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About

Gender forum is an online, peer reviewed academic journal dedicated to the discussion of gender issues. As an electronic journal, *gender forum* offers a free-of-charge platform for the discussion of gender-related topics in the fields of literary and cultural production, media and the arts as well as politics, the natural sciences, medicine, the law, religion and philosophy. Inaugurated by Prof. Dr. Beate Neumeier in 2002, the quarterly issues of the journal have focused on a multitude of questions from different theoretical perspectives of feminist criticism, queer theory, and masculinity studies. gender forum also includes reviews and occasionally interviews, fictional pieces and poetry with a gender studies angle.

Opinions expressed in articles published in *gender forum* are those of individual authors and not necessarily endorsed by the editors of gender forum.

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Target articles should conform to current MLA Style (8th edition) and should be between 5,000 and 8,000 words in length. Please make sure to number your paragraphs and include a bio-blurb and an abstract of roughly 300 words. Files should be sent as email attachments in Word format. Please send your manuscripts to gender-forum@uni-koeln.de.

We always welcome reviews on recent releases in Gender Studies! Submitted reviews should conform to current MLA Style (8th edition), have numbered paragraphs, and should be between 750 and 1,000 words in length. Please note that the reviewed releases ought to be no older than 24 months. In most cases, we are able to secure a review copy for contributors.

Article Publishing

The journal aims to provide rapid publication of research through a continuous publication model. All submissions are subject to peer review. Articles should not be under review by any other journal when submitted to *Gender forum.*

There are no submission or page charges, and no colour charges.

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Editorial

1 This special issue of *Gender Forum* is the final issue of our yearly ECR issues. Eight years ago, former editorial assistant Dr. Laura-Marie Schnitzler (at this point she was still completing her PhD), was interested in fostering researchers who are at an early stage in their career. More often than not those researchers have hardly the possibility to publish and if at all, they might be able to publish a review. However, we wanted to offer researchers in their early years a platform where we can assist and support them by going the extra mile in peer-reviewing their articles. We also wanted to find a platform for some of the papers that have been written as part of their university education but needed to be adapted to publishable articles.

2 Over the past 9 years we have received some extraordinary papers and we were allowed to assist numerous writers turn papers or mere ideas into articles. We are very happy and grateful that we were able to support so many researchers. I have been part of the editorial team of *Gender Forum* for almost a decade now and have been assistant, editor and editorial manager throughout my years. However, this will also be my final issue and I hope that you will enjoy, as much as I did, this final issue of *Gender Forum*'s early career researchers.

3 Eight articles and two reviews cover a variety of LGBTQI* issues and offer critical readings of theatre plays, novels, popular television shows and much more. This issue, again, proves that gender studies is relevant and that queer readings are important in the current climate. Read, share, support.

Dr. Sarah Youssef
Editorial Manager

Posthuman female heroines and postfeminist limitations in HBO's *Westworld*

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Abstract

Westworld (2016-present) is one of the most popular and complex television narratives in recent years. Based on the classic 1973 science fiction film of the same title, the show's first two seasons are set in a technologically advanced Western-themed Park where human guests pay to interact in any way they wish with the hosts/androids that populate its world. Yet, unlike the robots of the 1973 version who easily betrayed their mechanical origin, this time the hosts blur the boundaries between human and machine, real and fabricated, thus posing significant questions about posthumanism. Furthermore, the depiction of the hosts as specifically embodied and gendered artificial beings, also raises questions surrounding postfeminism. These two concepts, namely posthumanism and postfeminism, are interwoven in the representation of two of the show's main protagonists, Dolores (Evan Rachel Wood) and Maeve (Thandie Newton), two female androids that begin to realize their fabricated reality and develop a new subjectivity. The article argues that despite the emancipating possibilities that an emergent posthuman subjectivity suggests, the show's posthuman heroines are finally constrained by the text's humanist and postfemininst limitations.

Introduction

1 *Westworld* (HBO, 2016-present) is one of the most popular and critically acclaimed HBO shows, as verified by the record ratings of its first season (Arandreeva, "Westworld Finale Hits Season High") and its multiple awards and nominations (e.g. a Golden Globe nomination for Best Television Series, among others). *Westworld* is adapted from the classic 1973 science fiction film of the same title, which was written and directed by Michael Crichton. Showrunners Jonathan Nolan and Lisa Joy and producer J. J. Abrams expanded the original concept, further convoluting the original premise in a labyrinthine structure. The intricate narrative structure of *Westworld*, frequent in a number of contemporary TV shows and characteristic of what Jason Mittell calls "complex TV" (2), equally match the show's perplexing thematic concepts, which complicate and unsettles common perceptions of what means to be human. Westworld is a technologically advanced Western-themed Park where visitors pay to interact in any way they wish with the hosts/androids that populate its world. Yet, unlike the robots of the 1973 version who easily betrayed their mechanical origin, this time the hosts blur the boundaries between human and machine, real and fabricated, thus posing significant questions about posthumanism. Furthermore, the depiction of the hosts as specifically embodied and gendered artificial beings, also raises questions surrounding postfeminism.

2 These two concepts, namely posthumanism and postfeminism, are interwoven in the representation of two of the show's main protagonists— Dolores (Evan Rachel Wood) and Maeve (Thandie Newton), two female androids that begin to realize their fabricated reality. In the pilot, Dolores and Maeve enact rather traditional female roles, providing a concrete example of gender as a repeated performance (Butler 178). The former is the 'good girl,' daughter of a farmer, who goes about her daily chores and likes to paint in her free time, while the latter is the seasoned madam and owner of the town's brothel/saloon. However, once they gradually transcend their coding during *Westworld*'s first season, Dolores and Maeve start to rebel against their prescribed gender and species roles. This article aims to elucidate how posthumanism and postfeminism complicate questions regarding identity through *Westworld*'s ambiguous representations of Dolores's and Maeve's narrative arcs, drawing from strategic narrative instances of the show's first two seasons. The theoretical context of the article is informed by both critical posthumanism (Haraway, Hayles, Braidotti) and recent work on postfeminism as theory (McRobbie, Horbury), and is applied in the ensuing textual analysis of the two female characters.

Critical Posthumansim and Postfeminism

3 In her seminal article "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s," first published in 1985, Donna Haraway uses the figure of the cyborg to contest the binary dichotomies shaping our world. According to Haraway (158), the cyborg is simultaneously a product of fiction and a social fact that can be deployed as a political metaphor to transgress the dichotomies informing the Cartesian subject of the late capitalist societies. A hybrid of machine and flesh, the cyborg blurs the boundaries between nature and culture, public and private, body and mind, male and female, animal, human and machine, and therefore challenges the taxonomic categories of our post-industrial information societies. Thus, the cyborg as "a creature in a post-gender world" (Haraway 159) charts a possible path of liberation from dualities, such as gender roles and other hierarchical categorizations prescribed for our bodies and our world. Combining poststructuralist/postmodern critical theories and critically embracing the possibilities of technological advancement, the cyborg manifesto comprises the cornerstone of critical posthumanism.

4 The emergence of critical posthumanism from the mid-1990s onwards (Wolfe xii) is characterized by a rich literature that is constantly expanding and differentiating its object of study.

The present article focuses on the work of two authors, whose work is deemed relevant for the present analysis, namely N. Katherine Hayles and Rosi Braidotti. Hayles set the foundations of a posthumanism bound to embodied experience. The author envisions a version of the posthuman that

> embraces the possibilities of information technologies without being seduced by fantasies of unlimited power and disembodied immortality, that recognizes and celebrates finitude as a condition of human being, and that understands human life is embedded in a material world of great complexity, one on which we depend for our continued survival. (Hayles 5)

Hayles' conception of the posthuman offers new models of subjectivity that promote "the survival of the humans and of the other life-forms, biological and artificial, with whom we share our planet and ourselves" (291). Braidotti further develops such notions of the posthuman as an expanded and relational subjectivity. The author argues that classical Humanism's restricted conception of the human is what marks the passage to the posthuman. Posthumanism aims to dismantle this humanist subject and re-articulate it in a more complex and relational way. Becoming-posthuman is a process of redefining one's sense of interconnection with "a variety of others, starting from the environmental or eco-others and includ[ing] the technological apparatus (*The Posthuman* 193). In other words, Braidotti describes the posthuman subject in an affirmative, vitalist way as an embodied entity enmeshed with its natural, social, human or technological environment, constantly expanding into multiple different subjectivities. Following Hayles' and Braidotti's work, posthumanism can be defined as a change in a particular conception of the human as an autonomous, self-sufficient subject of liberal humanism. Posthumanism does not signify the end of humanity, and the posthuman is not necessarily a modified, enhanced or in any other bodily way altered human, but a decentered, expanded notion of subjectivity that overcomes the limitations of the western autonomous male subject. Finally, the choice of a popular TV show as our subject is based on the fact that cultural products such as the popular SF narratives in film, television and other media play an important role in shaping our awareness regarding posthumanism (Badmington 8). By providing concrete representations, these popular stories not only inform our understanding and imagination of how a posthuman future may look like but also influence and shape our current techno-cultural reality (Herbrechter 11).

5 Postfeminism is an equally contested term that has multiple signifiers. The term can be used to designate the period that followed second-wave feminism, a critique of second-wave feminism or a "shift in feminist thinking within feminist philosophy and theory", informed by

post-structuralism, postmodernism and postcolonial theory" (Horbury 213). It is this latter discourse that this chapter employs in order to proceed to the analysis of *Westworld*'s posthuman Dolores and Maeve. In the current neoliberal political climate, postfeminism addresses women as autonomous subjects. Yet, this independence does not free them from basic patriarchal rules but works as a superficial enticement or as a way to prove that feminism is no longer valid as women have the same opportunities as men. Angela McRobbie coined the term "double entanglement" (12), to showcase this political ambiguity. Alison Horbury defines the term as "a rhetorical exchange in which women are addressed as privileged subjects of education – with seemingly endless choice, freedom, and power – on the condition of accepting a subtle reworking of the old sexual contract of patriarchy" (215) based on a natural sexual difference. Applied to textual analysis, double entanglement manifests the contradictions inherent in postfeminism, as the same representation can be deemed both stereotypical and regressive as well as progressive and empowering.

6 Notwithstanding that the notion of natural sexual difference may seem at odd with reference to our two artificial female heroines, *Westworld* complicates these terms by interchanging and comingling issues of both sexual and species difference and by blurring the boundaries between artificial and real. The representation of Dolores and Maeve entangles discourses about posthumanism and postfeminism in a conflicting way that both undermines and perpetuates essentialist notions of human subjectivity and gendered identity.

***Westworld*'s Dolores and Maeve: posthumanism meets postfeminism**

7 *Westworld* is a fruitful terrain for both posthuman and postfeminism study. Not only does it follow a rich cinematic tradition of posthuman beings in science fiction that dates back to *Frankenstein* (1931), but being set in a technologically advanced future, where androids perfectly resemble humans, it unsettles notions of an essential human identity. Furthermore, as the narrative conflict begins when Dolores and Maeve realize their true origin and struggle for freedom, issues of gender become paramount.

8 Despite *Westworld*'s narrative complexity, the main premise is simple and imbued with both gender and posthuman issues. The theme park is the creation of two male scientists, Dr. Robert Ford (Anthony Hopkins) and the deceased (and artificially re-engineered) Arnold (Jeffrey Wright) while their first posthuman creation is Dolores, a female. As the park's name aptly

indicates, one of its most popular towns draws its inspiration from the mythology of the US and depicts a town in the Far West. It is thus convenient and appropriate that the two most important posthuman females in this world follow the stereotypical dichotomy between the Virgin and the Whore. Dolores is the gentle and innocent farmer's daughter who falls in love with a handsome young man and Maeve is the madam in the town's saloon, an experienced, cynical and strong woman. Yet, there is a subtle difference in that they are both posthuman, constructions of male humans for other humans to play with.

9 Dolores is introduced in the show's pilot experiencing the same day in a continuous loop where she plays her prescribed role of a sensitive, obedient daughter who minds her chores and lives in a farm waiting for her beloved and chivalrous Teddy (James Marsden) to come back. Situated between paternal loyalty and romantic love, she represents the classical notion of the woman in the western film as purity, virginity and the home/civilization (Agnew 194). She is coded with an optimistic perspective on her reality, seeing her world as beautiful. However, this beauty is constantly interrupted by violent acts where Dolores becomes the helpless victim of savageries of either male human guests or other male hosts. Gradually, her optimistic loops end with darker thoughts, but the park's technicians try to erase her terrifying memories to restore her to the previous blank status. Yet, her transformation into a self-conscious being cannot be contained in these little loops since "as the recursive looping continues, small deviations can quickly become magnified, leading to the complex interactions and unpredictable evolutions […]" (Hayles 225).

10 These loops are perhaps the result of the park's creator Dr. Ford's latest update on the hosts, which he labels *reveries*. This new code can be deemed a mistake, because it opens up a small fissure for the androids to access old, supposedly erased memories. It is through such a *reverie* that Dolores' father starts to process a photograph of the outside, 'real' world that he accidently finds, and consequently has a breakdown. Although Dr. Ford admires and even has tender feeling for his creations, he cannot anticipate the exact repercussions of the *reveries* or the role they can play in the formation of a host's autonomous consciousness. At the end of the pilot, only us, the viewers, witness how Dolores performs her first, tiny but completely un-programmed move: she kills a fly that stands in her neck, signaling that her loop is starting to break. Although Dolores is not conscious of this gesture, it nevertheless signals her emerging self-awareness.

11 In the next three episodes, we watch Dolores' gradual awakening of her consciousness. She starts to hear for the first time an inner voice, telling her to remember. Through surfacing

fragments of memory, she discovers a weapon buried in her garden—an object strictly forbidden for her role in the park but also a significant symbol of the classical western that is mainly associated with male characters. Dolores also experiences memory flashes of her mortal enemy, the Man in Black (Ed Harris), a human male/guest who has repeatedly abused, raped and killed her. Through these memory remnants, Dolores begins to observe things otherwise gone unnoticed. In one of the multiple iterations of her conversation with Teddy after he comes back, she reacts when he tells her that someday soon, they will live the life they dream of. Contrary to her coding, Dolores questions Teddy's statement and observes, rather coldly, that someday soon means never.

12 These embodied instances and encounters of a burgeoning self-awareness exemplify how consciousness —the defining characteristic of the classic humanist subject— is not the driving force of life, but rather an epiphenomenon, a secondary function that arises from a living body through its enmeshing with the environment (Hayles 203). Following this perspective, it can be argued that *Westworld*'s guests and hosts share many similarities. An android, similar to a human being is not a cogitating mind located in an insignificant material vessel or an autonomous agent making rational choices through its consciousness; rather, like all living organisms, s/he is the result of an intricate and conditional interaction with their surroundings. It is through these exchanges and interconnectedness with multiple human and non-human others— thus by formulating a posthuman subjectivity (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 96)— that Dolores begins to transcend her coding.

13 The divergence that marks the onset of Dolores' self-awareness occurs in S1E5 ("Contrapasso"), where she helps a human player, William (Jimmi Simpson), when they both find themselves at gunpoint. Instead of running as she is asked by Will, Dolores surprisingly stays and shoots the gun she had previously found buried. It is in this instant of action taking that Dolores performs two things at once. She first discards what her gender role in the Far West expects from her, by appropriating and subverting the most enduring symbol (the gun) in both the fictional and the real world of white, male domination over women, nature and racialized others. This conscious re-writing of her own story as the energetic protagonist and not as the perennial damsel in distress self-reflexively comments on women's hidden stories in both the western film's long history of male heroes and the patriarchal foundation of western societies. Second, Dolores also gains more insight into her posthuman subjectivity, which is "grounded in embodied actuality rather than disembodied information" (Hayles 287) and is shaped "through chaotic dynamics and emergent

structures" (288). Dolores' subjectivity is "emergent rather than given, distributed rather than located solely in consciousness, emerging from and integrated into a chaotic world rather than occupying a position of mastery and control removed from it" (Hayles 291). Therefore, this female character exemplifies the posthuman that overcomes the limitations of the classical humanist subject and opens up new paths in our understanding of what it means to be a human. It is these two interrelated aspects— her double articulation as a female and posthuman subject— that lead to Dolores's realization regarding her role in the park and the greater picture of Westworld. Once her consciousness is freed to a significant extent from her programming, Dolores is finally able to choose her own path.

14 However, this path leads her far away from the subverting potentials of the posthuman as described in Haraway's cyborg myth. In contradiction with Haraway's cyborg that is about "transgressed boundaries, potent fusions and dangerous possibilities" (161) and suggests "a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves" (178), Dolores embodies a rather different version of the posthuman, one that comes full circle to the same classic humanist values. In S2E1 ("Journey into Night") Dolores says to a group of captured and terrified humans that she has one last role to play, herself. But how does she envision this newly discovered self? Far from being a "creature in a post-gender world" (159) or a being that understands its interconnectedness with humans and non-humans alike, Dolores's journey seems highly implicated in and resonating the deep ambivalences and contradictions of a postfeminist but still unequal world (Gill and Scharff 3-5). Rather than challenge and bypass the incongruities of Westworld's human-centric, patriarchal and authoritarian edifice, Dolores reenacts all the binary oppositions of this repressive system by simply inverting the terms of the antithesis. Furthermore, instead of forming complex connections and "assemblages" with multiple others (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 103), she embraces individualism and becomes the autonomous, calculating and self-promoting agent of the classical humanist, and postfeminist culture in a contemporary neoliberal atmosphere. Ultimately, by adopting all the masculine values of war, antagonism and revenge and by re-enacting the us vs. them rhetoric— disregarding all the shades in between— Dolores still remains caught up in the praxis of patriarchy despite her emancipation. Consequently, her emergent posthuman subjectivity is re-inscribed within the limitations and paradoxes of contemporary postfeminism.

15 As Dolores turns from a sweet, innocent rancher's daughter into a ruthless leader, Maeve's trajectory follows a parallel albeit inverse course. Maeve is the strong, cynical and experienced madam in the town's saloon and her everyday loop includes a few scripted verbal exchanges with other hosts of her surroundings and a monologue she delivers to the guests in order to seduce them. This loop is disrupted when in S1E2 ("Chestnut"), Dolores helps Maeve access previous, erased memories. Maeve starts to have flashbacks of a previous blissful life as a mother with a daughter that is disrupted by a violent event. These memory flashes activated by her environment "impart an upward tension to the recursive loops of self-organizing processes so that, like a spring compressed and suddenly released, the processes break out of the pattern of circular self-organization and leap outward into the new" (Hayles 222). However, these images are perceived as a performance malfunction and Maeve is quickly withdrawn for examination by the park's technicians. While she is supposedly shut down on a surgical table in the laboratory's' sterile environment, Maeve surprisingly wakes up. Startled by her surroundings, she manages to get a glimpse of the horrors of this unknown world that defines her reality and although the technicians successfully erase this memory and reset her, the fragments of this revelation still remain within, ready to bootstrap her self-consciousness.

