black body and repeat colonial narratives of progress, but also attempts to celebrate Creole identity as detached from Blackness. Others, however, note that the liminal space in which mixed-race women like Beyoncé moves is part of the (anti-)Black experience. Blogger T. Anyabwélé from *Black Girl Speaks*, for example, points to colonial histories that fuel colorism; that is, the “division intentionally perpetuated through centuries of chattel slavery and forced miscegenation.” Colorism, she goes on to say, is “the layered wounds of an earthed history cloaked in colonialism,” in that it perpetuates both white supremacist racial hierarchies and divisions within Black community.⁴³

The relationality of texts like *Daughters* and *Lemonade* works to slowly, and always incompletely, unearth that cloaked history. Scenes in *Lemonade* that include shots of differently-hued women sitting in enormous oak trees while dressed in white gowns quote a scene in *Daughters* in which Yellow Mary sits idly in the crook of an oak next to Trula (fig. 5). Eula gazes up at them from the ground as Yellow Mary cautions her not to tell her husband who the white man was that raped her, if she does not want Eli to end up dangling from the very tree in which they sit.⁴⁴ “He doesn’t need to know what could get him killed,” she says. Trula looks on, a silent but notable presence: Her skin, even lighter than Yellow Mary’s, also indicates a history of violated Black bodies. Later, Eula calls on the Peasant women to recognize their shared traumas and to embrace Yellow Mary back within the family fold. Distressed and clinging exhaustedly to her heavily pregnant belly, she burst out in anger: “If you are so ashamed of Yellow Mary ’cause she got ruined. . . . Well, what do you say about me? Am I ruined, too?” The shooting script explains further: “The women freeze in mid-motion, their mouths open, gaping. Sexual abuse, a legacy of slavery, is a part of their unspoken history. Hearing Eula’s words, the women are ‘shamed’ for Eli and respectfully turn their faces away from him.”⁴⁵ Eula, however, does not hold back. She turns to look at each of the family members sitting and standing in the sand, circled around her.

As far as this place is concerned, we never enjoyed our womanhood. . . . Deep inside, we believed that they ruined our mothers, and their mothers before them.



Figure 5. Women sitting in trees throughout *Lemonade* (a, b) quote scenes in *Daughters of the Dust* (c, d). Screen grabs by author.

And we live our lives always expecting the worst because we feel we don't deserve any better. Deep inside we believe that even God can't heal the wounds of our past or protect us from the world that put shackles on our feet. . . . Do you understand who we are, and what we have become? We're the daughters of those old dusty things Nana carries in her tin can. We carry too many scars from the past. Our past owns us. We wear our scars like armor, for protection. Our mother's scars, our sister's scars, our daughter's scars. . . . Thick, hard, ugly scars that no one can pass through to ever hurt us again. Let's live our lives without living in the fold of old wounds.⁴⁶

The dusty things of which they are all daughters, the archive of wounds that Yellow Mary earlier in the film spoke of boxing up in a pink satin case, and the remedies, the things that Nana keeps in tin jars, are layered upon one another in *Daughters*, vessels in which bits of the women's interior, hidden lives are stored.

Shortly after the scene of women lounging in trees in *Lemonade*, Beyoncé breaks into the powerful track "Freedom." She stands on stage alone, staring at the women around her who are shown a few short minutes before gathered together to cook a large meal, just as the Peasant women do along the shore. Her rage simmers below the surface as she announces her intent to "march on the regular" toward an always elusive freedom. Midway through the track, the video begins to cut between various images of DePrince in the midst of improvised dance, of women standing and staring stoically back at the camera, and of the same women posed in trees. The chorus channels Eula's exacerbation as Beyoncé sings:

Freedom, Freedom, I can't move / Freedom, cut me loose / Singin', freedom, freedom, where are you? / Cause I need freedom too / I break chains all by myself / Won't let my freedom rot in hell / I'mma keep running / Cause a winner don't quit on themselves.

