“WOMXN LIKE ME ARE MADE”: POLITICS AND POETICS IN CLAUDIA RANKINE’S *CITIZEN* AND KOLEKA PUTUMA’S *COLLECTIVE AMNESIA*

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ABSTRACT

This thesis utilises an interdisciplinary approach to understand the political significance of the experimental poetics used by Claudia Rankine in *Citizen: An American Lyric* and Koleka Putuma in *Collective Amnesia*. Rankine and Putuma offer contemporary reflections on what it means to occupy marginalised spaces in society. These artists experiment with formal and conventional aspects of literature to explore and create new definitions of what it means to be Black in society. Their works and techniques allow for thinking outside of dominant ideologies of race and posit alternative Black identities that are not found within canonical theory on Blackness. This project reflects on existing theories of Black subjectivity as evident in Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* and Aimé Césaire's *Notebook on the Return to My Native Land*. While these theorists did not reject the role of Black women in Western civilisation, they should be read as a moment in a series of counter-discourse to the Black Other rather than the finite canon of Black subjectivity. The emergence of Rankine and Putuma's experimental poetics works to disrupt the conflation of the Black subject with the Black heteronormative male.

Using Michelle M. Wright's *Physics of Blackness* as its primary theoretical framework, this project advocates alternative and disruptive readings of Blackness that potentially shift Blackness away from its conflation with nationalism, masculinity and heteronormativity. This thesis uses a dialogical approach between political theory and literature which allows for *Citizen* and *Collective Amnesia* to be read as acts of resistance to epistemological erasure and as articulations of the politics relevant to the poets' lived experiences. Both the United States and South Africa have a history of institutionalised racial segregation, which allows Rankine and Putuma to be read in relation to one another. Where the Civil Rights movement and the

anti-apartheid struggle were both foregrounded as male-lead liberation movements contemporary social movements including #blacklivesmatter and #feesmustfall have initiated a return to the androcentric philosophies of Malcom X and Steve Biko, for example. As such Rankine and Putuma's literature and art marks a reclamation of female empowerment and visibility in the face of a political rhetoric that continues to be masculine and nationalist in nature. In the absence of a space where Black female and queer bodies are adequately recognised, the poetry they write creates a space of self-representation and recognition.

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NOTE ON REFERENCING AND ABBREVIATIONS

I have followed the MLA guide to referencing and formatting this thesis in conjunction with the regulations from the Rhodes University Department of Literary Studies in English. The following list refers to short-hand or abbreviated titles in parenthetical references used in this thesis:

BB - Becoming Black

BSWM - Black Skin, White Masks

Citizen - Citizen: An American Lyric

CA - Collective Amnesia

Discourse - Discourse on Colonialism

Decadence - Disciplinary Decadence and the Decolonisation of Knowledge

Notebook - Notebook on the Return to My Native Land

Physics - Physics of Blackness

WFS - What Fanon Said

Wretched – The Wretched of the Earth

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INTRODUCTION

"Naming and defining the contours of an age is one of the most urgent political and epistemological problems for any era"- Anthony Reed, *Freedom Time*.

The Significance of "The Word" and Black Experimental Writing

In the preface to Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, Jean-Paul Sartre theorises that Black individuals merely have use of the coloniser's language or "the Word." While the French language is perceived to be the key that promises to open the barred doors of recognition [within George Wilhelm Fredrich Hegel's dialectic in *Phenomenology of the Spirit*], anti-colonial theorists like Aimé Césaire and Fanon appropriate the French language to articulate their respective subjectivities.[1] [2] Formal experimentation of the Word became a tool used by Black writers as a means to resist historical and epistemological oppression and the erasure of Black subjectivity. As such, there has been a rise in the development of an embodied language that links theory and poetry in an attempt to counter Western modernity's "production and maintenance of hierarchical distinctions between groups of humans" (Weheliye 1). Anti-colonial theorists produced counter-discourses to nineteenth century theory that posited Black as Other to the white subject.

Césaire, A Martinican poet and politician argued that while French literature influenced him, he "strived to create a new language, one capable of communicating the African heritage…. An Antillean French, a Black French that while still being French, had a Black character" (*Discourse on Colonialism* 26). His poetics of Negritude, a doctrine which asserts the black man as a man with his own culture, civilisation and original contribution to Western society is showcased in *Notebook on the Return to My Native Land* (1939). It is a language and aesthetic that resisted assimilation into French society. As an ideological instrument, it sought to "smash forms of language" that imposed a consciousness of inferiority on the colonised (Kunene qtd. in *Notebook* 7).

[1] Aimé Césaire was born in Basse-Point, a village in the French Colony of Martinique in 1913. *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* documented the twentieth century colonial condition. Césaire was heavily influenced by the Surrealist movement and developed the concept of Negritude along with other Francophone artists. He was a politician for the French Communist Party from 1945 and had contributed towards the founding of several literary journals. He is an author, poet and playwright (Goldsmith 1)

[2] Frantz Fanon, a former student of Césaire's was born in 1925 in Martinique. *Black Skin, White Masks* was originally submitted as his dissertation for his psychiatry qualification but was rejected. Fanon practiced in Algeria and became involved in their political struggle.

In his seminal text, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), Fanon speaks through the coloniser's language which clearly positions him as the Other. His philosophy of existentialism arises "out of a consciousness of an imploded African existence" and is referred to as the zone of nonbeing (Henry 78). The zone of nonbeing is an existential state that denies, structurally, Black humanity and subjectivity. Albeit written in an expressively limited prose form, *Black Skin, White Masks* is comprised of an apparently urgent, embodied language that communicates Fanon's anger and frustration, linking his experiential consciousness to his text.

Black experimental writing, at the level of form, that advances an aesthetic of "unrecognizable speech" spurs the (re)imaginings of collectives of Blackness and established intellectual practices. Experimental poetics by Black writers push at Eurocentric ideological coverage and disciplines of knowledge to disrupt the familiar terms of analysing Black authorship and racial politics. Experimental poetics use literary experimentation to draw on and transform older traditions of poetry and other art forms in order to "reconfigure the possibilities of both literature and race without taking either to be static or transparent" (Reed 6). This thesis draws attention to the political implications of Black experimental writing in creating a space where the Black female subject can come into being.[3] It argues that Black literature produces its own acts of political theory and self-differentiation which allows for alternative subjectivities and their respective concerns to come into being.

The Black Subject and the Creation of the Other of the Other

Hegel's theories of the nation-state, the citizen and his theory on the master-slave dialectic are still operational today.[4] Hegel's construction of the subject is dialectically structured and located within a world ruled by reason. He determines that Europe is the birthplace of reason and the only geographical location in which it can be found (Wright *BB* 33). As such, the relationship between race and the nation is made clear. If reason is the nation's claim of authority, then it determines that anything outside of Europe is determined inferior and irrational. This was used to justify colonial "civilising missions;" which claimed to assist slaves in becoming subjects and citizens through their subordination but also through

[3] I use the phrase "Black female subject" in opposition to the established political heteronormative Black male subject. I am not here endorsing any form of essentialism and recognise that Blackness forms a part of the identity of many queer, transgender and nonbinary persons too.
[4] Hegel's work includes *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807); "The System of Ethical Life" (1913); *Reason in History* (translated 1953) and *The Philosophy of History* (1899, translated 1956).

European language. The work of Césaire and Fanon seeks to assert Black selfhood as a counter-discourse to Hegel's assertion of the Black as Other to white.

The Western construction of the nation operates in the same way as Hegel's dialectic, it derives its structure from Enlightenment methodologies that devoted all relationships into binaries. Nationality cannot fully accept difference because it necessitates a homogenous, unified identity. For those who reside within a nation but stand as signifiers of difference—whether racial, ethnic, sexual, gender or religious—they must be constructed as the antithesis to the nation's thesis. They serve as a marker of what the nation is continually attempting to "overcome" (Wright *BB* 38). In *Becoming Black,* Wright disrupts this construction of the Black Other by arguing that academic discourse often fails to interrogate its deployment of the category of the "Other" as "a synonym for non-white; it does not distinguish between a complex abstraction and actual individuals" (37). However, in challenging this dialectic—which construes the white male as synonymous with humanity—they have often excluded those in the contemporary moment "who perceive of and perform themselves as Black" (Wright *Physics* 14). Discussions of identity and its various formulations fall within a narrow binary of self and Other, to show how attempts to impose a homogenous and heteropatriarchal norm onto Black subjectivity one must return to the discourse that first produced Black Others. Race cannot "operate in a vacuum, divorced from other subject categories—gender, sexuality and class— that are always already part of any subject status," rather these categories are hidden because they do not conform to heteronormative ideals (Wright *BB* 229). Kimberlé Crenshaw discusses the significance of intersectionality in relation to incidents of police violence against African-American women. She argues for intersectionality as a frame of reference that will account for social justice problems like racism and sexism overlapping, creating multiple levels of social injustice. Wright cites Etienne Balibar's argument that different Others result from different racisms practiced on different racial groups, she furthers this notion by stating that these Others are conflated rather than discretely defined and, most importantly that one racial group can have different types of alterity placed on it depending on which textual agenda locates it as Other (*BB* 226). As such, she points to the logical fallacy that allows the production of the Black Other to the white subject but also how different Black others were produced to justify the specific relationship with the Black envisioned by that specific discourse (*BB* 28). Her main point is that:

> Like their white counterparts, many Blacks in the diaspora prefer formations [of identity] that, whether explicitly enunciating nation or diaspora, implicitly embrace nationalist discourse's call for an enforced heteropatriarchal homogeneity through which 'authentic Blackness' comes into being (*BB* 229).

Both within and outside of academic discourse, there is a lack of criticism of these heteropatriarchal formations. As such "not all Black subjects are able to speak" (*BB* 229). In *Physics of Blackness*, Wright builds upon the legacy of Black feminist literature with the assertion of masculinity and heteronormativity within canonical theory on Blackness has resulted in women not gaining the same historical timeline as men:

> Black women gain the right to vote decades later; African American women are formally removed from leadership positions as the Civil Rights movement achieves its official structure and LGBTQI+ blacks find themselves consigned to the shadows often as victims of white brainwashing like their white counterparts until the Stonewall Rebellion, but now encounter a stonewall almost wholly re-appropriated by queer white representations accompanied by statements that implicitly exclude Blackness from queerness. As a result, these identity narratives, even after famous and influential books that create and theorise them emerge, they do not change the focus that favours the heteropatriarchal black male body in the mainstream scholarship that represents Blackness.[5] (12-13)

Arguing that in order to define Blackness across the Diaspora, an inclusive and non-hierarchical feminist model needs to challenge existing theories on Blackness. Her model locates and connects common exclusions found in everyday speech, the scholarly canon and in public assumptions regarding Black subjectivity. Echoing the work of Black female theorists, she shows that existing theories of Blackness remain bound to a nationalist and patriarchal framework.[6] Wright poses an understanding of Blackness as "the intersection of constructs that locate the Black collective in history and in the specific moment in which Blackness is being imagined (*Physics* 14).

This thesis builds on Wright's hypothesis by engaging in a rereading of Césaire's *Notebook on the Return to my Native Land* and Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* to show that an approach which is able to shift Black identity from its links to nationalism, masculinity

[5] The Stonewall Riots were a series of spontaneous demonstrations by members of the LGBTQ community against a discriminatory police raid at the Stonewall Inn in New York City in 1969. (*Stonewall Forever* 1)
[6] Historically, Black female theorists have paid close attention to the intersection of social, political and economic rights of Black women. The framework from which Wright builds upon stems from the works of Zora Neale Hurston, Angela Davis, Audre Lorde, Toni Morrison, Hortense Spillers and Patricia Hill Collins.

and heteronormativity is required when considering the works of contemporary Black female poets such as Claudia Rankine and Koleka Putuma.

Rankine and Race in Post-racial America

A Jamaican-born poet, playwright, educator and multimedia artist, Rankine's work centres on the harmful effects of colorblindness on the African-American body and consciousness.[7] In 2013, she was elected a chancellor of the Academy of American Poets and in the following year she published *Citizen: An American Lyric* which received both the PEN Open Book Award and the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) Image award for poetry in 2015 (Serafin 1). Testament to her founding of The Racial Imaginary Institute in 2016, her work often crosses genres: incorporating political prose, lyrical poetry, visual art and digital media. *Citizen* delineates the psychic state of racialised people who have been subject to ethnic, religious or racial prejudice.

In an interview with *Studio 360*, Rankine discusses how she uses poetry to grapple with the problems that interest her. Rather than condemning racism, "poetry allows [her] into the realm of feeling and it's the one place where you can say 'I feel bad'," for her feeling is as important as perception and description (Frassica 1). Her experimental poetics—part documentary, part poetry—draws attention to the everyday injustices and micro-aggressions of racism in a society that claims to be post-racial.[8] Kenna O'Ruorke describes *Citizen* as a "collection of lived experiences… interspersed with postcolonial theory, excerpts from the news and pop culture, and artwork" (1). The collection is also the first book ever nominated in two categories for the National Book Critic Circle Award: criticism and poetry, winning the latter— it reflects the collection's varied literary approach as well as its timely, acute critique of contemporary American culture (Frassica 1).

[7] I use the American spelling of colorblind because the term is most commonly used when referring to American society. The phrase made a brief appearance during Fees Must Fall, when the University of Pretoria began a campaign called #colourblind called upon students to post black and white pictures of themselves online with a student of another race. For more see Hess, Lauren. "#Colourblind campaign takes off after racial tensions at Tuks." *News24,* 24 Feb. 2016 and Nicolson, Greg. "Maverick Interview: #Colourblind." *Daily Maverick,* 25 Feb. 2016.

[8] Post-racial America stems from the colorblind logic that followed the Civil Rights era. There is a debate around post-racial vs. post-blackness in American society, Glenn Ligon an artist featured in *Citizen* writes that post-blackness as the "liberating value in tossing off the immense burden of race-wide representation" (qtd. in Pinckney 1). Touré, a pop-culture journalist, released *Who's Afraid of Post Blackness*? A book that rejects the notion that America is post-racial and makes an argument for post-blackness which argues that there is no correct or legitimate way of being Black.

In an interview with *The Paris Review*, Rankine states that her literature is an act of public engagement. For her, "the relationship between public engagement and private thought are inseparable" (Ulin 1). *Citizen* went to print at the time when Michael Brown was murdered in Ferguson: the incident that turned the #Blacklivesmatter movement from something engaged with on social media into a series of protests against police brutality. In an opinion piece written for *The Guardian* titled "Our sons know they could be the next Michael Brown. But they should never surrender," Rankine writes about attending Brown's memorial and coming to understand that history is repeating itself, "I finally understand, fully, that I am in the midst of the continuation of the LA riots of the 20th century, where the beaten black male body has been executed publicly, in the 21st."[9] The Black Lives Matter movement "brought the world's attention to the crisis of racist police practices in the United States" (Taylor 2). The protests that occurred between 2014 and 2015 were in response to how the perpetuation of racist stereotypes of African-Americans as dangerous and exempt from basic humanity "is what allow the police to kill Black people with no threat of punishment" (Taylor 4). Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor cites Philadelphia as an example of the most brutal police departments in the United States. Citing an investigation by the Department of Justice conducted between 2007 and 2013 on their police department, the report found that 80 percent of the people Philadelphia police officers had shot were African Americans, even though they make up less than half the city's population. In 73 percent of cases pertaining to police officers violating department policy there was no termination or suspension (2-3). One of Rankine's primary concerns in *Citizen* is the American penal system and the state laws that unfairly incarcerate African Americans.

As such, Black Lives Matter became a slogan against the institutional disregard for Black life. In this regard, Taylor argues that if a central demand of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s was "federal intervention to act against discrimination and act affirmatively to improve the quality of life for African Americans, promoting the United States as colorblind or postracial has done the opposite as it is used to justify dismantling the state's capacity to challenge discrimination" (5). Understanding how Black deprivation continues in the United States through institutional racism, Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton in their book *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (1967) define institutional racism as:

[9] The Los Angeles riots of 1992 began in response to the acquittal of four white police officers connected to the severe beating of Rodney King, an African American motorist in March 1991 (Wallenfeldt 1)

> the policies, programs, and practices of public and private institutions that result in greater rates of poverty, dispossession, criminalisation, illness and ultimately mortality of African Americans (5-7).

Similarly, Taylor cites the Kerner Commission report which "plainly states that white racism was responsible for Black poverty, white society created it, white institutions maintain it and white society condones it," to provide an alternative understanding for white Americans on the position of the African American (9).

Black Lives Matter shares parallels with the struggles of the 1960s but does not replicate them. In fact, the movement emerges out of a disillusionment of those struggles' successes. The questions raised by the Civil Rights movement have largely been left unresolved as a result of the colorblind mentality brought forward from the 1970s, in which Nixon made clear that his administration would fight against "intentional racism" thereby narrowing the definition of racism from institutional to focusing on an individual's intent.

The protests in Ferguson led to deeper investigations into policing practices used in the United States. A report by USA Today found that "at least 70 police departments arrested Black people at a rate 10 times higher than non-Blacks" (Taylor 120). These discretions occur as a result of perpetuated stereotypes that legitimise the racialisation and criminalisation of Black people. Black Lives Matter started with a hashtag that community organiser Alicia Garza posted on Facebook following the acquittal of Trayvon Martin's killer, George Zimmerman. Taylor encapsulates the movement as follows:

> It was a powerful rejoinder that spoke directly to the dehumanisation and criminalisation that made Martin seem suspicious in the first place and allowed the police to make no effort to find out to whom this boy belonged. It was a response to the oppression, inequality, and discrimination that devalue Black life every day. It was everything, in three simple words. (151)

Garza, Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi transformed the hashtag into an organisation with the intention to act as an ideological and political intervention in a society where Black lives are systematically targeted for demise.

The hashtag is "an affirmation of Black folks' contributions to this society, our humanity and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression" (Taylor 151). In opposition to the Civil Rights Movement, which for the most part had a predominantly male leadership, the leadership of Black Lives Matter comprises mostly of Black women. Activism is usually male-led and organised, but the face of the movement is "largely queer and female" (Taylor 165). Taylor hypothesizes that the female leadership in Black Lives Matter "may actually

have been an outcome of the deeply racist policing Black men have experienced in Ferguson" (165). [10] Maintaining that the contributions of women to the movement are invaluable, she states "Black women have made a much more deliberate intervention to expose police brutality as part of a much larger system of oppression in the lives of all Black working-class and poor people" (166). This is because, as Garza reveals that,

> Black poverty and genocide is state violence…. Black women continue to bear the burden of a relentless assault on our children and our families that that assault is an act of state violence. Black queer and trans folks bearing a unique burden in a hetero-patriarchal society that disposes of us like garbage and simultaneously fetishizes us and profits off of us is state violence…. (qtd. in Taylor 167)

Garza's emphasis on state violence strategically shifts the focus of the movement onto state action. Rankine's own work focuses on state operations too. *Citizen* provides a means of understanding why these mass injustices— mass incarceration, police brutality— occur. They stem from racist micro-aggressions that occur in everyday life: "the process of reading becomes the process of experiencing the constant negation of blackness in the US… her poetically told stories illustrate the pervasiveness of white privilege and the corresponding oppression of black bodies" (O'Rourke 1).

Rankine has actively pursued what authors/theorists such as Ralph Ellison and Toni Morrison have argued is at the centre of American national literature: the white consciousness. The Racial Imaginary Institute (TRII) is working to capture the enduring truth of race, that despite being an invented concept operates with extraordinary force in the daily lives of Black people. The institute's interdisciplinary approach opens up the meaning of race rather than have it limit a person's movements or imagination: "we understand that perceptions, resources, rights and lives themselves flow along racial lines that confront some of us with restrictions and give others uninterrogated power" (TRII 1). The Institute's first issue challenged white dominance and whiteness as a source of unquestioned power: "given that the concept of racial hierarchy is a strategy employed to support white dominance, whiteness is an important aspect of any conversation about race" (TRII 1). Rankine writes in "Bleached racists and lynching trees: the show that's targeting white supremacy" about the Institutes first public exhibition *On Whiteness* in 2018. The primary challenge faced by the

[10] She uses statistics from the US Census Bureau to show that in Ferguson there are 1182 African American women between the ages of 25 and 34, there are only 577 African American men in the same age bracket. More than 40 percent of the men in that bracket are "missing" (165). By "missing," she implies that they are either imprisoned or dead.

institute was how to expose and criticise whiteness without further enshrining it as an artistic and cultural ideal. It came to the realisation that white people had not considered their identity critically. As such, it could not approach whiteness only through the violated bodies of minority groups but rather appealed to showcasing installations focused on white culture and how it has been normalised. *Citizen* works to redirect the gaze away from the stereotyped African American and onto the white American perpetuating the stereotype.

Putuma and Performance in Post-Apartheid South Africa

A South African theatre practitioner, poet and playwright, Putuma's debut collection *Collective Amnesia* is in its ninth print run since its initial release in 2017. It was awarded book of the year by the *City Press* in 2017 and deemed one of the best books of 2017 by *The Sunday Times*. In a similar manner to Rankine, Putuma acknowledges that the literature she produces is meant to be engaged publicly. She states that she "know[s] and understand[s] that *Collective Amnesia* exists or can exist in universities like Stellenbosch and UCT because of movements like #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall" (qtd in *Brittlepaper* 1). This comment was made following the inclusion of the collection into curriculums at the University of Stellenbosch and the University of Cape Town. The protests to which Putuma refers occurred between 2015 and 2017. Started as agitations for social justice on University campuses, and aided by cyber activism, in the form of social media, the protests created a "crucial moment in the redefinition of what counts as 'political' in [South Africa]," as they foregrounded the need for the decolonisation of public spaces such as the university (Mbembe n.p). The protests followed from a realisation that post-apartheid South Africa was still fraught with the same racial inequalities of apartheid. The Rhodes Must Fall movement sought to remove the statue of Cecil John Rhodes from the UCT campus because it represented the continued racism and alienation that black students still experienced on campus. The Fees Must Fall movement, initially started by students at the University of Witwatersrand, became a national protest against a proposed 10.5% fee increase for the 2016 academic year (Ndelu et al 2). The ideology projected by the protests were invoked by interpretations of theories of violence and liberation by Fanon, Steve Biko and Robert Sobukwe.[11] *Collective Amnesia* draws attention to the oppressions that these ideologies perpetuate by remaining inherently masculinist and

[11] Steve Bantu Biko was a prominent figure in the anti-apartheid struggle. He, along with other anti-apartheid figures worked to produce the Black Consciousness Movement. He was an influential student activist and was murdered by police while in custody on 12 September 1977. Robert Sobukwe was the first president of the Pan African Congress. He was imprisoned on Robben Island for demanding the repeal of Apartheid pass laws.

heteronormative. Despite intersectionality being foregrounded as a tenant of each movement, "sexism, heterosexism, homophobia and transphobia emerged as characteristics that marred these movements" (Ndelu et al 2).

The leadership of the movements were criticised for being misogynist and for using intersectionality as an empty promise in order to gain protest numbers.[12] As such a number of feminist interventions took place, at UCT a group of Black, queer and transgender women worked to claim the contested leadership space within Rhodes Must Fall; the UCT Trans Collective disrupted a photographic exhibition organised by Rhodes Must Fall leadership as a gesture of "resisting the erasure of black trans bodies from official narrative of the #RMF movement"; Patriarchy Must Fall emerged at UCT to challenge the institution's gendered bias; at Rhodes University the RUReferenceList protests named eleven men accused of rape on the campus and it sparked a national debate about rape culture on South African university campuses. At Wits, a naked protest was initiated under the social media hashtag "I am One in Three," which represents the number of women in South Africa who have or will be sexually assaulted in their lifetime (Ndelu et al 2). These social movements form part of a historical continuum of resistance against racism and colonialism on African university campuses, they simultaneously marked a point of departure as indicated by the above feminist disruptions. These disruptions "brought to the fore a clear and powerful feminist challenge to the cisheteronormative patriarchy— in broader society as well as within the student movements" (Ndelu et al 3).