16 As Maeve's memory flashes are intensified, she starts to unravel the mysteries of this parallel world. She quickly devises ways to kill herself so that she returns to the lab and soon learns the truth of Westworld in S1E6 ("The Adversary"). In a highly emotional sequence, after Maeve wakes up again in the lab and convinces technician Felix (Leonardo Nam) to show her this other world, we see her touring the immense facilities of the park. Walking slowly and maintaining the demeanor of her coded persona, but with eyes that betray her emerging consciousness and newfound empathy, Maeve walks by spacious rooms, where she sees animals being constructed, fellow hosts' faceless bodies being pumped with blood and other hosts being tested and probed. This haunting, three-minute sequence does not only constitute a narrative trigger as Maeve comprehends the fabrication of her reality but also exemplifies the emergence of posthuman subjectivity on two levels. First, Maeve grasps the artificiality of her nature, that is, her status as just one of this world's constructions and thus her species difference. Second, this sequence serves as an exemplary metaphor for the end of humans "as autonomous beings exercising their will through individual agency and choice" (Hayles 286) and the emergence of the posthuman which is rather "shaped by the complex interactions within an environment that includes both human and

nonhuman actors" (288). It is exactly this realization that prompts Maeve to alter her software and to benefit from her interconnection with multiple others in order to gain her freedom. She persuades the two technicians to modify her internal characteristics, maximizing her intelligence and minimizing her loyalty. It is in this instance of auto-poietic[1] or self-organizing creativity—that according to biologist Humberto Maturana is equated with life itself (138)— where Maeve emerges as a living, posthuman being.

17 In S1E8 ("Trace Decay"), Maeve decides to escape from Westworld, despite being tormented by flashbacks of her daughter and herself being attacked by the Man in Black. It is exactly in this suffering that some of *Westworld*'s non-human hosts become equated to human beings or "fellow creatures" (Wolfe 77). This common ground that "extend[s] across species lines and bind[s] us, in our shared vulnerability, to other living beings who think and feel, live and die, have needs and desires, and require care just as we do" (140) paves the way to a posthuman subjectivity. Conflicted by past memories, Maeve continues with her escape plans and for that purpose, decides to make allies. She approaches Hector (Rodrigo Santoro), one of her usual encounters in Westworld and reveals the truth about their existence. Although her updated code permits her to voice command other hosts, Maeve lets him choose for himself. By permitting him to freely decide, Maeve exemplifies the affirmative version of the posthuman as an "expanded, relational self" (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 60), one that understands how she is entwined and interdependent with all forms of living matter and understands that she must form alliances and creative assemblages to secure her continued survival.

18 However, these emancipating possibilities of an emergent posthuman subjectivity are yet again constrained by the text's postfemininst limitations. Although Maeve almost succeeds in leaving the park, she decides to stay in order to find her daughter at the last possible minute. Maeve's sudden loyalty to a fantastic motherhood aligns her representation not only with classical humanist discourses but also with a postfeminist conception of the emancipated yet traditional, 'natural' woman. This fantastic motherhood echoes Mary Anne Doane's argument that the intersection of women and technology in science fiction usually results in conventional representations of the female body and its relation with 'natural' reproduction. Such images

[1] Biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela define the concept of autopoiesis or self-making in their study *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living* originally published in 1972, as a process where a system's communication with the environment is prompted through the need of the system to produce and reproduce its own organization (Hayles 136).

underscore “the persistence of the maternal as a sub-theme accompanying these fantasies of artificial femininity” (183). The author maintains that the current proliferation of reproduction technologies “debiologise the maternal” (186), suggesting their potential to unsettle essential notions of motherhood. However, many science fiction films (e.g. *Alien*, *Aliens* and *Blade Runner*) strive to once again associate women with the maternal, re-confirming a natural sexual difference. Discussing the representation of the mechanical woman in the novel *L’Eve future* (1886), Doane contests:

> Motherhood acts as a limit to the conceptualisation of femininity as a scientific construction of mechanical and electrical parts. And yet it is also that which infuses the machine with the breath of a human spirit. The maternal and the mechanical synthetic coexist in a relation that is a curious imbrication of dependence and antagonism. (183)

It is exactly this infusion of the maternal in the machine, that animates Maeve throughout the show, re-inscribing an essential female nature in her newfound posthuman subjectivity.

19 Motherhood becomes Maeve’s driving force throughout *Westworld*’s second season as all her actions are motivated by her quest to find her child. Despite acknowledging the artificiality of this memory, the feelings are so powerful that she overcomes any obstacle to meet her offspring again. This is a classical trope in science fiction and other popular cinematic and televisual genres, which dictates that the female protagonist’s power and purpose should be related with a real, surrogate, missing or dead child (among others, see *Alien*s (1992), *Gravity* (2013) and *Arrival* (2016)). Especially the trope of the dead child, which has repeatedly shaped Maeve’s story, links the female characters with trauma. However, “the association between female exceptionality and trauma is problematic, since it either naturalises female suffering as a path to female strength, or punishes exceptional women” (Lovell 75). Maeve’s exceptionality arises from such troubled motherhood, establishing once again a naturalized sexual difference. The union of female power and exceptionality with motherhood in a postfeminist context implies that contemporary culture cannot simply accept a powerful woman in her own right without labeling her as “monstrous” (Creed 3) and that any female extraordinariness must be understood and contained in more accepted and traditional female roles.

20 Additionally, the image of the child also ties *Westworld* and its characters to what Lee Edelman calls “reproductive futurism”. This concept describes the

> terms that impose an ideological limit on political discourse as such, preserving in the process the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable, by casting

> outside the political domain, the possibility of a queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relation. (Edelman 2)

Reproductive futurism is established around the all-pervasive figure of the child, which stands in for the future, and is the limit of all political visions. The innocent image of the child in need of protection is also framed through heteronormativity and conventional understandings of gender roles. The child is a central figure in Michel Foucault's concept of biopower, where the state regulates its population though control apparatuses that promote gender norms and the privileging of the heterosexual nuclear family. Hence, the image of the child sets the dominant, heteronormative framework within which every political action is shaped "to affirm a structure, to authenticate social order, which it then intends to transmit to the future in the form of its inner Child" (Edelman 3). By depicting Maeve struggling to secure the survival of her child—and sacrificing herself in the process— *Westworld* joins this dominant, humanist discourse that regards the child as "the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmatic beneficiary of every political intervention" (Edelman 3). Despite Maeve's posthuman subjectivity that opens up new subverting possibilities she is —like Dolores— yet again ascribed with the limitations of a humanist and postfeminist discourse.

Conclusions

20 The above analysis of the narrative portraits of Dolores and Maeve shows that despite the disrupting possibilities of an emergent posthuman subjectivity, both posthuman characters are finally constrained by a humanist discourse, where a binary and hierarchical categorization of the world still prevails. Both Dolores and Maeve are re-situated within the limitations of a postfeminist sensibility that foregrounds the notion of the emancipated woman as an individual, free-choosing agent in a neoliberal climate and "point[s] away from structural understandings or collective solutions" (Gill, Kelan, Scharff 6). Their superficial autonomy is ultimately an illusion since both representations are essentially attached to patriarchal stereotypes; Dolores becomes a blood-thirsty leader in the tradition of myriads of male heroes and Maeve sacrifices her newfound identity for motherhood. What is more, their depiction as solitary agents lead to both characters' inability to form any collective socio-political formation. As such, they exemplify the "current of individualism that has almost entirely replaced notions of the social or political, or any idea of individuals as subject to pressures, constraints or influence from outside themselves" (Gill and

Scharff 7). It is telling that the paths of our two posthuman female protagonists intersect only twice, where they have a brief and rather hostile encounter. In their first encounter in E2S2 ("Reunion"), Dolores try to persuade Maeve to join her cause, telling her that they have to fight to keep their freedom. Maeve rejects her proposition, responding with irony. This encounter encapsulates the current impossibility to imagine any collective, political feminist action that overcomes the limitations of both the (historically male) authoritarian and hierarchical politics that Dolores represents and the (neoliberal) individualistic path to self-liberation that Maeve follows.

21 Furthermore, issues of natural sexual difference—one of the defining aspects of postfeminist sensibility (Gill and Scharff 4)— are played out and reworked in a contradictory way. On the one hand, Dolores' representation transposes issues of natural sexual difference in species difference by perpetuating the same binary and hierarchical logic of humanist and patriarchal discourse and projecting it into species difference. Hence, by inverting the hierarchy and imagining the hosts as a superior species that must replace humans and inherit the Earth, Dolores reproduces the same essentialism that is bound with the notion of natural sexual difference, but this time refracted into another aspect of subjectivity. On the other hand, by embracing her constructed and rather traditional *telos* as a Mother, Maeve simultaneously highlights the constructedness of motherhood and its attachment to the notion of natural sexual difference but also inevitably accepts them. In this way, despite that *Westworld* cleverly constructs the park as an allegory of the patriarchal edifice and its women as subjugated subjects, suggesting that patriarchy is a mythical discourse in danger, the series also reflects a postfeminist sensibility that once again entangles its female protagonists in the same dichotomous and essentialist discourse associated with the concept of a natural sexual difference.

22 The conflicting representations and discourses surrounding both Dolores and Maeve underscore the impasse film theorists arrive at when using postfeminist tools to unpack the meanings of contemporary narratives and the need for their revision or new theorization in order to reach a new understanding of these complicated narratives. The entanglement of postfeminism and critical posthumanism may offer such a renewed perspective by expanding the notion of difference in all aspects of subjectivity and embracing it not as an essentialist term that generates inequalities but as "the starting point for transformative practice" (Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory*, 143). Furthermore, critical posthumanism can reframe the impasses of postfeminist theory by suggesting a "post-anthropocentric turn" (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 57-58) that unsettles the

human/non-human binary and other hierarchical oppositions and allows for new forms of subjectivity to emerge. Notwithstanding *Westworld*'s dissonant representations, the show still poses significant questions about posthumanism and postfeminism and envisions the emergence of new subjectivities that disrupt humans' dominant position in the world, while it also further complicates gender issues and points to theoretical limitations regarding postfeminist methodologies.

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Genderqueer Perspectives on Sarah Kane's *Cleansed* and *4.48 Psychosis*

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Abstract

This essay analyses the plays *Cleansed* and *4.48 Psychosis* by Sarah Kane in the context of genderqueer identity. Genderqueer is used as an umbrella term for identities that fall outside the binary of male and female, a concept imposed by a Western hetero- and homonormative society that this work seeks to subvert. Contemporary queer (performance) theory and lived experiences of trans* and queer people form an integral part in understanding the plays' characters, their struggles and their journey in these plays. This serves as an attempt to disrupt academic discourse around identity in Kane's works to-date and inform ways to understand genderqueer perspectives.

Introduction

1 Sarah Kane's plays have received wide scholarly attention since their initial performances and subsequent publishing. Although the topic of gender and queerness has gained attention in this context, it has been discussed predominantly within a heteronormative and homonormative frame that reinforces the gender binary. However, Sarah Kane's works offer the reader and audience the possibility to think beyond the normative binary of male and female gender; instead, leaving behind this perception of gender by exploring an array of different identities. This will be highlighted by offering a genderqueer reading of Kane's plays *Cleansed* (1998) and *4.48 Psychosis* (2000), contributing to the already existing discourse, giving new impulses to read her and other's work in a contemporary way.

2 My analysis of these plays draws on queer performance theories and queer theory, as well as on contemporary queer experiences, including reflections on the scholarly approach to trans* and queer-coded bodies. The setting of *Cleansed* can be aligned with Jill Dolan's notions of queer and utopian performatives with regard to plot and characters, while the play's distinct use of violence evokes Lee Edelman's notion of the death drive and its connection to the queer individual. Moreover, I will show that the dichotomy between what happens on stage and the audience dissipates during the course of the play and a more direct audience address is being made in relation to trans* identities and queer bodies. Sarah Kane's body of work does not solely include trans* identities but *queers* the gender of characters. This occurs not only through language but also violence which is enacted upon the characters in the plays.

3 Believing, that no two queer experiences are the same, the analysis of the two plays will focus on individual exclamations of characters, not trying to forcibly draw parallels between fundamentally different experiences. It goes without saying that, intersectionality and

similar intersections and similarities of experiences among individuals in the queer community are a core part of what constitutes queer identity and builds towards something that is close to community or communitas. Queerness or queer is being used not necessarily as an identity category but a framing of experiences that exist and thrive outside of heteronormative and homonormative structures, which gender-transcending individuals often find themselves to escape from. The aim of this essay is thus not only to examine how genderqueerness is depicted in the works of Sarah Kane but also to offer a refreshing perspective for further research into theatre making of the late 20th century in regard to gender and queer studies.

4 To understand how gender is generated in *Cleansed* and *4.48 Psychosis* and with which understanding of gender to approach Kane's plays, it is important to know the history of genderqueer identities beyond the context of the most common Western perspective. 'Transgender' as an adjective denoting that a person has a different gender identity than the one assigned on a birth certificate. It has become an umbrella term for a variety of gender identities.

5 The binary idea of gender denoting men and women is a Western concept that was disseminated through the colonial endeavour and is still imposed on large parts of the world since colonisation. Two-spirit identities of First Nation tribes in North America, Indian *hijra* and Indonesian *waria* are just three of over a hundred recorded[1] gender identities all over the world (Manzano and Vincent 13). This post- and distinctly anti-colonial perspective is further explored by Jack Halberstam: "the colonial power to name has shifted away from the general management of gender-ambiguous bodies […] toward a more global production of power" and that "colonial control over naming and explaining […] falls less to medicine and more to political organisations committed to the project of identifying and remedying transphobia and homophobia globally." (Halberstam 28). Here, Halberstam emphasizes that the culture in which trans* bodies exist is hostile to the discourse among trans* people, trying to define their identity in order to be moulded into subjects which politics can weaponize for often conservative agendas. Halberstam also notes that even contemporary discourse about genderfluidity is heavily reliant on the twentieth-century formulations of the gendered body in terms of class and race.

6 According to Alex Iantaffi transgender people are often not able or not willing to conform to norms set out by the heteronormative society they have grown up in or the homonormative community they grew into (Iantaffi 286). By definition, trans* individuals

[1] Recorded by Western colonisers

cannot take part in the depoliticising of their identity since they are constantly forced to re-define it in order to be intelligible within the confines of a heteronormative society. As Ben Vincent and Ana Manzano point out: "When transgender people are discussed within mainstream media, medicine, or academia, this is most often in terms of the gender binary – that is, the cultural system which positions male and female as the only possible realities" (12). Lastly, it is essential to point out and keep in mind while reading the works of Kane that the experiences of trans* masculine individuals are often ignored and rarely represented in contemporary representations of trans* experiences.

Imagining queer futures in *Cleansed*

7 *Cleansed*, which premiered in April 1998 in the 380-seat auditorium Royal Court Theatre Downstairs, features seven characters: Graham, Tinker, Carl, Rod and Robin are all perceived as Androsome[2] people in the context of the play. Grace and the Woman are described as Gynesome people. However, Cristina Delgado-García observes that in *Cleansed*, Kane "produces bodies that appear as unintelligible from a gender-normative point of view" (233), since the gender markers on their bodies are rendered unintelligible by the violence inflicted on these bodies or since identities overlap or remain undefinable.

8 Graham Saunders notes that the "duality […] between tenderness and affirmation in love placed against annihilation and loss of self-hood is found within the title […] itself" (93). The play takes place in an institution described as a university, whereas it might become apparent throughout the play that the name refers more to what the building might look like than what is its actual purpose – a death camp. In this nondistinctive setting and the described tenderness of the play lies a complexity unlike any other, with the characters' identities forming the core of this complexity. The characters Rod and Carl are in love with each other, but the cost of this love is dismemberment and death by the hands of Tinker in the course of the play. The character of Graham, the brother and subject of love of Grace, is murdered by Tinker within the first scene, but remains a ghostly presence in the play. Grace and Graham, alongside Tinker are the primary queer subjects of this play. Throughout the play, Grace wishes to become Graham; while Tinker first hesitates, they[3] eventually agree and begin to see Grace as

[2] To avoid Western categorization or biological essentialism or determinism, the terms *Androsome* and *Gynesome* as proposed by Christina Richards, Walter Pierre Bouman and Meg-John Barker in the introduction of the 2020 multidisciplinary book *Genderqueer and Non-Binary Gender* will be used.

[3] The singular pronoun *they* will be used to describe Tinker as well as Grace and Graham. It is intended as an act of queering the character's identities when talking about them, to make their queer identities more accessible and apparent.

Graham, an Androsome person. The desire of Grace to become Graham and thus Androsome is an integral part of the play and the queering of Grace's body and identity is a part much overshadowed by the description of violence in the play. But before Grace arrives at that point, a history of violence ensues, initiated by Tinker.

9 The first variable in looking at genderqueer identities in *Cleansed* is the bodies' relationship to violence. The play contains a much-discussed "ritualised cruelty" as violence inflicted on characters' bodies and its representations on stage are the primary focus of the audience (Brusberg-Kiermeier 80). It can be argued that the violence inflicted on the characters which renders their bodies as "the site of violence", queers the identity of every character (Waddington 144). Trans* bodies are often objectified particularly by medical staff with the intention to 'cure'. Among healthcare 'professionals', there still is an inherent binary understanding of transgender people (Galupo et al. 205). The continued classification of gender dysphoria as a mental health disorder and shortcomings by medical staff in seeing the comorbidity of gender dysphoria and poor mental health, generates unpleasant, intruding and horrid experiences of trans* individuals with healthcare services. Tinker could be seen as the embodiment of medical professionals in contact with bodies which do not conform to their ideal of cis heteronormative standards and their attempt to 'cure' them of those incongruences.

10 Jill Dolan's notion of queer space is essential to understanding the importance of the setting of *Cleansed* and *4.48 Psychosis*. For Dolan queerness is "a place to which people can travel, to find pleasure, and knowledge and maybe (or maybe not) power" (Dolan "Queer Theatre" 5), while José Esteban Muñoz describes queerness as something that "is not yet here" in the opening sentence of his book *Cruising Utopia* (2009) (1). Utopia, queerness and performance are deeply intertwined. The three of them function off of ephemerality, a phase of transition, as the utopia itself should be temporal and spatial at the same time (99). The characters in the play never leave the perimeters of the university, the rooms and the grass outside function as queer space. In this space, change is actively happening, envisioned and acted upon.