Eula, who Dash says represents the continuation of the Peasant family in both its secular and sacred unfolding,⁴⁷ carries in her body the wounds of the everyday violences of dispossession, even of one's own body ("the raping of colored women is as common as fish in the sea," Yellow Mary notes wryly at one point). And yet, she also carries the refusal of that dispossession. She embraces and protects her unborn child with all the fierceness that mother-love can conjure, a fierceness that reappears in "Freedom" in images of mothers clinging to photos of their dead sons, of generations of women lovingly brushing one another's hair, and of children at play, all in spaces that once stripped Black women of rights to themselves and their kin.

Familial reconciliation, in both texts, appears as the allegorical means toward a larger project of healing, toward breaking the "fucking curse" that

Beyoncé speaks of earlier in the album, and imagining worlds in which emancipation is possible. Shortly before Beyoncé washes up on shore, embodied as the Igbo statue, she asks in a voice-over that recalls Eula's plea to her family to emerge from the folds of old wounds: "Why do you deny yourself heaven? Why do you consider yourself undeserving? Why are you afraid of love? You think it is not possible for someone like you? But *you are the love of my life.*" A line of women dressed in white walk from the ocean shore out to sea, appearing, like the Igbo, to walk across the water's surface (fig. 6). Later, Beyoncé speaks again:

Grandmother, the alchemist, you spun gold out of this hard life, conjured beauty from the things left behind. Found healing where it did not live. Discovered the antidote in your own kit. Broke the curse with your own two hands. You passed these instructions down to your daughter who then passed it down to her daughter. . . . True love brought salvation back into me. With every tear came redemption and my torturer became my remedy. So we're gonna heal.

Just as Eula calls upon the characters in *Daughters* to acknowledge the dusty things in tin cans, passed from daughter to daughter, Beyoncé calls on daughters to find healing where it does not live—in the curse, in the scars of old wounds, in the now that is always interrupted by the past.⁴⁸ The intertextuality of the scene layers *Daughters* into that now, and suggests a type of textually mediated sociality that is other-than sociality mediated by the teleology of capital and the nation, which produces Blackness as something undeserving



Figure 6. A line of women dressed in white walk from the ocean shore out to sea in *Lemonade*, appearing like the Igbo in the story Eula tells in *Daughters* to walk across the water's surface. Screen grab by author.

of social life—undeserving of love—altogether. When Beyoncé’s declaration that “*you are the love of my life*” is paired with images of moss-laden trees like those in which Yellow Mary and Trula sit and with women walking like the Igbo across the surface of the sea, she declares an expansive love of Blackness that is necessary for reconciliation to be possible. The allegory of familial reconciliation, when read through *Lemonade* and *Daughters* together, then, suggests something beyond heteronormative, enclosed family structures to which both the nation-state and capital appeal, and points instead to a sociality unbound by the discreetness of space and time, and the imperial narratives of progress those assumptions imply.⁴⁹

This is the labor of diasporic communion and intertextual exchange; it is the telling and retelling of otherwise erased stories that form and re-form the connective tissue between peoples of the African diaspora that colonialism, slavery, and contemporary anti-Black violence rend but nevertheless fail to rupture. The movement of the female characters in *Daughters* (to and from the mainland, for example) and in *Lemonade* (through the deployment of different female diasporic bodies and histories) signals a kind of communion among women that offers an alternative to place-based identity essentialism, and provides an associative history with each other and with other texts through visual and verbal quoting. Neither *Daughters* nor *Lemonade* imply that healing means the disappearance of scars. Rather, for reconciliation to be possible, *if* there is to be healing, than it is through turning out the folds of old wounds; it is through the work of drawing for each other the associative histories that make for diasporic communion—the dangerous work of making visible the social life of Blackness even as it is lived within the constructs of social death.⁵⁰ In other words, the work of diasporic communion, as part of an always ongoing project of freedom, declares, explores, and grows the fullness of Black life in the face of its erasure though stories passed between one text and another, between one generation and the next.

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Notes

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and for sharing space with me during a Society of Cinema and Media Studies panel in 2018.