While many would disagree with Putuma's critique, the collection has entered mainstream South African literature as a force to be reckoned with. In a review for *Afripop!* Luso Mnthali calls the book a collection of "survival poetry," while Sabelo Mkhabela for *OkayAfrica* writes: "It's surreal to hold a collection of someone who speaks the way I do… The South African publishing industry has its own types of books that it favours, and *Collective Amnesia* just wouldn't normally make the cut. Which is why Putuma's book is a special moment." Putuma's experimental poetry engages with larger concerns of the South African nation but also incorporates personal intimate testimonies with political intentions to reconfigure what she considers political in a post-transitional South Africa. A primary political concern evident in *Collective Amnesia* and Putuma's theatrical work is the pervasiveness of rape culture in South Africa.

[12] Intersectionality is defined in Crenshaw K (1989) 'Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black Feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics', in *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989, article 8

Her theatrical work includes the play "UHM" which won an award for the best student theatre writer for its script at the 2014 Standard Bank Ovation awards at the National Arts Festival (Mkhwanazi 1). "UHM" tells the story of how the English language interacts with identity in South Africa. The play is situated in South Africa's state of limbo following apartheid, "and so we based our metaphor for this in language: 'uhm', an expression used by humans as a pause for thought" (Mkhwanazi 1). Her involvement in the *Mothertongue* production of "Walk," a performance piece made by a group of South African artists in response to Maya Krishna Rao' "The Walk" which was a response to the gang-rape and murder of Jyoti Pandey in India, Mothertongue's "Walk" acts as a response to the gang-rape and murder of Anene Booysen. The company conceptualised "a performed response to gender violence in South Africa," the performance involves a series of performed installations that the audience walks through (*Mothertongue* 1). In a review for the performance at the National Festival of the Arts in 2018, Zondelela Njaba writes that "Walk" "shines a spotlight on rape culture and trauma imposed on the bodies of womxn and gender non-conforming persons.[13] This performance piece captures the trauma before the healing by confronting this violence, which was once avoided or spoken about behind closed doors and in whispers. It exposes the audience to a side which is often familiar to the victim before the survival" (1). Putuma won the 2018 SCrIBE Scriptwriting Competition for her adaptation of her poem "No Easter Sunday for Queers," into a script for production, Skinner writes that Putuma's subject matter "is poignant, hard-hitting and relevant. Koleka cleverly combines an interesting language of scripture with a contemporary voice to tell the story, and in the text we also have a strong sense of the theatrical potential of the play" (1). While the poem is analysed in this thesis, the play tells the story of Napo, a lesbian in her twenties who is in a relationship with another queer woman in her thirties. The two women are murdered at the church where Napo's father is the pastor. The play, similarly to the poem, explores the tension between queer identity and conservative religion.

These themes of trauma and violence on the Black body occur frequently in *Collective Amnesia* but Putuma argues that the collection is also focused towards the healing process from the above-mentioned traumas. Her personal accounts of love and joy are dismissed for not being outwardly political but their inclusion in the collection shows how Putuma is shifting the narrative of what she considers to be political within her subjectivity.

[13] Womxn or womyn is used as an alternative spelling of woman, aimed at removing the emphasis on the normative 'man' within the term (Thorpe 306). The term emphasises the complex intersectionality of race, gender and class, among others, as a framework for understanding and interpreting feminism.

An Exploration of Black Identity through Epiphenomenal Time

This thesis unpacks and extends Wright's notion of Epiphenomenal time to explore how Rankine and Putuma, when read comparatively offer contemporary reflections of Black identity and Black politics that are often erased by the logic of linear spacetime. Both the United States and South Africa have a history of institutionalised racial segregation, which allows them to be read in relation to one another. In both countries, the Civil Rights Movement and the Anti-apartheid struggle were both foregrounded as male-lead liberation movements. As women writing in this time, Rankine and Putuma have turned their literature into spaces of self-representation and resistance to erasure of contemporary political concerns that do not fit into a political rhetoric that continues to be masculine and nationalist in nature. Evidenced in this thesis's titular reference derived from Putuma's collection: "womxn like me are made," (23) both women experiment with poetics and formal aspects of literature in order to explore and create new definitions of what it means to be Black in society.

A comparative, dialogic reading of these two poets affords a variety of different Black subjectivities. Their experimental works and techniques allow for thinking outside of dominant ideologies of race and posit alternative modes of Black selfhood. Both authors invoke the historical past in relation to how Blackness is perceived of and performed in the current moment.

The first chapter of this thesis explores how the construction of identity is intrinsically linked to the nation-state and how the creation of the Black subject has resulted in the creation of the Black female and Black queer person as "Other of the Other." It attempts to set up a theoretical framework to understand how the experimental poetics used by Rankine in *Citizen* and Putuma in *Collective Amnesia* play with Epiphenomenal time in order to show how the continued heteropatriarchal constructions of Blackness erase political concerns of women and queer persons. It looks at how their work, if considered in relation to Grant Farred's concept of the "Black vernacular intellectual" hold the potential to act as political theory for the contemporary moment.

In the second chapter, the trope of masking and ventriloquism in the works of Césaire and Fanon are explored as means of showing how the Black male subject works his way out of the zone of nonbeing. It also shows how masking does not allow for Rankine and Putuma's respective subjectivities to come into being but rather positions them deeper within the zone of nonbeing than their male counterparts. I use Wright's argument for a dialogic reading of the work of Black female poets in *Becoming Black* to show how this reading allows for the

Black female subject to come into being. This is clearer in Putuma's work as she is thematically concerned with the intersubjective relationships that women share with one another. *Collective Amnesia* hardly addresses men in a similar manner to the way *Black Skin, White Masks* and *Notebook on the Return to My Native Land* silences or erases female voices. This deliberate subversion allows for the women discussed in Putuma's collection to critique patriarchal oppression as an intergenerational concern and further incorporates how religion is used to enforce this patriarchal oppression. Rankine's decision to use Serena Williams as an example of "Black Excellence," shows an awareness of the intersecting oppression that women face in society. Williams, as a sports-women faces criticism not only based on her race but also on her gender in a space dominated by white heteropatriarchal values.

Chapter three considers how the "epistemic closure" faced by the Black Other in chapter two impacts the way these bodies move through public spaces that are inherently anti-black. It argues that Rankine and Putuma's work are acts of Black sousveillance, a means of "looking back" on the white and male gaze to show an awareness and resistance of its presence. The stereotypes enforced upon the Black and female body are exploited in public spaces. This is evident in how the stereotype of the Black male as "criminal and threating" has encouraged racial profiling and mass incarceration in the United States and how the policing of female sexuality has resulted in the pervasive rape culture found in South African society and the eruption of the RUreferencelist protests of 2016 that sought to fight the rape culture on South African university campuses. The chapter focuses on the tension between the private and public spheres of society and the debilitating effect it has on the Black body. This is work that has been shown in *Black Skin, White Masks* and *Notebook on the Return to my Native Land,* but this thesis extends their findings to include gender and contemporary political concerns.

CHAPTER ONE:

Writing a Collective Memory: The Significance of Black Female Poetry in Re-formulating Black Identity

This chapter attempts to set up a theoretical framework for a relational analysis of the experimental poetics used by Rankine in *Citizen* and Putuma in *Collective Amnesia*, respectively. In their experimental literary modes, these writers articulate and complicate the subject status of Black individuals who do not conform to white heteropatriarchal ideals insisted upon by the nation-state. This chapter uses Wright's theoretical model in *Physics of Blackness* to explore how Rankine and Putuma engage with vertical interpellations of Blackness that are often linked to the nation-state in a masculinist manner while at the same, explore how horizontal interpellations of Blackness provide a more inclusive understanding of what it means to be Black.

Written as a critique of an established metanarrative of Blackness and its tendency to equate Blackness to only straight (American) Black men, *Physics of Blackness* maintains that the assertion of masculinity and heteronormativity within canonical theory on Blackness has resulted in "Black women not gaining the same historical timeline as men" (12). Wright's assertion is based on the ways in which the gender subtext of Black female writers is often usurped and overlooked to make it fit into a collective historical archive on Black discourse. This archive stems from the articulation of Black subjectivity through a linear-progress narrative that tracks the collective's progress to the development of a nation-state. Vertical interpellations are hierarchically structured, the collective's histories foreground its male participants while its female and queer participants are often side-lined or erased.

This chapter explores the limitations of a linear progress narrative in the articulation of Black subjectivity by looking at how the concept of identity is intrinsically linked to the nation-state, it further incorporates and expands upon Wright's notion of Epiphenomenal time to show how Rankine and Putuma articulate their politics and Blackness in "post": Post-racial America and Post-Apartheid South African society. When engaging with the poets' respective poetics; this chapter further utilises Anthony Reed's analysis in *Freedom Time* of Black Experimental Writing as a disruption of racialised reading. According to Reed, racialised reading is an intellectual tradition that reads the majority of Black literature as counter-discourses to the Hegelian dialectic that posited the Black as Other to the white subject. He argues that this limits the ability of a text to engage with political, epistemological and emancipatory concerns. This chapter argues that Rankine exerts a post-

lyrical poetics to engage with the colorblind logic of the United States and considers Putuma's poetics as post-transitional.

The Limitations of Linear Spacetime in Articulating Black Identity

As Benedict Anderson has shown, the concept of identity is intrinsically linked to the idea of the nation-state.[14] Moreover, as the introduction to this chapter has shown, that identity is tied closely to the Hegelian dialectic. This has resulted in the ambiguity of contemporary Black identity. In *Physics of Blackness*, Wright states that "Blackness remains undefined and suffering under the weight of many definitions" (1) because it is simultaneously rooted along a linear timeline as both a political and a historical identity. One cannot dismiss social, political and cultural discourses and practices that clearly link Black communities across the West to their African origins but locating blackness as a determinable 'thing' provides a misconception of a "one-size-fits-all definition of Blackness" (*Physics* 2). *Physics of Blackness* argues that Blackness operates as both a construct— defined through a set of shared physical and behavioural characteristics— and as phenomenological— how it is imagined through individual perceptions depending on the context (Wright 4). If Blackness is largely a matter of perception then it cannot be located on the body because there is a diversity of bodies that claim Blackness as an identity. By using a phenomenological approach to understanding Black identity one can consider the "when" and "where" Blackness is imagined, defined and performed. However, when Blackness is positioned along a linear timeline, the political identity is associated with the male leaders of these political movements. South Africa's intellectual tradition of Black Consciousness much the same as other global Black Nationalist struggles such as Negritude and the Civil Rights Movement in the United States sought to create a collective identity that resists anti-black racism, the coded-language used by these movements often resulted in the humanity of whole groups of people being rendered illegitimate (Gordon "Decadence" 89). Lewis Gordon argues that

> These moments of justice did not transform the question of the human status of black peoples and the presumption of humanness enjoyed by people with or those who have managed to acquire the special credit or capital of whiteness. The result has been an effort to seek in normative life what is, in effect beyond justice. (Decadence 89)

[14] This notion is taken from Anderson's book *Imagined Communities* (1983) which depicted a nation as a socially constructed community, imagined by the people who perceive themselves as part of that group (6-7).

While there are many qualities within these movements that remain relevant and important for Black solidarity today, their discourses are masculinist because in foregrounding race as the primary form of oppression, they overlook the existence of intersecting oppressions such as gender and sexual orientation. The normative interpretation of these discourses positioned men as empowered voices within these movements and hegemonic masculinities emerged as a result. These discourses are positioned along what Wright terms a linear progress narrative. The linear structure offers immediate clarity and representation which is why it is favoured by theorists who seek to define Black identity historically. The linking of events through a logic of "cause-and-effect" ties the past to the present and provides direction for future articulations of Blackness. As such, it appears self-evident in the lived experience of Blackness and "offers an almost altruistic and thus worthy goal: to improve the lived experiences of the Black collective but also humanity at large" (*Physics* 17).

Wright unpacks this "cause-and-effect," or reactionary notion, to Black identity using Newtonian laws of motion that naturalise the assumption that time always moves forward, linearly and that this movement is inherently positive and progressive. This assumption undermines the work of anti-colonial and anti-racist struggle because it assumes that success is inevitable. Anti-black racism is assumed to be the agent that sets the historical agenda for the Black progress narrative because it initiated the Atlantic Slave Trade, segregationist laws, racist violence and terrorist acts against Black communities. By providing anti-black racism this amount of agency, it is difficult to reverse the binary whereby Blackness is only assumed to be reactionary.

While Wright focuses on the effects of a linear progress narrative on African Americans, her analysis is applicable to Black diasporic communities that identify their blackness ancestrally. She explains that the Middle Passage's

> central historical events, arranged on a linear timeline move from slavery to rebellions to civil disobedience and some form of social, political or even economic gains in this present moment, in which the reactive, racist state, corporate, or even military interests seek to deprive Blacks in the West of what few socio-political and economic gains they have secured. (*Physics* 43)

As such, where a historically assertive linear progress narrative is essential for reading Blackness as a collective identity and works to retrieve and archive marginalised and excluded Black individual and collective identities, Wright highlights three concerns that

limit the inclusion of marginalised identities into the linear progress narrative. The first limitation is the reliance on the origin of a timeline that sets a specific event as the starting point. This neglects the histories and identities that may have existed prior to its inception. In this regard, a Middle Passage epistemology that locates its origin with the enslavement of Africans precludes the existence of precolonial African existence and communities. The second limitation is that linear narratives make use of hierarchical means of representation. That is, where the histories of communities are tracked through the progress of their leaders within an historically heteropatriarchal and heteronormative narrative, the achievements and contributions of women and queer people are typically marginalised and erased, thus perpetuating the false belief that men did indeed "dominate the intellectual, cultural, political and economic contributions of that community's timeline" (*Physics* 45). The third limitation to the linear progress narrative involves the agency of the collective. If Blackness is always considered a reaction to white oppression, it is reduced to only a series of struggles and defeats against white racism meaning that, blackness can "only as the object of and at best the reactor against white racist agency" (*Physics* 113).

These limitations exemplify the way in which linear progress narratives apply not only exclusively to men, but also only to men who enact determinative codes of masculinity. Iconic figures of resistance, challenge and combat are historically overwhelmingly male: like the figures considered in this study Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire. Women are celebrated for auxiliary roles as mothers and caregivers to revolutionary leaders. Passive and feminine notions of resistance are celebrated despite a large amount of critical work that has been accomplished by Black queer and feminist scholars.[15] As such, the collective associates normative Blackness with the heterosexual male, Wright states "despite an entire people's suffering under racist treatment one is asked to see and seek agency in the heterosexual male body only" (*Physics* 53). The experiences of black women and LGBTQI+ Black people are not articulated when Blackness is framed in this way.[16] When certain bodies are held up as representations for a movement, one begins to assume and look only for similar bodies. This produces an inaccurate history of which bodies were part of which historical events. Constructs of Blackness that are produced through history, culture and ancestry predicated on linear spacetime, provide Black identity with material weight. However, these constructions,

[15] I consider the work of Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Kimberley Crenshaw, Patricia Hill-Collins in creating Black Feminist theory and intersectional understandings of Blackness not linked to a heteronormative masculine subjectivity.

[16] LGBTQI+ stands here for: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Queer, Intersex and gender-nonbinary or gender-nonconforming individuals.

do at times, exclude those who perceive of themselves as Black but do not share that same linear timeline (Wright *Physics* 14).

This understanding of Blackness causes a "qualitative collapse," a disintegration of "meaningful, layered, rich and nuanced interpellations of Blackness that occur when seeking to interpellate the diversity of Blackness through the parameters of linear spacetime" (Wright *Physics* 142). Vertical interpellations which are inherent to linear progress narratives position women at the bottom of the nation's social hierarchies. They lock the collective into a postcolonial heteropatriarchy whereby the complexity of the construction of Blackness is lost to the simplicity of linear spacetime parameters. Reed further explains that linear spacetime understands the past, present and future as chronological and provokes racialised reading, which locates texts within a "pre-emptive black tradition or black social location" (13). That is, although the connection between race and literature is not inevitable or "immanent to the texts," the elision of other forms of analysis that do not fit the linear progress narrative rehearses and perpetuates the manner in which disciplinary practices read, produce and analyse racially marked literature (13). Wright argues that linear causality has shaped knowledge formation, extending back "at least as far as the European Enlightenment" (*Physics* 32-33). She states that the epistemology of Blackness, the "narratives of knowledge that are taught, learned, relayed, exchanged and debated" (*Physics* 8, 26) and rely solely on its linear causality, fails to provide an accurate representation of the collective. Racialised reading involves reducing black culture to a set of properties borne out of writing back to the European canon. As such, racialised reading favours the same notion of the black experience as a normative linear progress narrative: the heteropatriarchal structure. Constructs of blackness are largely historical and more specifically based on a notion of spacetime that is fitted to a linear progress narrative.

Poetics in the Plural Instant

Lewis Gordon argues that "to be political is to emerge, to appear, to exist" (Decadence 88). A consequence of this is the attempted elimination of speech. The ease with which predominantly heteropatriarchal white and Black male narratives can provide a broad overview of antiracist progress that supposedly benefits all members of the collective "has been taken to mean that women and queers need not be explicitly named, much less narrated" (Wright *Physics* 158). For Black female writers, race exists as part of a larger articulation of social oppressions. When analysing a text's poetics, one needs to consider it as a shareable

technique that marks the site where literature interacts with social and historical concerns, these intersecting oppressions may then express more radical embodied forms of Black politics.

Oppression is considered a discursive dilemma in which the black female writer highlights the problem of Black women's relationships to power and discourse. Often, this is characterised by silence because Black women are often spoken for and about by others. As such, the self-inscription of Black womanhood requires the disruption of canonical theory and other conventional generic forms. Because Black women speak both to and from the position of the Other, they have the ability to combine personal and public forms of discourse in which they are capable of speaking simultaneously to white men about racial and gender differences, to white women about racial differences and to black men about gender differences. Their multifaceted positionalities allow for their recognition and the inclusion of politics of gender and sexual orientation into the Black experience.

Wright argues in this way that the addition of horizontal interpellations of Blackness which function at the "intersection of two spacetimes rather than of a separate time and space," allows for linear progress narratives to be disrupted and destabilised (*Physics* 144). When Blackness is read through the Epiphenomenal moment of the "now," it produces Blackness as a negotiation of identities through an "indeterminate, fuzzy, hybrid reality consisting of many strands" (*Physics* 41). Epiphenomenal structure uses the current rather than the historical moment to connect with a variety of collectives based on the means through which they self-identify as Black. Wright uses the term 'Epiphenomenal' because of its emphasis on the phenomenological interpretation of time.[17] She argues for this phenomenological interpretation "because our world can be observed and analysed only through our senses, we can never claim to have unmediated access to it, to truly understand it independently of how our senses first present it to us" (*Physics* 145). Phenomenological aspects of Blackness read together with the historical construct of Blackness shed light on issues of exclusion and the lack of agency by those rendered Other in linear spacetime.

Epiphenomenal time provides Black subjects with far more agency than is provided for in established linear progress narratives. It is difficult for Black women to read themselves into linear narratives of collective Blackness because although they are memorably present, they are not considered the agents of progress. Histories are both constructed and

[17] Phenomenology is a theoretical framework that concentrates on the study of structures of consciousness and experience.

phenomenological: they are a chosen arrangement of events perceived to be the defining moments of collective Blackness. Reading Blackness in Epiphenomenal time does not mean erasing or marginalising the past but rather "produce Blackness that is richly incorporative of a diversity of identities" and at the same time "bring to light Black identities that have been erased, marginalised or forgotten until the moment of their interpretation" (Wright *Physics* 17). Similarly, works of literature often play with Epiphenomenal time, reading one moment through the experiences of many, or a series of moments through the experience of one narrator. Epiphenomenal time often interpellates an individual as the point at which many collective identities intersect. This produces a site for a broad variety of other collective epistemologies to emerge without relying on the individual to become the dominant representation of all those collective identities. As such, Epiphenomenal time "holds the ability to interpellate Blackness multidimensionally by locating an individual at the intersection of multiple collective identities or epistemologies (Wright *Physics* 30). Unlike a progress narrative, which must move forward, reading Blackness into the now or the "plural instant" shows that "all collective identities are dialogic when read at distinct moments through intersecting linear and Epiphenomenal spacetimes" (*Physics* 22).

Reed advocates for the study of poetics and literature in the "plural instant" which, like Wright's notion of Epiphenomenal time, consists of "multiple competing traditions operational in a given conjunction of spacetime" (62). The plural instant acts as an overlap of moments between personal and collective global memory, this allows experimental poetics to be linked across time without claiming to be universal making visible alternative ways of arranging texts, knowledge, history, bodies and the social order (Reed 29). Experimental poetics that make visible the literary production of speech interrupt the modes of social thought that condition the idea of the black voice.

Broken Witness vs National Poetry

Using Reed's analysis of experimental poetics, this section focuses on and applies his notion of broken witness to Rankine and Putuma's work. Reed defines broken witness as "not giving a voice to or speaking on behalf of another or the self but voicing the silence" (28). This deconstructs the concretism located in Black nationalist literature that purports to hold the "authentic truth of language and performative power to shape history and self-perception" to articulations of national belonging (Reed 28). The concretism of Black nationalist language often silences narratives that do not fit into the linear progress narrative because it provides a

window onto a particular, racialised subject position while purporting to define and legitimise the realities of *all* Black people.

Fanon himself, in *The Wretched of the Earth* unpacks the problems of the linear progress narrative and its fixation on a return to a past that cannot be achieved following colonisation. He argues that this fixation reduces national culture to folklore, whereas it should be:

> the collective thought process of a people to describe, justify and extol the actions whereby they have joined forces and remained strong. National culture in the underdeveloped countries, therefore, must lie at the very heart of the liberation struggle these countries are waging. The African intellectuals who are still fighting in the name of negro-African culture and who continue to organise conferences dedicated to the unity of that culture should realise that they can do little more than compare coins and sarcophagi. (*Wretched* 168)

Here, Fanon articulates the need for national culture to represent all involved in the struggle for freedom and emancipation. To further emphasise Fanon's argument, Gordon writes that colonial subjects "suffer a paradoxical melancholia. They live in a haunted precolonial past, a critical relation to the colonial world from which they are born, and a desire for a future in which if they are able to enter they are yoked to the past" (Decadence 90). From this description, one can link Negritude and its' invocation of similar phrasing to the concept of nationalist language. In *The Wretched of The Earth,* Fanon puts forward a notion of culture that is driven by a progressive future where all those who identify as belonging in a nation are adequately represented. His critique stems from emerging nationalist movements in the post colony, where he writes: "we must shed the habit of decrying our forefathers or feigning incomprehension at their silences or passiveness", while these movements fought as best they could with the intellectual weapons they possessed at the time, their work ultimately disallows for articulations of Blackness that do not "take into account the historicising of men" (145, 154). This can be done by destabilising the norms, prevalent in the proliferation of first-person accounts of everyday life and formal legal situations that tend to obscure the past and consider the present as historical (Reed 29). By experimenting with the concreteness of these accounts, "rearranging the elements of poetic language" and making visible "other ways of arranging texts, knowledge, history, bodies and the social order" broken witness can transform and extend the expressive possibilities of Black writing (Reed 29). For Reed, the act of witnessing "is rooted in and routed through the consensual institutions of governing where relationships between subjects are relatively fixed and stable (42). These institutions maintain the vertical interpellation of Black identity by maintaining the power relations

within its hierarchical structure. Reed argues that these male theorists engage with the concept of "nation language" which subverts the conventional poetics of European literature,

> Nation language is part of a larger project of cultural interpretation that unseats European literature, metonymically invoked through iambic pentameter as the standard against which the literature of former colonies should be measured. The voice carries with it a certain experience, and it is a performative version of English that is like a howl, or a shout or a machine gun. (61-63)

While nation language speaks through texts without representations of Blackness being the poem's primary function, it needs to be "forged outside of the relations of colonial or neo-colonial domination but names site-specific forms that any language, any culture takes, an internalised fragmentation that is a language's way of being" (69). However, Negritude remains a heteropatriarchal articulation of Blackness, with its paternal figures being Leopold Senghor and Aimé Césaire and their fixation on a precolonial past. In his introduction to Senghor's *Black Orpheus,* Sartre writes that "these black men are addressing themselves to black men about black men… it is an awakening to consciousness" (16). This quote points to the inherently masculine tradition of national consciousness. Sartre extends this notion by stating that the Black poet is creating a "great collective poetry; by speaking only of himself, he speaks for all negroes," once again it is evi dent that the Black subject is spoken for by the Black male (22).