11 Once any subject and their queerness exit the temporal space of, for example, the theatre performance, they also exit utopia. For both, Dolan and Muñoz, utopia and performance hold queerness. The theatre Dolan imagines is utopian, a "no-place" (Dolan *Utopia in Performance,* 13), a place that is not there (yet), anteceding Muñoz. Without queerness, this place is not conceivable and will remain utopian. But by ascribing utopia to a stage, it gains a physical aspect, it becomes a place (Muñoz 99). Queerness itself, in turn, becomes a space where potential change is possible, even if not manifesting as a physical action. Dolan states that "to

be queer is not who you *are*, it's what you *do*, it's your relation to dominant power, and your relation to marginality, as a place of empowerment." (Dolan "Queer Theatre" 6). After the performance, or the specific moment in the performance, is over, the audience is left with the queerness that was part of it. Here, people arrive at something possibly utopian. At the same time, they exist in that very utopian sphere, the ephemeral. Stephen Farrier correctly states that "bringing the virtual-queer and the body-political into a space where they do not cancel each other out, but work to produce something else, is a utopian queer move" (Farrier 50). Dolan's notion of the utopian performative is closely tied to Elizabeth Freeman's queer temporality. Queer temporality after Freeman "rejects notions of 'natural progression' […] again, queer temporality is not compelled to follow a specific path, nor does it seek to normalized outcomes" (Freeman in Duda 5). Freeman situates the queer temporality as a "nonsequential time", as to say that it does not conform to the understanding of time most people have (qtd. in Halberstam 86). Jill Dolan's understanding of performance and theatre as something queer and therefore, now, outside of a normative conception of time, serves as an example of how the audience of the plays might feel watching Kane's plays on stage. They are presented with something they perhaps have not yet experienced and, simultaneously if they were to be queer themselves, might find affirmation in. Moreover, scholars such as Kara Keeling, working on the intersection of race and queerness, have pointed out that queer temporality is experienced in distinctive ways by those individuals who are black *and* queer.

12 As Brusberg-Kiermeier notes, "the body's desire to inscribe itself into the world is answered by the inscription of violence on to the body" (86). It quickly becomes apparent that the characters must endure violence if they want to reach their respective aims of self-agency. In the institutional setting of the play, queerness is achieved through violence and a radical re-imagining of one's identity, a no-place as Jill Dolan describes it. Through the repetitive mutilation and rituals of violence enacted by Tinker, this place also sustains itself through the queering of the characters' identities, albeit violently. Lee Edelman's notion of the death drive with regard to queer individuals offers further insight into the characters' relationship to violence. Drawing on Jacques Lacan, Edelman constructs the death drive as being imposed on queer individuals by heteronormative society, but as something that should be embraced at the same time: "Queers should affirm their identification with the drive, in order to proclaim the rift within society's (and subjects') fantasy of self-preservation" (Edelman in Jarcho 2). Thus, although the death drive is not inherent in the subject, it has learned to live with it to be able to imagine themselves a future. By imagining the death drive on stage and affecting the audience

and readership of the plays, it also furthers a future reality in which perceptions of queer realities and futures could be understood differently by the heterosexual cis-gendered majority.

13 Through each act of violence, the characters outer as well as inner appearance changes and the *cleansing* of their character ensues. Delgado-García argues that the play "presents the body not as the stable and unique material fact of an equally fixed and exclusive selfhood, but rather as the contingent effect of dynamic processes that repeatedly inform and subject physical matter" (Delgado-García 233) which coincides with Jay Stewarts notion of the genderqueer body as a site that is constantly re-negotiated and re-evaluated (Stewart 61).

14 Brusberg-Kiermeier argues that "the title *Cleansed* implies not only a cleansing from drugs or ethnic cleansing, but also a purification of love […] a triumph of mind and soul over the body" (87). While the assumed homosexual characters Rob and Carl are seeking this love through their mutual attraction, declarations of love and sexual acts, Tinker and Grace seek this fulfilment through a change of gender, in Grace's case at the cost of violence. The loss of Grace's lover/brother Graham occurs in the first scene of the play, before the character of Grace is introduced. Graham is killed by Tinker, who administers a drug overdose to Graham's eye. Kane chooses to let Tinker inject the deathly dose into Graham's 'eye*'* which is implying the end Graham's and Grace's literal perception of themselves. There is almost always a great discrepancy between how genderqueer and trans* individuals *see* themselves in opposition to how they are perceived by their heteronormative environment. The administering of the doses by Tinker in Graham's eye could be read as the first step in the incongruent relationship between Grace/Graham's body and mind. In Scene Five, Grace voices their wish to become Graham for the first time and manages to take on some attributes of Graham by mirroring his behaviour:

> GRACE. Teach me.
> […]
> GRACE. *Gradually, takes on the masculinity of his movement […] she mirrors him perfectly as they dance exactly in time.*
> *When she speaks, her voice is more like his.* (*Cleansed* 119)

Later in the same scene, they both make love to each other, perhaps the most tender description of that act in Kane's plays. The sexual act in itself is described as unison, free from any hierarchy of gender. In the act, their identities are queered, as they reach a moment of queer temporality; while a sunflower that grows out of the floor constitutes an impossible act that is

possible while queer temporality exists for them. Throughout the play Grace's dialogue hints at their dissatisfaction with the gender they are perceived as, particular in Scene Seven:

> ROBIN. If you could change one thing in your life what would you change?
> GRACE. My life.
> […]
> GRACE. My body. So it looked like it feels. Graham outside like Graham inside.
> […]
> GRACE. I'm not like that, a girl, no. (*Cleansed* 123-28)

Following the remarks and questions of Robin/Graham, Grace expresses discomfort with her body and grows seemingly uncomfortable as shown in short answers and cut off lines. In Scene Three, Grace puts on Graham's clothes and tells Tinker:

> GRACE. I look like him. Say you thought I was a man. (*Cleansed* 114)

According to Delgado-Garcia "[Grace's] self-assignation of identity requires external reassurance" (144). Grace's desire to be read as something other than a woman is apparent throughout the play and confirms that Grace does not only wish to be reunited with Graham out of love, but also wishes to become another gender in order to be themselves. The categories of body, sex, sexuality and gender are disrupted in the discourse about Grace's or Graham's identity. Notions to adapt Graham as a character that does not really exist or is just a projection of Grace do not grasp the subversive potential of the play. In Scene Fourteen, the woman Tinker goes to see in the Black Room, becomes a projection of Grace for Tinker and serves as a catalyst of Tinker's future acceptance of Grace's gender identity.

> WOMAN. Don't want to be this.
> TINKER. You're a woman, Grace.
> WOMAN. I want –
> TINKER. Don't say that.
> WOMAN. You said –
> TINKER. I lied. You are what you are. No regrets.
> […]
> TINKER. You're a woman.

WOMAN. You're a doctor. Help me. (*Cleansed* 143-44)

The denial of Grace's gender identity by Tinker is common among people close to trans* individuals due to the fear of losing something when the individual in question chooses to start their social or medical transition. These microaggression, namely misgendering through pronouns or using deadnames, should be regarded as violence as well, as "for all the violence inflicted on bodies in *Cleansed*, language is possibly the most violent agent" (Chute 186). Scene Eighteen is set after Tinker performed surgery on Grace, detailing how bloodied bandages are strapped around Grace's chest and hips, substantiating a gender-conformation surgery (*Cleansed* 147). Thus, Grace turns into Grace/Graham in Sarah Kane's playtext, an identity foregrounding that all parts of Grace are not lost. Grace might be the most obvious example of a genderqueer individual in Sarah Kane's oeuvre, since they not only voice their discomfort but also undergo surgery to confirm their gender identity. In the last scene of the play, Grace/Graham expresses comfort with their body and subsequent identity:

GRACE/GRAHAM. Body perfect.
[…]
Thank you, Doctor. (*Cleansed* 149-50)

15 The dialogue between Tinker and the woman does not only change the fate of Grace, but also of Tinker who are themselves grappling with their fluid identity as described by Saunders (96). They are set up as the antagonist of the play but redeem themselves through their actions – as clear in the penultimate words of Grace/Graham – functioning as a catalyst for the progress of the queer space that is the setting of the play. As Saunders observes, "once Grace's identity has been obliterated both Tinker and the Woman seem free to become lovers" (99).

16 Concluding, the categories of body, sex, gender and sexuality are subverted in the realm of the play. Following Judith Butler's terminology, Delgado-García identifies a "performative subversion as parodic practices based in a performative theory of gender acts" to explain the disruption of common cis heteronormative conceptions of these categories (232). Grace represents the quintessence of a genderqueer body existing in a non-normative queer space and their own queer temporality. They also, as do the other characters, embody and appropriate the death drive as queer individuals. Samuel Grassi suggests that "the play makes the point that love is a matter of pain and loss of integrity for the self" (163). It can be argued, this loss of

integrity, however, only correlates to the homo- and heteronormative understanding of self. It is essential to note that none of the characters in the play actually try to fight back against Tinker's violent practices, but rather endure them. Grace endures rape by multiple unknown people, Carl loses his arms, his lover Rod is killed and burnt, and Robin who is also in love with Grace/Graham is eventually hanged by Tinker. They all adopt their fate as individuals who are furthering the inquiry into a new queer futurity through their acceptance of violence and even death. The violence these characters experience can be read as a radical expression of what it means to live one's life as a queer and trans* individual. *Cleansed* offers a unique perspective of the physical and psychological violence trans* individuals have to endure both before and during their transition. Through the self-proclaimed and self-inhabited queer space and queer temporality due to the outside violence, the play and its characters can explore (gender)queerness in their identities. More importantly, through utopian performativity, it presents the audience with a 'could-be' but not a 'should-be' and encourages them to help the comfort of trans* individuals in their own worlds.

Re-defining the Trans* Existence in *4.48 Psychosis*

17 *4.48 Psychosis,* the last play written by Sarah Kane, offers little to no indication of gender, nor of individual character. The text exists in the form of a voice, arranged like a dialogue and yet completely rid of any. While Jo McInnes, was cast in the first production of the play, and stated that the "woman in the play is definitely a real person" (qtd. in Machon 155), giving some indication of the gender of the queer subject and Kansiz notes, "the use of pronouns as well as the autobiographical context corroborates the idea that the patient possesses a female body" (281), the play clearly subverts these categories. Numerous attempts at defining the voice as a character or patient fail to acknowledge the fluidity of the text. At the same time, the decision to divide the voice into characters made by productions can confirm the paradoxical nature of this fluidity. When there is no attribution to characters in the play, there can be endless and no possibilities for dividing up the text to be read by one actor or multiple actors on stage. Kathleen Morgeneyer, who was cast in the 2020 production of the play at Deutsches Theater in Berlin, calls for the text not to be divided up into male or female voices, but for merging them to become one voice (Morgeneyer). "No specific setting and textual fragments instead of a consistent plotline" are observed by Annette Pankratz as well (158). Albeit the plays self-identification as an autobiographical expression of Kane's own depressive episodes, or perhaps because of it, the play – the text – is queer and offers queerness to the

reader and audience. The body, sex, gender, sexuality paradigm which was already subverted in *Cleansed* does not exist in *4.48 Psychosis.*[4] Cristina Delgado-García states,

> the body morphology suggested in *4.48 Psychosis* resists the normative presumption of a correlation between gender identity and gendered corporeality, as well as the existence of a binary gender […] Instead, *4.48 Psychosis* offers anatomically ambiguous genitalia, with references to 'the broken hermaphrodite who trusted hermself alone', and transgender identity. (242)

This identity, however, must use coded messages unique to the experience of a trans* individual to convey their struggles to the audience despite there not being any indication of character in the playtext.

18 The text of this play, like *Cleansed,* voices the frustration of the queer subject with their own body. According to a recent study by M. Paz Galupo, Lex Pulice-Farrow and Louis Lindley (2020), gender dysphoria can be triggered by a variety of factors, most prominently social interactions. They state that "historically, gender dysphoria has been framed from a clinical lens which emphasizes body incongruence and dissatisfaction" and perpetuates the "woman trapped in a man's body" narrative due to the focus on trans women and the neglect of consideration of trans men or individuals with other gender identities (Galupo et al. 200). The distinction between socially transitioning, e.g., conforming to a heteronormative and homonormative understanding of one's gender, and medically transitioning, e.g., HRT, mastectomy is vital in this context as well. The authors of this study emphasize that the "distress requirement for the diagnosis can be - or rather has to be - understood in a social context" (200). The study includes several accounts of individuals describing their personal experience with dysphoria., which make up only a fraction of how gender dysphoria can manifest itself. One person states that they feel a "Constant wondering if what I'm wearing will draw attention to the fact that I am not cisgender, fear of being invalidated by my peers and family, and fear of being physically harmed by individuals due to my gender orientation. (Biracial/multiracial male, 18)" (Galupo et al., 203) These reports also show that outside triggers, such as conversations and microaggressions, and "the binary organization of social and institutional spaces" can elevate dysphoria (felt by those persons) (Galupo et al. 205). The study offers insight into ways of reducing gender dysphoria, transitioning being the most important one. The selected reports show how gender dysphoria can have severe effects on mental health.

[4] I will sometimes use the term 'queer subject' to describe the text and voice in places where it is imputable who speaks, to challenge the common conception of gender in the play which is often used in scholarly work on it. The singular 'they' will also be used. The word "patient" will not be used in order to not further the pathologisation of trans* people in the medical context.

Isolation and depressive episodes are comorbid conditions – suicide can also be directly linked to gender dysphoria. The subject in *4.48 Psychosis* experiences a similar mental state as people with gender dysphoria, resulting in their intrusive thoughts and actions.

19 The play starts in a no-place and therefore as queer place. No indication of time and place, only silence at the beginning of the play, queers the space for the audience and readership and it can be located in queer time, as Lee Edelman states that "queer time is not lived in a series of milestones and imperatives, but rather as a stolen moment in spite of looming death" (Edelman 84). Through a voice in the text, space and time are created but remain undefinable. The voice speaks to someone stating that someone has friends.

> --- But you have friends.
> *(A long silence.)*
> You have a lot of friends.
> What do you offer your friends to make them so supportive? (*4.48 Psychosis* 205)

The text reassures through someone's inner dialogue or another person that they have friends. At the same time, it doubts them by asking if their friends are really supportive if they might have nothing to offer their friends in return. Duda perceives this voice as the therapist questioning the patient, noting, "we see that the heteronormative figure of the therapist cannot conceive of a community in which one does not need to offer anything in order to be accepted into it" (49). However, this voice could also be read as the subject themselves, already doubting themselves, falling into a state of queer mourning. The concept of genderqueer identity is epitomised in yet another phrase in the opening lines of the play.

> the broken hermaphrodite who trusted hermself alone finds the room in reality teeming and begs never to wake from the nightmare (*4.48 Psychosis* 205)

The "nightmare" that is described here is the dreamscape, to borrow terminology from Graham Saunders' analysis of *Cleansed,* in which the voices exist. What the heteronormative observer might describe as a nightmare, the hermaphrodite merely experiences as a dream in which they can ask themselves questions about their existence and their gender. This line also assists the situatedness of the "victim, perpetrator, bystander" trichotomy that is mapped onto the text of the play (*4.48 Psychosis* 231). Although Alicia Tycer identifies this trichotomy in the audience – as they themselves serve as these categories - it can also be applied to the text itself, as the

queer subject describes themselves as all of these later on. If the line is spoken by a bystander about someone – in this case the hermaphrodite - the language used is failing to understand their identity. Whether the individual is genderfluid, non-binary, agender or trans* is not relevant to this analysis, nor is their genital configuration. The observer attempts to describe what escapes the binary logic of language patterns. The utopian performative of Dolan applies once again, as the audience is confronted with the problem of heteronormative discourse in their own world. When "Kane's characters identify themselves and the audience as potential victims, perpetrators, and bystanders engaged in traumatic re-enactments", it constitutes intersubjectivity among the audience members lifting them up into their own reality (Tycer 32).

What follows in the text is a vocal manifestation of the state of mind of the queer subject. It almost exclusively consists of negatives, describing what the person in question cannot do and what they are unprepared for doing. This is even addressed explicitly at one point in the play acknowledging that they are a "child of negation" (*4.48 Psychosis* 239), demanding empathy. Duda speaks of "a state of queer mourning", as the queer subject is forced to conform to norms laid out by a heteronormative society of which the therapist is the figurative personification (52). The segment offers ways to situate in text in the discourse around trans* bodies and the problems which they face in their daily lives.

> I cannot overcome my loneliness, my fear, my disgust
> […]
> I am charging towards my death
> I am terrified of medication
> […]
> My hips are too big
> I dislike my genitals (*4.48 Psychosis* 207)

The first phrase expresses discomfort rooted in loneliness and depression. It is similar to the discomfort Grace feels in *Cleansed.* Following, the voice expresses what could be read as the most literal indication of the queer death drive as outlined by Edelman. The word "charging" expresses the urgency of the action they are about to take. Having identified the heteronormative structures decisive for the state of queer mourning, the queer subject is not only figuratively seeking to end an unbearable state of consciousness imposed by the straitjacket of social institutions. In *4:48 Psychosis* the institution in question is the psychiatric hospital, but - as suggested in *Cleansed* - this equally applies to seemingly diverse places

ranging from the prison to the university. In *4:48 Psychosis* the voice acts as the embodiment of Edelman's understanding of the death drive, consciously choosing to embrace it, planning suicide as a final escape:

> At 4.48
> When desperation visits
> I shall hang myself
> to the sound of my lover's breathing (*4.48 Psychosis* 207)

As love is mentioned by the voice as something that they are unable to feel and to reciprocate, Lacan's approach that the death drive is part of every drive – such as love - is affirmed.

21 The queer subject's statement about not being able to take medication not only gives context about their past – being subjected to medical professionals and medical institutions all their life has resulted in trauma – but also their future, that taking medication for them to feel better is an option that is not explored further by them because of said trauma, instead imagining other ways to feel more at home in their body (*4.48 Psychosis* 207). The comments on the body and the dislike of their genitals can be read in terms of gender dysphoria. Similar to Grace, they voice this discomfort, verbalising it and through this the queer space becomes a reality. Jack Halberstam argues, one has to think about new ways "to claim a body" instead of reiterating the same modes of asserting the trans* identity, as important as it is (Halberstam 50). But the queer subject is still stuck in defining itself over what they are not able to do, instead of what they can become. This is the fundamental tragedy of *4:48 Psychosis*.