1. Mikhail Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 84–258. Bakhtin describes chronotope as the way in which time and space are represented in language, and especially literature. Chronotope, or "time space," he says, refers to the "intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature," and, I would add, in the mediums of film and video. Through artistic deployments of chronotope, "spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history" (84–85). The type of chronotopic disruption expressed in *Lemonade*, then, represents space and time as part of a whole, but not necessarily as fused into singular points within a narrative. In other words, the whole is expansive rather than concrete, and time is fluid and mobile rather than "thickened."

2. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso, 1983, 2006), 5.

3. Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (Summer 1987): 64–81. In my use of the term "unrooted" instead of "uprooted" or "disrooted," I follow Hortense Spillers's description of "ungendered" flesh, which indicates the violent removal of the slave commodity from the symbolic order of gender and race. "Unrooted" indicates the subsequent cut of natal ties caused by the slave trade, and the re-ordering of slave bodies as ungendered flesh that are denied the capacity to maintain significant genealogical ties.

4. Julia Kristeva, "Word, Dialog and Novel," in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 37.

5. Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text," in *The Rustle of Language* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968), 60.

6. Toni Cade Bambara, "Reading the Signs, Empowering the Eye: Daughters of the Dust and the Black Independent Cinema Movement," in *Black American Cinema*, ed. Manthia Diawara (New York: Routledge, 1993), 141–42.

7. Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 7. Patterson writes: "I prefer the term 'natal alienation,' because it goes directly to the heart of what is critical in the slave's forced alienation, the loss of ties of birth in both ascending and descending generations. It also has the important nuance of a loss of native status, of deracination."

8. For a discussion of absence and archives, see Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 26, 12, no. 2 (June 2008): 1–14., and Toni Morrison, "The Site of Memory," in *The Invention of Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*, 2nd Edition, ed. William Zinsser (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1995): 92. In Hartman's lyrical essay, she discusses the ways in which Black archives are haunted by absence through her meditation on the difficulties inherent in telling the story of the slave, who usually passes unseen through historical annals. In the case she examines, a slave girl, "Venus," is named in passing simply as a *dead girl* in a legal indictment. Hartman says, "We stumble upon her in exorbitant circumstances that yield no picture of the everyday life, no pathway to her thoughts, no glimpse of the vulnerability of her face or of what looking at such a face might demand. We only know what can be extrapolated from an analysis of the ledger or borrowed from

the world of her captors and masters and applied to her" (2). Morrison, too, describes such concerns as the impetus for her writing of *Beloved*, which ultimately acts as a conflicted act of "rememorying" the untellable tale of the "interior life" of a slave.

9. See Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1984, 2007), for example. Lorde's emphasis on the relationship between the felt and the thought rejects the type of dualistic thinking that marks Western modernity and its gendered and racial devaluing of emotional and embodied experience.

10. In *Elle* Magazine's "A Call and Response with Melissa Harris-Perry: The Pain and the Power of *Lemonade*," for example, L. Joy Williams, president of the Brooklyn chapter of the NAACP, says that after watching *Lemonade*, she thought "Anybody else just wanna run in these streets and break everyone's chains? When it was all over I sat on my couch and '...only church folk will understand this.' You know that high you feel after the spirit moved? That's me right now, just rockin' on my couch." In the same article, Mychal Denzel Smith, author of *Invisible Man, Got the Whole World Watching*, says, "What I see in *Lemonade* is Beyoncé collapsing the notions of separate humanities for black womanhood. This visual album is Beyoncé telling us that she doesn't see a distinction between the sexual, political, spiritual, and artistic selves." And Treva B. Lindsey, assistant professor of Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies at Ohio State University, notes, "Beyoncé is centering the South and also connecting this to the Black global South. She is unapologetic in her Blackness, her woman-ness, and her Southernness. *Lemonade* is an archive of Black womanhood/girlhood honed in the South. ... The project asserts a complex, variegated, and infinitely generative space of Black kinship, creativity, resistance, and freedom dreams."

11. Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," and Morrison, "The Site of Memory," 92.

12. Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 4.

13. Alicia Wallace, "A Critical View of Beyoncé's 'Formation,'" *Black Camera* 9, no. 1 (2017): 190. doi:10.2979/blackcamera.9.1.12.