Wright argues that it is easier for Black heteronormative men to embrace a return to precolonial origins because their brotherhood lies in heteropatriarchy. Most overarching mainstream histories that claim to represent the Black collective use a vertical hierarchy whereby "leaders represent the collective as a whole and the effects of their words and actions are explored by those below and above them…[d]ominant discourses in Black studies, as in most other academic disciplines, assume a heteropatriarchal model for this verticality; its leaders and workers are represented as overwhelmingly male" (Wright *Physics* 92). [18]

Engaging in a poetics of broken witness is to produce a statement that interferers with the existing forms of thinking and knowing in a given moment. By practicing a form of broken

[18] Within literary canons of Negritude and the Harlem Renaissance, "figures of heroic men and nurturing women facilitate modern representations of Blackness" (Wilks 21). Depictions of Black women threatened the nationalist ideals which reinforced those representations

witness in their texts, Rankine and Putuma articulate the ambivalence of their belonging to their respective nation-states. They bear witness to the coincidence of multiple performances of Blackness through Epiphenomenal spacetime. The politics of broken witness derive from the desire for alternative literary arrangements that provide more adequate representations of the way Blackness is performed in the "now". The use of spatial form as a reader's perceptual basis of time in a poem links to Wright's notion of performing Blackness in Epiphenomenal time. Broken witness, as poetics, allows for new conceptions of time and relationality of experiences. The possibilities of Black expression are not wholly under Black control given the nature of the linear progress narrative. As such, broken witness "does not give voice to the enslaved in a way that would then be subject to verification by the ruling order but voices the silence required and generated by the ruling order's common sense that makes such witness impossible" (Reed 53). Broken witness "denaturalises the social world and disciplines of reading and interpretation that set the meaning and direction of black writing in advance" (44). By voicing the silence through the use of broken witness, Rankine and Putuma draw attention to the epistemological erasure of marginalised Black identities and thus the qualitative collapse of Blackness. They disrupt the conditions that authorise who speaks for the Black collective through their inclusion of personal testimonies that occur in Epiphenomenal time. Through broken witness, the histories linking disparate sites and people are dramatized on the page, without any internal master key or trope to sort out their relationship (Reed 53). Broken witness works in epiphenomenal time because it locates personal testimonies phenomenologically and historically providing meditation on the nature of historical facts through the speaker in the plural instant.

"Post" Poetics in *Citizen* and *Collective Amnesia*

Wright argues that "performance studies and poststructuralist arguments (in gender and sexuality studies especially) have introduced arguments that social identities are performed and, as such are at least partially phenomenological" (*Physics* 16-17). Both Rankine and Putuma use race as a site of conflict in their literature rather than a stable concept (Reed 22). They maintain the theme of Black vulnerability throughout their texts in an attempt to articulate how race and gender positions make those they attempt to address in their work vulnerable to a premature death. Poetry has the ability to exploit the immediacy of performance because the power of the present is controlled by the performer. Unlike the novel, in poetry, time is performed rather than constructed and the traditional linearity

imposed by Black nationalism can be disrupted by the speaking poet. Wright argues that the interpellative limits of linear spacetime need to be revised because one cannot travel back through linear time as a collective. A people's past comprises of a multitude of strands and poets who make use of Epiphenomenal time often use the act of linear return to an origin as a site of trauma. She refers to Hortense Spillers's comments on the buried Black female body in from her 1987 article, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book,":

> In order for me to speak a truer word concerning myself, I must strip down through layers of attenuated meanings, made an excess in time, over time, assigned by a particular historical order, and there await whatever marvels of my own inventiveness… the personal pronouns are offered in the service of a collective function. (*Physics* 79)

The limitations of Spillers argument lie in the return to a Black African origin in which traditional heteropatriarchal societies were the norm. This allows for the creation of a Black female subject but not of a Black queer or transgender subject because one cannot unravel the myths of a racist history by using one person to represent the entirety of that history (*Physics* 79). If the Black collective *must* always be defined through its origin, then the origin cannot be fixed to the linear timeline. For Wright "origins must operate in at least two spacetimes—the fixed past and the fluid present" (*Physics* 86). Wright shows that by using both linear and Epiphenomenal time to analyse the limitations Black women encounter in subject formulation, they "can provide a more cohesive and inclusive analysis of Blackness than [linear] spacetime alone" (*Physics* 74).

Furthering Wright's argument, Reed states that "to simply settle on history, and the tacit assumption that history has passed is to risk seduction by the false reassurance of a progress narrative," he suggests that this assumption of a narrative of emancipation does not allow for current political struggles to be addressed in works of Black writers (53). The myth of a "free state" has been disrupted by political movements such as Black Lives Matter and Fees Must Fall, which focussed on the false promises of freedom that the current generation is suffering under (Reed 53). Both the United States and South Africa consider themselves to be "post" societies: post-racial and post-Apartheid. Rather than considering their respective societies as restored states, their poetics respond to pressing demands of personal and geo-political histories that impact communities in process, ones that have not yet achieved recognition but are in a state of becoming.

As indicated in the introduction to this thesis, the Black Lives Matter movement has disrupted post-racial America's colorblind logic as more than just the denial of racism. Colorblindness has become "the default setting for how Americans understand how race and racism work," it has convinced American society that if there is an absence of racial insult then there is an absence of racial discrimination (Taylor 72). Taylor argues that colorblindness is used to hide and obscure inequalities and disparities between African Americans and white Americans, and is a "critical weapon in the arsenal of the politically powerful and economic elite" (72). Colorblindness has resulted in American society becoming incredibly individualist in its regard to civil society. African Americans are held accountable for their own oppression because America is a society where "hard work makes the difference between those who are successful and those who are not" (Taylor 72).

Rankine exploits this individualism in *Citizen* by distorting the conventional lyric mode in ways that disrupt the genres' "expressions and experiences of a singular intending consciousness" (Reed 96).[19] The lyric is a formal type of poetry which expresses personal emotions or feelings, typically spoken in the first person. However, the use of "I" to speak for a collective implies a repetition of the vertical interpellations that result in the erasure of marginalised voices. As such, Rankine specifically presents a voice suspended between "I" and "we" which, suspending the presumption of speaking for someone else, captures "some of the ambivalence of speaking as and for black in this moment" (Reed 104-105) and makes visible the literary production of speech. Her poetics break the assumption of racialised reading because there is a dialectical disruption of the lyric mode. Rather than approaching the collection within the frame of the lyric— which figures the expressions and experiences of a singular intending consciousness that is in turn synonymous with Blackness as an identity—she uses techniques that present a dimensionless present in which an intersubjective consciousness comes into being.

Rankine invokes the past into Epiphenomenal time through the use of visual art in *Citizen.* The graphic elements in the collection rework the concreteness of witnessing to incorporate a more horizontal interpellation of Blackness. The hood depicted on the cover, evokes a number of historical and current associations with Black culture. The image is a photograph of David Hammon's sculpture, *In the Hood* (1993); but the most pointed association is the

[19] Reed's consideration of Rankine's work as postlyrical references her previous collection *Don't let me be lonely: An American Lyric* (2004) which shares similar stylistic choices and thematic concerns with *Citizen. Don't let me be lonely* inquires into the nature of loneliness by using the lyric form and discusses post 9/11 American society. The lyric incorporates visual art and political prose in a similar manner as *Citizen.*

murder of Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old African American in 2012. The hoodie that Martin wore at the time of his death became a symbol of racial profiling used by American police and was used as an icon of resistance by the Black Lives Matter movement. Rankine fills *Citizen* with arresting images taken from realms of mass culture and fine art to provide a visual counterpoint to her prose on the social terrain of racism and race in America. While her prose provides an ambiguous voice, these images are a stark contrast to the questioning tone of the speaker. What the speaker cannot express verbally as a result of her ambigious positionality, Rankine counters with the inclusion of visual art by Black artists. Rankine's pervasive use of citation in *Citizen* demands audience participation. Its experimental form creates a dialogue with its readers.

In presenting Hammon's *In the Hood* as the first image that the reader sees, Rankine creates a dynamic relationship between herself as author and her reader by drawing them into the hood and experiencing the negation of Blackness in everyday life. Rankine further includes Glenn Ligon's *Untitled,* which uses Zora Neale Hurston's quote "I feel most colored when I am thrown against a sharp white background" (52-53), a representation of what happens when one body encounters another and race becomes apparent. The artwork repeats Hurston's phrase but the words become black splatters moving down the page. This inclusion of Ligon's piece replicates exactly what *Citizen* discusses in its prose. What starts off as seemingly clear becomes more ambiguous, vague and discoloured as the text continues. The images in the collection act as moments of self-othering (Reed 98). "Public Lynching" depicts white citizens at night standing under a tree at which one man has his hand pointing towards the branches at nothing (91). Rankine has edited the original image from the Holton Archives from 1930 and removed the black bodies. In this photo Rankine reframes the politics of exposure by refusing to allow violence or the white gaze to define the black body, she renders it invisible so that the reader's attention is drawn to the perpetrators rather than the spectacle. *VOLUME X No.5 Black Angel* by Mel Chin showcases "a popular vintage encyclopaedia processed to represent the contradictory layers and logic of personal and public information" (Rankine 163). The images from twenty-five volumes of Funk & Wagnall encyclopaedias spanning 1953-1956 are reconfigured as a collage (Rankine 74), this represents the potentiality of images to be trapped by their historical context and open up debates surrounding new political associations of Black bodies in contemporary society. The images also force the reader to explore *Citizen*'s intertextual nature. One cannot read the work seriously without doing their own research into the images it contains or watching the "situation videos" that link to the scripts in part VI.

Barbara Boswell in "Conjuring up her wholeness: Post transitional black South African women's poetry and its restorative ethics" argues that the end of formal apartheid spurred a rise in the creative expression of those who were denied creative agency by repressive laws such as the Publications and Entertainments Act of 1963 (8). Her argument stems from Gloria Vangile Kglone's 1996 survey of Black women's poetry between 1970 and 1991 which found that the main preoccupation with women's poetry at the time was the anti-apartheid struggle, liberation politics and the subsequent gender politics within the anti-apartheid struggle. Boswell argues that South Africa's transitionary period was a space for Black women to articulate through poetry "concerns other than the narrowly-defined political or protest genres of black writing" (8). Fees Must Fall and Rhodes Must Fall point to South Africa's entry into a post-transitionary period, which she defines as "a contested discursive space where meaning is fluid, incomplete and provisional" (9). In this period, the work of Black female poets has expanded from modes of resistance to engaging in the "imaginative work of remembering the injustices of history, while reconfiguring current, gendered nation building, through expanding definitions of what they consider political" (Boswell 9). This feeds into Wright's notion of the invocation of the past in Epiphenomenal time because writing is no longer obviously tethered to the past and history as it was during apartheid but rather the past is reformulated through a disjuncture between memory and historical narratives as evident in the concept of "re-memory" in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (Boswell 13). The concept of re-memorying is "a subversive act of imaginatively recreating subjugated historical memory" (Boswell 13) and relays the disjuncture between memory and dominant narratives of history. Re-memorying by an individual with regards to a collective's history "works against wilful forgetting… political acts of excluding subjects from history's construction" (Boswell 13).

Memory in *Collective Amnesia* is positioned as being subject to revision. The collection is divided into three sections: "Inherited Memory," "Buried Memory" and "Postmemory"; these sections articulate the disjuncture between subjective iterations of the past and the unreliability of memory. Putuma explores the notion of re-memory through introducing alternative narratives of Black childhood that are not centred on the atrocities of apartheid. In "Black Joy," she remembers her childhood:

> But
> isn't it funny?
> That when they ask about black childhood,
> all they are interested in is our pain,

as if the joy-parts were accidental. (13)

Here, replicating structurally, the childlike "voice," Putuma points to the cultural misconception of growing up Black in South Africa and the desire of white South Africans and internationals to focus on the pain of poverty rather than Black Joy. Putuma goes on to explain,

I write love poems too,
but
you only want to see my mouth torn open in protest,
as if my mouth were a wound
with pus and gangrene
for joy. (13)

Here she invokes the student protests of 2015 and 2016 as well as an awareness of what is expected from her as a Black writer from her readers. This awareness links to Reed's statement that racialised reading frames what black writers will say in advance.

Putuma indulges her readers with political poems in "Postmemory." In "1994: A Love Poem," she composes a satirical love poem dedicated to Nelson Mandela in which the speaker in the poem desires a love as unconditional and uncritical as the love that white South Africans have for Mandela. The speaker seeks "a lover who will build Robben Island in my backyard/ and convince me that I have a garden/ and fresh air, a rainbow and freedom." The deceptive personality she seeks in her lover acts as a shrewd rejection of South Africa as the "rainbow nation" and notes the continued lack of economic redistribution in post-transitional South Africa. Putuma plays on the myth of the rainbow nation, revealing its fallacies as "one of the many residues of slavery: being loved liked Mandela" (101).

"Kakstad" is a satirical poem about the racial politics of Cape Town. The wordplay on "Kaapstad" continues into the body of the poem where the line "slegs Blankes" is repeated (106).[20] The poem indicates that despite the formal end of apartheid and the removal of the physical signs which designated specific spaces "for whites only," there is still a racial divide. Putuma's use of Afrikaans links the question of language into a question of land and ownership. As evident in "Kakstad," Afrikaans is a language frequently used by white South Africans to claim ownership to public spaces. This is further expanded upon in poems like "Local," which articulates how the speaker cannot use her mothertongue language in public

[20] Kaapstad is the Afrikaans term for Cape Town and "slegs Blankes" translates into "whites only."

spaces and in "Mountain," where the speaker describes a hike in Namaqualand where she trespasses on "private property." The speaker in "Mountain" says

> When the old white lady in her pyjamas turns my back with her Afrikaans
> And says, *You are on* ***private property…***
> I question why I understand what she has said
> And the mountain she calls private. (Putuma 102)

In both instances Putuma uses the Afrikaans language to signify South Africa's history of land dispossession as well as the imposition of education in Afrikaans by the apartheid government. There are still current debates regarding land reform in South Africa, President Cyril Ramaphosa has stated that "this problem of land will be resolved through adherence to the rule of law and adherence to the constitution," (EWN 1) however the notion of land reform has caused conservative Afrikaner groups to spread a myth of "white genocide": that white farmers are being targeted and killed as result of these changes in policy. Historically during the Soweto Uprising in 1976 students protested the imposition of Afrikaans education in townships schools. But the issue of language was also brought up during the Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall protests with documentaries such as "Luister" raised the challenges of receiving their tertiary education in Afrikaans at the University of Stellenbosch.[21]

By asking "I question why I understand what she has said," Putuma invokes the historical legacy of land dispossession and bantu education while simultaneously invoking Fanon's notion of land possession as an act of dignity afforded to rights-bearing citizens. This notion of dignity is then conferred onto the speaker's body which she argues is also private property. The phrase "private property" is repeated throughout the poem and this suggests the various connotations that the phrase holds: for the speaker it is her thoughts and her body, but at the same time it is violated through ownership like "in the way your obsessive partner are his or her private property" and "in the way private property was lynched and sold back in the day" (103). These moments do not dominate the main body of Putuma's collection but the intimacy of her content reveals how institutional violence in historically white spaces is enacted upon Black queer bodies and perpetuates their marginalisation because of their sexual orientation.

In (re)configuring the spatial arrangements of her text, Putuma transforms *Collective Amnesia* from a text of of black expression into a text that deconstructs the conventions and

[21] Watch the full documentary at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=sF3rTBQTQk4

authenticating norms governing the relationship between personal experience and historical testimony. Her collection is hauntological in this way, in the sense that it reveals "something present but not apparent in the presence of the printed word" (Reed 29). In her collection, Putuma mines the buried histories in the collective consciousness of Black South Africans but it remains unclear whose memory is being explored in the collection and for whom the poet is speaking.

It could be suggested that Putuma combines the public amnesia of the position of Black women in South Africa. On the cover of *Collective Amnesia* is a black and white image of a barefoot Black woman dressed in black. She is sitting on the floor with her face obscured by the headwrap she is wearing. The woman holds a white plastic baby doll in a white dress against her chest. The juxtaposition of black and white provokes an immediate association to South Africa's racial tension, past and present. The image evokes expressions of Black womanhood and alludes to Black women acting historically as caregivers to white children; the picture thus alludes to Black girls and the innocence of childhood and Black women who mourn the loss of their daughters.

The collection is thematically concerned with intergenerational relationships between Black mothers and daughters. Despite the *Collective Amnesia*'s celebration of Black communal life there is a strong tension between the effects of both personal and historical trauma on each generation. Wright argues that this trauma occurs when attempting to invoke the past in Epiphenomenal time. Putuma seeks to articulate the silencing of Black women in heteropatriarchal families despite the intergenerational dispute concerning what goes unsaid and what should be spoken aloud.

Her work incorporates a poetic technique which Reed defines as i-mage, which is a means of undoing the concreteness that shapes Black writing:

> i-mage: a term for the incomplete processes of articulation, the space left for the writer to impress her experience on the language wherein formal standard language is subverted, turned upside down, inside out and even sometimes erased. (46)

Rather than disavowing the linear progress narrative, the use of i-mage reconfigures history from within a specific subject position to inform contemporary society of the silencing and erasure that occurs in this narrative. As such it is a "self-erasing and anti-disciplinary way of using language and poetic techniques" that often presume what a Black poet is expected to say (Reed 46). This is evident in "Memoirs of a slave & queer person" which both provides an account of and refuses to bear witness to the atrocities of historical slavery,

I don't want to die with my
hands up
or legs open. (Putuma 75)

Putuma's use of i-mage shows how she does not tell the story that she is expected to tell but rather provides her audience with a reinterpretation of historical time (Reed 53). There is further evidence that points to Putuma's self-awareness on what is expected from her as a Black female poet. Her footnoted poems when read in conjunction with the poem "teachings" suggest her manipulation of spatial form to perform back to the Black literary canon:

Storytelling[1]- How my people archive. How we inherit the world.

Footnote[2]- Some poems show up to undo your silence.

Love[3]- Some drugs come dressed as twelve step programmes.

Suicide[4]- Not everyone can afford to breathe for a living.

Apartheid[5]- A genocide that can still be found in the township. (11, 34, 46, 73, 109)

"Teachings"

transparency (n): a weapon used to exorcise a lineage of silence.
talk (n): a medicine used to heal years of silence.
writing (n): a doctrine used to deliver one from the ills of silencing.
share (n): a tool used to dismantle a learnt behaviour of suffering alone in silence.
publishing (v): a middle finger to the erasure and silencing of womxn like me.
archiving (v): a FUCK YOU to the canon. (79).

The footnotes function as a dual narrative that is simultaneously experienced with the main body of the collection. It is an intrusive authorial style which works to resist erasure. Putuma takes the unemotional language and structure of academia and puts it to emotional use creating an emotional landscape through what is not visible on the blank page.

The Commodification of Black Culture and the Rise of the Black Vernacular Intellectual

Reed argues that Blackness itself has become a commodity "perhaps as a direct result of the objectification required to understand it as something other than the outcome of historical and political processes" (104). He maintains that in these instances

> [t]he possibilities of black expression are not wholly under black control, which becomes especially troubling in a moment when black genius separates people from their race as exceptions, or when the absence of black genius normalises paternalist relations of power, violence and discipline upheld by repeated public invocations of black pathology. (104)

Reed points to something sinister here; with the increasing popularity and pervasiveness of Black culture, Black writers can often fall into the trap of their art becoming a marketable commodity because it is not wholly under *their* control. Ralph Ellison argues that the work of Black writers is fated "to perform a social function which reinforce[s] those very social values which they most violently oppose" (144). He argues that art, like the stereotype operates on a personal level but the artist has limited control over how their work is interpreted.

Putuma's work was recently showcased at the Spier Light Art Festival (10 December 2018- 31 January 2019), an art installation at a historical wine farm in Stellenbosch, where a line from "Mountain": "every entrance (we see) is fenced" is located at the entrance to the farm. This festival appears to market to the white-middle class and while Putuma's work holds commodity value, given its critical success, it runs the risk of being misread and misappropriated by a white audience.

But this sinister fate of Black writers is countered by Grant Farred in *What's my name? Black Vernacular Intellectuals.* He argues that thinking in the vernacular allows for the exploration of the links between the popular and the political (1). Vernacularity is

> the socio-political occasion "when the conventional intellectual speaks less as a product of a hegemonic cultural-economic system than as a thinker capable of translating the disenfranchised experience as an oppositional, ideologically recognisable, vernacularized discourse. (Farred 11)

He further states that in order for minority struggle to be sustained it must contain a cultural element that has popular purchase (1). For him, popular culture "represents that mode in which the political and the popular conjoin identificatory pleasure with ideological resistant" (1). The concept of the vernacular intellectual stems from Antonio Gramsci's model that "all men (sic) are intellectuals" and reconfigures the concept of the intellectual to include public

thinkers and creatives such as Rankine and Putuma. His argument stems from an understanding of how intellectualism is influenced by "the recognition of popular culture as a primary site of politics" (Farred 3), he recasts Gramsci's model to state that "all men and women who participate in the production of popular cultural practices are intellectuals" (5).

In considering how the vernacular functions by immersing itself in the language of the popular, this means that while being rooted in race, one must take issues such as gender and sexual orientation into account because they complicate and give nuance to the possibilities of the vernacular intellectual. Commenting on the misogynistic practices of modes of struggle Farred states that "anticolonial forces, as much as independent postcolonial societies, denied women access to the public sphere, curtailing their capacity to give voice to their particular vernacularity (12). He uses the example of the difficulties that Venus and Serena Williams face in a sport that is shaped by patriarchy and goes on to state that the largely male-dominated world of sport and popular music reveals "how embedded the vernacular is in suppressing its own "female unconsciousness" by oppressing women and queer people (13).