22 The voice tells the audience about experiences with numerous doctors, "Dr This and Dr That and Dr Whatsit," which is the experience most trans* individuals have when seeking medical transitioning (*4.48 Psychosis* 209). This way, the play shifts to a "medical narrative", as Merve Kansiz argues, and the clinical gaze on the queer subject becomes more palpable (Kansiz 277). This is further elaborated on when the text lists eight different medications with which the subject has been in contact. The official diagnosis seems to be "pathological grief" but it is never further specified (*4.48 Psychosis* 223). The queer subject in the play voices anger at the medical institutions much like a trans* person would in the world beyond the stage. The disregard of the self-proclaimed gender identity by medical professionals especially, furthers the feeling of internalised transphobia and shame, which the queer mourning is a symptom of. In opposition to being accepted unconditionally by a wider social community the queer subject

is "placed in a cycle where the same created by the gaze of the clinic bring about symptoms which again expose [their] body to the same gaze" (Kansiz 84). This passage takes the audience out of the achieved queer temporality and queer space of the play. The chance of this transpiring is even greater if the audience member or reader is a trans* person since these experiences might sound all too familiar to them. While Kane does not explicitly state here why the queer subject is in treatment[5], the scenes do resonate with trans* and genderqueer people. Tycer states that "when readers and audience members experience silences within such a detailed passage, they become inclined to include their own personal details" (Tycer 26). The reading of the queer subject as having a genderqueer identity is attested by the utopian performative by Dolan. The most apparent example of gender dysphoria appears in the text anew and clamantly:

> I will drown in dysphoria
>
> In the cold black pond of my self
>
> The pit of my immaterial mind (*4.48 Psychosis* 213)

> Do you think it's possible for a person to be born in the wrong body? (*4.48 Psychosis* 215)

These passages allow for a genderqueer reading as they explicitly address dysphoria and an incongruity between inside and outside. The queer subject expresses doubt about the attainability of a state of congruence between body and mind. The experience that "every compliment takes a piece of my soul" can be read in relation to the continuous misgendering of the subject by other people in everyday life (*4.48 Psychosis* 213). The queer subject's despair over the confines of the heteronormative "moral majority" (*4.48 Psychosis* 214) is evident in acts of self-harm ("cutting") which are alluded to numerous times as attempts of the queer subject to feel their body as their own and to counter the clinical gaze to which they ironically subsequently are being subjected (*4.48 Psychosis* 217). The queer subject is eventually able to dismantle any conceptions of their body with the exclamation of horrid crimes and their refusal to be perceived:

> I gassed the Jews, I killed the Kurds, I bombed the Arabs, I fucked small children while they begged for mercy, the killing fields are mine, everyone left the party because of me, I'll suck your fucking eyes out send them to your mother in a box and when I die

[5] An indication for this is only given much later in the play.

> I'm going to be reincarnated as your child only fifty times worse and as mad as all fuck I'm going to make your life a living fucking hell I REFUSE I REFUSE I REFUSE LOOK AWAY FROM ME (*4.48 Psychosis* 227)

This violent outburst is the direct result of the trauma they have been subjected to during their treatment. They want the audience, whether it be the actual theatre audience or the audience of voices to "regard [them] with multiple and shifting identities with different sexes" (Kansiz 286). With this tantrum, they claim a queer time and space by claiming to be "Victim. Perpetrator. Bystander." of all these events, thus disrupting normative timelines (*4.48 Psychosis* 231). The queer subject claims agency of these atrocities, still not taking agency over their own life. This is the first time they can do so because it has been made impossible to do the latter by medical staff for the whole of the play.

23 Here am I
and there is my body (*4.48 Psychosis* 230)

This line sums up the feelings of dissociation of the queer subject from their surroundings, something most genderqueer and trans* individuals who experience gender dysphoria have around their body and mind. The line break in between the two phrases not only mirrors the disconnect but also grants space in the reader's mind. Space to envision a utopia not only for the queer subject but the text as a whole. Through a radical re-imagining of their queer identity, a turn towards a more hopeful future emerges. A place that is "not yet here" but can be imagined if given space and time to be imagined (Muñoz 1). From then onwards, even the supposed therapist offers reassuring words but simultaneously disrupts the queer temporality of the space. When the therapist mentions their own lover and friends, and a home, the heteronormative world is flooding the text and thereby again shaming the queer subject who says, "I am sorry" (*4.48 Psychosis* 237) who is overcome with despair again. Before the play ends, the physical space between the lines spoken expands noticeably, encouraging the audience to fill that space with their own experiences. The closing words of the play

> It is myself I have never met, whose face is pasted on the underside of my mind
> please open the curtains (*4.48 Psychosis* 245)

Through bringing forth the curtain, the queer time is disrupted, and the queer subject's identity is too. The finality of the words 'never met', symbolise that through the opening of the curtains the re-imagining of their identity has come to an end. The curtain is not closed but rather opened, opening up new possibilities of imaging. Not a successful end, but a journey identified by the death drive seeking to re-define their queer existence for them and others.

Thinking Beyond Normative Discourse

24 This analysis of Sarah Kane's *4.48 Psychosis* and *Cleansed* shows a way in which to place them in the context of genderqueer identities and contemporary queer theory discourse. Kane disrupts the notions of time and space and gives space to queerness and an envisioning of a utopia made possible entirely by the characters. The characters themselves and the settings in which they are located are not only queered due to how they are presented to the audience through text and performance, but also do not fall victim to a non-nuanced depiction of transgender identities. Although not necessarily intended by Kane, her characters offer a multitude of ways to be analysed, sympathised and empathised with.

25 The little attention such readings have received in academic discourse so far also allows for new ways of scrutinising plays by other contemporaries of Kane. There is also need for more dialogue about the importance of the gender and its implications when presented in a hetero- and homonormative way beyond politics of mere representation, discussing the institution of theatre as well. With urgency, the space for this has to be created by all types of theatre-makers, patrons and playwrights alike and has to include a diverse range of activist and scholarly voices.

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Basic Instinct with a Twist: How the Femmes Fatales of *Killing Eve* Queer the Gendered Politics of Crime Television

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Abstract

The femme fatale, one of the most common and renowned female, cinematic tropes across different crime genres, undergoes a queering in the 2018 UK series *Killing Eve*, in which the female investigator Eve Polastri and the female killer Villanelle engage in a dangerous cat-and-mouse game driven by mutual, queer desires. *Killing Eve* serves as a critical revisitation of the 1992 US-American classic *Basic Instinct*, in which one of the most notorious, flamboyant and influential femmes fatales to this day, Catherine Tramell, seduces and threatens a male investigator. By conducting a close, comparative reading of *Killing Eve*'s Villanelle and *Basic Instinct*'s Catherine, the relationship between investigator and female murderer in both media respectively, and by reading *Killing Eve*'s character Eve as an investigator who herself emerges as a femme fatale, this paper demonstrates how *Killing Eve* subverts the trope of the femme fatale, escalates its queer monstrosity and extends Catherine's ability to violently disrupt the heteronormative, gendered politics of pop-cultural imagination.

> "The alternative is the thrill that comes from leaving the past behind without rejecting it, transcending outworn or oppressive forms, or daring to break with normal pleasurable expectations in order to conceive a new language of desire."
> (Mulvey 835)

> "… the power of fantasy is not to represent but to destabilize the real."
> (Halberstam, "Imagined Violence" 190)

Introduction: Revisiting *Basic Instinct* through *Killing Eve*

1 The femme fatale is a prominent figure and one of the most common female tropes in postmodern crime genres, (neo-) noir, the psychological thriller and the action thriller. Perhaps her unceasing popularity lies in the ambiguity of her character: The femme fatale is duplicitous, opaque and unsettling. As a profoundly liminal figure who disturbs categories and borders of femininity, womanhood or even humanity, she invites controversy and queer readings. Since the femme fatale poses a deadly threat to men, she can be a subversive character who undermines heteronormative narratives. Where she appears, gender trouble is inevitable.

2 One of the most controversial and influential femmes fatales in cinema is the character of Catherine Tramell, from Paul Verhoeven's 1992 blockbuster *Basic Instinct*. In the movie, the male, heterosexual, white investigator Nick Curran is trying to solve the case of a female murderer, who kills male targets with an icepick. Nick engages in an affair with Catherine, the rich, white, blonde prime suspect. *Basic Instinct* played with such gendered genre conventions of the neo-noir genre as the roles of the male investigator who deduces, and the morally ambiguous woman who seduces. To this day, Catherine represents the epitome of the femme

fatale as treacherous seductress. She left a polarizing legacy: On the one hand, gay rights activist protested Catherine's depiction as a queer, man-murdering predator, interpreting the movie as an example of homophobia and misogyny in Hollywood cinema (Tom). On the other hand, queer readings of Catherine's character continuously claim her as a powerful, queer icon. As one critic sums up the allure of the femme fatale in 2016:

> Catherine is godlike. She knows all, sees all, and outwits everyone around her. … It's astonishing to think that we haven't had a gay character before, or since, who possesses that kind of power. As a community, we are traditionally shown to be poor, powerless, or victimized. But not here. Not Catherine. In *Basic Instinct*, being 'other' is an asset. … I applaud this film, not for its stereotypes, but for the ones it broke and the questions it asks, but also, for the legacy it leaves. (Morrison)

3 Since 2018, the British TV series *Killing Eve* by writer Phoebe-Waller Bridge has been re-negotiating the legacy of the femme fatale, so far dedicating three seasons to the trope and marking the femme fatale's entrance as protagonist into an internationally celebrated streaming title. In *Killing Eve*, MI6 agent Eve Polastri is investigating an internationally active, female contract killer named Villanelle. The two develop a queer desire for one another, as a suspense-packed cat-and-mouse game across Europe entails between them.

4 *Killing Eve* is a highly intertextual series with many cross-references to other popular narratives of the spy thriller and crime genre. Most saliently, it can be interpreted as a critical re-visitation of the femme fatale in *Basic Instinct*. For instance, Villanelle inherits many of the character traits of *Basic Instinct's* prime antagonist. Both Catherine Tramell and Villanelle are blonde, white, iconic, murderous women, coded as behaviorally bisexual and characterized as psychopaths. At the same time, Villanelle strongly transgresses the trope of the femme fatale because, for instance, she is not a seductress and sex icon like Catherine. Also, both *Basic Instinct* and *Killing Eve* prominently explore the trope of the femme fatale through a relationship between femme fatale and investigator. Strikingly, in the case of *Killing Eve*, Villanelle's opponent is not a male, heterosexual investigator, but the female, queer agent of color, Eve Polastri. As such, *Killing Eve* offers itself as an interesting case study to analyze what it means to stereotype, subvert and re-negotiate the femme fatale in a contemporary, serialized format.

5 By conducting a close, comparative reading of *Killing Eve* and *Basic Instinct*, this paper argues that *Killing Eve* distinctly queers the trope of the femme fatale and thereby undermines the heteronormative, gendered politics of crime genres. The aim of this paper is not to construct a narrative of linear, queer evolution between the two, but to take *Basic Instinct* as a point of contact as well as departure. *Killing Eve* references the queer, disruptive potential of the femme fatale in *Basic Instinct*. Only, it exaggerates and expands the trope of the femme fatale, thinning

it to the point that it only just encompasses the characters Villanelle and Eve and allows their intelligibility as femmes fatales.[1] Reading *Killing Eve* through *Basic Instinct* and vice versa, I aim to make productive what Laura Mulvey has described as "leaving the past behind without rejecting it, transcending outworn or oppressive forms" (835) in search of a feminist counter cinema. This way, it becomes possible to read *Killing Eve* as a critical revisitation of *Basic Instinct*, that develops the trope of the femme fatale further.

6 First, this paper discusses Catherine and Villanelle, the respective blonde antagonists in *Basic Instinct* and *Killing Eve.* It takes as a starting point the similarity of Catherine and Villanelle, acknowledging that the imagined violence of both femmes fatales destabilizes the hegemonic nexus of masculinity and power within their respective narratives. It then proceeds to show how Villanelle subverts Catherine by aggravating the queer effect of female violence, deconstructing the trope of seduction, transgressing mature womanhood and detaching the trope of the femme fatale from male significance. Secondly, this paper discusses how *Killing Eve* queers the relationship of investigator and femme fatale by exploring how the relationship of Eve and Villanelle emerges as a form of mutually encouraged, combined, queer monstrosity. Lastly, the paper illustrates how *Killing Eve*'s investigator Eve herself transforms into a femme fatale, queering normative associations of the trope with whiteness and heteronormative femininity and dissolving the borders between culprit and investigator, law and criminality, morality and immorality, heteronormativity and queerness.

White, Blonde and Deadly: How Villanelle References and Subverts Catherine Tramell

"… First, I'm going to use you for sex.
(laughs) Just a joke."
(Villanelle to an MI5 agent, *Killing Eve*, Season 1, Episode 5, 00:33:14)

7 Initially, Villanelle and Catherine, the two blonde antagonists of *Basic Instinct* and *Killing Eve*, respectively, stand out as femmes fatales. One could say that Villanelle constitutes a re-interpretation of Catherine, one that ties in with Catherine's disruptive power to queer the trope of the femme fatale. In this regard, one of the strongest reference points that connects Villanelle with Catherine, is that Catherine's violence produces a queer effect: The violence of the femme fatale disturbs the hegemonic association of femininity with passivity and victimhood, of masculinity with power and violence. In other words, Catherine represents a femme fatale whose violence threatens and undermines the symbolic, heteropatriarchal order of crime genres, an idea on which Villanelle expands.

[1] I thank my friend and colleague Dr. Lisa Spieker for supporting me to formulate this thought so succinctly.

8 In the case of *Basic Instinct*, Catherine represents a hypothetical, looming threat to the investigator that culminates in the ending of *Basic Instinct*. As she and Nick are lying in bed together in the final scene, Catherine raises the question what they are going to do now. To this, Nick monotonously responds that they will "Fuck like minks, raise rug rats and live happily ever after" (*Basic Instinct*, henceforth *B.I.,* 01:57:16). The cynicism of this response as well as the overall gloominess of the scene, set in dull colors and dim lighting, diverts from the promised happiness of a heteronormative ending. Eventually, the camera cranes downwards, and the movie ends with a shot that reveals an icepick under the bed. As spectators are aware of, being the weapon of the wanted murderer, the icepick implies that Catherine may – or may not – have been about to stab Nick. What should end in the restoration of heteronormative order through appropriation, domestication, devaluation or salvation of the femme fatale by the male investigator, instead is implied to be his downfall.

9 Accordingly, in "Imagined Violence/Queer Violence", Halberstam notes that the open ending of *Basic Instinct* poses "a question about the possibility that female violence will disrupt once and for all the compulsory heterosexual resolution of narrative" (197). Furthermore, Halberstam emphasizes that when women, who are normatively represented as objects of violent crime, become imaginable as subjects who execute violence, this does not constitute a simple role reversal between men and women (191). Instead, "female violence transforms the symbolic function of the feminine within popular narratives and … challenges the hegemonic insistence upon the linking of might and right under the sign of masculinity" (191). In other words, female, imagined violence, or rather, the fear of female violence that this fantasy produces, fundamentally disintegrates the hegemonic nexus of masculinity, violence and power (191-193).

10 In this line of thought, Catherine not only violently upsets the heteronormative ending, which already marks her as a decidedly queer femme fatale, but constitutes an embodiment of imagined, female violence that fundamentally disintegrates the normative, symbolic function of femininity and masculinity in representations of violence. Being a deadly and, most importantly, uncontainable threat to Nick, Catherine destabilizes the male authority and power that the male, white, heterosexual investigator is supposed to represent. Notably, she achieves this without reverting to displays of hegemonic, masculine aggression. Unlike Nick, she never hollers or even so much as raises her voice. In many instances, her behavior directly contrasts that of her male counterparts, as when she nonchalantly and disarmingly dismisses their verbal attempts at establishing authority over her (e.g. *B.I.*, 00:12:13). Apart from the graphic opening scene of the movie, Catherine is not seen to be physically violent, and even gets to express

weakness, as when she is crying in Nick's arms, mourning the loss of her girlfriend (*B.I.*, 01:28:50). Despite being a white, blonde woman who outwardly exhibits femininity and emotionality, which would normatively associate her with a need for protection, Catherine is assigned the indubitable power to destroy men. As a femme fatale, she disintegrates meanings like non-violence and victimhood assigned to femininity and delinks masculinity from power.

11 Likewise, *Killing Eve*'s femme fatale Villanelle has come to join the "coalition of postmodern terror", as Halberstam calls the threat that imagined violences constitute to white, heterosexual masculinity (Halberstam, "Imagined Violence" 199). Having said that, Villanelle condenses and hyperbolizes the queer, destabilizing effect of imagined violence, taking the trope of the man-murdering woman to its utmost extreme. She preserves neither the subtle horror and mystery that *Basic Instinct* associates with the femme fatale, for instance through the floating, ominous soundtrack by Jerry Goldsmith, nor the suspense that *Basic Instinct* continuously builds through the question if, and when, Catherin's violence will erupt. Villanelle's kills are frequent, immediate, blunt and ultraviolent, producing an abundance of representations of female violence with an abundance of possible male victims. Catherine seduces and kills men, Villanelle reaps them.

12 Importantly, Villanelle's kills are often framed as acts of symbolic punishment of men who have threatened her, as when she murders archetypes of hegemonic masculinity, like the arrogant intellectual, misogynistic voyeur and women's killer Aaron Peel (*Killing Eve*, henceforth *K.E.*, S2 E8, 00:12:00), or the creepy predator disguised as Good Samaritan, Julian (*K.E.*, S2 E2, 00:35:37). Thereby, the violence of the femme fatale in *Killing Eve* is expanded by a dimension of comprehensibility, other than female violence in *Basic Instinct*, which is defined within the narrative as "unreadable, irrational, insane, motiveless" (Halberstam, "Imagined Violence" 198). Villanelle queers the femme fatale by demonstrating that women may have good reasons to respond violently to men. At the same time, her violence is never entirely rationalized, given that she also kills out of sheer impulse or annoyance. For example, Villanelle calmly and immediately shoots her new handler, Anton, for talking to her in a patronizing, infantilizing manner (*K.E.*, S1 E7, 00:18:34). Shooting Anton is not entirely out of line with Villanelle's reaction pattern of responding violently to hegemonic, male behavior, given that Anton's manner of talking down to Villanelle represents a sexist form of denigration. Still, Villanelle's reaction is impulsive, unreasonable and devoid of compromise. Thus, *Killing Eve* explores the queer threat of violent, female retaliation through the trope of the femme fatale on the one hand, without attempting to rationally explain or determine female violence, on the other hand.