14. Mako Fitts Ward, "Queen Bey and the New Niggerati: Ethics of Individualism in the Appropriation of Black Radicalism," *Black Camera* 9, no. 1 (2017): 148. doi:10.2979/blackcamera.9.1.09.

15. Wallace, "A Critical View of Beyoncé's 'Formation,'" 195.

16. bell hooks, "Moving Beyond Pain," May 9, 2016, accessed July 13, 2018. <http://www.bellhooksinstitute.com/blog/2016/5/9/moving-beyond-pain>.

17. Carrie Battan, "Beyoncé's *Lemonade* is a Revelation of Spirit," *The New Yorker*, April 24, 2016.

18. *Lemonade* consists of twelve songs, each with an accompanying video, that are bridged together through spoken poetry and interstitial "chapter" titles that appear between songs.

19. Uri McMillan, *Embodied Avatars: Genealogies of Black Feminist Art and Performance* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 6.

20. Oneka LaBennett, "The Aesthetics and Style of Race, Gender and Politics: Beyoncé's *Lemonade*," Roundtable, Cornell University, September 22, 2016, accessed July 2, 2018, <http://www.cornell.edu/video/beyonce-lemonade-aesthetics-style-race-gender-politics>. LaBennett develops some of these ideas further in her article "'Beyoncé and Her Husband': Representing Infidelity and Kinship in a Black Marriage," *Differences* 29, no. 2 (2018): 154–88. doi: <https://doi-org.libproxy.clemson.edu/10.1215/10407391-6999816>.

21. Sybrina Fulton, mother of Trayvon Martin, Lesley McSpadden, mother of Michael Brown, and Gwen Carr, mother of Eric Garner, are among the women who have been named “Mothers of the Movement.” Members of a horrific club, each of their sons were killed gratuitously by state-sanctioned violence. The ellipses in the text represents all those mothers who are not featured in *Lemonade*, and the terrible fact that the list continues to grow daily.

22. Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” 4.

23. Carole Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing, and Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 4.

24. bell hooks, “The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectatorship,” in *Black Looks, Race and Representations* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 115–16. hooks describes Black women’s powerful oppositional gazes as resistant to the systematic denial of Black people’s right to look.

25. Annie McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 217.

26. Michelle M. Wright, *Physics of Blackness: Beyond the Middle Passage Epistemology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 3.

27. *Ibid.*, 8.

28. *Ibid.*, 12. Wright notes, “Indeed, *most* Black bodies are excluded from most discussions on Blackness because the majority of dominant discourses in Black studies, like most white discourses, implicitly or explicitly favor and focus on the heteropatriarchal male body as the Black norm in these histories and theories. It should be stressed that this exclusion is rarely accompanied by sexist or misogynist expressions. Unfortunately, these exclusions, conscious or not, can manifest many of the same effects that a deliberate and explicit bigotry would. When women, LGBTTQ (lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender/transsexual/queer and questioning) Blacks, and other students of these narratives struggle to apply the examples and abstract theorizations to themselves and cannot, this implicit exclusion of their voices and experiences from the ‘main narrative,’ in spite of the occasional paragraph or perhaps chapter giving voice to their existence, reinforces a sense that they are somehow not ‘normally’ Black.”

29. *Ibid.*, 53.

30. In her later article, LaBennett notes that the inclusion of queer voices in *Lemonade* nevertheless falls short of fully including gender-nonconforming agents. She points in particular to Beyoncé’s inclusion of the voices of gender-nonconforming artists such as Messy Maya and Big Freedia while nevertheless absenting images of their physical bodies. See LaBennett, “Beyoncé and Her Husband.”

31. LaBennett, “The Aesthetics and Style of Race, Gender and Politics.”

32. It can be argued that dropping the song at the Super Bowl itself undermines its radicality, given the NFL’s key role in the sports industrial complex, but that analysis dismisses the power of popular culture to ignite a radical consciousness in consumers.