The vernacular's history provides only a partial account of resistance because it is bound by the patriarchal constraints of its historical modality. By bringing the concept of the vernacular into a more horizontal interpellation, one can resist its initial erasure of female figures. Taking the vernacular as a "mobile and flexible experience, accommodating of different trajectories… [and derived] from a keen understanding of and engagement with the popular" one can hope to include Rankine and Putuma in this category (Farred 14).

Rankine and Putuma both engage in a language of vernacularity. Their language is that of the Other within the dominant public sphere. As vernacular intellectuals they "craft a unique public space from which to speak as they address the issues of the day that directly affect their community" (Farred 22). Vernacularity is a discourse that encodes larger economic and political disenfranchisement while remaining true to a politics of being. *Collective Amnesia* situates itself squarely within South Africa's contemporary social, political and intellectual sphere. Putuma has positioned herself as a voice of South Africa's post-transitional period. Through the collection, Putuma represents the fluidity and instability of the post-transitional space in a similar manner to Rankine's "suspended voice" in post racial America. Rankine states that for her, *Citizen* "was about having a conversation" about race in America (Olin 1). The writers critique the fissures in their respective societies using small, familial and domestic realities which probe into the larger questions of the nation-state.

CHAPTER TWO:

Unmasking the Zone of Nonbeing: Articulating the Black Subject through the Trope of Masking and Ventriloquism

The zone of nonbeing is described by Fanon as "an extraordinary sterile and arid region, an utterly naked declivity where an authentic upheaval can be born" (*BSWM* 2). This zone stems from his analysis of the "line of humanity" enforced by colonial rule and which divides society into two zones, a zone of being and a zone of nonbeing. Those in the zone of being have their humanity considered in terms of human, civil and labour rights, whereas those in the zone of nonbeing are denied their humanity and thus their rights are often not taken into account. Albeit coined by Fanon, the conceptual "zone of nonbeing" dates back to the "modern collapse of reason and history into all things European" (Gordon *WFS* 19) and can be seen in the work of Negritudist, Césaire and other anti-colonial thinkers. Where the social experiences and histories of the West are used to create social theory that is considered valid and universal to most of the world's population, what these theories fail to consider is the fact that those in the zone of nonbeing do not share the same experiences as those in the zone of being. Fanon and Césaire negotiates their position in the zone of nonbeing through the subversive trope of masking or ventriloquism.

Masking functions as the moment at which the Hegelian dialectic, the one that posits the Black Other to the white subject, breaks down and the Black subject emerges. The narrator of the text appears "double-mouthed," using a linguistic mask to articulate their "Othering," while speaking in the language of the oppressor. As such, masking critiques the inherent paradoxes within the binary of the white subject and the Black Other, by showing that the Black Other can only come into being by presenting themselves as white. Rather than taking on a role of pure mimicry, the mask allows the narrator to criticise their positionality within the binary and articulate their experiences that are denied by the dialectic. Masking often evades concerns of internalised differences, because the zone of nonbeing is often read as being a homogenous space, where all of its participants seek recognition as citizens within the West. This section further explores how Putuma and Rankine articulate their positionality as Black queer, and Black women respectively, through similar tropes of masking articulated in the Negritude movement and in Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks.* Rankine and Putuma open up the zone of nonbeing as a heterogenous space where they articulate issues such as institutional sexism and microaggressions from within their own Black communities.

Masking and the Agency of the Black Subject

This chapter reads Césaire and Fanon's work as examples of the counter-discourses that constitute the basis for theories of the Black subject across the African Diaspora. Their work aids an understanding of the available options for theories on Blackness but also show the common theoretical threads that these counter-discourses share. Masking, as a trope in their work shows the relationship Blackness has in relation to the West and is used as a strategy to evade the traps that counter-discourses tend to fall into. But Wright argues that although counter-discourses are often successful in providing a voice to the marginalised, they are ultimately read *through* the discourse that produces them. Fanon's dialectic of experience in *Black Skin, White Masks* is a response to Hegel's master-slave dialectic and Césaire's embodiment of Negritude in *Notebook on the Return to my Native Land* responds to Gobineau's assertions of Black inferiority. Masking allows these theorists to "critique the assumption that the Black is incapable of logos by creating the speech act that negates the idealist negation of the Black Other" (*BB* 67).

Some racist discourses reduce the question of Black subjectivity to the mask by associating it with savagery, backwardness and the absence of culture (Wright *BB* 91). One of the most prominent depictions of the Black savage in European discourse is the African mask and its rendering of the wearer silent. Ralph Ellison, in his essay "Twentieth-Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity," published in 1953, expands upon the agency of masking within works of American fiction. His observations are similar to Fanon's in that "the most insidious and least understood form of segregation is that of the word" (134). He depicts a similar zone of nonbeing for the American Negro in the works of writers such as Ernest Hemmingway and William Faulkner, where "formulations of modern American fictional words have been so slanted against [the American Negro] that when he approaches for a glimpse of himself he discovers an image drained of humanity" (134). Ellison argues that the Black stereotype is used as a social instrument for the white American to resolve the conflict of democratic process: "that all men are created equal and his treatment of every tenth man as though he were not" (137). He further suggests that when articulating "American reality," the Black is either left out or their humanity is distorted "to fit [Faulkner's] personal versions of Southern myth, [the authors] seldom conceive Negro characters possessing the full, complex ambiguity of the human" (135).

Wright acknowledges that masking is a "complex performance of subversion and deception that enables a Black subject within a pathologically hostile environment of white

racism" but her reading of the trope is used mainly as a point of comparison between varying "theoretical strategies located in early-to-mid-twentieth century African diasporic counter-discourses" (*BB* 68). Wright states that in the Harlem Renaissance, Black American and Caribbean writers had to combat American stereotypes of their Blackness as being "historically and culturally vacant" (*BB* 87). Their use of masking was a means to signify their diasporic culture and history, traceable through works such as *Black Skin, White Masks* and *Notebook on the Return to my Native Land*. She replaces the concept of performance and the nature of its subversion by claiming that the speech act articulated by theorists such as Césaire and Fanon is both their counter-discourse and their claim to Black subjectivity. These counter-discourses "construct a Black subject who, although in part bounded by the racism of the original Western discourses, draws on materialist structures to point to the fallacies of the former and the freeing possibilities of the latter" (*BB* 69). In deploying the as performance of Black subjectivity rather than a static signifier for the existence of a Black subject, these counter-discourses "avoid positing the black as abject, created by racist discourse and praxis" (*BB* 124).

Defining the Zone of Nonbeing

Ato Sekyi-Otu in *Fanon's Dialectic of Experience* argues for the rereading of Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* through the "stage directions" provided in "Concerning Violence" in *The Wretched of the Earth* (24). These "stage directions" are primarily concerned with the spatial division of the colonial world according to race. Fanon writes that,

> This compartmentalised world, this world divided in two, is inhabited by different species. The singularity of the colonial context lies in the fact that economic reality, inequality and enormous disparities in lifestyles never manage to mask the human reality. Looking at the immediacies of the colonial context it is clear that what divides this world is first and foremost what species, what race one belongs to. (*Wretched* 5)

He begins his chapter "The Lived Experience of the Black" with an account of a white child indicating to his mother that a *Negre* has boarded the train that they are on. The force of the language used by the boy sets up the zone of nonbeing as a realm of epistemic closure:

> 'Dirty nigger!' Or simply, 'Look, a Negro!'

> I came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning in things, my spirit filled with the desire to attain to the source of the world, and then I found that I was an object in the midst of Other objects. (*BSWM* 82)

In the instance above Fanon finds himself "sealed into that crushing objecthood," (*BSWM* 82) whereby he cannot articulate himself as something Other than *negre* in the face of whiteness. He explores how when the Black man comes into contact with the white world "his ego collapses; his self-esteem evaporates, and he ceases to be a self-motivated person" (*BSWM* 86). He argues that the Black man, is in fact not a man but rather a construction of the white world that is "barred from all participation" (*BSWM* 86). The trope of space and spatial delineation would become a characteristic idiom of Fanon's work and what he provides in *Black Skin, White Masks* is an exploration into these two radically separate and unequal zones of existence.

The Hegelian dialectic creates a "perverse anonymity" among Black people because their identity as Black "closes off the need for further knowledge," they are not white and therefore not structurally regarded as human. The zone of nonbeing is both a deviation from and imitation of the presumed original white body (Gordon *WFS* 23).

By positioning white as the standard for a dialectic of recognition, Black people needed to prove that they were as human as white people by performing whiteness. The Black man lacks a metaphysical self because he stands in conflict with a "civilisation that he did not know and that imposed itself on him" (Fanon *BSWM* 83). The anti-Black racism to which Fanon is responding, presumes complete knowledge of his being because his identity is exemplified by his Blackness,

> I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors. I subjected myself to an objective examination, I discovered my Blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave-ships and above all else, above all: "Sho'good eatin." (*BSWM* 84-85)

He experiences epistemic closure: the "assumption of the complete knowledge of a phenomenon" (Gordon *WFS* 49). His body is given back to him "sprawled out, distorted, recoloured" with a caricatured version of what the Black man should be: an animal, bad, mean and ugly (*BSWM* 86). He argues that it is correct for the coloniser to say that he knows the colonised well, because he has brought the colonised into existence. The coloniser derives his validity from the colonial system through the fabrications of the colonised. For Fanon, the Black man is "overdetermined from the outside" because he has had to learn about himself

through “the white man, who had woven [him] out of a thousand details, anecdotes and stories” (*BSWM* 84).

As such, *Black Skin, White Masks* operates as a masked critique of the colonial structure. The dialogical form is evident through the authorial voice being communicated throughout the text, alongside the protagonist’s plights. As both the protagonist and the author, Fanon uses the trope of failure to explore the options offered to the Black individual by modern Western thought. *Black Skin, White Masks* displays the zone of nonbeing as a collision with “history-lived-as-antidialectic” (Sekyi-Otu 54). The governing principle of Hegel’s dialectic is reciprocal recognition. Gordon in *What Fanon Said: A Philosophical Introduction to his Life and Work,* argues that “to fail [at recognition] is to succeed; to miss the mark is to demonstrate the validity of rejecting [the dialectic], therefore affirming or achieving [subjectivity]” (24). In “The Negro and Language,” Fanon places significant emphasis on language and its power to form the reality of those who embody it. Within the French language, Fanon’s identity is closed off only as Black. However, he is able to transform this reality though a different language of self-presentation. Fanon further argues that mastering language for the sake of recognition, fails to reflect Black humanity.

As the protagonist of *Black Skin, White Masks* fails, Fanon as the author succeeds in his critique of Colonial discourse. His success relies on the protagonist failing to “renounce his Blackness.” We see this in instances throughout the text, in “The Negro and Language,” the protagonist attempts “to speak white-like,” but in doing so, becomes a threat to the white audience. Language allows him to mask himself as a subject, but he is known as a predator of words rather than being capable of articulating his subjectivity. Fanon holds onto the French language as a medium to articulate his critique, he shows mastery of the language that has denied him of his subject status. The double-mouthed critique allows Fanon to display how the protagonist lives the contradictions of what is expected of him as *negre* as well as being critical of these instances through dimensions of sight and thought.

There is a resounding tendency to construct the Black Other, as a problem being in Western society. Fanon takes this positioning of the Other and articulates the lived consciousness of a being seen only through the eyes of those in the zone of being. The protagonist in the text “misses the mark” when attempting to escape the zone of nonbeing and be recognised by the West. The protagonist also fails at securing his Blackness within the zone of nonbeing. “The woman of color and the white man,” and “the man of color and the white woman” explore how even when retreating from the public sphere, into a private relationship, the Black protagonist is still denied the recognition of his humanity. The distinction between the public and private

spheres in the text allows Fanon, the critic, to show how even when one fights *publicly* against racism and colonisation, they are not necessarily taking the time to reflect on their internal consciousness. In Wright's reading, Fanon's use of the mask stands out in relief because he describes the mask as white rather than as a signifier of the Black subject.

"At the end of the small hours": Negritude and the Speech Act

Negritude is a literary movement that emerged out of the Paris intellectual environment in the 1930s and 1940s. It is a product of Black writers using the French language to assert their own cultural language and an identity that is their own. In an interview conducted in 1967 by Haitian poet Rene Depestre, Césaire discusses the concept as an attempt at a theory which "encompasses all of [his] reality" (*Discourse* 27). Negritude is:

> a concrete rather than an abstract coming to consciousness. What I have been telling you about the atmosphere in which we lived, an atmosphere of assimilation in which the Negro people were ashamed of themselves–has great importance. We lived in an atmosphere of rejection, and we developed an inferiority complex. I have always thought that the Black man was searching for his identity. And it has seemed to me that if what we want is to establish this identity, then we must have a concrete consciousness of what we are- that is, of the first fact of our lives: that we are Black; that we were Black and have a history, a history that contains certain cultural elements of great value… Therefore we affirmed that we were negroes and that we were proud of it, and that we thought that Africa was not some sort of blank page in the history of humanity; in sum, we asserted that our Negro heritage was worthy of respect, and that this heritage was not relegated to the past, that its values were values that could still make an important contribution to the world. (*Discourse* 30)

For Césaire and Senghor, Negritude was thus an attempt to articulate the particularity of Black experience in an anti-Black world.[22] The literary and cultural movement sought to create a theory of Blackness that would emancipate the Black subject from their imposed inferiority complex. The word *negre* was adopted as a "term of defiance" (Césaire *Discourse* 29) and expressed resistance to the politics of assimilation imposed on the colonised subject during colonialism. Negritude was not only an intellectual reaction to an alienated Black consciousness but also a positive affirmation of the being of the Black person. Césaire believed that poetry was the only way "to break the stranglehold the accepted French form held on

[22] Senghor's iterations of Negritude are Africa-centred and oriented towards the cultural consciousness of being African..By contrast, Negritude for Cesaire is much more focused on the existential consciousness of Black people in the context of colonial and racist situations. Rather than limiting Blackness to the African continent, he articulates a mode of being Black in an anti-Black world.

[him]" (*Discourse* 25), and he sought to create an "Antillean French, a Black French that, while still being French, had Black character" (*Discourse* 26). Language is used as a tool to articulate a Black subject, who is able to point out the fallacies within the Hegelian dialectic and achieve emancipation of his own subjectivity from the zone of nonbeing.

The phrase that opens *Notebook on the Return to my Native Land* (hereafter referred to as *Notebook*), "at the end of the small hours," is repeated throughout the text in the form of a refrain. The refrain reminds the reader that the speaker is between two worlds, the zone of being and the zone of nonbeing, positioned at the margins where his Blackness intersects with whiteness and where lines of identity become blurred. Césaire argues that there is no predetermined Negritude but rather only that of a "living history"; *Notebook* explores the dynamic of this living history through the speaker's musings on a precolonial utopia and the living history of colonisation he has experienced,

> The strand of dreams and the senseless awakening on this frail stratum of earth already humiliated by the greatness of its future when the volcanoes will erupt, and naked waters sweep away the stains ripened by the sun till nothing is left but a tepid molten simmering pried over by sea birds
>
> At the end of the small hours: this town, flat, displayed, brought down by its common-sense, inert, breathless under its geometric burden of crosses, forever starting again, sullen to its fate, dumb, thwarted in every degree, incapable of growing as the sap of its earth would have it grow, set upon, gnawed, reduced, cheating its own fauna and flora. (Césaire *Notebook* 38)

The speaker's reality, a stifling atmosphere in which he cannot *be* because the space he finds himself does not allow for fruition above, is barren and devoid of meaning. His dream thus works as a landscape where he can explore his consciousness and being outside the gaze of the coloniser. Those living in the desolate reality are portrayed as mute— "stagnant and lacking their own movement and meaning" (*Notebook* 38). The muted crowd with the "dreadful zero of our reason for living," are unable to form a community because they lack a voice to speak to their compatriots. The speaker believes that the crowd in the "disowning town and its wake of leprosies, consumption, famines" (*Notebook* 39), holds a cry within them despite being "deaf to its own cry of hunger and misery, revolt and hatred" (*Notebook* 39).

The speaker sets out to "rediscover the secret of great speech and of great burning" (*Notebook* 49), as he invokes natural phenomena such as storms and tornados to empower his

speech. The natural imagery stands in contrast to the desolate zone of nonbeing he has described in previous passages. The destruction of his homeland has not been at the hands of mother nature but rather at the hands of the coloniser.

The concept of a notebook suggests an incomplete project, and this provides insight into the way identity is explored in the text. The identity of the speaker is continually interrogated as the text, through masking reflects on his positionality in relation to the world around him. The narrator subjects himself to successive re-makings and transformations, making the plurality of selves a central leitmotif of the poem. The first mask donned by the speaker is one of racist stereotypes,

> As there are hyena-men and panther-men,
> So I shall be a Jew man
> A Kaffir man
> A Hindu-from-Calcutta man
> A man-from-Harlem-who-hasn't-got-the-vote.
>
> Famine man, curse man, torture man, you may seize him at any moment, beat and kill him- yes perfectly well kill him- accounting to no one, having to offer an excuse to no one. (Césaire *Notebook* 48)

These are the images of the speaker that are projected from the outside in. In a similar way to how language seized the protagonist in *Black Skin, White Masks* these racial stereotypes entrap the speaker of *Notebook* into a realm of epistemic closure. The speaker directs these names to the presumably white implied reader and states that they may kill him without repercussion because as the colonial state would have him believe, Black bodies do not account for anything of significance in society, as depicted in the descriptors of "famine," "curse" and "torture."

The speaker proclaims boldly that his mouth "shall be the mouth of adversities that have no mouth, [his] voice, the freedom of those voices that languish in the dungeon of despair" (Césaire *Notebook* 50), however, his tone shifts when he once again finds himself alone amongst an apocalypse of "monsters," deciding that he is incapable of speaking for every being in the zone of nonbeing. The speaker cannot act as a grand mouthpiece of all oppressed races and ethnicities as this reduces their being to an unspecific Blackness once more. The speaker resists these stereotypes, critiquing them as being self-imposed by a lack of consciousness and knowledge to an authentic self. These identities create a spectacle of the Black body and Black voice in the text but for the speaker "a man who cries out is not a dancing bear" (*Notebook* 50). The reader is brought back by his memory of death, all the pointless deaths he has witnessed in his reality. There is a reoccurring thematic rhythm of

emotional inflation and deflation in the text. The speaker dons a mask in response to the Coloniser but following a sober thought, he realises the mask does not fit and removes it.

This is seen again, when the speaker considers the mask of the "madman," in response to the Coloniser's favouring of "reason," this places the speaker within the realm of the Other in the Hegelian dialectic. There is a shift from the speaker's "I" to a collective referral of "we," implying that the kinship he has claimed stems from a "dementia paradox with flaming madness with tenacious cannibalism," (*Notebook* 55) bonded together with "the madness that remembers/the madness that screams/the madness that sees/ the madness that unchains itself" (*Notebook* 55). Through the mask of the madman the speaker seeks to revitalise his compatriots by restoring historic memory, voice and vision all in the service of liberation. This historic memory stems from his unique Caribbean identity, he invokes Haiti and the Haitian revolution as inspiration for his consciousness, "Haiti where Negritude rose to its feet for the first time and said it believed in its own humanity" (*Notebook* 52).

Similarly, to Fanon's excerpt from *Black Skin, White Masks, Notebook* contains a sequence where the speaker recounts an episode that exposes him to the white gaze. The incident occurs on a tram and involves a Black man whose appearance evokes ridicule and disdain on the part of the other passengers. The speaker spectates the event as both the white passengers and himself,

> A negro who was comical and ugly, and behind me women giggled as they looked at him.
> He was COMICAL AND UGLY
> COMICAL AND UGLY, for a fact.
>
> I sported a great smile of complicity… (Césaire *Notebook* 69)

This incident forces the speaker to remove his mask once again, in a rather confessional tone, he admits that he was complicit in these comments. He was unable to speak up for the Black man on the tram, the speaker chooses silence over speech in this moment. He is denied his "full" and "great" voice as he is reminded that "for centuries this country repeated that we are brute beasts; that the human heart-beat stops at the gates of the Black world" (*Notebook* 67). He considers the weight of his mask heavily, referring to his heroism as a joke. The segment acts as a moment of ventriloquism, despite the speaker's silence he is speaking for the white observers. Césaire gives voice to the racist discourse that has silenced the speaker. Blackness as a concept is ridiculed as indicated by the women's laughter. The negro referred to in the above stanza is described in ways that point to aspects of Western discourse outlined earlier

in Wright's analysis: the conflation between the Black face and the African mask. For Césaire, masking is used to show that one can be both a subject and an Other. In the moment where he recognises that he is mimicking racist discourse, the act of ventriloquism disables his narrator.

With an emerging warmth within the small hours, the speaker provides the reader with a definition of his Negritude,

> My Negritude is not a stone, nor deafness flung out against the clamour of the day
> My Negritude is not a white speck of dead water on the dead eye of the earth
> My Negritude is neither tower nor cathedral.
> It plunges into the red flesh of the soil
> It plunges into the blazing flesh of the sky
> My Negritude riddled with holes
> The dense affliction of its worthy patience. (Césaire *Notebook* 72)

Once again, the reader sees that the consciousness of the speaker is articulated through natural elements of soil and sky. The assertions are at first in the negative, indicating that the negative connotations of Blackness are being reclaimed by the speaker. There is also a shift from nouns to verbs which implies that Negritude is a continuous act. The verbs also act as a denial of objectification. One cannot objectify an action and hold it as a noun.

Assertions are at first in the negative, reclaiming the negative connotations of Blackness. The image of "Negritude riddled with holes," implies the patience of the speaker in discovering his consciousness. Holes can be read as bullet wounds, but also implies the various forms Negritude takes. It is not a solid identity but rather like a fishing net, allows for a gathering of solidarity but not a single unified identity. The "small hours" often imply the speaker's isolation but the addition of warmth to the line suggests that the speaker has found what he has been looking for throughout the text—a collective identity:

> Those who invented neither gunpowder nor compass, those who tamed neither steam nor electricity, those who explored neither sea nor sky, but those who know the humblest corners of the country of suffering, those whose only journeys were uprootings, those who went to sleep on their knees, those who were domesticated and Christianised, those who were inoculated with degeneration, tom-toms of empty hands, inane tom-toms of resounding wounds, burlesque tom-toms of emaciated treachery. (Césaire *Notebook* 72)

Collective identity is not here reduced to racial stereotype, but rather links those "who know the humblest corners of the country of suffering" (Césaire *Notebook* 72); those in the zone of

nonbeing who share a mutual understanding of their position in society. The speaker claims to accept the definition of his biology because he understands that there is no weight to the racial segregation on the basis of the anti-dialectic of colonial racism. His Blackness is not, "confined to a facial angle, to a type of hair, to a nose sufficiently flattened, to a pigmentation sufficiently melanose" (Césaire *Notebook* 84). He understands that there may be some who "never get over being made in the likeness of the devil and not in the likeness of God" but strongly believes that no single race holds a "monopoly of beauty, intelligence and strength" (Césaire *Notebook* 85-86). Negritude embodies the totality of Blackness, everything is acknowledged including the history of subjugation under a European coloniser.