13 At the same time, Villanelle queers the trope of the femme fatale because she resists a reading as an exclusively anti-male, or anti-patriarchal, revenge phantasy. Catherine exclusively murders men and *Basic Instinct* hints at a certain degree of solidarity between the female killers Catherine, Hazel Dobkins and Roxy that Halberstam characterizes as "a kind of sorority of empathy" (Halberstam, "Imagined Violence" 198). On the contrary, Villanelle kills regardless of gender or kin, least sorority. To name only one example, Villanelle brutally and malevolently attempts to murder her ex-girlfriend Nadia, who is another professional assassin (*K.E.*, S1 E4, 00:37:32). As a result, Villanelle is characterized by a general disregard of human life. She refuses to be read as partisan, exempting her from holding faith with any group of people or complying with the norms of a gendered solidarity. This only further complicates a reading of her motivation and increases the opacity of her character. Therefore, one could say that Villanelle constitutes the ultimate, queer femme fatale: a traitor of all norms, a character without essence, distinct allegiance and predictability.

14 Simultaneously, the versatility of Villanelle's violence queers the femme fatale, because it deconstructs notions assigned to femininity by ironizing the objects associated with female murderers. In *Basic Instinct*, Catherine exclusively and unironically relies on an icepick, a phallic weapon. In *Killing Eve*, the femme fatale is not determined by her need to arm herself with a phallus symbol: Villanelle stabs, shoots, poisons, strangles, suffocates, cuts or bites throats, breaks necks, or throws victims off ladders or in front of cars and subways, to name a few. Not only does her versatility qualify Villanelle as a hyper-vigilant, hyper-competent female power fantasy, perhaps more so than Catherine. It also plays with and delinks the symbol of the phallus from its hegemonic, heteronormative meaning of masculine power and importance.

15 For instance, while the first scene in which spectators witness Villanelle murder a target, the mafia boss Cesare Greco (*K.E.*, S1 E1, 00:23:14-00:25:04), directly references the opening of *Basic Instinct*, it also includes an ironic twist. In both scenarios, the murder takes place in a bedroom and the target is a rich, white man. The weapon Villanelle uses to kill Greco can be read as a cross-reference to the icepick in *Basic Instinct*, given it is also a sharp, metallic object used to stab the victim. However, in Villanelle's case, the corpus delicti is disguised as a hairpin, and, as if that were not enough, it is also a retractable syringe containing a lethal poison. By collapsing the phallic object and feminine signifiers like the hairpin or poison, the latter being traditionally stereotyped as a feminine weapon, into one weapon, *Killing Eve* subverts the icepick. The weapon emerges as a self-reflexive collage that hyperbolizes and mocks the

cultural symbols and meanings assigned to femininity and masculinity, laying bare their constructedness and variability.

16 Villanelle and Catherine also differ in another common aspect of the femme fatale trope: the idea that the femme fatale uses her sexuality as a weapon to seduce men, which is most vividly discernible in Catherine. She became a classic sex icon the moment that *Basic Instinct* was released. Even today, *Basic Instinct's* arguably most commonly remembered scene is Catherine's revelation of her vulva to a group of police officers during interrogation (*B.I.*, 00:26:30), a moment Catherine carefully stages to sexually provoke the men, and successfully, at that. The men break into sweat, Catherine commands the room. Questioned whether she likes to engage in kink activity, Catherine flips the question and slyly asks the officer: "Exactly what did you have in mind? …" (*B.I.*, 00:25:10), revealing her awareness of the sexual fantasies and arousal that her presence provokes in her male counterparts and her ability to instrumentalize those. Catherine is the epitome of the femme fatale as evil seductress, who weaponizes her sexual appeal and kills men during sex. Of course, this ties in with misogynistic discourses that frame female sexuality as a danger to men, or as woman's only true power over men.

17 In this regard, it is important to note that *Basic Instinct* frames and sexualizes the trope of the femme fatale through a distinctly male, heterosexual gaze. Nick is established as the articulator of the gaze early in the movie, when he first encounters Catherine: Taking off his sunglasses to take an unobscured, desiring look at her, viewers not only get to see 'what' Nick sees, namely an iconic shot of Catherine against the backdrop of the blues sea, but also 'how' Nick takes pleasure in the act of intense gazing (*B.I.*, 00:10:44). Throughout the movie, this is repeated as a dominant pattern of shot reverse shots, cutting between close-ups of Nick's face, gazing with a facial expression of fascination or arousal, and shots of Catherine's body. Her spectacle is frequently sexualized, as when she strips naked in her bedroom, being watched by Nick (*B.I.,* 00:21:40). Thereby, the femme fatale essentially becomes the passive object of the investigator's gaze, a gaze that, as Mulvey has argued, is active, voyeuristic and caters to desires of male, heterosexual spectatorship (837).

18 Additionally, *Basic Instinct* constructs investigation of the femme fatale as a matter of gazing at her. As Shiri Eisner demonstrates, drawing on Israeli researcher Ronnie Halpern, Catherine is constructed as a dangerous, bisexual riddle that Nick must solve (153). Through Nick's point of view, spectators are interpellated into the masculine viewer position and invited to look at Catherine as erotic and enigmatic. Mulvey proposes that an identification with the male protagonist allows male spectators to project their look onto that of their screen surrogate, combining their own erotic look with the power of the male protagonist who controls the events,

which creates a sensation of omnipotence in the spectator (838). In line with this argument, *Basic Instinct* can produce an alignment of male spectators with Nick's quest to 'solve' the case of Catherine. By partaking in his gaze, they become investigators of the female body themselves. The femme fatale is, essentially, a sexual riddle to be deciphered by looking at her.

19 On the contrary, Villanelle queers the trope of the femme fatale as sex object and seductress, because she does not seduce men to kill and is not sexualized like Catherine. Take the assassination of Cesare Greco in Italy. In this situation, Villanelle's tactic relies on efficient manipulation, producing a trap situation, but not on seduction. She instrumentalizes Greco's unsuspecting grandchild to lure Greco into a secluded room in his house, under the pretense that he is about to receive a present (*K.E.*, 00:22:36). Once alone with Villanelle, Greco is all too willing to assume that Villanelle must be his 'present', remarking upon her beauty and attempting to touch her neck. Villanelle resists his advances and murders him on spot. There is no preparation to appeal to Greco. Villanelle's outfit is hardly even a disguise: She is wearing a dress of Greco's wife that she has found only after infiltrating the mansion. The dress is a long, modest specimen in light pastel blue and floral ornaments in white lace, connoting beauty, but not sex or seduction. Thus, Villanelle queers the trope of the femme fatale by detaching her from the misogynistic concept that sexuality is woman's weapon, and that seduction is a necessary means to deceive men. Particularly, she ironically subverts Greco by unveiling that man's downfall is not the femme fatale's seductive charm, but his inability to view her as anything 'other' than sexual, no matter how she looks. Additionally, Villanelle extends the anti-patriarchal threat of the femme fatale, because other than Catherine, Villanelle represents danger to men in general, not just a select few who are unfortunate enough to fall for her charm.

20 On a different note, Catherine not only seduces men but also conveys that she uses them for her own sexual pleasure. For instance, when Catherine is suspected to have murdered her ex-lover and questioned whether she is sorry about his death, she dryly replies: "Yeah, I liked fucking him" (*B.I.*, 00:11:50). The macabre sense of humor implies that her ex-lover meant nothing to Catherine but the purely sexual benefit she got out of him. In a similar vein, Catherine announces clearly that she uses men like Nick as character templates for her fiction books, scripting their deaths and disposing of them the moment they have fulfilled their function, as when she tells Nick to leave because she has finished her new book (*B.I.*, 01:44:26). In and of themselves, men bear no significance to Catherine. Instead, she uses them as a means to an end. She keeps turning to men for what they have to offer her, that she seeks. Hence, Catherine is a femme fatale who is associated at least to a certain degree with a motif of need.

21 On the other hand, rather than following a need, Villanelle operates on the motifs of joy and fun. She orients towards what generates excitement and enjoyment. This is for instance illustrated when Villanelle is driving through Tuscany on a motorcycle, wearing hotpants, a leather jacket and sunglasses, accompanied by a non-diegetic rock soundtrack (*K.E.*, S1 E1, 00:19:11). The scene connotes a sense of teenage hipness, independence and girl power that give Villanelle the air of a young, female tourist on an exciting trip through Europe, rather than that of a sexual predator on the way to her next victim. Villanelle indulges, whether in shopping for fashionable clothes, living in a luxurious apartment or watching her victims die (e.g. *K.E.*, S1 E3, 00:05:31). This also becomes apparent in the playfulness of her character: Villanelle's attempts at spooking her handler Konstantin Vasiliev, pleased to see how he flinches every time, serve as a running gag throughout the series (e.g. *K.E.*, S1 E1, 00:10:21). Even Villanelle's kills frequently adapt game mechanics, as when she incorporates Cesare Greco's grandson into a deceptive 'prank' of hide-and-seek. Villanelle is, essentially, a sensation-seeking character.

22 One result of this is that Villanelle queers the femme fatale along the dimension of maturity and immaturity. Catherine is a problematic woman, because she does not like children (*B.I.*, 01:57:21), kills men and resists heteronormative domestication. Nevertheless, she is intelligible as a mature woman, because the motifs of seductiveness, sex and need associate her with mature womanhood. Villanelle, on the other hand, resists intelligibility as a mature woman because her childlike ability of turning everything into a game, her orientation towards joy and excitement are juvenile qualities that associate her with girlhood. At the same time, of course, she is not a teenager, but a hypercompetent, autonomous killer in her twenties. Villanelle constantly transgresses the categories of maturity and immaturity, girlhood and proper womanhood, marking her as an exceptionally liminal femme fatale. Villanelle is the deadly femme, the deadly girl, the deadly anti-woman, who irritates the normative association of girlhood with innocence and questions what is left that constitutes womanhood of the femme fatale.

23 Another consequence of Villanelle's orientation towards joy, rather than fulfilling a need, is that, unlike Catherine, she has no need whatsoever for men. In fact, the series directly and ironically references her difference to Catherine when Villanelle is asked by one of her victims, MI5 agent Frank Haleton, if she is going to kill him (*K.E.*, S1 E5, 00:33:14 – 00:33:32). Villanelle nods and adds: "But first I am going to use you for sex." At the sight of his confused reaction, she breaks into laughter, assuring him that is "just a joke" and proceeds to kill him. Thus playing with her victim, Villanelle ironically subverts the 'using men for sex' theme associated with Catherine. Her joke humorously sums up how men are not of use to Villanelle,

sexually or any other way, and dismisses any trace of male indispensability. Overall, the series leaves no doubt that Villanelle does not bother with men and their lives. As Natalie Adler points out, *Killing Eve* is "about femme power, femme cruelty, femme treachery – an explicitly queer power, one that doesn't suffer cis men" (Adler). Whereas Catherine in *Basic Instinct* deliberately attracts the attention of men, forming a relationship with Nick on the premise of benefit, Villanelle in *Killing Eve* completely emancipates the trope of the femme fatale from its relation to, and the importance of, men. To borrow a phrase by Sara Ahmed, one could say that Villanelle queers the femme fatale by "wrestling her away from him" (Ahmed 224). A trope once bound up with heteronormativity and essentially defined through its relation to men, unfolds its queer potential because the threat to male exceptionalism comes into full effect.

Queer Monsters, Collapsing Borders: How *Killing Eve* Queers the Relationship between Femme Fatale and Investigator

"I think we all have monsters inside of us.
It's just that most people manage to keep theirs hidden."
(Eve to Villanelle, *Killing Eve*, S3 E8)

24 Notably, both *Basic Instinct* and *Killing Eve* most prominently explore the relationship between femme fatale and investigator, respectively. It is within this relationship that the femme fatale unfolds her most unsettling quality in *Basic Instinct*, seducing and manipulating the male investigator, to whom she poses a dangerous riddle, as illustrated. Arguably, it is also in respect of the relationship between killer and agent that *Killing Eve* most strongly digresses from *Basic Instinct* and the queering of the femme fatale takes its full effect. *Basic Instinct* posits the femme fatale in an antagonistic relation to the heterosexual, male investigator, presenting her as a corrupting influence who facilitates his metamorphosis, while she remains largely uncontaminated by his character. Conversely, *Killing Eve* creates a female agent and assassin who transform alongside and with one another through their mutual desire and emerge as a unitary monster, a postmodern alliance eroding the categories of investigator and femme fatale, morality and immorality, right and wrong.

25 Initially, the potential of psychic parasitism to disturb the borders of subjectivity between femme fatale and investigator, likens Catherine to Villanelle. Both are characterized through their pronounced ability to infiltrate minds, especially the mind of the respective investigator. For instance, Nick's boss warns him about Catherine, telling him: "She is screwing with your head, Nick! Stay away from her" (*B.I.*, 00:59:41). Likewise, *Killing Eve* frequently showcases Villanelle's ability to infiltrate other character's minds as a form of psychological threat. In a conversation with Eve, Villanelle's handler Konstantin warns Eve not to get to close

to Villanelle, echoing the words of Nick's boss, because: "She's a parasite, Eve. She gets into your brain, she eats you up and makes space for herself … Burrowing in and creeping around" (*K.E.*, S2 E3, 00:01:47). Notably, the warnings point to a central trope of Gothic horror, namely live burial, which Halberstam reads along parasitism: "Live burial is the entanglement of self and other within monstrosity and the parasitical relationship between the two. The one is always buried in the other" (Halberstam, *Skin Shows* 20). In other words, the self and its other are not distinct categories, instead their relationship and inter-dependence is what constitutes monstrosity (20). In this sense, becoming buried in another person's mind, feeding of it like a parasite, is an ability that vitally disturbs the border between the characters of investigator and killer and signifies the monstrosity of their relationship in both *Basic Instinct* and *Killing Eve*.

26 What sets *Killing Eve* and *Basic Instinct* apart, however, is the meaning assigned to psychic parasitism between investigator and femme fatale. In *Basic Instinct*, the way in which Catherine becomes buried inside Nick's character is framed as a process of dangerous contagion. Nick undergoes a metamorphosis that makes him increasingly resemble the femme fatale. For example, Nick rapes his lover Beth, whereupon Beth remarks that he has not exhibited this type of sexually aggressive behavior before (*B.I.*, 00:37:00). Of course, sexually predatory behavior is a trait associated with the femme fatale Catherine. Given that Nick has engaged Catherine prior to meeting Beth, the succession of events suggests that Nick has taken on sexual aggression from Catherine.

27 Furthermore, the psychic parasitism in *Basic Instinct* is constructed as a unidirectional influence. Catherine remains seemingly unaltered by her interaction with Nick, plotting and controlling him, without undergoing a metamorphosis that can be ascribed Nick's influence. As Halberstam resumes, Nick "is played as a distorted mirror image of Catherine: he slides ever more clearly into a criminal relation to the law and she masters and manipulates his movements as if he were simply a character in a scene she has scripted" (Halberstam, "Imagined Violence" 198). While *Basic Instinct* constructs a monstrous relationship between Nick and Catherine that transgresses the lines of subjectivity and morality, it does so under the sign of the female threat to male supremacy, hence the central conflict whether the male investigator will be able to withstand the femme fatale's corrupting influence.

28 Dissimilarly, *Killing Eve* takes the monstrosity of the relationship between investigator and femme fatale to an extreme, completely blurring the line between self and other. This makes it a lot harder to read *Killing Eve* as a story of the corrupting femme fatale. Surely, the series revisits and plays with the concept of corruption, as the investigator Eve undergoes a considerable metamorphosis into monstrosity herself through her engagement with the femme

fatale. Consequently, Eve's actions, like Nick's, become increasingly morally questionable and she departs further from the law. For example, this is illustrated when Eve, realizing that Villanelle's skills are of use to her, has Villanelle interrogate another suspect: a female assassin called The Ghost (*K.E.*, S2E5, 00:33:15). Eve is not present at the interrogation, which is hinted to involve an element of torture on the part of Villanelle. When Eve attempts to speak to the suspect afterwards, the woman angrily snarls "Monster!" (*K.E.*, S2E5, 00:37:24). As the utterance not clearly refers to either Villanelle or Eve, its ambiguity conveys that monstrosity has become as much an attribute of Eve's as of Villanelle's.[2]

29 Given Villanelle's infatuation with Eve, though, the trope of the corrupting femme fatale does not stand up to closer scrutiny. For instance, Konstantin's warning about Villanelle's psychological parasitism seems obsolete if one considers that Eve is as much buried in Villanelle's mind as Eve is buried in Villanelle's: Both confess to each other that they are constantly thinking about one another (*K.E.*, S1 E8, 00:35:47). Eve is shown to cause a certain vulnerability in Villanelle. Eventually, Villanelle even allows Eve to get close enough to her to inflict a potentially fatal stab wound (*K.E.*, S1 E8, 00:39:14). Thereby, Villanelle strongly digresses from the usual, hyper-competent and hyper-vigilant personality she exhibits towards other characters, signifying a change of character. Instead of either character corrupting the other, Villanelle, too, is contaminated and transformed by Eve.

30 Most importantly, monstrosity in *Killing Eve* is not something transferred from the femme fatale to the investigator; it is not constructed as contagion. Rather than presenting monstrosity as something that is transferred to the investigator, like character traits of Catherine's in *Basic Instinct*, *Killing Eve* presents monstrosity as something that is already inherent in the character of the investigator, that only beckons to be encouraged. After all, Eve's inappropriate and morally questionable fascination with the female assassin, surfaces well before she meets Villanelle, as early as in episode two, when she tells her employer Carolyn: "She is outsmarting the smartest of us and for that she deserves to do or kill whoever the hell

[2] Visibly, Eve's metamorphosis is conveyed when she changes into the carefully selected clothing that Villanelle gifts her (e.g. *K.E.*, S1 E5, 00:18:01). Villanelle's habit of constantly changing her appearance, cross-dressing and slipping in and out of camouflage, serves as an example of the "immediate visibility" (Halberstam, *Skin Shows* 1) - a term Halberstam borrows from Baudrillard - of postmodern monstrosity. Halberstam uses the concept to describe a process by which identity, humanity and essence are dissolved to the thinness of the immediately visible surface, of skin (1). As Eve visibly changes into Villanelle's 'skin', so, too, her monstrosity becomes visible. The act of dressing points to a similar open-endedness and elusiveness of Eve's character. Reduced to the thinness of skin, personality and identity not just of Villanelle, but also of Eve, become fluctuant, inconsistent, unstable. It would make for an interesting reading to compare Villanelle's and Eve's changing appearances with a character like Buffalo Bill in Jonathan Demme's *Silence of the Lambs*, whose habit of dressing up in layers of women's skin is read as an example of the monstrosity of surfaces by Halberstam (1).

she wants" (*K. E.*, Eve, S1 E2, 00:05:43). The inherent monstrosity of Eve is made explicit in a dialogue between Eve and Villanelle on Tower Bridge:

V: Do you think I'm a monster?
E: You're so many things.
V: Doesn't answer my question.
E: I think we all have monsters inside of us. It's just that most people manage to keep theirs hidden.
V: Well, I haven't.
E: *(laughs)* Neither have I.
V: I think my monster encourages your monster. Right?
E: I think I wanted it to." (*K. E.*, S3 E8, 00:38:40)

31 Discussing their relationship, Eve introduces the thought that monstrosity is something inherent to the human condition, including herself and Villanelle, and that the only question is, whether it surfaces or not. The dialogue is an almost verbatim citation of Halberstam's proposition that the distinctly queer potential of the postmodern Gothic is that it defines subjects as always partially monstrous (*Skin Shows* 27). Likewise, just as postmodern Gothic "warns us to be suspicious of monster hunters, monsters makers, and above all, discourses invested in purity and innocence" (27), so does *Killing Eve*. There is no original monster in *Killing Eve*, no original innocence. Instead, just as postmodern monstrosity marks a "conspiracy of bodies rather than a singular form" (27), Eve and Villanelle conspire together, constantly encouraging each other's monstrosity and forming a unitary monster that contests any border between investigator and culprit, investigator and femme fatale, good and evil, morality and immorality, legality and criminality.