33. hooks, “Moving Beyond Pain.” hooks’s forceful observations on *Lemonade* note the tension between showcasing Black women’s beauty, and showcasing Black bodies as commodity:

Real life images of ordinary, overweight not dressed up bodies are placed within a visual backdrop that includes stylized, choreographed, fashion plate fantasy representations. Despite all the glamorous showcasing of Deep South antebellum fashion,

when the show begins Beyoncé as star appears in sporty casual clothing, the controversial hoodie. Concurrently, the scantily-clothed dancing image of athlete Serena Williams also evokes sportswear. (Speaking of commodification, in the real life frame Beyoncé's new line of sportswear, Ivy Park, is in the process of being marketed right now).

Lemonade offers viewers a visual extravaganza—a display of black female bodies that transgresses all boundaries. It's all about the body, and the body as commodity. This is certainly not radical or revolutionary. From slavery to the present day, black female bodies, clothed and unclothed, have been bought and sold. What makes this commodification different in *Lemonade* is intent; its purpose is to seduce, celebrate, and delight—to challenge the ongoing present day devaluation and dehumanization of the black female body. Throughout *Lemonade* the black female body is utterly-aestheticized—its beauty a powerful in your face confrontation.

As hooks points out, however, this “powerful in your face confrontation” risks being undermined by the commodity function that is the Beyoncé enterprise. The Ivy Park line, for example, has recently come under scrutiny for the sweat shop conditions of the Sri Lankan plant in which women are said to labor for six dollars a day.

34. hooks, “Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance,” *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 21.

35. The Ava Clark, accessed May 2017, www.theavaclarke.com.

36. Nicole Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 3, 24.

37. McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 217.

38. Caroline A. Streeter, “Was Your Mama Mulatto? Notes toward a Theory of Racialized Sexuality in Gayl Jones's *Corregidora* and Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*,” *Callaloo* 27, no. 3 (2004): 768.

39. *Ibid.*, 772.

40. Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*.

41. Patricia J. Williams, “On Being the Object of Property,” *Signs* 14, no. 1 (1988): 6–7.

42. Wallace, “A Critical View of Beyoncé's ‘Formation.’”

43. T. Anyabwèlè, “Beyond Beyoncé: A Lesson In Colorism,” *Black Girl Speaks*, February 9, 2016, accessed July 16, 2018, www.blackgirlspeaks.me/2016/02/beyond-beyonce-colorism-lesson.

44. Jacqueline Bobo, *Black Women as Cultural Readers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 143. This scene in *Daughters* is itself a part of an intertextual reference to Bill Gunn's vampire film *Ganja and Hess* (1973, United States), as Bobo has pointed out. The particular scene of note in *Ganja and Hess* involves a moment when the title character, Dr. Hess Greene (Duane Jones), attempts to talk his assistant, George Meda (Gunn), out of suicide as he sits in a large tree with a rope loosely looped over a branch. As Greene gazes up at Meda, all of Meda that is visible are his legs, swinging slowly to and fro, conjuring up images of lynchings while Meda discusses his despair.

45. Julie Dash, *Daughters of the Dust Shooting Script* (Alexandria, VA: Alexander Street Press, 1991), 82.

46. Dash, *Daughters of the Dust Shooting Script*, 84.

47. See dashtv.com.

48. Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” 4.

49. I would like to again thank Anastasia Baginski for her insight into this article, and her expression of these ideas in particular.

50. See Tiffany Willoughby-Herard, *Theories of Blackness: On Life and Death* (Cognella, 2011), and M. Shadee Malaklou and Tiffany Willoughby-Herard, “Notes from the Kitchen, the Crossroads, and Everywhere Else, too: Ruptures of Thought, Word, and Deed from the ‘Arbiters of Blackness Itself,’” *Theory and Event*, 21, no. 1 (2018): 2–67, for a discussion of “holding social life in the same frame as social death” and the productive tensions that are unleashed when bringing together “black feminism’s fugitive demands to undo the world and Afro-pessimism’s unflinching turn towards social death” (“Notes” 4).

Making visible the social life of Blackness is “dangerous” in that it exposes Black bodies to hostile power structures, as well as makes them vulnerable to appropriation by and/or seduction of capital, as the contradictions between the avatar Beyoncé performing for social justice and the Beyoncé Empire makes clear.

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