The Need for Conversation: Introducing Dialogue into Black Subjectivity

The subsequent sections of this chapter explore how Rankine and Putuma invoke similar concepts of masking as articulated by Césaire and Fanon but also looks at how they engage with Wright's concept of dialogism and Epiphenomenal time in order to destabilise the invocation of the Black male as subject. Césaire and Fanon's counter-discourses assume an idealist formation of the nation whereby the Black is either citizen or interloper and the female is either a passive landscape or non-existent. As such, they are best understood as the first in a series of counter-discourses rather than the finite canon of African diasporic subjectivity. Black women remain in these narratives as "Other of the Other," despite the central role they played across the diaspora. Wright argues that when Césaire and Fanon frame their moments of consciousness within the construction of a patriarchal nation, they "effectively ignore and erase the ways in which Black women played a leading role in the formation of Black communities in the West" (*BB* 131). In the allegory of the nation, the Black man is not wanted as a citizen. In both *Black Skin, White Masks* and *Notebook* white women are deployed to symbolise this rejection by the white nation. She draws on the gender discourse of the white woman as the nation and the white male as her citizen. This patriarchal discourse spilled over into the era of the Black Arts Movement and as such, Black female artists and theorists face a difficult challenge "to both recuperate the erased socio-political legacy of their mothers and to make themselves visible again in this new discourse of the Black nation in the West" (*BB* 131). She cites Michele Wallace's argument that "Black feminist creativity is routinely 'gagged and disappeared'," because of the inability of the dialectic to accommodate an "Other of the Other" (*BB* 137). This inability stems from the logical fallacy in the construction of the nation and subject:

> The dialectic of the subject and the counter-discourses [such as Césaire's and Fanon's] deploy a version of chronology in what Mikhail Bakhtin identifies as the simplest chronotrope, or adventure time, in other words, a narrative that has the appearance of sequence but in fact is independent events externally ordered in a way that belies their random contingency. (*BB* 137)

She draws attention to the presence and contribution of Black women being ignored in discussions of race, citizenship and nationality. The failure to consider gender, like theories of subjectivity that ignore race, is not an error of omission. In narrative form, the story of the nation reads only as the story of men. Black nationalist leaders perpetuated two myths from these counter-discourses: "that masculine power is absolute and that a nation's history can be (and in some cases has been) racially homogenous" (Wright *BB* 141). These myths are perpetuated by ignoring the agency that women possess as the only group that can produce children. However, Wright points to the potentially disruptive and destructive role of the mother in nationalist discourse.

The trope of the Black mother, as used by poets such as Carolyn Rodgers and Audre Lorde creates a discourse which explores Black female subjectivity. The trope of the Black mother "challenges Black nationalist constructions of the subject, providing an alternative discourse that enables a Black feminist subject within a more inclusive understanding of a politicised Black collective," Lorde and Rodgers both reject dialectical constructions of the subject in favour of a dialogic structure (Wright *BB* 142). By rejecting a system in which Black subjects can only be produced against Black Others, dialogism works as a new collective model for Black subjectivity.

Wright argues that a dialogic model creates an "omnivocal" subjectivity, because she argues for diversity as a means of unity. Instead of a dialectic which enables the subject to delineate and reject others, an omnivocal subject possesses the power of being able to connect with others and recognise their subjectivity. This is a significant step beyond Hegel, whose exploration of recognition was limited to the master-slave dialectic whereby the master sets the terms of that recognition. Fanon and Césaire both explore this negative aspect of recognition, ultimately reaching the conclusion that it defines the moment when the Black becomes aware that he is Other. Using a dialogic model, she provides a new type of recognition wherein difference becomes the means by which one subject can speak with, recognise and thus be recognised by a variety of subjects. The dialogue that Wright foregrounds cannot be created without two speaking subjects, as such she shifts the

formulation of the subject locked into the binary of the nation and articulates a Black female subject who deploys dialogue as her speech act (*BB* 142).

"The Others out in public": bridging the gap between the zone of being and zone of nonbeing in *Citizen*

Citizen begins with a similar setting to *Notebook*, it presents an indeterminate time threshold, where the speaker is between the zone of being and the zone of nonbeing. The speaker begins: "When you are alone and too tired even to turn on any of your devices, you let yourself linger in a past stacked among your pillows" (Rankine 5), before falling into a memory sparked by her smell. The correlation between physical senses and memory occur throughout *Citizen* and the physicality of these moments are often likened to natural forces. The speaker states that, "certain moments send adrenaline to the heart, dry out the tongue and clog the lungs. Like thunder they drown you in sound, no like lightening they strike you across the larynx (Rankine 7). These references act as a homage to Rankine's Caribbean heritage and her acknowledgement of the literature and ideal borne out of Martinique.

The speaker recounts numerous incidents where she is made "hyper-aware" of her Blackness within the public sphere. The perverse anonymity articulated by Fanon is echoed in the text through the speaker's recognition of the racist language she encounters. Discussing a lecture by philosopher Judith Butler, the question is asked "what makes language hurtful?" to which Butler responds, that language navigates our addressability and our emotional openness:

> The ambition of racist language was to denigrate and erase you as a person. After considering Butler's remarks, you begin to understand yourself as rendered hypervisible in the face of such language acts. Language that feels hurtful is intended to exploit all the ways you are present. (Rankine *Citizen* 49)

Racist language seals the speaker into a realm of epistemic closure, but she has not learned how to respond to such acts. The outside word affects the speaker's body and the text shows a coming to consciousness where she uses words to denounce the power of racist language over her:

> Every day your mouth opens and receives the kiss the world offers, which seals you shut though you are feeling sick to your stomach about the beginning of the feeling that was born from understanding and now stumbles in you. (Rankine *Citizen* 154)

The speaker's presence in the zone of being constantly denies her attributes of the Black self. The speaker recounts multiple incidents where she is confused for another Black co-worker or a "nameless Black," and considers whether she feels hurt because it is another "'all Black people look the same' moment, or because [she is] being confused with another after being so close to this Other?" (Rankine *Citizen* 7). The zone of being is portrayed as being "colorblind," where the speaker's identity is not overtly linked to her race. Race is tiptoed around and never overtly addressed in the text by the implied addressee,

> A friend argues that Americans battle between the "historical self" and the "self self." By this she means you mostly interact as friends with mutual interests and, for the most part, compatible personalities; however, sometimes your historical selves, her white self and your Black self, or your white self and her Black self, arrive with the full force of your American positioning. Then you are standing face-to-face in seconds that wipe the affable smiles right from your mouths. What did you say? Instantaneously your attachment seems fragile, tenuous, subject to any transgression of your historical self. And though your joined personal histories are supposed to save you from misunderstandings, they usually cause you to understand all too well what is meant. (Rankine *Citizen* 14)

Fanon's final lines in *Black Skin, White Masks* "O my body, make of me always a man who questions!," introduces a motif in which the speaker constantly questions the language used by others. The line "what did you say" is repeated as a refrain in *Citizen* following encounters the speaker has that have left her "hypervisible." The questions appear to occur internally; the speaker does not verbalise her questions but rather the question itself causes an explosion of consciousness which the speaker cannot contain. The question acts as a reminder of the power of language to entrap one into the zone of nonbeing. Her position in the zone of being is determined by how she articulates herself without her Blackness. In Part IV, the speaker begins to use speech in the form of a "sigh," referring to it as "the pathway to breath" and an act of "self-preservation," she is aware of the spectacle she may cause by expressing her frustrations, but she has grown tired of being told to "Feel good. Feel better. Move forward. Let it go. Come on" (Rankine 66).

The speaker focuses on the speech act of racist language through which she provides a critique of the dialectic by focusing on the pronoun "I"

> Sometimes 'I' is supposed to hold what is not there until it is. Then what is comes comes apart the closer you are to it.
>
> This makes the first person a symbol for something.
> The pronoun barely holding the person together.

> You said ‘I’ has so much power; it’s insane. (Rankine 71).

In the dialectic, “I” is synonymous with the White Subject, whereas “You” is often a referral to the Black Other. In conversations, the “I” often holds power over the “You,” but because the speaker is not white, the pronoun “I” does not encapsulate her. The speaker shifts the focus of the pronoun, instead of identifying with “I” to get to know “You” because:

> You are you even before you
> Grow into understanding you
> Are not anyone, worthless,
> Not worth you.
> Even as your own weight insists
> You are here, fighting off the weight of nonexistence (Rankine 139)

The speaker tentatively shifts into a consciousness following the recognition that her positioning is a result of the negation of her Blackness by the zone of being. The text ends, with a similar tone deployed in *Notebook* and *Black Skin, White Masks* in addressing the reader with a reminder and a mandate moving forward. There is a similar tone of affirmation and pride shared among the texts,

> To arrive like this every day for it to be like this to have so many memories and no other memory than these for as long as they can be remembered to remember this:
>
> Though a share of all remembering, a measure of all memory, is breath and to breathe you have to create a truce—
> A truce with the patience of a stethoscope. (Rankine 156)

The constant stream of questioning creates a breakdown in the speaker’s consciousness, from here the question of “what is wrong?” gets stuck in her dreams,

> Hold up, did you just hear, did you just say, did you just see, did you just do that? Then the voice in your head silently tells you to take your foot off your throat because just getting along shouldn’t be an ambition (Rankine 55)
>
> Who said that? She said what? What did he just do? Did she really just say that? He said what? What did she do? Did I hear what I think I heard? Did that just come out of my mouth, his mouth, your mouth? Do you remember when you sighed? (Rankine 63)

Part V of *Citizen* positions the speaker in limbo, there are no definitive references to place but rather her body is suspended in an unknown place. The reader is exposed to the narrator's consciousness, or lack thereof,

> You begin to move around in search of the steps it will take before you are thrown back into your own body.
>
> You could build a world out of need or you could hold everything Black and see. You give back the lack.
>
> You hold everything Black. You give yourself back until nothing's left but the dissolving blues of metaphor.

In the section there is repetition of Black, back and lack almost interchangeably, Black is linked to lack and back, suggesting that the speaker's Blackness is what is holding her back from the zone of being. This echoes her recollection of the medical condition — John Henryism— in an earlier segment. John Henryism is a medical term for the coping mechanism in dealing with the stresses stemming from racism.[23] The speaker writes that African-Americans "achieve themselves to death" (Rankine 11), to avoid their erasure in society.

Serena Williams and the consequences of Black Excellence

Citizen's focus on the "hypervisibility" of the Black body is most evident in Rankine's poetic essay on Williams. She writes,

> Serena's frustrations, her disappointments, exist within a system you understand not to try to understand in any fair-minded way because to do so is to understand the erasure of the self as systemic, as ordinary. For Serena, the daily diminishment is a low flame, a constant drip. Every look, every bad call blossoms out of history, through her, onto you. To understand is to see Serena as hemmed in as any other black body thrown against our American background. (*Citizen* 32)

In an article Rankine wrote for *The New York Times Magazine*, she interviews Serena Williams. her article opens as follows:

> There is a belief among some African-Americans, that to defeat racism, they have to work harder, be smarter, be better. Only after they give 150 percent will white

[23] The theory of John Henryism was coined by Prof. Sherman James of Duke University to describe "the pressures of systematic racism can harm the body as well, making it significantly more susceptible to both depression and heart-related disease (Roisin 1).

> Americans recognize black excellence for what it is. But of course, once recognized, black excellence is then supposed to perform with good manners and forgiveness in the face of any racist slights or attacks. Black excellence is not supposed to be emotional as it pulls itself together to win after questionable calls. And in winning, it's not supposed to swagger, to leap and pump its fists (Rankine "The Meaning of Serena Williams" 1)

Rankine uses Williams's experience to position the female body as always already subject to erasure in American society. A dialogic reading of this experience shows how the racism and sexism that Williams faces is projected onto the speaker. Her body is used as a marker of American citizenship within a historical framework that continues to negate her body based on racial prejudices. Rankine uses Williams's tennis match as a metaphor for understanding notions of belonging: white is winning, and Black is losing. To answer the speaker's question: "What does a victorious or defeated black woman's body in a historically white space look like?" (25) It looks like Williams. For the speaker, Williams shows signs of humanity and authenticity that she cannot. She will not be forced into stillness; she won't accept those racist projections onto her body without speaking back. The speaker applauds Williams for "reacting immediately to being thrown against a sharp white background. It is difficult not to applaud her for existing in the moment, for fighting crazily against the so-called wrongness of her body's positing at the service line" (29).

For the speaker, Williams's bold actions on the tennis court embody every feeling of rage and anger the speaker must hide in everyday life. The speaker is "brought to full attention by the suddenly explosive behavior" of Williams in the 2009 Women's US Open semi-final (Rankine 25). To Rankine, Williams is the definition of black excellence but her female body suffers under the weight of perpetuated racist stereotypes. By making Williams's body visible she critiques tennis etiquette to allow for the reader to consider how societal narratives, fraught with racist implications, enact violent experiences on those who do not belong to the zone of being. For Rankine,

> who imagined winning as a free space, one where the unconscious racist shenanigans of umpires, or the narratives about her body, her "unnatural" power, her perceived crassness no longer mattered. I thought it to be the rare space free from all the stresses of black life (TMOSW 1).

This space is reconfigured to show even though no one was saying anything explicitly about Serena's black body, "you are not the only viewer who thought it was getting in the way of

Alves's sight line (*Citizen* 27).[24] Despite racism not being explicitly shown towards Williams, the speaker is convinced that her body is "trapped in a racial imaginary, trapped in disbelief— code for being black in America— is being governed not by the tennis match she is participating in but by a collapsed relationship that had promised to play by the rules. Perhaps this is how racism feels no matter the context— randomly the rules everyone else gets to play by no longer apply to you" (Rankine *Citizen* 30).

"Queer Skin, Straight Masks": Exploring Putuma's Zone of Nonbeing in "No Easter Sunday for Queers"

Koleka Putuma's poem, "No Easter Sunday for Queers," [25] explores the positionality of a Black, queer female subject living in Cape Town. The poem showcases how the speaker must negotiate and often mask her sexuality in both the Northern and Southern suburbs of the city to belong to the community she associates with in both areas. In the introduction to *The Prize and the Price: Shaping Sexualities in South Africa,* Melissa Steyn and Miki van Zyl argue that heteronormativity remains the dominant ideological formation in post-apartheid South Africa. [26] When considering the influence of South Africa's persistent history of hegemonic whiteness; the most prized sexual being in South African society is the "white, adult heterosexual male" and the most prized sexual relation would be a "monogamous, same race heterosexual union between two able-bodied adults" (4).

Putuma's poem, and her collection at large, shows how socio-political and cultural processes of creating races, genders and sexualities are expressed through and upon our bodies. It is through the stigmatisation of non-hegemonic bodies that Othering occurs and upon which these bodies different forms of exclusion, oppression and violence are perpetrated. In this way the body becomes "the site of discursive power struggles" in daily social and political life (Steyn & van Zyl 3). Putuma's text brings Frantz Fanon's account of the inferiority complex instilled into the colonial subject in Black *Skin, White Masks* into the contemporary moment where subject creation- and often negation- include notions of gender and sexuality alongside race.

Interestingly, Gordon points out that Fanon's interrogation of subjecthood takes inspiration from Simone de Beauvoir's analysis of femininity in *The Second Sex*, in which "these bodies

[24] Mariana Alves was the umpire for the 2004 Woman's US Open Final.
[25] I use the term queer to include all individuals identifying within the LGBTI community, it is a reclaimed identity term that challenges compulsory heterosexuality in society.
[26] Heteronormativity is the institution of heterosexuality in society, based on the assumption that there are only two sexes and that each has predetermined gender roles (Steyn & van Zyl 3).

are different." Her observation that "one is not born but rather becomes a woman" (291), interrogates how civilisation is responsible for the creation of values of femininity as well as how the European patriarchal family is the model for normative society. Published in 1949, *The Second Sex* foregrounds Fanon's analysis of the Black as a white construction in Black *Skin, White Masks* in 1952. [27] This observation lends itself to a more intersectional understanding of Fanon's work, if one considers that there was an evolving community of ideas in which one cannot invoke Fanon without considering Beauvoir and as such cannot explore the marginalisation of race without considering the influence of sexuality and gender.

As such, both race and heteronormativity operate on the notion of binaries and, by extension, a dialectic where an "Other" is created in order to validate the superior position of the subject-citizen. Heteronormativity operates in same way as whiteness by maintaining its invisibility through its normative power. The Black in society is positioned as an anonymous representative for collective Blackness as a whole, rather than being able to take on an individual identity. The desire of Black and queer persons to be recognised and treated as equal members of society require them to live in a series of failures of their individual identity in order to "fit the norm." A Black subject would need to live "white-like," forgoing their own identity and assimilating into a culture that was imposed on them. Whereas, a queer subject would need to remain closeted, live heteronormatively to be accepted into society. Both subjects must grapple with an inferiority complex imposed upon them due to their failures to live "normally," this social condition impedes human development. As such they often become nonbeings or mask their true identities when navigating society.

Putuma makes a visual statement of the speaker's nonbeing through the use of strikethroughs in the text. The hesitation of the speaker to consider herself as queer is apparent in her inability to find the correct collective pronoun when discussing herself:

> How ~~they~~ we tell no one
> In the
> ~~*Southern Northern*~~
> ~~*Suburbs*~~
> ~~Them us them us,~~ considers *them* a sin and disgrace
> How ~~they~~ we tell no one

[27] Gordon reveals that Fanon had both of Beauvoir's texts in his home library despite not acknowledging her in his analysis in the same way he acknowledges the works of Anna Freud, Aimé Césaire and Jean Paul Sartre (WFS 33).

The speaker's alienation is evident when she asks "no one" to help her "carry a cross that crosses ~~us~~ out" (Putuma 25), the strikethroughs throughout the poem working similarly to the speech act that renders Fanon into a realm of pure exteriority in Black *Skin, White Masks*. [28] Fanon, in a similar manner to Putuma experiences a perverse anonymity whereby his own individual identity is stripped away and he is rendered a nameless figure, an object that the white child calls *Negre*. This process of negation, stigmatisation and objectification is highlighted by Putuma's explanation of the hate crimes against Black lesbian women.

The Black subject and by extension ~~–~~ and to a certain degree more so ~~–~~ the Black queer subject, disappear into the zone of nonbeing, whereby they "encounters difficulties in the development of [their] bodily schema" (Fanon *BSWM* 83) due to the epistemic closure they find themselves in. In this sense, the Black and the Black queer subject can only produce their identity in relation to normative whiteness and heterosexuality. The creation of consciousness then becomes a negating process whereby the subject struggles with the tensions of the stereotypes imposed on them by the outside world and self-affirming aspects of themselves that *should not exist*. This inferiority complex is used to fix the subject onto the hierarchy that maintains hegemonic masculinities, whiteness and heteronormativity. Different participants will be valued and affirmed or oppressed and stigmatise to varying degrees depending on their intersectional position in the dominant heteronormative hierarchy (van Zyl 366).

"No Easter Sunday for Queers" provides a division between what the speaker associates with the Northern Suburbs and the Southern Suburbs which allows for us to think in terms of a politics of location.[29] The speaker's experience in both of these areas point to the "disjuncture between the rights encompassed by citizenship and liveable lives" (van Zyl 365). Despite the recognition of gender equality and sexual orientation in South Africa's Bill of Rights and their protection in The Constitution; South African society remains locked in a heteronormative hierarchy whereby traditional and cultural values perpetuate further stigmatisation of and discrimination against those who identify as other than heterosexual.

In the Northern Suburbs, the influence of the speaker's religious upbringing on her sexuality becomes apparent. We learn that the speaker's father is a pastor at a church in Belville (Putuma 32), and that she has not yet "come out" to him and the community she belongs to. For the speaker, the Northern Suburb is compared to the Old Testament, from which verses from the

[28] The phenomenon of being seen as a thing, governed purely by casual forces, a being without inner life and self-control (Gordon WFS 48)

[29]The way power lines operate within a particular location to create conditions for identities to emerge, the conditions for a subject's belonging (Steyn & van Zyl 4)

Books of Leviticus and Kings that position homosexuality as sinful and immoral are referenced (Putuma 27-28). The speaker belongs to "a family [she] cannot shame," where she believes she "hoards two lives in one body" (Putuma 25). The gospel as portrayed in the text negates the speaker's presence in the Northern suburbs. In a preceding poem "Growing up Black & Christian," Putuma writes that "the gospel is how whiteness breaks into our homes and brings us to our knees" (23), Christianity is based on notions of generation and reproduction, with the nuclear family at the core of its theologies. Thus, queer relationships are considered "unnatural" because they lack the ability for reproduction. The patriarchal nature of Christianity stems from the conventional understanding of God as a father figure and the bible's teachings of women to be submissive and passive followers of the Lord and by extension of their husbands.

She describes herself as "dyslexic in this language [she loves in]" (Putuma 25), because her upbringing has not equipped her with words for same-sex desire. The speaker describes the "Our Father" as a prayer malfunctioning in her lesbian mouth (Putuma 29). The prayer offered her solace as a child but in discovering and exploring her sexuality it only renders feelings of guilt and shame (Putuma 27). She finds some semblance of acceptance in the Southern Suburbs. Areas such as Rondebosch, Observatory and Claremont are popular residential areas for students studying at the University of Cape Town. She describes it as a "new kind of church" (Putuma 26), providing a community where she is able to express her sexuality because of its more liberal and tolerant attitude towards gender and sexual orientation. This new kind of church is a gay bar called Zero21 at which:

- The usher is a bouncer
- Beyoncé and Rihanna are slaying bodies at the altar
- Eternity is the night
- Communion is R28 at the bar
- Hell is the possible statistic we become when we leave this place (Putuma 26)

The incorporation of the lyrics of Beyoncé's song "Partition," celebrating female sexuality and sexual pleasure becomes a new hymn for the speaker. However, the speaker seems unable to shake the moral repercussions of her upbringing despite being in a place of new-found acceptance. She weaves biblical verses into "Partition":

Drop the bass man, base get lower/ radio say speed it up, I just go slower
High like treble/ pumping on them mids/ 1 Kings 22:46 [and the remnant of the sodomites, which remained in the days of his father Asa, he took out of the land]
And why ya think ya name keep rollin' off your tongue?

Cause when you wanna smash, I'll just Romans 1:26 [For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature] *another one*

I sneezed some chapter and the beat got sicker

Yonce y'all 1 Timothy 1:9-10 [the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for man slayers, for whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine] *like liquor* (29).

"Partition," off Beyoncé's self-titled fifth studio album released in 2013, lends itself towards the sexual empowerment of women rather than their sexual objectification. The song and its accompanying music video affirm and celebrate a woman's ability to fantasise about sex and demand pleasure from her partner. Sexual empowerment is a subjective and personal feeling of power and agency. Beyoncé owns her sexuality in the music video and its lyrics. The inclusion of biblical verses into the text shows the speaker's internal struggle to accept her sexuality as a result of her conditioning that homosexuality is sinful and immoral and that sex is not meant to be a pleasurable act but rather one that leads to procreation. Beyoncé and Rihanna represent icons that the speaker is able to look up to, worship in a sense, because the speaker desires the same level of articulation and comfort in expressing her own sexuality.

The speaker's feelings of belonging are short-lived in the Southern Suburbs as Putuma references two incidents of gender-based violence:

LESBIAN MURDERED IN FRONT OF FAMILY, NYANGA, C.T
LESBIAN STABBED AFTER LEAVING TAVERN, KAYALITSHA, C.T (28)

These lines, capitalised and structured as Newspaper headlines, show that despite exercising strict control over many aspects of sexuality, the apartheid state paid "scant notice to gender-based violence unless the victim was white and the perpetrator Black" (Van Zyl 365). Despite a framework of constitutional rights protecting gender and sexuality in post-apartheid South Africa, a large amount of gender-based violence occurring within post-apartheid society. Violence and threats of violence are used to keep people in their place. The apartheid government enacted political violence on the basis of people's identities as Black to maintain the status quo of white supremacy. In a similar manner, one finds queer and female bodies are considered as deserving of violence because they are a major threat to ruling masculinities. Van Zyl makes reference to Former President Jacob Zuma's rape trial in 2006, as a "battleground for cultural hegemonies over the terrain of gender power" (371). Zuma's

positioning as a symbol of African masculinity bore a great deal of weight for a society that considers homosexuality to be unAfrican and where, judicially, Fezekile Kuzwayo's sexual orientation was used to justify why she was not raped by Zuma.