32 Of course, it is important to note that the mutual transformation and encouragement of monstrosity between femme fatale and investigator in *Killing Eve*, is facilitated by a female, queer gaze[3]. Particularly, *Killing Eve* constructs a mutual, reciprocal gaze between both women, as Megan Wilson points out: the series "primarily uses Eve's gaze through which to observe Villanelle, and vice versa" (7). As a result, Villanelle returns the gaze of the investigator in a way Catherine does not. The bilateral gaze of both Eve and Villanelle is strikingly visualized in one of their season finale stand-offs, on Tower Bridge. Standing close, they are exchanging desiring looks while facing each other in a symmetrical shot, with Eve on the left and Villanelle on the right side of the frame (*K.E.*, S3 E8, 00:40:01), a pattern repeated throughout the scene. Both women are presented as equals engaging on eye level; neither character is the singular

[3] Not least, the series was written by a diverse team of 16 authors and 8 directors ("*Killing Eve* – Full Cast & Crew") of different genders, whereas *Basic Instinct* was written and directed by two men. Contemporary serial productions commonly have different episodes written and directed by different people, allowing for more perspectives and looks behind the camera, raising the question whether serialized genres particularly lend themselves to layered explorations of gendered narratives.

object of the gaze. Therefore, *Killing Eve* subverts the hegemonic dichotomy between a passive, looked-at, femme fatale and the active, looking investigator, emancipating the femme fatale from the voyeuristic, male point of view that is characteristic of *Basic Instinct*.

33 The encounter on Tower Bridge demonstrates how the queer, mutual gaze enables a bilateral connection between femme fatale and investigator. The scene is coded as a break-up, accentuated by a somber, non-diegetic soundtrack by Johnny Jewel, and the tender, romantic conversation between Eve and Villanelle (*K. E.*, S3 E8, 00:38:40). When Eve asks Villanelle to help her end their relationship, Villanelle advises Eve to turn around, walk, and not look back. An end of connection is thereby marked as an end of gaze. As both characters walk away, they eventually stop and turn around (*K.E.*, S3 E8, 00:41:55). Consequently, as they are looking at each other from a distance, their connection is extended and unbroken. The connection is constituted by the gaze; the gaze 'is' the connection of the two women.[4] Thus, the season ends with the question, whether Eve and Villanelle will stay together. This is supported by the setting: The meeting of both characters in the middle of a bridge connotes both connectivity and division.

34 Whereas the gaze in *Basic Instinct* focuses on women as erotic objects, the gaze in *Killing Eve* focuses on connecting women with each other[5]. The mutual gaze between Eve and Villanelle both connects them and enables them to articulate desire for the other female object. A male, unilateral gaze like Nick's in *Basic Instinct* others the femme fatale, creating a more

[4] *Killing Eve* thereby extends a tradition of looking aesthetics in lesbian romantic drama, in which longing, mutual looks become the vehicle for the connection of two - often closeted - queer women. The bridge scene parallels a key theme in Céline Sciamma's *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* (France, 2019): the classic Greek myth of Orpheus' attempt to rescue Eurydice from the underworld. To save her, he must not look back as he guides her out of Hades; when he looks back at her, he loses her forever. In *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*, the myth is subverted by a dialogue in which a maid suggests that perhaps Eurydice encouraged Orpheus to look back. This reading challenges female passivity and places importance not on salvation of Eurydice, but a symbolic preservation of connection. This idea is later paralleled by the protagonist Héloïse when she beckons her lover Marianne to turn around and look back at her one last time before they part forever. Like Orpheus, who cannot save Eurydice from hell, Marianne cannot save Héloïse from her confinement to a heterosexual, bourgeois life, but the two keep their connection intact through a mutual gaze. Héloïse later keeps conveying this gaze to Marianne secretly through a queer-coded painting, after they have parted. In an interesting twist, in *Killing Eve,* to save the other, or help the other end their relationship, would have meant for Eve and Villanelle to leave and not look back on Tower Bridge. Instead, neither Eve nor Villanelle save themselves or the other, foregrounding instead the question of connectedness through keeping sight of one another.

[5] This also queers the relationship between femmes fatales and spectators: As Lucie Arbuthnot and Gail Seneca have criticized, feminist film projects in the past have sometimes focused more on denying men the ability to see women as erotic objects than to focus on connecting women with one another, in this way disabling both male viewers' pleasure and pleasurable female identification at the same time (qtd. in Kaplan 123). Interestingly, in *Killing Eve*, the mutual gaze between femme fatale and investigator enables both to articulate desire for one another. Wilson demonstrates how the constellation of Eve and Villanelle in *Killing Eve* does not produce a heterosexual spectator subject "and is therefore difficult to view in terms of masculine pleasure" (7). At the same time, it enables a distinct viewing pleasure for female, queer spectators, allowing them to desire both feminine objects, Eve 'and' Villanelle, without having to take on a masculine, heterosexual spectator position (7) like they would have to in *Basic Instinct*. Thus, the femme fatale in *Killing Eve* is not only awarded the agency to look, but also caters to the desires of a different target audience who is better enabled to identify with the femme fatale.

rigid distinction between femme fatale and investigator, between the object and the subject of looking. Dissimilarly, connection through the gaze is what facilitates mutual contamination and transformation of femme fatale and investigator in *Killing Eve*, as well as their formation as a unitary monster, at the same time not conflating both characters into a heteronormative, stable, domestic union. As demonstrated, Villanelle's and Eve's connection remains unstable, uncertain and shifting, which creates a radically open, queer dynamic between femme fatale and investigator.

The Deadly Woman of Color: How Eve Polastri Queers the Femme Fatale

> "I'd paralyze you with saxitoxin and suffocate you in your sleep.
> Chop you into the smallest bits I could manage, boil you down,
> put you in a blender, then take you to work in a flask
> and flush you down a restaurant toilet."
> (Eve to Niko Polastri, *Killing Eve*, S1 E1, 00:26:40)

35 Along with this, one could go so far as to say that Eve herself becomes a femme fatale throughout the movie. At first glance, Eve clearly does not fit the trope. A married woman with "a husband, and a house, and a chicken" (*K.E.*, S3 E8, 00:38:04), as Eve herself sums up her initial heteronormative lifestyle, Eve lacks the exciting sex life, the extravagance and radiance of a femme fatale. When Catherine or Villanelle enter a room, their presence fills the room; they command the room, if they want to. When Eve, on the other hand, enters the MI5 conference room in the pilot, late and hungover, she gets interrupted by her boss, earns awkward glances for noisily unpacking a croissant and gets belittled for her theory that the assassin is female (*K.E.*, S1 E1, 00:04:24 – 00:06:49). None of this is particularly femme, nor fatal, instead Eve appears like the antithesis of a character like Villanelle.

36 However, as the series unfolds, Eve reveals a cunning logic and manipulative tactics that are in no way inferior to Villanelle's. One example is the way in which Eve anticipates Villanelle's motives and reactions like no other investigator in the series can, mirroring Villanelle's ability to burrow into other people's minds. When advised by her colleague to execute an encounter with Villanelle in a team, for safety reasons, Eve repudiates: "We need her calm and thinking she's in control. She can't know I'm expecting her. … I'll only be safe as long as she trusts me. We need to be alone. It needs to feel intimate" (*K.E.*, S2 E5, 00:19:29). This demonstrates that both Villanelle and Eve have in common the calculating, cunning quality typical of a femme fatale. Eve seems to possess a knowledge of Villanelle that other characters do not, implying that, perhaps, it takes a femme fatale to understand one.

37 The critical turning point that marks Eve's metamorphosis into a femme fatale, occurs when she manages to inflict a potentially deadly wound on Villanelle in a stand-off (*K.E.*, S1 E8, 00:39:38). Luring Villanelle into a false sense of secure intimacy, while both are lying closely in bed, Eve stabs Villanelle in the stomach with a knife she has kept hidden. Wilson argues that this constitutes one of the series' most homophobic instances, given that Villanelle is symbolically punished, and with a phallic weapon no less, having her immoral queer desire used against her in her most vulnerable state (8). Although this is an important, accurate reading, what constitutes a form of homophobic abjection[6] can also be interpreted as a queering of the femme fatale trope. Firstly, that is because Eve's ability to exploit Villanelle's queer desire for her reverts the roles of the two characters. Suddenly, Villanelle is on the receiving end of seduction and violence, whilst Eve becomes the deadly woman. Secondly, the ruse reveals that Eve is aware of a certain degree of power she holds over Villanelle and can use to her advantage. Therefore, the scene conveys not only how Eve transitions into a femme fatale, but also that she already has the confidence and self-awareness of one.

38 Reading Eve as a femme fatale fundamentally subverts key aspects of the trope. Characteristics that first marked Eve as an improbable femme fatale, at second glance question the very construct of the femme fatale. For instance, Eve transgresses normative, white standards of femininity stereotypically associated with the trope. There is no trace of Catherine, the blonde, sexual icon commonly remembered for wearing a revealing, ivory-colored dress to a police interrogation. Catherine serves style, sex and decadence, Eve, on the other hand, prefers pragmatism. She usually wears trench coats, slightly oversized parkas and pants that are anything but form-fitting. Whereas Catherine - and Villanelle, for that matter - often has a tight, blonde hairstyle, referencing the aesthetics of white femmes fatales of the 1950s like Madeleine in Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, Eve seems exasperated by the task of pinning her dark, curly hair up

[6] I draw on Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject as that which "disturbs identity, system, order" (qtd. in Creed 8: 4). Threatened by the abject, the subject is compelled to exclude the abject and redraw the line of an imagined border (qtd. in Creed 9: 2). Consequently, subject and abject are always defined and constituted by the other (qtd. in Creed 9: 2). Importantly, the abject can never properly be expelled, it is continuously "beckoning the self to take up the place of abjection, the place where meaning collapses" (Creed 10). This idea is visible in Eve's violent attack against Villanelle: By stabbing Villanelle, Eve herself crosses the border between morality and immorality, between law and criminality, pointing to the fragility of these distinctions. The scene highlights the proximity of Eve's violence and simultaneous queer desire for Villanelle, which is conveyed through the intimate atmosphere of the encounter, the setting in bed. Any attempt to erect an imaginary border between herself and Villanelle, is bound to fail - there is no stable, heteronormative, lawful subject Eve. Villanelle's queerness and criminality, like Kristeva's abject, is something Eve rejects but cannot part from (Kristeva 4). Villanelle continues to beckon, and – unsurprisingly – Eve frantically attempts to administer first aid to Villanelle immediately after having stabbed her (*K.E.*, S1 E8, 00:39:58).

and mostly wears it down (*K.E.*, S1 E1, 00:33:39). In this way, Eve challenges a tradition of normatively feminine, white, blonde femmes fatales who are easily recognizable as the trope.

39 Additionally, like Villanelle, Eve is characterized by a disregard for men. Most notably, her husband Niko Polastri, a bridge-playing teacher whose character constitutes Villanelle's unexciting, inverted mirror image, is constantly over-shadowed by Eve's increasing obsession with Villanelle. In fact, Eve's indifference to Niko results in him getting harmed by the investigation, losing his friend Gemma, and his referral to a psychiatric clinic (*K.E.*, S3 E1, 00:35:00). Drawing on Adrienne Rich's concept of compulsory heterosexuality, Shiri Eisner suggests that the potential indifference of bisexual women to men constitutes a threat to men and heteropatriarchy (151). She argues that the power of female bisexuality lies in its embodiment of choice: a choice whether or not to have relationships with men, and on women's terms (150). This is what has already constituted the threat of the bisexually coded Catherine to men like Nick Curran in *Basic Instinct* (153). Similarly, Eve's queer desire for Villanelle plays with the fears surrounding female, queer choice and indifference to men[7]. While queer desire and activity between the femme fatale and other women in *Basic Instinct* is only ever relevant in relation to the heterosexual protagonist and objectified through his male gaze[8], in *Killing Eve*, it is the male characters who are continuously sidelined by Eve and only relevant in relation to her convergence with Villanelle. An impudent exaggeration of male insignificance and of pervasive queer desire, a woman who could not be less domesticated despite her apparent domestic life, Eve represents the remarkably queer danger of the femme fatale to patriarchy.

40 Eve's character also queers the femme fatale trope along the dimension of racialization. She is a woman of color, unlike Villanelle, Catherine and most other femmes fatales in Hollywood or British cinema. Eve is performed by actress Sandra Oh, and coded as a Korean-American agent living in Britain. In season three, for instance, she is working at a restaurant in the Korean enclave New Malden in London, where her colleagues speak to her in Korean. Interestingly, race gives Eve an advantage, both as an investigator and as a femme fatale:

[7] That is not to say, of course, that *Killing Eve* is an unproblematic, harmless depiction of bisexually coded women. Eisner has already pointed out that "bisexuality is often used to represent anything but itself (often to underline characteristics such as murderousness, duplicitousness, hedonism etc.), while erasing bisexuality as a topic in its own right" (76) and San Filippo has ascertained that "bisexuality and other forms of 'deviant' female sexuality are likened to mental and criminal deviance (variously diagnosed as abnormal, antisocial and insane)" (130). Femmes fatales like Catherine, Villanelle and Eve, who can be read as bisexually coded, or queer, are notably characterized along concepts like psychopathology, social deviance and criminal energy. For a discussion of how bisexually identified individuals assess media representation enforcing biphobic stereotypes and its possibly detrimental relationship to mental health issues in bisexual communities, please refer to Johnson 2016.

[8] This is epitomized in the dance club scene, when Catherine dances lasciviously with her female lover Roxy, creating a spectacle for Nick (*B.I.*, 01:07:27). The scene is dominated by the male, voyeuristic position, which is established through over-the-shoulder-shots, directly placing Nick as the spectator of the dancing women. This constellation brings to mind the visual language of mainstream, straight-coded, lesbian porn, in which erotic activity between women is reduced to a catering to the desires of heterosexual, male spectatorship.

Firstly, her understanding of the cultural invisibility of immigrant workers allows Eve to convict the assassin The Ghost, an Asian-British woman of color. Eve is the first in her team to conclude, in conversation with her Black co-worker Jess, that a non-white woman can easily disguise as a cleaner, thereby gain entrance to an office building and assassinate a white-collar worker, because nobody will suspect her (*K.E.*, S2 E2, 00:28:17, 00:32:18). Eve is awarded an embodied understanding of racism that her white team members do not possess or doubt; she is able to recognize whom and what white people have learned to overlook. Secondly, Eve can successfully pass as an invisible worker of color herself, when she disguises as laundry staff to gain access to Aaron Peel's mansion in Rome. A stolen hotel staff outfit as a makeshift disguise and a few words in Korean are enough to convince the security that she is an immigrant worker and she is waved through to the staff entrance (*K.E.*, S2 E8, 00:08:38). In both scenarios, white naiveté and arrogance are mocked. The ability of the femme fatale of color to exploit the racism of white people to her advantage, weaponizing it against them, distinguishes her as a powerful trickster and danger to white supremacy. Also, Eve subverts the normative association of the femme fatale, and of the criminal investigator, with whiteness.

41 Owing to the abovementioned, Eve widens the scope of who can embody the trope of the femme fatale. She essentially calls into question what constitutes the very recognizability, or intelligibility, of the femme fatale. Significantly, she only adds to the disruptive, queer power and threat that the trope represents to heteronormativity and white supremacy, because she implies that any femme – married or unmarried, stereotypically feminine or gender-nonconforming, of color or white, employed in national security or a restaurant kitchen, has the potential to become fatal at any given time. The rich, dazzling Catherine heralds her danger so flamboyantly it becomes dubious how a male investigator could ever be foolish enough to get involved with her; the inconspicuous Eve, if anything, is tremendously more dangerous.

Conclusion

42 While *Killing Eve* extends the legacy of a femme fatale like Catherine Tramell in *Basic Instinct*, the series also strongly subverts the trope, with a heightened sense of self-reflexivity and irony. One of the most common female tropes within crime genres thus becomes permeable and unstable, being re-arranged and stretched to the point that it is barely still recognizable as such. Like in an experimental setting, the femme fatale in *Killing Eve* is adjusted, exaggerated and distorted to an extreme, producing unusual, queer outcomes. A result of the series' extensive, postmodern critique is that it aggravates the queer potential of the femme fatale to

disrupt the symbolic, heteropatriarchal order imagined in pop-cultural representations within and across a variety of crime and detective genres.

43 As demonstrated, *Killing Eve*'s Villanelle directly references Catherine and re-interprets the figure of the blonde, attractive, dangerous woman. While Villanelle preserves the threat that imagined, female violence constitutes to the nexus of masculinity and power, a disruptive quality that already distinguishes *Basic Instinct*'s Catherine as a decidedly queer femme fatale, Villanelle takes the effect of this violence to its extreme. Catherine's violence constitutes a threat to male authority and power, especially against the profoundly heteronormative backdrop of the movie, such as the hegemonic masculinity of the heterosexual investigator, through whose gaze *Basic Instinct* is framed and narrated. In *Killing Eve*, though, there is no noteworthy male authority; Villanelle does not even suffer men. She subverts Catherine, discharging her, layer by layer, from such defining characteristics of the femme fatale trope as a reliance on seduction, an effort to appeal to men, or a motif of need. Villanelle is not dangerous because of her sexuality, she just 'is', because she is capable and willful. She presents the femme fatale as a conglomerate of juvenile joy, raw adrenaline and brutality, an endless blurring of lines between play, reality, reason and impulse. In Villanelle's opaque, liminal character, the categories of girlhood and womanhood, reason and emotion, maturity and immaturity lose all essence.