The speaker in "No Easter Sunday for Queers" comes to realise that her sexuality is policed by men in both areas and that her "body is at the mercy of men" (Putuma 27). Her surrender in both spaces shows a negation of identity, a chosen absence. Coming out as queer in a climate of stigmatisation means becoming visible, despite her protection constitutionally the speaker is hesitant to appear in marches that fight for these rights, she does not want to "be caught on any kind of media/ spotted in a selfie with a rainbow behind it" (Putuma 27). Disclosing one's identity when it is not consistent with the expectations of traditional heteropatriarchies can be both a source of pleasure, resistance and belonging but also a cause of deep anxiety. Identifying oneself as a threat to the normative landscape puts one at risk "of homophobic violence or hate crime" (van Zyl 371). Putuma shows how society perpetuates rape culture, slut shaming and victim blaming in the following stanza:

> She was 24/ she was 19/ she was 25/ she was queer/ she was straight/ she was out too late/ out on the wrong night/ acting like a man that night/ jeans too tight, skirt too high, a sodomite/ a sin/ a sinner/ a sinful act/ a fact/ a figure/ a number/ a body/ dead body/ dead lesbian body/ premediated fate/ a prayer too late/ hate/ hate/ all because of hate/ she was 24/ she was 19/ she was 25/ she was queer/ she was dead/ I could die
>
> (Putuma 29)

Firstly, one sees the perverse anonymity pointed to by Fanon used by Putuma to describe how women are ultimately not safe in society no matter their age, what they wear or their sexual orientation. Women are held responsible for their sexual assault, because it has been ingrained into society through a process of epistemic closure that women are not allowed to testify or act out against hegemonic masculinities in society. They are bodies that are seen as deserving of violence if they attempt to challenge the status quo in any way. Putuma builds the follow-on line from the previous word, act becomes fact, fate turns to hate. This could be the speaker's stream of consciousness, informing the reader of all the conditioning of women to not express any form of sexuality outside of what is considered normative. Her paranoia stems from not wanting to become one of these statistics nor have her body in a dump (Putuma 27). Putuma navigates the religious and social consequences of "coming out" simultaneously by merging the two suburbs more intensely towards the end of the poem.

The speaker's father's position as a pastor interrogates further the patriarchal element of her religious upbringing. When the speaker talks to god, she also speaks to her father. The

concluding stanzas of the poem act as a celebration and an acknowledgement of the Black lesbian women who are brutally raped and murdered, only to remain anonymous in the media. Putuma frames the stanzas as the speaker attending an imaginary sermon performed by her father. Her manipulation of religious iconography to represent the redemption of queer bodies in society is clearly evident in this section. Putuma compares the queer womxn she encounters in the Southern suburb as gods being crucified for their sins:

- He is preaching about a God whose hands were tied with underwear and her ankles with shoelaces
- Her head and collarbone nailed to a dump site with three bullets
- How she was not crucified with two thieves but a lover who could not pick a paradise
- He says some will not remember the Calvary of queer bodies
- This crucifixion is a gospel that goes unpreached, unnamed and unrecorded most times.
- Lesbians are crucified like Christ (Putuma excerpts from page 30)

The comparison of lesbians to Jesus Christ being crucified on Calvary represents the shift in tone of Christianity's tolerance of sin. Whereby the resurrection of Christ led to the forgiveness of all sin and a more tolerant attitude in the church following. Homosexuality appears to be a sin that is still not wholly forgiven nor accepted despite the New Testament's teaching of unconditional love. For Putuma, there is no Easter Sunday for queer bodies. Their death is one that often goes unacknowledged, the weight of it unconsidered by society and they are not redeemed in the same manner that Christ is. The speaker shifts the tone of this imaginary sermon towards a more personal interrogation of patriarchal attitudes in the home:

Daddy,

- If I were crucified
- And dumped in a tomb for three days
- And rose again as a headline
- Would you preach about me? (Putuma 32)

If it was the speaker who died, would her father finally acknowledge her sexuality? And would he be able to ignore the issue if it was his daughter crucified like Christ? This act of interrogation acts in opposition to the epistemic closure experienced by marginalised identities in society. It drives heteropatriarchal subjects to acknowledge and recognise the individual as an individual and not a nameless figure passing through society.

South African national politics are interwoven with discourses of colonialism, apartheid and postcolonialism. Putuma reveals in "No Easter Sunday for Queers," how these discourses are

all steeped in heteropatriarchal values and work to negate the presence of those who do not "fit the norm." She shows how the positionality of the Black queer female subject is one of almost complete absence and total erasure.

"Third Generation Messiah": Intersubjectivity in *Collective Amnesia*

As Wright applies a dialogic reading of Rodger's *How I Got Ovah*, this section explores how Putuma ventriloquises the interaction between female family members in *Collective Amnesia*. Rodgers positions the mother and daughter in her work in a conversation—or dialogue—rather than as oppositional figures. This creates a subjectivity that "reclaims and recuperates the history and contributions of Black women past and present" (Wright *BB* 145). "Buried Memory" is thematically concerned with the concept of grieving and provides an intergenerational understanding of what it means to different women in Putuma's collection. The speaker, in "Online" discusses the social protocols that are followed with regards to mental health on social media. Her "3456 friends [on Facebook] do not know how far back [her] trauma runs" (57). There has been a shift in the de-stigmatisation of mental health in recent years, where being more public and open regarding one's mental health is a positive thing. The speaker stems from an upbringing where grief and mental health struggles have always been private. She writes, "it is sore in all the places [she] cannot see or wrap gauze around. / In all the places that have not healed in [her] bloodline" (57). By indicating that the trauma runs deep into her familial history, the speaker feels compelled to keep her feelings private because "God forbid [her] status reveals that [she is] lost or breaking" (57). "At the Cemetery" shows how public grieving and mourning is filled with "the wailing and singing" of women who "toss themselves about in the sand/ with no one holding them" in contrast to the men "who do not cry" (58-59). The poem acts as a critique of patriarchal discourse that emphasises that men should not show emotion, the speaker writes that "grief is contagious/and deadly," to the men at the burial.

In her poem "Interview," Putuma exposes the normalisation of violence inflicted on black bodies in society by inhabiting the body of a narrator/speaker who has grown tired of "being the coffin in the room" and "having other coffins lowered down [her] throat and being asked if [she is] breathing OK?" (76). The image of the coffin reveals aspects of structural violence in society such as institutional racism as well as the continued violence against black bodies because of police violence, sexual assault, gang violence and other crimes. The poem is structured as a response to the question "Why did you leave?" which suggests Putuma's

removal of herself as a writer from narratives that fixate on the trauma and difficulties of being black. She articulates some of the reasons for her removing herself from this space:

> Of pallbearing the news of murdered lesbians and being expected to breathe OK
> Of the expectation that we must exist as obituaries
> Of being hung at half-mast and being expected to breathe OK
> Of being written about as if I am already dead (76)

The above lines express a resistance to the silencing and normalisation of the ongoing abuse, murder and lack of recognition of black women in society. Putuma attributes this trauma to black men and white womxn who are often responsible for "speaking for" black women in society rather than allowing them a space to speak for themselves. Putuma's collection expresses the difficulty in articulating a stand-alone black female subject, one that is not seen in relation to white women or black men. In this regard, Wright argues that:

> Gender and subjectivity must grapple with a history of presence and invisibility, a revolutionary era that complicates the minority's relationship to an oppressive and antagonistic federal authority and the relationship between Black men and women, as well as black women among themselves. (*BB* 150)

Collective Amnesia seeks to explore the intersubjective relationships of Black women through an intergenerational dialogue about changing and "unlearning" the behaviours that silence and erase female consciousness and thus female subjectivity.

In an interview with *Africa in Dialogue,* Putuma states that particularly as a black person, she finds true liberation in verbalising an experience of hurt because it is not something that she was every taught to do growing up:

> I think that the hardest thing for black people to say is, "Dad or mum or auntie or uncle or somebody, you hurt me or you broke my heart," especially when you are younger than the person, and for that person in turn to say "I am sorry." That is the rarest intergenerational interaction you will find between black people (Mogami 1).

She describes how the narrative of submission is instilled into black women from their mothers, aunts and grandmothers and needs to be "unlearned" by the family's younger members. The trope of silence, of "things rather left unsaid" reoccurs in the poem "Graduation," coming home following the completion of her studies, the speaker describes how contributing financially has now earned her a seat at the "grown-ups' table," but despite this financial autonomy she must still "watch her mouth" and slip into roles she has since outgrown. She chooses not to challenge

her parents out of respect for the positionality and the provisions of her elders. The speaker's relationship with her parents appears to be strained and this could be a result of the speaker's unwillingness to maintain the duty, diligence and respect she has been taught which causes her to silence her pain and her true self:

> When your parents visit
> You will prepare their room
> And hide all the things they probably know or suspect about you
> Your mother will offer to help with the cooking
> The way she chops onions is loaded with questions
> You both have not mastered how to chop onions without crying
> Chopping onions that way is how you have difficult conversations (Putuma 36)

Where she has now invited her family into her own home but, despite it being a space that is ultimately *hers*, she is unable to reveal her true self. In previous poems, like "No Easter Sunday for Queers" and "Growing up Black and Womxn" Putuma speaks about masking her sexuality from her family. This is further emphasised by the speaker hiding from sight anything that may reveal this to her parents. Putuma's image of a mother and daughter silently preparing a meal is distorted by the act of chopping onions which suggests the difficulty the speaker and her mother have talking about their own experiences of pain and trauma.

The process pre-empts the speaker's desire to leave behind a legacy of unlearning for her own children,

> When your mother asks
> Where you left the things she gave you
> You will want to say, *I am unlearning them*
> But unlearning is not a real place or destination
> And that maybe *unlearning* should be a place
> And all the womxn in your family should gather there more often
> Until *unlearning* is a tradition you can pass onto your children (Putuma 36)

She wishes to engage with the women in her family in a process of unlearning of their prescribed silence with regards to trauma and pain. The trope of the "strong black woman" is criticised by revealing how ingrained their silence is into the family structure:

> When unresolved family traumas ruin dinners
> You will want to facilitate
> Using a language of grieving that will be foreign to them
> You will realise the elders in the room
> Learned the alphabet of hurting and falling apart differently
> For you, healing looks like talking and transparency

For them, it is silence and burying
And both are probably valid. (Putuma 36-37)

Putuma here explores how the "conversation of unlearning has different avenues" (Mogami 1) as a result of the kinds of systematic violence that black people have endured in society. As part of a younger, more socially conscious generation than her parents and family elders, Putuma speaks about her trauma and her pain. She acknowledges the need and validity of her parents' ingrained ways of dealing with their trauma, but she does not want this legacy to pass down to her children. In "Indulgence," she recognises the responsibility that parents bear towards their children and how it impacts their relationship with one another:

Mother teach your daughter
that a grief
that sets itself loose
in the middle of a busy highway
is not madness.

When aunty so-and-so
Runs wild in the cemetery
Do not say
Your aunty is a madhouse

When your daughter asks
What is wrong with your eldest sister

Say

Nothing

Tell her

It is normal
To long for what is gone
To be so angry
And lost
You don't know what to do with yourself

Say
One day
You will understand

(Putuma 69-70)

This poem points to the inherent intersubjectivity between mothers and daughters. Although the speaker in the poem is expressing an internal dialogue, ventriloquising her mother's

responses she incorporates her own discourse of "unlearning" onto the generation before her. The conversations held between the speaker and her mother throughout the collection stem from mutual recognition and as such allow for "intersubjective moments of recognition and understanding" (Wright *BB* 159). Tellingly, Putuma's poem, "Lifeline" is a list of names of female authors, poets, politicians and academics. It is the recognition and acknowledgement of the influence of women who came before her. Stating that she is "searching for work that celebrates black joy, black intimacy, black friendship, black sisterhood in the way that is not something that is commercialised" (Mogami 1), Putuma describes the piece of writing not as a poem but as a lifeline she holds onto during difficult times. Putuma writes that every name listed is "a gospel shut up in my bones/every name/chants/*Black girl - /Live! /Live! /Live!*" (85).

CHAPTER THREE:

Backchat and Black Sousveillance: Disrupting the White and Male Gaze

This chapter explores how Rankine and Putuma disrupt the "all seeing eye" that fixates on their identity as Black and as Black and queer respectively. Their work exerts a form of sousveillance against the persistent surveillance of the Black body in public spaces. It uses Simone Browne's *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* as the focal theory for this section in conjunction with Sartre's observations on the white gaze in his introduction to Senghor's *Black Orpheus* as well as Toni Morrison's commentary on the white literary imagination in *Playing in the Dark* to show how the epistemic closure discussed in chapter two impacts how these bodies move in a space that is made for whiteness: the public sphere. This chapter argues that by considering racialised surveillance as a white eye that subjugates Black lived experience, the male gaze also needs to be considered when looking at the Black female subject because of her intersectional positionality. Browne's method of analysing surveillance and the conditions of Blackness places historical documents, art, photography, contemporary popular film and television into dialogue with critical race scholarship and feminist theory (7-8). In this way, she produces an understanding of how certain acts of cultural production disrupt the facticity of surveillance in everyday life.

Arguing that *Citizen* and *Collective Amnesia* both enact a "staring back" at the white and male gaze, disrupting its omnipotent presence; this chapter further incorporates Michelle Alexander's analysis of mass incarceration in *The New Jim Crow* and Pumla Dineo Gqola's concept of the "female fear factory' in *Rape: A South African Nightmare* in conjunction with the literature to show how the stereotypes invoked upon the Black and female body affect the way they move through public spaces.

Surveillance is a French word in which the prefix *sur* means "from above" and the root word *veillance* means "to watch or observe." While *veillance* is considered a neutral form of observation, the supplementary *sur* implies a power relationship between the surveyor and the surveyed. In opposition the supplementary *sou* implies observation from below. Black sousveillance is a moment of interaction with white surveillance that critiques and resists the white gaze. As works of Black sousveillance, *Citizen* and *Collective Amnesia* subvert the relationship of power by talking back to and revealing how violence is enacted on the Black body through the stereotypes purported by the white and male gaze.

The All-encompassing White Gaze and the Concept of Black Sousveillance

Browne cites George Orwell and Michel Foucault's conceptualisations of surveillance as integral to modernity and applicable specifically to contemporary processes of white surveillance (17). She suggests that when considering the ontological conditions of Blackness, one must consider how enactments of surveillance reify boundaries along racial lines. Racialising surveillance is a technology of social control where "surveillance practices, policies and performances concern the production of norms pertaining to race and exercise a power to enforce racial boundaries in public spaces" (Browne 16). Where whiteness is coded as normality, the behaviour of the Black person is often counter-coded as abnormal or threatening. As such, Black presence within public space is often met with discriminatory and violent treatment. While Blackness as the zone of nonbeing is typically obscured from and rendered invisible in society, *Dark Matters* works to "name the absented presence of Blackness" to show how racism and anti-Blackness is sustained in the present day in public spaces that are shaped for and by whiteness (Browne 9, 13). These public spaces often have a detrimental effect on the Black bodies that occupy or pass through them.

Arguing that surveillance has "long been deployed [to track] Black mobilities, stabilities and containment" (25-26), Browne references Fanon's concept of epidermalization, the imposition of race on the body, in order to trace modern expressions of surveillance from the physical branding of enslaved Black bodies to contemporary ideations of white normativity and Black sub-humanity. During his time in Tunisia, Fanon presented a series of lectures on surveillance in which he argued that records, files, time sheets and identity documents form an unauthorised biography of the modern subject and highlights the effects of such surveillance practices on the Black body (Browne 5). He describes embodied psychic effects such as nervous tensions, insomnia, and nightmares in labourers under surveillance. Fanon's chapter, "The Lived Experience of the Black" in *Black Skin, White Masks* presents the framework of the human condition that fixes and frames Blackness as an object of surveillance in which the Black subject is thrust into the zone of nonbeing by the white gaze, conceptualised through stereotypes that are posed as threatening to whiteness and require the strict regulation of the Black body within public spaces. Surveillance as a discursive and material practice relies on the concept of "controlling images" or stereotypes of Blackness and the affect they have on the everyday experiences of Black people in white controlled public spaces. Expanding this notion, Browne's discussion on the Panopticon describes how prisoners display a certain self-discipline under the threat of external observation. This notion carries through to public

displays of excessive force such as public executions which are demonstrated in the notable image in *Citizen* called "Public Lynching" (Rankine 91). She argues this control has continued into the current moment: "when [the] body is Black, the grip hardly loosened during slavery has continued post-Emancipation, with for example, the mob violence of lynching and other acts of racial terrorism" (Browne 38).

Surveillance often takes the form of the banopticon which Browne (citing Didier Bigo) characterises as

> the exceptionalism of power (rules of emergency and their tendency to become permanent), by the way it excludes certain groups in the name of their future potential behaviour (profiling) and by the way it normalises the non-excluded through its production of normative imperatives, the most important of which is free movement.[30] (38-39)

Stop-and-Frisk policing practices of racial profiling in the United States are used ostensibly to determine who is a risk to the nation-state and so define those who fall outside of the bounds of citizenship. These practices fall under this mode of surveillance. In this way, the historical formation of surveillance is not outside of the historical formation of African American slavery and later segregationist practices such as the Black Codes and Jim Crow.[31] Ensuring that "Blacks would stay in their designated, subordinate places in white-controlled public and private spheres" (Collins qtd. in Browne 57), surveillance renders the body hyper-visible and open to intense scrutiny in order to maintain social control.

Black sousveillance, then, attempts to resist epistemic (dis)closure by problematising representations insisted upon by the white gaze. It offers a "rejection of lived objectivity" and a tracing and critique of the origins of the white imagination. Black sousveillance is an "active inversion of the power relations that surveillance entails" (Browne 19). If observing and recording is done by an entity that is not in a position of power, it resists ways of seeing and conceptualising Blackness through stereotypes. In this way, Black sousveillance is "an imaginative place from which to mobilise a critique of racialised surveillance" — in which

[30] This is an extension of Foucault's panopticon.

[31] The Black codes were a series of laws, rules and restrictions imposed only on African Americans (Taylor 108-109). Following the end of the Civil War, the codes conflated Blackness with criminality and gave white Americas the right to police the activities of African Americans, "it shall be the duty of every citizen to act as a police officer for the detection of offenses and the apprehension of offenders, who shall immediately be handed over to the proper captain or chief of patrol" (Taylor 110). The Jim Crow era was a period where African Americans were forced into a segregated second-class citizenship in which they were legally denied the ability to obtain employment, housing and public benefits (Alexander 4).

surveillance is understood as social control that allows the tools used to be subverted, appropriated and challenged in order to shift the gaze from Black to the all-encompassing white gaze (Browne 21). For her, acts of cultural production, expression and everyday practices "offer moments of living with, refusals, and alternatives to routinised, racializing surveillance" (82).

Sartre argues that the Negritude movement, as an act of cultural production and expression, provoked a re-examination of white consciousness. He states, "today these Black men are looking at us, and our gaze comes back to our own eyes" (13), which questions white knowledge about Black identity and forces whiteness to question the foundations of its own identity. Arguing that whiteness has gone uncriticised with the white man "enjoy[ing] the privilege of seeing without being seen" he notes that he has suddenly come under scrutiny by the Black gaze. Sartre is careful to point out that it is not simply a Black gaze upon whiteness but the Black gaze reflecting the white gaze back onto itself. Negritude poetry broke through the white gaze that constructed twentieth century Black identity. For Sartre, it is Black poetry discussing itself, its history and future that cracks open whiteness. He shows how this disruption takes place by quoting Senghor: "A Black poet/unconcerned with us/whispers to the woman he loves," these lines showing how this poetry pays little attention to the white gaze but it about its own consciousness.

The white imagination has begun to examine itself by way of this imagining of a new Black gaze which necessitates the rethinking of the normativity of whiteness in the first place. Sartre shows that the gaze turning back on whiteness begins at the same level of epidermalization. White men feel a type of unpleasantness about themselves from their own gaze for the first time, this unpleasantness can be read as the disassociation of whiteness to truth. The white man, argues Sartre, was "white because he was man, white like daylight, white like truth, white like virtue" (13). The returned gaze forces whiteness to reconsider its previous identity around which knowledge, culture and other identities were formed. This claim assumes that the white gaze will begin to critique itself and its social identity that oppresses colonial Black subjects. It begins to understand itself as only possible through the exile of the Black Other. While beginning to think about its own history as oppressive, it still perceives the Black as a threat from within society. White-self critique would aid social change, but the awareness of anti-black racism has resulted in the perpetuation of deeper ingrained and enforced domestic stereotypes to maintain the ruling order. Colonisation was considered the white gift to primitive Black culture, a civilising mission which was expected to result in gratitude for the colonial transformation of the Black Other but within Negritude poetry there is no gratitude reflected

"but there are no more domesticated eyes: there are wild and free looks that judge [the white] world" (14). As such, the Black Other found within this literary movement provokes a threat upon white society and white consciousness.

While Morrison does not use the term black sousveillance, her analysis of the white literary imagination reflects a similar examination of the effects of racism on the white consciousness. She extends the commentary of both Sartre and Ellison into post-racial American society. Within the white imagination "Black or colored people and symbolic figurations of Blackness [remain] markers for the benevolent and the wicked" (Morrison ix). As she intimates, Black sousveillance works to disrupt the notion that:

> Black people signified little or nothing in the imagination of white American writers. Other than as the objects of an occasional bout of jungle fever, other than to provide local colour or to lend some touch of verisimilitude or to supply a needed moral gesture, humour, or bit of pathos, Blacks made no appearance at all. This was a reflection, I thought, of the marginal impact that Blacks had on the lives of the characters in the work as well as the creative imagination of the author. (Morrison 15)

Rather, the coded language and purposeful restriction of Black characters in American literature was a means to reproduce the codes and restrictions experienced by African Americans in everyday life. Black sousveillance is a "serious intellectual effort to see what racial ideology does to the mind, imagination and behaviour of masters" (Morrison 12). It rejects the pattern of thinking that pushes the contemplation of the Black presence to the margins of the literary imagination and places it at the centre of reading works of national literature. As a poetic form, it disrupts what Morrison refers to as "images of impenetrable whiteness" which almost always appear "in conjunction with representations of Black or Africanist people who are dead, impotent or under complete control" (33). It reveals the violence inflicted upon silenced Black bodies by the "fears and desires that reside in white consciousness (Morrison 33).

Stop-and-Frisk: Black Sousveillance of White Supremacy in Rankine's Citizen

Literature produced as Black sousveillance counters institutionalised surveillance and the negation of Black life in order to showcase its structural embeddedness and pervasive nature. Rankine, in collaboration with John Lucas, a documentary photographer, produces a series of videos that exist around the public experiences in individual lives; particularly the lives of African Americans. These "Situation Videos" can be found on Rankine's website. The videos

add a visual component to the scripts Rankine compiles from part VI of *Citizen*. In the videos, Rankine narrates selections from *Citizen* as well as provides other narration over a combination of still and moving images shot by Lucas. Many of the videos depict people performing private everyday acts in public spaces. "Situation 2," illustrates the dominant formal characteristics of the video series; centred exclusively on shots of sleeping airline passengers the video superimposes still photographs over moving images. The intermingling of these different visual media highlights the dichotomy between the private and the public. The effects illustrate the disruptiveness of private engagement within public spaces. Although the figures represented in the videos engage in quiet and introspective behaviours, the spectator of the situation video is absorbed into the interiority of their actions, invoking an element of theatricality. While Rankine's voiceover appears to articulate private thoughts of bystanders, outsiders cannot access the subjective states of these figures. These acts of absorption function as forms of spectacle that allow people to withdraw from public spaces while still drawing attention to their actions. Rankine here shows how the public sphere is not necessarily a neutral space but rather that it consists of a series of embodied racialised moments. Within discourses of race and civility, the historical demand for Black Americans to "act civil" implies a demand for silence and subjugation. In the context of the situation videos, African Americans separate themselves from the racist public spaces they inhabit through displays of private engagement, which function as a form of protest due to their disruptive theatricality. The situation videos offer an alternative voice to mediated images and everyday interactions in public spaces. Rather than offering an overarching narration of individuals in the public space, Rankine looks at how public experiences affect individual lives. In part, it documents the microaggressions that then feed into macroaggressions such as police brutality and mass incarceration. Her argument is that these aggressions stem from the imagined fears of white Americans.

Michelle Alexander, in *The New Jim Crow,* shows how laws, regulations and informal rules, reinforced by social stigma, push African American men to the margins of mainstream society: "they are legally denied the ability to obtain employment, housing and public benefits" in a similar manner to the segregated, second-class citizenship of African Americans in the Jim Crow era. She argues that mass incarceration in the United States is a "stunningly comprehensive and well disguised system of racialised social control that functions in a manner strikingly similar to Jim Crow" (4). The staggering increases in incarceration rates in Black communities are often credited to consequences of poverty, racial segregation, unequal

education opportunities and the presumed realities of the drug market.[32] Alexander argues that the racial dimension of mass incarceration is its most striking feature. This racial dimension is emphasised in her observation that "the U.S imprisons a larger percentage of its Black population than South Africa did at the height of apartheid approximately 750 per 100,000 people" (6). By mass incarceration, she refers to

> not only to the criminal justice system but also to the larger web of laws, rules, policies and customs that control those labelled criminals both in and out of prison. Once released former prisoners enter a hidden underworld of legalised discrimination and permanent social exclusion. (13)

Despite most Americans being opposed to race discrimination and endorsing colorblindness, the current penal system locks a huge percentage of the African American community out of mainstream society. The system operates through institutions of criminal justice but functions more like a segregation system than one of crime control. Alexander comments that the system of mass incarceration operates with stunning efficiency to sweep people of colour off the streets, lock them in cages and then release them into an inferior second-class structure (100). The discretion granted to law enforcement officials with regards to whom they stop, search, arrest and charge for drug offenses is not regulated and any challenges to the racial disparities amongst these arrests are shut down. She states that "in at least fifteen states, Black men are admitted to prison on drug charges at a rate from twenty to fifty-seven times greater than that of white men" (96). These statistics reinforce dominant racial narratives about crime and criminality dating back to colonialism. While national narratives influence national literature and represent commentary on the transformations of biological and ideological concepts of racial difference "the literature has an additional concern and subject matter: the private imagination interacting the external world it inhabits" (Morrison 65-66). Darren Wilson, the police officer responsible for the death of Michael Brown, told the jury that he shot Brown because he looked like a demon. While most Americans swiftly deny the accusation that the U.S criminal justice system is a tool of racial control, there is a lack of understanding regarding how racial oppression actually works, "because mass incarceration is officially colorblind, it

32 In 2014 African Americans constituted 2.3 million, or 34%, of the total 6.8 million correctional population. They are also incarcerated at more than five times the rate of white Americans. Although African Americans and Hispanic people make up approximately 32% of the U.S population they comprised 56% of all incarcerated people in 2015 (www.naacp.org/criminal-justice-fact-sheet/).

seems inconceivable that the system could function much like a racial caste system" (Alexander 178).

In "Situation 7", Rankine narrates an incident aboard a train, in which some unidentified individual notices that one woman would rather stand than sit next to a Black man, who quietly stares out the train window. The anonymous bystander quickly fills the seat next to the man but she states "the man doesn't acknowledge you as you sit down because the man knows more about the unoccupied seat than you do," He understands first-hand the experiences of moving through public spaces as a Black man and while the bystander attempts to imagine he can only manufacture a fantasy of the man's private experience of communal spaces. Through his silent repose the man retains authority over his private thoughts which simultaneously draw the bystander to his experience within intimate public environments. Alexander notes an interesting point with regards to American society's understanding of racism. She argues that it is influenced by shocking images of the Jim Crow era and the struggle for civil rights, "therefore shaped by the most extreme expressions of individual bigotry, not by the way in which it functions naturally almost invisibly when it is embedded in the structure of a social system" (Alexander 178).

Alexander argues that the most important parallel between mass incarceration and Jim Crow is that both have served to define the meaning and significance of race in America. Jim Crow defined what it meant to be a second-class citizen. For her, mass incarceration "defines the meaning of Blackness in America: Black people, especially Black men, are criminals" (4). Even though African Americans are not significantly more likely to use or sell prohibited drugs than white Americans, they are made criminals at drastically higher rates for the same conduct. Mass incarceration has produced a racial stigma similarly to the slave, in the fact that Black people are often considered criminals over other races. In "situation 5: in memory of Trayvon Martin" Rankine describes the criminalisation of Black men, "my brothers are notorious. They have not been to prison. They have been imprisoned. The prison is not a place you enter. It is no place" (89). This imprisonment has stemmed:

> Those years of and before me and my brothers, the years of passage, plantation, migration, of Jim Crow segregation, of poverty, inner cities, profiling, of one in three, two jobs, boy, hey boy, each a felony, accumulate into the hours inside our lives…. (89-90)

The critical point here is that, for Black men, the stigma of being a "criminal" in the era of mass incarceration is fundamentally a *racial* stigma. Alexander emphasises that this is not to say stigma is absent for white criminals but rather, that the stigma of criminality for white

offenders is a non-racial stigma. She explores how the term "white criminal" is nonsensical because it lacks social meaning. For her, "what it means to be criminal in [America's] collective consciousness has become conflated with what it means to be Black" (193). The War on Drugs constructed an expression of anti-Black resentment. While it is no longer permissible to be racist, one can be critical of criminals. The U.S criminal justice system "provides a vehicle for the expression of conscious and unconscious anti-Black sentiment that the prison label is experienced as a racial stigma." For those who have been branded as criminal, the branding serves to intensify and deepen the racial stigma, as they are constantly reminded in virtually every contact they have with public agencies, as well as with private employers and landlords, that they are second class citizens:

> Throughout the criminal justice system, as well as in our schools and public spaces, young + Black + male is equated with reasonable suspicion, justifying the arrest, interrogation, search, and detention of thousands of African Americans every year, as well as their exclusion from employment and housing and the denial of educational opportunity. Because Black youth are viewed as criminals, they face severe employment discrimination and are also "pushed out" of schools through racially biased school discipline policies. (Alexander 54)

There is a certain mutability in the understanding of citizenship with regards to the Black body. The public sphere is a dangerous space for the Black male body to move around in. In "Stop-and-Frisk," two African American males can be seen trying on streetwear in a clothing store. They shift into different versions of the same caricature of the Black male. Trying on hooded sweatshirts, flat caps and repeatedly pulling their hoods up and down and looking at themselves in a shop mirror. The video is shot from the perspective of the mirror and is juxtaposed with the red and blue hues of a police vehicle's flashing lights. There is recorded audio from a 911 call, with a woman saying that "it sounds like a male," which plays in between Rankine narrating an experience of racial profiling by a police officer while driving. The two men and their slight alterations of the same persona link to Rankine's words: "and you are not the guy and still you fit the description because there is only one guy who is always the guy fitting the description" (105).

Rankine's narration in "Stop and Frisk" expresses the experience of a driver being pulled over by a police officer. The incident seems to be recurrent to the speaker when they state that they knew they would be pulled over. The lines: "Yes officer rolled around on my tongue which grew out of a bell that could never ring because its emergency was a tolling I was meant to swallow" refer to the silencing of Black Americans at the hands of racial profiling. Despite

claims from law officials that they do not engage in racial profiling in *United States v. Brigoni-Ponce*, the Court concluded that it was permissible under the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment for the police to use race as a factor in making decisions about which motorists to stop and search (Alexander 128). In that case, the Court concluded that the police could take a person's Mexican appearance into account when developing reasonable suspicion that a vehicle may contain undocumented immigrants. The Court said that "the likelihood that any person of Mexican ancestry is an alien is high enough to make Mexican appearance a relevant factor" (Alexander 128). As such, police are granted permission to rely on racial stereotyping when making discretionary decisions.

Rankine released "Situation 8" in 2016, another collaboration with Lucas, the video consists of hand-held recordings and CCTV surveillance of police brutality against Black men in the United States.[33] The video opens with Rankine's voiceover establishing public spaces shared by Black and white bodies: "daily we share the same elevators, streets, corridors, stairways, sidewalks, highways, arenas, restrooms, lobbies, subways" and the concept of public trust is introduced. (9:35-9:45). Rankine states that public trust relies on "an implicit understanding and a mode of seeing," one that does not allow for the racialised stereotypes of the Black male as criminal to exist. The video showcases recorded audio from a 911 call with contrasting CCTV footage of the "suspect," unarmed and walking around a grocery store. The caller states that he is armed with a gun and pointing it at people. The video unpacks Rankine's continued metaphor of visibility versus invisibility. The bodies of Black men pose a great threat to the white imaginary, as such they are the most vulnerable to brutalisation in these public spaces. As such, "Situation 8" addresses the white imaginary by asking `whiteness to look carefully and rather than seeing an imaginary figure resulting from stereotypical brutish depictions of Black bodies, perceive what is in front of them.

The awareness of the level of police violence that Black women experience is exceedingly low. In *Citizen* the focus of police violence is restricted to its impact on Black men with few mentions of the experience that woman face. While Rankine does express how the Black female body is viewed in public – her interrogation does not include the narratives of women such as Sandra Bland, Michelle Cusseax, Tanisha Anderson, Aura Rosser and Meagan Hockaday who were killed by police between 2014 and 2016.[34] The erasure of these women

[33] The film "situation 8" is available at: https://vimeo.com/channels/situations/152362755

[34] The most noticeable of these cases was the murder of Sandra Bland, a 28-year old Black woman who died in police custody in 2015. She was arrested for failing to signal while changing lanes. She was found dead 'by hanging' in her cell three days later.

stems from the positioning of these murders within the larger narrative of general violence against African Americans and then more specifically the narrative of violence against women. Many concerns of social justice, such as racism and sexism overlap – creating multiple levels of social injustice. These women's experiences fall through the cracks because the available narratives surrounding their deaths overlap in frames of both police brutality and gender-based violence. As a response to this, the African American Policy Forum began demanding that participants at Black Lives Matter protests and gatherings "say her name" (Crenshaw 14:03) to include the experiences of these women where state violence against Black bodies is being discussed. This helps ensure that participants bear witness to "the everyday violence and humiliation that many Black women have had to face, Black women across colour, age, gender expression, sexuality and ability" (Crenshaw 14:06).

Disrupting rape culture through poetics: An exploration into Putuma's "backchat" in *Collective Amnesia*.

This section is concerned with the stylistic use of the concept of "backchat" by Putuma in *Collective Amnesia*. Putuma's poetics here reads as a resistance to rape culture in South Africa and an undoing of the silence surrounding violent masculinities in society. The poems "On Black Solidarity" and "Oh Dear God, Please! Not another Rape Poem," highlight the pervasiveness of rape culture in which the speaker's tone enacts as a "speaking back" to entrenched patriarchal discourses.

In *Rape: A South African Nightmare*, Gqola suggests the ability of fiction to enable consciousness of those unclaimed and unrecognised incidents of rape culture and sexual violence. In a society where, sexual violence is not readily spoken about, works of fiction help to "flesh out the hints, suggestions and confirmed instances that are not fully told as stories" (Gqola 172). Fiction allows for a terrain where the contradictions of silence are explained and can be considered sources of knowledge not otherwise gained by everyday discussions. The instances of "outlaw speech" demonstrated by the #RUReferencelist protests of 2016 cannot be separated from the broader context of student discontent following the Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall movements of 2015-2016. Putuma's work "revisits and updates a persistent and deep-rooted feature of South African politic that makes struggles against gender and other injustices secondary to struggles against racial injustice" (Vetten 1).

Her poem "On Black Solidarity", offers readers insight into the presence of violent masculinities in the recent student protests and the history of protest spaces in South Africa.

The speaker writes that "Black solidarity at the expense of a black womxn's anything, is a farce, a rip-off," (Putuma 80). The poem critiques Fees Must Fall for failing to develop a nuanced theory and praxis around gender and sexuality and its use of a political rhetoric that was often masculine and nationalist in nature. For instance, Chumani Maxwele, a leader of Rhodes Must Fall came under fire after images of him physically assaulting a fellow member and calling her *stabane* circulated.[35]This reveals how women, queer and trans persons often found themselves in a space that was "centred around cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied men" but their concerns were often silenced despite their presence making up the protest numbers publicly (CSVR 65). As if in dialogue, in section 5 of the poem the speaker asks the implied reader "how come references to your revolution are only limited to biko, fanon and malcom?" (80). Historically, from slave and anti-colonial resistance to the Unity Movement, African National Congress, Pan African Congress, Black Consciousness Movement, the South African Communist Party, freedom from apartheid in these movement foregrounded racist oppression and persecution (Gqola 62) while neglecting and "undermining Black womxn's struggle" (Gqola 62). The speaker in section 9, here positions herself as the Black male telling women that their issues will divide Black people and that their personal concerns must wait:

> Terms and Conditions of your solidarity:
> - No feminism
> - Limited feminism
> - No feminism that exposes patriarchy
> - No feminism that disturbs patriarchy (Putuma 81-82)

Her politics are of no concern to the male leaders in these movements echoing her sentiments in section 6 where she states that these men undermine Black women's struggle by insisting that their concerns will divide the movement and that "the revolution does not need all that sass and feminist noise" (Putuma 81). Busisiwe Deyi, a queer Trans feminist activist, speaks to the role of Black consciousness in redefining contemporary Black masculinity in the 5th issue of *Frank Talk*. She speaks for a lack of "Black-masculine consciousness" stemming from the movement because of how men have conceptualised their "masculine identities within an oppressive system" (4). She argues that because Black men were socialised under apartheid as always being inferior to the white man, Black Consciousness was understood to be a validation of manhood. Raymond Suttner states that under apartheid, declarations of masculinity were understood as assertions of adult agency (qtd. in Gqola 156). While it is difficult to read the

[35] A derogatory term for homosexual.

assertion of manhood as automatically creating a patriarchal relationship with women, because not all claims to masculinity are in and of themselves assertions of violence, hypermasculinity is "a heightened claim to patriarchal manhood, to aggression, strength and sexuality" (Gqola 154).

When the claim to manhood is accompanied by masculinist organisational culture then it implies hierarchical relationships between genders. Michele Wallace's "Black Macho" was the image of the hypersexualised Black man that was appropriated by Black Power advocates and transfigured into the ideal Black freedom fighter who reads the quest for Black liberation as the search for manhood. The infantilization of Black men by the apartheid struggle meant that the struggle for manhood was the struggle for dignity and reclamation of rights as an adult human being. However, in response to the infantilization of Black men, "the claim to recover from emasculation often requires the performance of hypermasculinity that women are expected to support as part of enabling these men to attain manhood" (Gqola 157). The speaker in "Black Solidarity" speaks back to these men stating that women involved in these movements "… can no longer hold [black men's] secrets and fragility" (Putuma 80). Violent masculinities create a public consciousness in which violence is acceptable, natural and desirable. The speaker states that it is "the kind of violence they shed into laughter at the police station and replay in front of you just to make sure you got the joke" (Putuma 80). This consciousness codes hypermasculinity as an assertion of political agency and heroism. The pervasive culture of violence also means that when others defend themselves, or stand up for themselves by questioning violent men, the latter groups become available for attack by the defenders of violent men using threats of violence to silence dissent and enhance female fear and subordination (Gqola 153).

When former president Jacob Zuma sang "*umshini wam*" when he was accused of rape, he located himself in the realm of heroic and militant masculinity of the anti-apartheid struggle.[36] His performance presented a legacy that is recognisable to most South African audiences and used the struggle song's symbolic legacy to cast the complainant, Khwezi, as a political enemy. Gqola argues that Zuma "understood the power of heroic masculinity, having previously embodied it himself, and knew how to reference it to shame Khwezi" (158). She goes on to state that:

[36] A struggle song made popular by the African National Congress' military wing, Umkhonto weSizwe, during apartheid. The song's title translates in English to "Bring me my machine gun" (Mangena 1). Liz Gunner, in "Jacob Zuma, The Social Body and the Unruly Power of Song," explores the implications of the song in relation to the masculine presence he asserted in the South African political sphere.

> The spectacle of Zuma's performance evoked the militancy associated with the armed struggle, the anger that was underlined as the appropriate response to apartheid, and the importance of taking up arms as self-defence against, and attack on, a brutal white supremacist regime. (160)

The language and iconography borrow from the struggle and invite the public to view Zuma's prosecution as unjust. When Zuma took up his metaphorical machine gun, he was implying that Khwezi and all those who believed her and questioned his behaviour "were agents of the apartheid state" (Gqola 161). Kimberly Yates notes that spectacular masculinities, like any system of domination dogmatically and inhumanely requires the immediate extermination of any views contrary to their own via sever punishment (qtd. in Gqola 165). Much that transpired inside and outside the court during Zuma's rape trial was instructive of how South Africans deal "with rape, why rape survivors make certain choices and the ways in which the legal system responds to and treats rape complainants" (Gqola 102). Violence against Black women is trivialised within protest spaces because Black women are deemed by Black men as impossible to rape. The infantilization of Black men by the suppressive order, denies them the masculine power to inflict violence against the female body (Gqola 157). During Fees Must Fall, a UCT student tweeted the name and photograph of another student and fellow Fees Must fall activist who she accused of raping her. The man in question "forced his fingers into the vagina of another Rhodes Must Fall protester" (Mugo 1). UCT's administration downgraded the incident from a rape to sexual assault because according to its' institutional policy "a rape has occurred only if a penis has penetrated a vagina" (Mugo 1).

Fees Must Fall foregrounded intersectionality as pertinent to decolonisation in its mission statement. The movement held the potential to open up a space for the exploration and expression of the complexities of what it means to be Black in contemporary South Africa. Intersectionality requires the politics of those in the contemporary moment to be taken up by the movement with as much vigour as the call for free decolonised tertiary education. In section 8 of the poem, Putuma addresses the implied reader, which in this context, refers to a Black male fallist, "endorse intersectionality but not at the expense of your praise and visibility" (81). While these narratives rarely claim to be speaking for all members of the Black collective, all of the time but rather they hope to represent most of the collective most of the time. The speaker in "Black Solidarity" emphasises that "[black men] can assert [their] position without negating [black women's] presence. / [They] can take up space without making [black women] invisible" (Putuma 80). However, certain bodies are foregrounded and as a result one looks only for similar bodies. This produces inaccurate history whereby future generations are raised

on histories that primarily feature men. This results in "repeated discursive erasure from/ or marginalisation of vulnerable identities." Fees Must Fall showed similar divisions as a result of the movement's minority group's experiences of erasure, exclusion and abuse. The UCT Trans Collective, a group of gender diverse students disrupted a public exhibition honouring the #RMF movement in 2016. They staged a nude protest which raised deep cutting issues around representation, inclusivity and diversity in the movement. In a public post on Facebook the collective stated that it is disingenuous to represent trans people in a public gallery when their issues were not taken seriously during the movement's private meetings, they stated that "we are done with arrogant cis heteropatriarchy of Black men" and the movement's use of "intersectionality as public persuasion rhetoric" (CSVR 72). Despite the media and public appearances fairly representing the LGBTI community, they were only acknowledged when addressing their experience of financial and class oppression and not to their experiences stemming from their gender and sexuality. They asked the movement not to tokenise their presence, and that they will "not have [their] bodies, faces, names and voices used as bait for public applause" (CSVR 72).

The title of Putuma's poem "Oh Dear God, Please! Not another rape poem," points to the prevalence of rape and sexual violence in South Africa. Between 2016 and 2017 the South African Police Service (SAPS) recorded just over six thousand sexual assault cases and close to forty thousand reported rapes. Anti-abuse campaigns on international social media such as #MeToo, #TimesUp and local campaigns such as #RUreferencelist and #RhodesWar attempted to disrupt in conventional discussions around sexual violence in the public sphere. According to Lisa Vetten "not all forms of sexual violence are defined as crimes in South Africa" (ISS Policy Brief 72, 2). Despite figures provided by SAPS, some cases of sexual victimisation are hidden because rape is extensively under-reported in South Africa. The One in Nine Campaign indicates that in 2006, on a national level, only 1-in-9 women who had been raped reported the attack to the police.[37]

Low levels of reporting are not unique to South Africa, but it does call into question the validity of figures released by SAPS on an annual basis. Reasons for not reporting sexual assault stem largely from what Gqola calls "the manufacture of female fear," which uses the threat of rape and other bodily wounding to "remind women that they are not safe and that their bodies are not entirely theirs" (79). Gqola states that the manufacture of female fear is an

[37] The One in Nine Campaign was established in 2006 at the start of the rape trial of former president Jacob Zuma to ensure the expression of solidarity with the woman in that trial, for more details see: https://oneinnine.org.za/about-us/

exercise of power that keeps women in check and often results in women curtailing their movement in a physical and psychological manner:

> [it] works to silence women by reminding us of our rapability, and therefore Blackmails us to keep ourselves in check. It also sometimes works to remind some men and trans-people that they are like women, and therefore rapable. It is a public fear that is repeatedly manufactured through various means in many private and public settings. (79-80)

Gqola uses the story of Anene Booysen to show how elusive safety is for women[38]. Booysen was accused of reckless behaviour, being in the wrong place at the wrong time, despite drinking at a tavern close to her home, drinking with friends and leaving with a male escort rather than leave alone: "she followed the script given to girls and young women about safety- she did not go too far away, and when she chose to drink, she did so with people she knew. When she left the tavern, she did not leave alone" (85).

Rape culture is a patriarchal desire to control, monitor, and police all aspects of women's lives. The rape survivor invariably feels that what happened to her is at least partly her fault. She is then scared to speak out due to feelings of guilt, and sometimes might fear retribution. Another problem we face here is dealing with the stigma attached to this crime which causes so many perpetrators of this violent crime to go free (Gqola 96). The pervasiveness of rape culture in South Africa stems from a continuation of myths and stereotypes about rape and rape survivors which trivialises their experiences. Rape culture reduces rape to sex and denies the harm associated with it[39]. Vetten states that the contribution of rape myths to a culture of male sexual entitlement and the normalisation of rape suggests that a high level of rape myth acceptance coincides with very high levels of rape (ISS Policy Brief 72 6). Gqola argues that the successful conviction of rape is dependent on "how closely a survivor's rape resembles her society's idea of what a rape looks like, who rapes, who can be raped, when and how" (29). I'd like to start off with Gqola's definition of rape:

> Rape is the communication of patriarchal power, reigning in, enforcing submission and punishing defiance. It is an extreme act of aggression and of power, always gendered and enacted against the feminine. The feminine may not always be embodied in a woman's body; it may be enacted against a child of any gender, a man who is considered inappropriately masculine and any gender non-conforming people. Rape has also been

[38] Booysen was a 17-year-old woman from Bredasdorp in the Western Cape, who was raped and disembowelled after leaving a tavern with her brother's peer in 2013.