44 Entirely dismissing a male, heterosexual investigator, who so prominently features in *Basic Instinct*, and instead focusing on the relationship of a female investigator and assassin, allows *Killing Eve* to explore what happens when two femmes fatales collide. The result is a monstrous alliance of dangerous women: As Villanelle and Eve become buried within one another and the line between both is contested, it becomes impossible to identify an original monster, a corrupting influence like that of Catherine in *Basic Instinct*. The relationship of Villanelle and Eve emerges as a queer monstrosity that escalates when two femmes fatales conspire together; a monstrosity not bound to a singular body, but inherent to the characters' subjectivity itself. The femme fatale in *Killing Eve* is thus a unitary monster that highlights the fragility of the distinction between criminal investigator and femme fatale, morality and immorality, inside and outside of the law. *Basic Instinct* is a story about an exceptional and flamboyantly dangerous femme fatale who will not be contained by law and heteropatriarchy. However, the notion of a dormant, universal queer monstrosity that can be awakened in anyone, given the right circumstance and queer pairing, assigns the figure of the femme fatale in *Killing Eve* an even more subversive significance.

45 The character of Eve deviates even further from the trope of the femme fatale in *Basic Instinct*, queering virtually any aspect of it. Compared to Villanelle and Catherine, Eve is least recognizable as the trope initially, yet she undergoes a distinct metamorphosis that brings forth the qualities of an exceptionally opaque, layered and liminal femme fatale. Smart and cunning, but not necessarily seductive; apparently living a middle-class, domestic life, but deadly; a femme fatale, yet remote from flamboyance and heteronormative notions of femininity; a woman existing in relation to men, but indifferent to them; a woman of color who stands both inside and outside of the law and poses a threat to white heteropatriarchy, Eve dissolves any border between law and criminality, between investigator and femme fatale.

46 Catherine, albeit a powerfully disruptive and queer character, still fits well within the trope of the femme fatale and has certainly become one of its most memorable representatives in US-American cinema, but in the case of *Killing Eve*, it seems inappropriate to even speak of a trope, given that Eve and Villanelle resist a clear definition. One might ask, then, what is left that distinguishes the femme fatale, that constitutes her intelligibility when her stereotypical markers are subverted almost beyond recognition. She is a femme, but not necessarily feminine in her expression, at least in any heteronormative sense of the word. If she need not be a mature woman, if she may be a girl, if she so thoroughly and violently disrupts the very category of womanhood, then the femme fatale does not have to be female at all. Perhaps the femme fatale of the 21st century has become her own gender: a pop-cultural excess of queerness, a postmodern monstrosity that "represents the disruption of categories, the destruction of boundaries, and the presence of impurities…" (Halberstam, *Skin Shows* 27) and that takes seriously the assertion that "we need to recognize and celebrate our own monstrosities" (27). She is more of an effect than a trope, because where she appears, she plots the destruction of viewing habits and gendered certainties. She is a betrayer of the heteropatriarchal order, a rejoicing, queer danger that does not suffer men and rejects any definitive loyalty.

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Nannie Helen Burroughs and the Descendants of Miriam: Rewriting Nannie Helen Burroughs into First Wave Feminism

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Abstract

We argue that early twentieth century Black women labor organizers and their movement for inclusive women's suffrage and women's labor rights stay absent from popular first wave feminist narratives. After the ratification of the nineteenth amendment, Black women continued organizing for women's suffrage and labor rights in the face of racial and gender-based policies that legalized the labor exploitation of Black women and the suppression of the Black vote. We detail African American educator Nannie Helen Burroughs's labor and voting initiatives to challenge the white women-centered chronology of first wave feminism and expand its narrative to include Black women's labor organizing both at home and abroad. While working with women's suffrage organizations, Burroughs established the National Trade School for Women and Girls in 1909 to improve the working conditions of Black domestic workers and create career opportunities that had been denied to them because of discriminatory hiring practices and intersecting racial and gender inequalities. In 1921, Burroughs co-founded the National Association of Wage Earners, a national union organizing effort for Black women. While piecing together her groundbreaking initiatives from archives, obituaries, newspaper articles, speeches, secondary literature, event notices, and the biographies of her co-organizers, we assert that her story sheds new light on the rarely acknowledged connection between Black women's labor and political organizing in the United States and abroad, drawing attention to the often-marginalized histories of Black domestic worker organizing in feminist historical narratives. We intend for this historical uncovering of Burroughs writings to begin the conversation about who she was as a national and international labor organizer.

We argue that Nannie Helen Burroughs (1870-1961) was a significant labor leader and rhetorician of the early twentieth century. We challenge racial, gendered and classed constructions of history and rhetoric that render invisible the work women like Burroughs did during nadir. She believed a women's labor collective would lead to political, social, and economic rights for the entire Black community. We examine how Burroughs employed her audacious, progressive, and forward-thinking labor rhetoric through an analysis of three major texts: "The Colored Woman and Her Relations to the Domestic Service Problem" (1902), "Divide Vote or Go to Socialists" (1919) and "My Dear Friend" (1921). Through these three texts we trace the development of Burroughs's womanist labor rhetoric over time. We argue that following her speeches, Burroughs developed and employed a labor rhetoric that led to the formation of a historic labor union for African American domestic workers in 1921, the National Association of Wage Earners (NAWE). We intend for our examination of her writings to commence rather than end a discussion about who Burroughs was as a labor organizer and rhetorician seeking to complicate the legacy of Burroughs. She was a scholar first who sought to liberate black women from penury by asserting their humanity through offering a broad educational focus, instilling pride within her students' gender and race, and placing these women into positions of stable employment through a womanist themed national labor and unionization platform.

"It has ever been from the time of Miriam, that most remarkable woman,
the sister of Moses, that most remarkable man,
down to the courageous women that in very recent years
have carried the Gospel into Thibet and Africa and proclaimed
and taught the truth where no man has been allowed to enter.
Surely, women somehow have had a very important part
in the work of saving this redeemed earth"
(Burroughs 1900).

1 Early African American women's labor organizing is omitted in popular narratives about the first-wave feminist movement, which often foregrounds white middle-class women's fight for white women's right to vote.[1] Nannie Helen Burroughs and other Black women labor organizers who dedicated their lives to advocating for Black women's labor rights, are characterized as tangential historical figures to the women's suffrage movement, although they simultaneously organized for women's right to vote.[2] Burroughs (1879-1961) established national institutions and organizations to advocate for civil, women's voting, and women's labor legislation before and well after the ratification of the nineteenth amendment in 1920. She founded the National Trade School for Women and Girls (NTS), the largest school in the nation's capital in 1909 for Black women and girls to improve their working conditions and create new career pathways that had been denied to them because of systemic racial and gender inequalities in the labor economy.[3] Burroughs also established the National Association of Wage Earners (NAWE) in 1921, the first Black women's labor organization of the twentieth century that fought for national labor legislation and she co-founded the National League of Republican Colored Women in 1924, an organization that advocated for Black women's voting rights. Still, Burroughs and Black women's labor organizing are not widely remembered nor publicly discussed as leaders who helped create a movement for *all* women's access to voting.[4] Often these clubs are forgotten because they were connected to

[1] Feminist historians have produced groundbreaking scholarship debunking the waves metaphor and the myth that only white middle-class women fought for women's right to vote. There is also abody of literature that details white suffragists' racism towards African American suffragists and their exclusionary focus on attaining voting rights for only white women. See Nancy Hewitt's *No Permanent Waves: Recasting Histories of US Feminism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010; Brittany Cooper's *Beyond Respectability: The Intellectual Thought of Race Women* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2017).

[2] We use African American throughout the manuscript to identify the racialized ethnic identities of Burroughs and the African American women who she worked with. We use "Black" to indicate her global view of women's labor rights. Burroughs and her co-organizers fought for better working conditions for all Black women of the African Diaspora.

[3] According to the United States Labor Census records (1900-1950), the majority of Black women and girls were concentrated in domestic service and sharecropping, US Department of Labor records.

[4] Black women intellectuals had to go out into the community and do the work that Black male intellectuals were ignoring or refused to do for African Americans (24). The goal of respectability politics was livable wages and fair

churches or called married women's societies in order for them to appear more respectable, but in reality, Burroughs and her colleagues were building an aggressive labor platform for rights for all women.

2 In this article, we disrupt the whitened chronology of feminism by writing Black women's labor organizing into the women's suffrage movement narrative through the story of Nannie Helen Burroughs. Black women's labor organizing history reveals the privileging of white women in the periodization of suffrage. While women were granted the right to vote in 1920, it was not until the Voting Rights Act of 1965 when Black women and other women of color gained unequivocal access to the ballot box. Black women's labor organizing was instrumental to the passage of that act and thereby expands the chronology of the women's voting rights narrative.[5]

3 The hegemonic first-wave feminism narrative relies on the notoriety of 'big name' women leaders such as Susan B. Anthony, Carrie Chapman Catt and Lucretia Mott to tell the story of early women's activism. Catt even went to so far as to rebuff black women organizers such as Maude Evangeline Craig Sampson Williams ("Letters Regarding African American Suffrage Organization"). Black women's labor organizing history, however, unveils lesser-known women who were politically engaged and helped make the right for *all* women to vote possible. Burroughs could not have created labor initiatives on her own. She relied on the grassroots organizing of Sadie Henson, Lucy Holland, Mahala Hill, and other middle and working-class women in the NAWE to draw a membership of 5,000 people (Connecticut Labor Press). We believe it is important to discuss the work and specific names of women who are rarely identified (even in accounts about Burroughs) to draw further attention to the groundbreaking cross-class approach of Black women labor organizers as many early Black feminist organizers are not covered under federal unionization guidelines today.[6] They are also deserving of attention because their first wave organizing was a manifestation of early intersectional feminism that developed through Black women's unionization efforts. Burroughs and her NAWE co-organizers operated under the

living conditions for Black women, yet it was limited in its relationship to labor, often favoring middle-class African American women as organizers and citing them as teachers, but not intellectuals.

[5] For a history of the critical role that African American domestic worker organizing played in the Civil Rights Movement, see Premilla Nadasen's *Household Workers Unite: The Untold Story of African American Women Who Built a Movement*.

[6] The National Labor Relations Act of 1935 (also known as the Wagner Act) created a federal baseline for private sector workers to unionize, strike and engage in collective bargaining (to equally negotiate working conditions between employer and employee), however, it also barred both domestic and agricultural workers, creating a two-tiered system of laborers.

fundamental belief that justice for Black women meant equal rights for everyone because they were subjected to racism, sexism and classism. Finally, beyond the material, the labor and political lens we offer in viewing the NAWE shatters the common ideal of pulling oneself up by their bootstraps in the guise of upward social mobility. Members of the NAWE re-envisioned what political and economic progress looked like and what it meant to be sisters in the struggle.

4 Together, Burroughs and her NAWE co-organizers built a union, without support from the government and white women's labor organizations, through their own networks and associations attempting to take the country into their own hands and seek justice for themselves and their communities. The project of detailing the shadowed history of the NAWE through obituaries, newspaper articles, speeches and event notices is not enough to provide a complete picture of the achievements of Burroughs and her co-organizers. We hope to inspire continual archival excavation of the NAWE to advance understanding of the significant role that Black women labor organizers played in a truly inclusive movement for women's voting rights.

"But what's the sense of talk, if you don't do something?": Burroughs' Early Years of Labor Organizing[7] (Burroughs and Hammond 49)

5 Burroughs learned early lessons about the significance of labor to the Black freedom struggle. She had a grandmother who taught her racial pride and honor and a grandfather who owned a farm and taught her the importance of entrepreneurship and manual labor (Hammond and Burroughs 47). Burroughs was also raised by a mother who taught her that domestic service labor could be used by Black women to provide opportunities for their children. Her pastor father was largely absent but instilled in her the spiritual belief that ethical labor practices were paramount[8]. Combining her childhood influences, Burroughs' believed that African Americans could acquire the tools needed to challenge the racial, class, and gendered barriers of Jane Crowe America through faith and labor organizing. She experienced gender and class discrimination firsthand when she was rejected from a teaching position in D.C. by the Black elite because of her dark skin tone and working-class background. After having graduated with honors from the prestigious M Street School Burroughs had few options but to work as a janitor and secretary, all while she wrote

[7] Burroughs began developing a public discourse about the connections between labor, educational, and voting organizing with her 1922 book *In the Vanguard of a Race*, edited by Lily Hardy Hammond (47-62).

[8] Graves argues Burroughs' core purpose was theological and that the subjugation of Black people was part of God's plan for their eventual rise (Graves xxii- xxxiii).

hundreds of letters and documents to the NBC advocating for Black women's labor rights (Graves xxv; Higginbotham 158).

6 Burroughs was a devout Christian who believed that US society could not live up to its professed Christian ideals until white employers and government officials remedied the labor exploitation of Black women. She correspondingly believed that Black women did not have the luxury of waiting for white people to alter their perceptions of them. According to Burroughs, voting was the surest method for domestic workers and other working-class Black women to gain labor rights. From her remarks at a symposium for women's suffrage, it is clear that Burroughs saw Black women organizers as those who had their own internal worth and therefore, needed the America's public acceptance of their value in the form of equality at the ballot box:

> A fact worthy of note is that in every reform in which the Negro woman has taken part, during the past fifty years, she has been as aggressive, progressive and dependable as those who inspired the reform or led it. . . . She needs the ballot to reckon with men who place no value upon her virtue, and to mould healthy public sentiment in favor of her own protection. (Burroughs, "Black Women and Reform")

7 Due to her focus on religion and working-class Black women in her labor organizing, however, Burroughs is not traditionally considered significant to the "first wave" feminist movement; her ideologies were complex (Graves xxix). On one hand, she organized with middle-class white women and African American women for women's suffrage and Progressive-era domestic and hygienic viewpoints. She was a proponent of the 3 B's—the bible, bath, and broom, the three values that she insisted that all women live by to have spiritually clean lives. On the other hand, she had an unwavering commitment to organizing for federal legislation to protect Black women from exploitation during a time when the majority of Black women were subjected to slave-like working conditions as domestic workers and sharecroppers.

8 Burroughs's meteoric rise to fame in the began when she was twenty-one with "How the Sisters are Hindered from Helping," her speech at the 1900 National Baptist Convention (NBC) in Richmond, Virginia[9]. As Corresponding Secretary of the Women's Convention, an auxiliary group to the NBC, Burroughs was determined to create a national labor agenda to improve the working conditions of Black women. We are reading her speech in relationship to the purpose, which was to create a physical space for a church that is inclusive of both men and women's labor. "How the Sisters are Hindered from Helping" denotes a beginning in the lone line of advocacy by Burroughs

[9] Republished in Graves 2019.

of spaces where women's religious labor could be accepted as valid. While the conservative theological context of Burroughs' speech regarding Miriam[10] is evident, women who speak against men are punished, the implications within Burroughs' speech are much more radical than the theological. Burroughs argues specifically that Black women as "unpolished gems" are prevented from achieving their full potential in the male-led NBC and patriarchal world in general (Burroughs). Her speech employs the language of the community that she labored for and the central purpose is to define a space for Black women as descendants of Miriam, whom Burroughs acknowledges as a prophetess, writer, unwed woman and organizer.

9 No longer minoritized, the descendants of Miriam need to be freed to make wide-scale social change. Her speech was crucial in establishing the Woman's Convention (WC) within the NBC, an association which served as an adjunct to the NBC and serves as a core example of early labor activism, she wanted proportionate spaces for Black women to organize. This space was where Black women could exercise their labor and political organizing power independently of male membership and white women suffragists who shunned them from women's organizations. The speech, laced in religious meaning and teachings, is about the significance of Black women's labors within this church. Burroughs reads Black women's invisible labor as salvation for the entire race following the example of the prophet and teacher Miriam highlighting that it is time for black women to rise and become equal through all their labors. While it took several decades for the male leadership of the NBC to support her vision, Burroughs forged ahead establishing several historic initiatives for laboring Black women.

10 As an educator, Burroughs founded the National Training School (NTS), a dual liberal arts and vocational institute in 1909 (Higginbotham 162-64). The school within itself was a labor initiative. Burroughs' primary motivation for establishing the school was to improve the working conditions of the masses of Black women and girls concentrated in household employment. Specifically, Washington, D.C., had a substantial African American population due to the Great Migration of African Americans fleeing the South to escape racial and gender terrorism. Even so, domestic work was a dangerous job in D.C. According to Darlene Hines Clark, women who

[10] Miriam is considered the anonymous sibling who watches his collection from the Nile into the Egyptians hands. She is cited as a prophet (Exodus 15:20). The messaging around Miriam is clear: she questions Moses (Numbers 12:1), becomes ill as a result with leprosy (Numbers 12:10), recovers when she submits to his authority and he prays for her, yet eventually succumbs to her illness (Numbers 20:1). God even later warns that he struck down Miriam for questioning his main messenger (Deuteronomy 24:9).

migrated rarely had their working conditions significantly improve, they were not paid a living wage, they were physically and sexually vulnerable to their employers, they often served as breadwinners for their families and they were never given time off, physical privacy, or a room of their own (301).

11 Burroughs wanted to create employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for Black women who wanted to pursue careers outside of domestic service. The NTS offered an expansive curriculum to meet the varied life goals of students. It included general educational and liberal arts-based core courses in English, History (American and African American), Science and Mathematics alongside vocational topics of Domestic Science, Dressmaking, Business, and Social Service (Burroughs 15-21). Across the various occupational programs, Burroughs sought to organize laboring Black women and girls through a curriculum that emphasized the significance of spirituality, racial pride, African American history[11], and self-reliance. In addition to her educational activism, Burroughs worked with internationally with the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) challenging colonialism and addressing full citizenship not only for Americans, but for all Africans (Hornsby-Gutting 40). Specifically, Burroughs educated missionaries and sent them abroad, across Africa and held educational programming discussing ongoing social and historical events such as colorism abroad.