[39] I use the term rape survivor instead of rape victim, I take the view that the term survivor does not take away from a person's agency in the same way as being labelled a victim.

> central to the spread of white supremacy and the way race and racism have organised the world over the last four hundred years. (21)

Here, Gqola outlines three key elements of what rape is. Firstly, it is about power— not sex, there is a misconception of rape being "inappropriate sex" and this leads to shaming of the survivor and the dismissal of the severity of the crime. Secondly, that it is a patriarchal tool used to oppress the feminine in society using the notion of female fear and the praising of violent masculinities in society. Considering rape as a patriarchal tool allows for an explanation of incidents of corrective rape because lesbian women are marked as inappropriately sexual. Thirdly, rape is intrinsically linked to colonisation and the oppression of Black bodies. For Gqola it is impossible to talk about rape without talking about race. Rape myths hold severe implications for who is held accountable/responsible. This section reads Putuma's "Oh Dear God, Please! Not another rape poem" as speaking back to the "female fear factory" Gqola outlines in *Rape: A South African Nightmare* to show how Putuma disrupts the conventional narrative of rape in society.

The poem reads as an outline or essay plan consisting of a preface, introduction, body, conclusion and then a reference list/bibliography. The form seems oddly formal for Putuma's style, despite the elements of slam poetry remaining. It could possibly be read as an outline for a formal argument against rape culture with the bullet points listed as points of discussion and debate. The poem's form holds links to Jane Bennet's argument on the credibility and plausibility of rape survivor testimonies. For Bennet the plausibility of a testimony is dependent on the hearer and what the hearer deems possible. The speaker is presenting the implied hearer/ audience with an argument that the hearer would need to deem plausible or not. A rape testimony is plausible when:

1. The listener/ reader is open to believing and understanding what is being presented.
2. The listener/ reader finds that the different events and aspects of what is being told individually make sense.
3. The listener/reader is convinced of the connections between said events and the aspects of the narrated rape.
4. The listener/reader is able to make sense of everything in how they think the world works.

(Cited in Gqola 30)

Bennet's argument on credibility depends on how believable the speaker is. In this case, the speaker needs to fall into a category that is seen as "possible-to-rape" (Gqola 31), some people are not considered to be "possible-to-rape": sex workers, wives, slave women and men. Finally,

credibility also implies that the accused must fall into a category of "potential rapists": strangers, poor men, Black men, socially inept men (Gqola 32).

If one considers the speaker presenting an outline of her testimony to an implied audience, then the audience's worldview would ultimately define the result of the speaker's conviction. As is seen in Bennet's argument, there is very little consideration for the speaker's testimony but more so on the believability of her testimony in relation to what the audience deems possible. In "Oh dear God, Please! Not another rape poem," the audience's response is pre-empted as being resistant to the speaker's view. In the addendum, the speaker proclaims that the title of the poem can be read as a "loud sigh" (Putuma 91), suggesting the listener' sense of fatigue or apathy, a mood indicative of the broader society's reluctance to take rape seriously. As Bennet's argument points out, a large part of the conviction process on rape trials is dependent on the implied audience. If an audience is unwilling to challenge the myths surrounding rape and the underlying tensions of rape culture in the world around them, then there is little chance of a successful conviction against a rapist who does not "fit the mould" of who they consider possible rapists to be. Putuma is challenging her reader's own points of view regarding rape culture by positioning them as the implied audience of this poem.

If the general population is considered the implied hearer in the poem, then a plausible rape conviction, in their worldview, would read as follows:

> The accused, a Black man abducted the female student from outside her school and assaulted her. The victim has clear signs of being raped, her body shows visible cuts and bruises and she went directly to the police following the incident. The victim's rape kit shows positive signs of the assault being true and as such the police began their search for the accused. The accused bears no relation to the victim and he appears violent and has been charged on previous accounts of assault and public violence.

In this instance the testimony is plausible on these accounts: firstly, the man falls into the category of possible rapist because of his race, his lack of relation to the victim and his tendency towards violence. Secondly, the victim, a school girl who showed visible markings of trauma, can be conceived of as "possible-to-rape," she is a minor and therefore has no sexual history nor agency that would allow her to resist the event taking place. Thirdly, she reported the incident to the police and they could retrieve the necessary evidence to pursue the matter further.

However, as the poem shows, rape is a far more complicated matter. While instances like the one above are prevalent in society, more often than not, the matter hits closer to home. In the poem, the speaker's uncle is accused of sexual misconduct with his nieces (Putuma 89).

This supports Vetten's claim that "girls under the age of 12 are especially likely to be raped by someone known to them, with relatives, friends and neighbours perpetrating 84% of rapes reported by girls in this age category" (ISS Policy Brief 72 3). The accusation of a familial patriarch complicates the plausibility of the speaker's testimony. The women in her family, while possibly acknowledging the uncle's misconduct, do not aid the speaker in addressing the issue. In the preface, Putuma writes: "*some mothers set their daughters alight to keep their men warm/ and some family members would rather describe the smoke than smell it*" (89). These lines highlight the embedded patriarchal values imposed on the family structures that implicate women as perpetrators of violence. The implied image of fire and burning continues throughout the poem as a metaphor for the internalised guilt felt by the speaker and the women in her family for remaining silent on this matter. She describes her uncle as a "siren in some living rooms" (Putuma 89) and describes "hell burning between [the women's] thighs, too" (Putuma 91) in the conclusion of the poem. Putuma makes use of bracketed words in the introduction of the poem:

- Sometimes [hell] is a penis
- Sometimes [girls] repent just to save themselves from encountering the devil
- Sometimes [uncle] is a boyfriend, a random, a test you will keep taking but always fail
- Sometimes [uncle] is a siren in some living rooms
- Sometimes[uncle] is an aircon everyone is too lazy to adjust or switch off
- Sometimes [the daughters] are not left alone with him
- But [he] is not banned from family gatherings, either
- Sometimes [collateral damage] is another way of saying:
- I am a coward (89)

Brackets are primarily used to add words that the original speaker might not have mentioned. These brackets provide clarity to the speaker's situation. The ambiguity of the references made by the speaker such as "siren in some living rooms" and "an aircon everyone is too lazy to adjust or switch off" hold no weight if "uncle" was not placed into the sentence. The brackets visually draw attention to the uncle's position and the subsequent comparisons allude to his problematic behaviour. The victims of assault, "the daughters," are also inserted in brackets, this could indicate their lack of agency in the situation, they may be too young to resist the uncle's advances and their presence is not deemed important in the greater familial structure.

The poem concludes at an imagined family gathering; presumably, one of the gatherings the speaker mentions in the introduction. The speaker's attempt at further clarification is demonstrated in the continued use of parenthesis and bracketed words:

- (sometimes) hell is burning between their thighs, too
- (sometimes) they can no longer find salvation in their vows
- But the gospel has taught them how to stay
- Even when the devil is the one promising eternity
- It's easier to hold the [child] accountable for a "lie" than it is to hold the [uncle] accountable for the truth
- The [children] play hide-n-seek and find grown people's things in forbidden rooms
- The [family] is not interested in the nightmares they have after

Because

- No one wants to have x-mas dinner with skeletons
- And, anyway
- The [girls] were warned
- Hide-n-seek is for heathens
- And [girls] should not be out so late playing with ~~men~~ boys (Putuma 91)

There is a contrast between the words in parenthesis and the words in brackets. "Sometimes," softens the subsequent phrases and showcases a possible uncertainty on how often the women in the family are able to maintain their stance on the matter. "Uncle" appears in brackets once again as well as "children," and "girls" implying a forceful continuation of the uncle's inappropriate behaviour and the silencing/ ignoring of it by the family.

In fact, it is implied that the manifestation of rape culture in this family is exacerbated by religious traditions, suggested in the reference to Christmas as a significant religious occasion and in religious diction such as "hell," "salvation," "gospel" and "eternity" and "heathens." The line "the gospel taught them how to stay" suggests that the women are complicit in the uncle's actions because they have been policed to remain silent and stand by their men according to their wedding vows. The uncle's advances are not brought to light for fear that they will bring shame upon the family and within the Christian faith one is taught to respect their elders and to be submissive to the patriarchs of the family.

If the perpetrator is a family member, pressing charges against them becomes difficult. In the statistics released by SAPS annually, the relationship between the survivor and the perpetrator is never mentioned. As the speaker mentions, it is easier for the family to dismiss the lies of their children than it is for them to face the truth of the uncle's actions. Most cases of sexual assault are not reported if the victim knows the perpetrator, fearing a "loss of financial support if the rapist is a family member, stigma, protecting loved ones from the consequences of the rapist being arrested and fear of further violence by the rapist and those associated with him" (Gqola 148).

Further on in the poem, the speaker's argument comprises of a juxtaposition of references to mainstream culture and then to rape culture:

Many things are cultural like:
- Oppikoppi
- Nike
- theatre
- Afrikaburn
- Church
- Crop tops

  Sometimes [rape] is placed in the same sentence as culture.
  Rape culture:
  - A term that makes the act seem like
  - Something you could wear (~~voluntarily~~)
  - Or wash
  - Or take off
  - Or drop off at the laundry
  - Or buy tickets to see
  - Or an experience you are excited to tweet about
  - Or a meme that goes viral
  - Or something whites anticipate to appropriate
  - Or a zol passed around at a bonfire
  - Or salt at the dinner table (Putuma 89-90)

The speaker mocks white South African's superficial national culture. Oppikoppi and Afrikaburn are music festivals attended by majority white, middle-class South Africans and Nike and crop tops seem to be a fashion-favourite by the same festival attendees. These stanzas provide a sharp contrast between the introduction and conclusion of the poem and the body of the poem. In the introduction and conclusion, the reader encounters a very raw account of the severity of silencing sexual violence, whereas the body of the poem associates rape culture with the frivolity of meme culture and music festivals. Putuma uses an unsettling tone to show how rape is discussed in conventional, everyday discourse. The normalisation of rape and sexual violence undermines the complex realities of rape and rape survivors.

The speaker provides an extensive reference list for her argument, some of the points have been included below:

- Patriarchs
- Proverbs 31
- Black solidarity
- Apologists

- #naked protests
- Mini skirts
- Drunk girls
- Campus
- Hoes
- Twerking
- Slutty behaviour
- Sluts in general (Putuma 92)

The use of terms like "hoes" and "sluts in general" points to the act of "slut-shaming" as a tool to police women's behaviour. Both terms are derogatory toward women and are often used to describe women who are sexually active, sexually promiscuous and dress in a manner that shows their bodies off. These are all aspects of femininity that are not condoned by the patriarchy. Women are raped in all manners of dress and undress. There is no correlation between how a woman dresses and her ability to escape rape. This links back to Gqola's notion of the female fear factory, women are taught to not drink and to dress conservatively, because if they do not, they will be raped. The act of slut-shaming places all blame on the survivor of rape for their conduct rather than on the perpetrator. Women are taught to not get raped, whereas men are *not* taught to *not* rape.

The call for the University currently known as Rhodes (UCKAR) to change its sexual assault policy began with student-led campaign #Chapter212, which publicly challenged the university's insufficient support to victims of sexual violence. The campaign sought to challenge the university's definition of rape as "an unlawful and intentional act of sexual penetration with another person without that person's consent" (Pilane 1). The #Chapter212 campaign highlighted the mistreatment of UCKAR students on a management level. [40] In April 2016, a list bearing the names of eleven men was circulated on a campus Facebook page. The post was titled "reference list" and it was revealed that those named were alleged rapists on the campus. The following protests dubbed #RUReferencelist, protested the prevalence of rape culture on UCKAR campus and the protection of the accused from proper prosecution.

UCKAR is notably a progressive space that supports fight against rape and sexual violence. The Silent Protest was formed by a small group of gender activists who stood in solidarity with Khwezi. It has since expanded to other universities where, every year, a day is spent showing solidarity with survivors of sexual violence. UCKAR's policy is not unique, but rather a microcosm that "exposes South Africa's rape culture and the continuous burden it places on

[40] The right to freedom and security of the person in the South African Bill of Rights

victims" (Pilane 1). Vetten argues that the under-reporting of rape and sexual assault reflects the lack of trust and confidence in institutional structures to handle these matters. #Chapter212 revealed comments made by prosecutors, students and management to those seeking to lay complaints of rape. These posters included students being asked "if they really wanted to ruin promising young men's careers by pursuing their complaints or being told there was insufficient evidence to warrant pursuing a complaint" (Vetten 1). These comments are symbolic gestures of hegemonic power to silence students within the University. On the removal of these posters by campus security, Vetten argues that the Reference List is "the sort of rogue speech that seeks to disrupt by stating what has become unsayable" (Vetten 1). Initial acts of rogue speech trace back to 1989, when anonymous pamphlets were distributed at the University of Cape Town accusing five men of rape and an anthropology student submitted a thesis at the University of the Western Cape which sparked calls for the adoption of policies and procedures addressing sexual coercion (Vetten 1):

> "Within the context of militant opposition to apartheid, when the struggle against racism was seen to trump that against sexism, Collette Solomon's thesis pointed to how sexual coercion by male student activists and leaders literally could not be spoken of by women students" (Vetten 1).

The "Reference List" comes as a symbol of frustration against that silencing. Students opted to move outside the traditional form of reporting their assaults as the system in place presently has and had been failing them. Students sought to change the definition of rape in the university's sexual assault policy and ensure that survivors were protected, and the accused were held accountable for their actions. Students shut down campus and provided a space that physically disrupted the norm regarding rape culture. By closing the university, other students were forced to listen to the participants and confront rape culture head on. A component of #RUreferencelist was the naked protest. Women stood topless to reclaim their bodies and desexualize the female form. The significance of the naked protest speaks to survivors reclaiming their bodies from the patriarchy. A woman's body is usually presented for the male gaze in a submissive and silent form but in the context of protest it is a fighting, speaking, defiant body. It speaks the language of someone vulnerable, yet powerful and strong at the same time. Representations by national and international media cast the student protestors as irrational, emotional and violent radicals, they draw public attention away from the discussions about rape culture and patriarchal social structures. They also contribute to a violent racist

discourse that constructs women, and in particular Black women, as "overly emotional, 'angry', and unwilling to hear reason" (Haith 1).

Victims of sexual assault are told to remain silent in the name of the revolutionary matter at hand. In a number of cases women and LGBTQI persons have been sexually violated by movement leaders but are silenced because they threaten to dismantle the work that the movement is trying to achieve. Thenjiwe Mswane, a key member of the Fees Must Fall movement states that "when Black female bodies [are] going into spaces that are predominantly Black male spaces there isn't [ever] a sense of being completely safe" (Pilane 1). The space is also grossly violent against queer bodies. The violation on on-heterosexual male bodies is something that happens continuously within these spaces of student protest. She explains that these concerns stem from a lack of intersectional understanding of Blackness: "it was all very well and good to understand that the world can be a tar pit of despair when experiencing it as a Black person, but what of experiencing it as a Black woman? Or a Black queer person? Or a Black trans person?" The side-lining of women and nonbinary members occurred frequently during the protests despite the movement's claims of being representative of an intersectional revolutionary praxis. *Collective Amnesia* was published a year after the #RUreferencelist protests. Whether or not the speaker's reference list was inspired by the protests both share a common political goal to disrupt the conventional narrative regarding rape.

The speaker concludes the poem with "evidence" of her uncle's coercive behaviour:

- *Hug uncle*
- *Greet uncle*
- *Stop being funny*
- *Stop being antisocial*
- *Give uncle a kiss*
- *Sit on uncle's lap*

The use of italics emphasises the uncle's words to the speaker. These small instances of sexual coercion are not enough for them to be deemed as sexual assault, acts like this are often condoned in society because they are not outright violent. This stanza links to Gqola's reference to the One-in-Nine's Campaign statistics:

> Some forms of sexual violence, too, are socially constructed as acceptable because of the nature of the relationship within which they occur. Thus, a distinction is often made between "rape" and "coercion to have sex," with the latter comprising the vast majority of sexual violence— those not involving "overt" violence and where the perpetrators are members of the family or boyfriends and husbands (147-148).

Vetten further notes that majority of the reasons rape is not reported stems from a fear of "the power and authority of the abuser," "fear of upsetting the stability of the family" and "fear of loss of economic support by the abuser" (ISS Policy Brief 72 3).

Putuma's work helps to destabilise the conventional myth of rape in South Africa. She complicates the matter by drawing the audience into the speaker's home and allowing them to observe how patriarchal attitudes and rape culture often result in the silencing of rape survivors. The extensive nature of her "evidence," allows the reader, as the implied hearer, to determine the plausibility of the uncle's misconduct. It is up to the reader to decide whether in their world view that the speaker's argument is credible.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has shown the limitations of racialised reading and the linear progress narrative in articulating a more inclusive understanding of Blackness in the current age. When approaching literature written by Black authors through the lens of a counter-discourse or reading the work of Black male theorists as the sole definition of Black consciousness: the work of Black female authors and poets often lose their nuanced political significance.

By engaging with Rankine's *Citizen* and Putuma's *Collective Amnesia* at the intersection of where Blackness is defined historically along a linear progress narrative and through a phenomenological approach that engages with how Blackness is being performed in Epiphenomenal time, or the "now," one can ensure that a more intersectional and inclusive notion of Black identity is articulated. The use of experimental poetics by each poet, showcases what *they* consider to be political in their respect spacetimes. For Rankine, it is resisting the colorblind logic of post-racial America and for Putuma, the inherent patriarchal discourse in Black nationalist ideologies in post-apartheid South Africa. Their works showcase how by reconfiguring the spatial form of traditional poetry, they engage with their social conditions as they manifest themselves in everyday life. As vernacular intellectuals, the popular appeal of their respective collections allow for the engagement of political and social issues within the public sphere. Their work sparks discussion, debate and resists the erasure of marginalised narratives within the Black literary and theoretical canon.

The interdisciplinary approach used in this thesis stems from the desire to understand that literary works hold the potential to create their own forms of political theory. In order to consider a text from a multitude of vantage points, one cannot restrict their reading of the text in isolation from the moment it is borne out of. Most of the information on *Citizen* and *Collective Amnesia* stems from reader engagement in the form of reviews and online articles but little has been done in the academy on these texts just yet. The inclusion of Putuma's collection into curricula at the University of Stellenbosch and the University of Cape Town, show that the collection's popular appeal has allowed for her work to enter the academic sphere in a process of decolonising literary studies as they stand. The Fees Must Fall and Rhodes Must Fall protests spanning 2015-2016 called for the decolonisation of historically white universities such as those mentioned above. The inclusion of her collection into curricula in these institutions show that despite the masculinist and nationalist leadership of these movements, decolonisation of the curriculum is in fact taking place. Rankine's creation of *The Racial Imaginary Institute* following the Black Lives Matter protests and in the era of

"the new Jim Crow" in the United States, shows that race, specifically whiteness, is coming under scrutiny and the myth of a post-racial society is being interrogated. Given the rigid control that the American government has on state institutions, most of this disruption is occurring in works of art and literature during this time. This thesis acknowledges that without the work done by anti-colonial thinkers such as Césaire and Fanon, the works of Rankine and Putuma may have taken much longer to manifest themselves, especially within theoretical negotiations that, above all else signify the Black subject in the West. However, their discourses are not without fault when considering different variations of being Othered and operating on different interpretations of the dialectic construction of the nation-state. While these theorists did not reject the role of Black women in Western civilisation, they should be read as the first in a series of counter-discourses to the Black Other rather than the finite cannon of Black subjectivity. The emergence of the experimental poetics of these poets works to disrupt the conflation of the Black subject with the Black heteronormative male. This conflation stems from the Black subject coming into being through engaging with the Hegelian dialectic. Taking recognition as the primary means of subjecthood within Hegel's dialectic, Fanon shows that the Black man will never gain recognition in his Blackness but only through donning a white mask, which negates his Blackness. Negritude as articulated by Césaire also worked to resist the assimilation culture of colonial France, disrupting the French language to create an Antillean French that encapsulated the experiences of the Black man under French colonialism. Through this language he is able to articulate his consciousness and resist donning the white mask that Fanon argues results in a series of failures in the lived experience of the Black man.

Engaging with this debate on the agency of the Black subject, Wright shows how introducing a dialogical— as opposed to a dialectic— engagement of Black subjectivity allows for the Black female subject to come into being. For her, dialogue relies on the mutual recognition of speaking subjects. While many Black female writers feel "spoken for," in a similar manner to how the Black male subject is a spoken rather than speaking subject, a dialogic approach to their work shows how their work produces an omnivocal subject. In *Citizen,* the omnivocal subject is present in the disembodied voice of the speaker, articulating a variety of micro-aggressions and oppressions while specifically not purporting to be speaking for the experience of all Black subjects. In Putuma's work, we see the intersubjectivity of women and an intergenerational dialogue which looks at how the speaker navigates her world in relation to other women in her life, rather than in relation to other men. *Collective Amnesia* and *Citizen* both show how the trope of masking does not allow their

speaker's respective subjectivity to come into being. Rather, they find themselves deeper within Fanon's zone of nonbeing where masking allows them to move in public spaces, they cannot achieve subject status.

The exploration of Epiphenomenal time in the works considered in this thesis, show how they work as acts of Black sousveillance. The concept of sousveillance, as articulated by Browne, is "observation from below," these women look back at the gaze that renders them into the zone of nonbeing. The surveillance of the white and male gaze on the Black body often results in violence being enacted upon this bodies in public spaces. This surveillance does not stem from actively looking at Black people as human beings but rather is tainted through the perpetuation of racial stereotypes and as such is used to police the Black body in the public sphere. Rankine's situation videos are works of sousveillance, specifically "situation 8," released after *Citizen* was published but contains real footage, from social media, CCTV cameras which show police brutality and the work that African Americans are documenting themselves to show that they are being racially profiled by American police and white Americans. Rankine's narration discusses the notion of "public trust," which relies on mutual recognition between subjects as human beings, but the visuals show that the stereotypes of the African American are far too ingrained into the white imagination for them to engage in any form of public trust. Putuma's "backchat," is speaking back to the patriarchal discourse she faces as a womxn in South Africa. She holds male fallists to task in "On Black Solidarity" for their lack of intersectionality and the violence enacted on female and LGBTQI+ bodies during these protests. Her poem "Oh Dear God, Please! Not another Rape Poem," indicates the pervasive rape culture in South Africa, the policing of the female body not only in the public sphere but in the home, where incidents of sexual violence often occur more frequently but go under-reported. The social significance of these works cannot be limited to the texts alone, one needs to consider the political significance of Rankine and Putuma's respective lived experiences as influencing their poetry and suggesting alternative modes of being.

When Fanon wrote that "the explosion will not happen today. It is too soon… or too late" (*BSWM* 1), he further stated that his work did not hold timeless truths, yet he remains a significant political figure today and his influence is seen whenever questions of decolonisation and anti-black racism come up. Rankine and Putuma's work have presented themselves out of an explosive political climate in their respective societies. While not being purely responsive to the concerns of Black Lives Matter and Fees Must Fall, these movements have opened a space where concerns previously silenced are being called into

question. The movements themselves appear to have declined, the work of writers and theorists continue turning the praxis of these social movements into theory to disrupt academic discourse.

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