12 Burroughs's vision became a reality for some NTS students. Susie Green, a student who could not initially afford the NTS tuition, opened her own printing business after graduation and volunteered at the YWCA to assist other young Black women who were seeking gainful employment (1929, 5). According to *The Worker*, Beatrice Oger, a student who graduated from the NTS's domestic science program, refused to work in the homes of employers who did not pay living wages and provide safe working and living conditions (Burroughs[12]). After landing a position that met her standards, she was able to support herself financially as well as her mother and siblings down South. Ruth Doswell, an NTS student who initially disliked the school and cried

[11] There was a specific room in the NTS dedicated to African American History (Classroom with sign "This room is for the Study of Negro history" at the National Training School for Women and Girls, Washington, D.C. Washington D.C, 1935. Photograph).

[12] Burroughs wrote about Beatrice Oger's story in her newspaper publication entitled *The Worker* to advertise the NTS domestic science program. *The Worker* was one of the first national Black women's labor periodicals of the early twentieth century and it was produced in the Printing Department of the NTS. Burroughs was the sole author of the paper for the first ten years of its existence. *The Worker* still circulates to this very day, although its focus has shifted to Baptist missionary work. See https://www.pnbc.org/resources/publications/the-workers-magazine. Accessed September 13, 2020.

every single day to go back home, later sent her own daughters to the NTS and crafted a political organizing career for herself (14). Burroughs was not merely advertising her school[13]; she advertised her values through the education and organizing goals she met through changing the lives of black young women, deifying black motherhood and the role that black women can have in building a nation.

13 Drawing parallels to the Women Wage Earners and the National Association of Wage Earners, its successor, shows that Burroughs and her organizers were aware of the challenges in front of them and still sought to move forward. In 1917, Burroughs co-founded the Women Wage Earners Association in Washington D.C. for Black women domestic workers. Run by lawyer and Black Republican party advocate, Jeanette Carter, the organization sought better wages, fair working conditions, and certification from the American Federation of Labor (AFL) as a union (Washington Bee). While this early union effort sought to organize domestics and cooks, they also broadened their scope to include Black female business owners within Washington, D.C. (Washington Bee). The association gained attention from national media outlets and local D.C. residents. Like the NAWE, this organization met in D.C. with a national focus with plans to move to other locations and was centrally located near the Phyllis Wheatley YWCA which offered housing for African American women domestic workers who had enough funds to make it feasible not to live in employers' homes. The association planned forums to engage in community discussions about Black women's labor issues. The speakers included women and men from a variety of occupations including domestic workers, professors, census administrators, government workers, and military personnel. Jeanette Carter sought a variety of perspectives to influence her union and actively advocated for federal jobs for domestic workers and cooks in the World War I industry (Washington Herald; Washington Times). Carter advocated for technical skill training for average Black women workers including mechanical or nursing work through a platform of venerating labor of Black women through the Women Wage Earners Association (*Washington Herald; Washington Times*). There are no membership records of the association, yet the press described their meetings as well-attended, even citing a surprising shortage of chairs. Like

[13] Post-war she was seeking funding opportunities and, again, creating her legacy as a black woman intellectual educator through celebrating the successes of her students (Burroughs, Nannie. *Making Their Mark: Results in the Lives of Graduates.* Women and Social Movements. Database. Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, D.C. 1929. 1-21).

Burroughs, Carter saw labor rights as integral to voting rights. She collaborated with Burroughs and the National Association of Colored Women on suffrage organizing (*Evening Star*).

14 Burroughs and her colleagues needed collaborators, therefore, they attempted to gain solidarity support through the International Congress of Working Women (ICWW) in 1919. In collaboration with Elizabeth Ross Haynes and Mary Church Terrell among other organizers, Burroughs petitioned the International Congress of Working Women (ICWW) for Black domestic worker representation at the Congress and was ignored. The ICWW chose to defer to the agenda of mostly European and White American women's labor efforts, while the ICWW had an interest in the status of Black women organizers and domestic workers, they could not translate their guilt and culpability into practice (Vapnek 5). Haynes was a social worker who published a portion of her master's thesis, "Two Million Negro Working Women," in *The Southern Workman* covering the barbaric and dehumanizing conditions in which domestic, agricultural, and factory workers labored. Domestic positions had escalated since the war and there were nearly one million across the United States, but the work came "with all of the shortcomings of ordinary domestic service; namely, basement living quarters, poor working conditions, too long hours, no Sundays off, no standards of efficiency, and the servant 'brand'" (Hayes). Burroughs consistently cited Haynes' numerical data to ICWW and to Black themed advertisements and publications, regarding education, labor and political organizing of black women for the NAWE and beyond. Yet, without support from white women allies and with their petition rejected from the AFL, Burroughs and her colleagues continued to organize independently without help or governmental assistance. Burroughs consistently cited Haynes' quantitative data in her published writings about education and labor to galvanize political organizing among Black women for workers' and voting rights.[14]

"The women backing this organization are not misfits and failures, but successful in their particular lines" (Burroughs, "My Dear Friend")

15 In 1921, Burroughs deepened her commitment to reforming domestic service employment by creating the National Association of Wage Earners, a national union with the primary purpose

[14] The petition was one of the first places she cited Haynes' thesis data, citing 853,357 Black women in domestic service and 1,051,137 in agriculture ("First Convention of International Conference of Working Women." November 4, 1919. International Federation of Working Women Records, Schlesinger Library, Folder 3. Washington, D.C.). Burroughs later used this data in the NAWE organizing drive through her publications in the *Connecticut Labor Press* among other local Washington D.C. papers for black readership.

of organizing Black domestic workers (NAWE). The organization consisted of twenty-three chapters and a membership of NTS students and middle- and working-class Black women and men who advocated for higher wages for domestic workers. Their belief was that improving the working conditions of domestic workers would lead to better working conditions for all Black workers (Higginbotham 202). While the primary goal was to attain labor rights for domestic workers, the organization was open to Black women of all professions.

16 Although scholarship about Burroughs describes the NAWE as an unsuccessful organization because it ended in 1926, we argue that Burroughs was successful in creating and establishing an independent union in a country that still has not established federal labor protections for domestic workers[15]. Our analysis of the feminist activity through the NAWE's active years and beyond provide a new framework that allows for a detailed examination of what the organization accomplished, Burroughs's feminist approach to labor organizing, and the largely unknown women who helped establish such a historic initiative.

17 Burroughs composed a letter dated March 26, 1921, for the NAWE asking for 10,000 women from all professions to recruit 10,000 more, building on Carter's call from the Women Wage Earners citing for 5,000 women to recruit 5,000 more. Burroughs insisted on a living wage for domestic workers through occupational training and community organizing. She also sought to create entrepreneurial opportunities for domestic workers by creating an on-site factory for women to design their own uniforms and household appliances. The factory was a profit-sharing enterprise for NAWE members and officers. Burroughs' NAWE vision reflected the feminist ethos of equality across class lines. Two internal membership letters Burroughs titled, "My Dear Co-Worker" (an elaboration of "My Dear Friend") and "The Way to Make Money" (an internal union document on profit sharing) indicate that Burroughs sought to create a labor union of Black women workers to stand equally earning funds together to support themselves and the NAWE[16]. She addressed the first document "fellow co-worker" to imply collegiality and collaboration with NAWE members. The second document is not addressed at all, implying that all members of the NAWE were equal and engaged in fundraising collectively. Burroughs and Hammond detailed Burroughs's inclusive approach to women's organizing in the NAWE *In Vanguard of the Race*:

[15] Scholars use rhetorical terms invoking the union's loss of life, brief life and overall collapse in 1926 due to the Depression and fire at the settlement house (Higginbotham 219; Graves xxv; Thomas 251; Easter 102).

[16] Nannie Helen Burroughs papers 1922, National Association of Wage Earners. Box 308, Washington, D.C.. Library of Congress.

Miss Burroughs is at present working to unite the women of her race for mutual service. She is organizing them as workers--including artists, teachers, business and professional women, domestics, and home women in one big group, without regard to class distinctions. She wants them to stand together as women with common ideals of work, of standards of living, of service, and of self-respect. She wants the most favored women of her race to stand beside the poorest and, in doing so, to give the latter a new respect for themselves and their work, new hope, and new ambition, that, through a better service, they may win a better reward (Burroughs and Hammond 61-62). Burroughs differed because she did not only wish to work with the elite women, subverting the Talented Tenth ideal; she wanted to work with all Black women under the guiding philosophy of justice for all.

18 The NAWE's constitution, steeped in the Black suffragist belief that women's domestic work is skilled labor and held significant social and economic value, included a strike clause when workers' expectations were not met, professional development training, employee placement in both temporary and permanent positions, fair housing and wages, and a grievance filing process.[17] Employers who wanted to hire NAWE members were required to sign a document adhering to the working standards outlined in the NAWE's constitution. While Burroughs believed that Black women-owned organizations were critical for changing their working and living conditions, she also had a clear understanding that true and lasting change was impossible without voting. Thus, the NAWE constitution also consisted of a commitment to community organizing for labor legislation to protect Black women from labor and sexual exploitation in their homes of employment (Burroughs 1922).

19 The NAWE's headquarters in Washington D.C. consisted of a practice house for weekly meetings and events to discuss labor issues. The headquarters also provided a space for Black women to document grievances against their employers and strategize ways to attain higher pay, benefits, and a room of their own to take breaks (Evening Star, 1924). With a governing board across seven states, the NAWE had members from Florida, Connecticut, Virginia, Massachusetts, Kentucky, New York and Pennsylvania.[18]

[17] Burroughs's contemporary and fellow suffragist Anna Julia Cooper, for example, argued that Black women's domestic labors strengthened the US economy and were critical to the survival of the Black community. See Cooper's "Colored Women as Wage Earners."

[18] Burroughs writes to DuBois a letter asking him to forward photographs of the headquarters of the NAWE to a woman who was part of women's suffrage organizing magazine, Mrs. Raymond Brown. ("Letter from National

20 As Burroughs was personally aware because of her own work experience prior to establishing the NTS, Black women moved in between professions and rarely stayed within one field for the entirety of their lives. A union for all Black women workers was necessary to create a bottom-up and member-driven organization that served the diverse needs of labor Black women in Jane Crow America (McClusky 418-23). Like any good organizer, publication and data management was a crucial component of Burroughs' platform. Interviewed by Fredrick J. Haskin and advocating for the NAWE in national membership call, Burroughs emphasized that nearly three million Black women served as domestics and personal servants and the job standards were lower than working-class (*Evening Star*). Burroughs referred to Hayne's data in all her membership publications and calls, citing that only great numbers of women from a variety of backgrounds and life histories would be able to achieve equal rights together. Therefore, quantitative data helped make her case for the importance of Black women having access to the ballot box.

21 She put her theory into action by creating a diverse labor organization. The organizers of the NAWE were active clubwomen in Washington, D.C., including domestic workers, service workers, homemakers and public-school employees. Each co-organizer brought their own community networks, expertise, and personal labor experiences to NAWE organizing. Mahala Hill was a domestic worker and organizer in the National Association of Wage Earners (NAWE). For nearly seventy years, Hill worked in the home of the Glovers, a wealthy socially progressive D.C. based banking family. She received a cash allowance of $3,000, a pension, and a $4,000 trust, and died in their family home (*Evening Star*). Hill was the type of woman who Burroughs organized for. She was active in the D.C. social scene and fundraised for the NTS (*Evening Star*). According to her obituary, she was an educated woman who taught the household children, read voraciously, and traveled to Europe as a companion to Mrs. Glover (*Evening Star*). She used her connections and status at the Glover household to recruit domestic worker members to the NAWE (Murphy 145). The respect and gratitude from the family is shown in their dedicated obituary to her memory and celebration of her life through a funeral service at her home church, Ninetieth Street Baptist. Similarly, Lucy E. Holland was another influential organizer who brought her own networks, skills, and personal knowledge of Black women's labor issues to the NAWE. She worked as a

Association of Wage Earners to W.E.B. Du Bois"). This letter is one of the only examples of the full board of the NAWE.

waitress and joined the NAWE immediately after the call for membership, listing her own name as her recruiter[19] (Murphy 27). She organized for the NAWE within club women's organizations as well through the Phyllis Wheatley YWCA's Premiere Club for Business (Y.W.C.A. News). Holland similarly brought other members who lived near her home such as domestics and custodial wage-earners in working class jobs into the NAWE (Murphy 141). As Hill and Holland's history shows, the best organizers are people in the professions that they seek to transform for themselves and for future generations.

22 Lizzie Fouse, another NAWE organizer, was a successful community organizer in Kentucky and a former teacher who left the profession upon marriage.[20] Fouse had expertise in teaching domestic science courses, emphasizing preservation and preparation during WWI, and she was an effective political organizer. She recruited over one thousand signatures for a pledge to conserve food in 1918 in Kentucky from primarily Black signatories associated with her school (*The Kansas City Sun* 1918). Fouse was the registrar for the NAWE and later served as an officer of the National Association of Colored Women (*National Association Notes*). Working between both organizations, Fouse maintained the membership and official records from across the 23 chapters in the United States (*Connecticut Labor Press*). Generally, within labor unions themselves, there is usually one dedicated personnel who confirms lists and dues payments, therefore, her dedication to the organizing work is admirable, so much so that Fouse gave up her other work as President of the Kentucky chapter of the NAACP in 1920-1922 to work at the NAWE. During her time at the NAACP, she collected data specifically on the sexual assault of Black minor children.[21] As an educator and tireless advocate for Black women and young girl's rights, Fouse served as an unpaid full-time labor organizer for the NAWE.

23 Sadie Tignor Henson served as president of the NAWE's district union chapter in D.C. Prior to the NAWE, she organized with the Women Wage Workers Association (*Washington Post; Washington Bee*). As D.C. local president, Henson was responsible for recruitment and maintenance of the membership. In addition, she was a long-time member of the Freemasons Order of the Eastern Star and was buried with full honors (Evening Star). Henson worked as a truant officer in Washington D.C. and was familiar with the struggles young Black women underwent in

[19] Nannie Helen Burroughs papers 1922, National Association of Wage Earners. Box 308, Washington, D.C.. Library of Congress.
[20] See the edited collection on all of the lesser-known activists of Kentucky (McDaniel 274-293).
[21] Papers of the NAACP, 1913-1930, Lexus Nexus. University Publications of America.

receiving fulfilling and long-term employment after their education. A longtime supporter of Black women's rights in education, employment and voting, Henson traveled often and lectured about her work at the Women Wager Earners Association meetings during its inception (Washington Bee). Henson and her husband both worked in solidarity with their shared goal of elevating the status of Black workers. Henson served in two other management positions as a Zion Baptist Sunday School and the National Association of Colored Women (NACW). Through her matrix of affiliated organizations, Henson was able to meet and recruit a diverse number of workers to the NAWE (Murphy 27).

24 Maggie L. Walker served as the Treasurer of the NAWE and was responsible for the funding and dues of the organization. According to Elsa Barkley Brown, the women that Walker recruited to the NAWE sought coalition building, "a women's organization that sought to pool the energies and resources of housewives, professionals, and managerial, domestic, and industrial workers to protect and expand the economic position of black women. The NAWE argued that it was vital that all black women be able to support themselves" (612). As the first Black woman to found a penny save bank and appoint as many women as possible working around her, Walker believed that *all* Black women deserved to have a fair wage and access their own funds and savings from the results of their own labor (Brown 617). Like Fouse, Walker left the teaching profession upon her marriage because it was not legal at the time for married women to teach, therefore, she shifted her attention into a full-time position of unpaid labor organizing on issues such as suffrage and fair pay (Brown 612). The only way for Black women to grow together would be through collective economic development. As Burroughs was building the NTS, Walker was one of the only Black women to support her both emotionally and financially, "When things looked most hopeless, Mrs. Maggie L. Walker, the woman banker of Richmond, gave her 500 on condition that she would not tell anyone who gave it to her" (Burroughs and Hammond 55). Walker embodied solidarity through her principals based on economic equality of Black women laborers. While never being able to draw a salary for themselves, both Fouse and Walker were the two housewives listed on the NAWE membership roll making the invisible organizing labor of Black women visible.

25 While presiding over the NAWE, Burroughs never lost sight of voting rights and its importance to bringing the NAWE's goals into fruition. Although Black women could legally vote after the ratification of the nineteenth amendment, local governments implemented racist policies

that blocked their access to the ballot box for the following forty-five years. In 1924, Burroughs co-founded the National League of Republican Colored Women (NLCRW), an organization that advocated for the right for Black women to vote. The NLCRW was also instrumental in collecting qualitative and quantitative data that measured the suppression of the Black women's vote. Burroughs created an NLCRW questionnaire to measure Black women's political engagement in the presidential election of 1924. As she explained, "The Race is doomed unless Negro women take an active part in local, state, and national politics . . . They must oppose parties and candidates opposed to equal citizenship. They must organize to fight discrimination and class legislation.[22] The questions included in the survey made clear that Burroughs believed that attaining labor rights for domestic workers was integral to collecting information to "fight discrimination and class legislation" and "help our women become a factor in the body politic" ("Colored Women in Politics"). As someone who was intentional about everything that she did and said, Burroughs' decision to type the questionnaire on NAWE letterhead signals that she believed domestic worker organizing was integral to voting rights, and voting rights was thereby critical to the larger goals of the NAWE.

26 Similarly, Burroughs sought to extend her programming not only nationally, but internationally. She advertised in many newspapers, including in Dallas, Texas, where she announced the forming of the NAWE with the reasoning to create locals and gain membership all across the United States ("Wage Earners Association Meets"). She composed a personal letter to Margaret Murray Washington in the papers of Mary Church Terrell (fellow clubwoman) on NAWE stationary titled, "A Labor Organization with a Constructive Program" indicating Burroughs sought to send students abroad for the "Darker Races Group." Dated 1925 it shows that the NAWE was firstly an organization about labor rights for black women at work (even missionaries) and potentially sought to move their program transnationally when it was successful in America. Burroughs sought to align all black women together in a single united vision of sisterhood and togetherness.

27 Burroughs and her co-organizers tried to expand the political power and reach of the NAWE by attempting to work with the American Federation of Labor (AFL). Speaking to the *Connecticut Labor Press* twice, Burroughs announced that she was seeking a charter with the AFL

[22] "Colored Women in Politics." Nannie Helen Burroughs Papers. Questionnaire 1922. National Association of Wage Earners. Box 308, Washington, D.C.. Library of Congress.

in March and revealed in October that the AFL rejected the NAWE's petition to become an affiliated charter (Connecticut Labor Press). Burroughs and her co-organizers continued organizing and pushing their membership forward. As Burroughs explained, "This is an organization for every worker, skilled and unskilled. This is an organization for every woman, high or low, servant or secretary, college president or field hand" (Connecticut Labor Press 1924). Without support from white labor organizations and the federal government, NAWE organizers recruited a total of five to ten thousand women (*Connecticut Labor Press*)[23].

28 While the NAWE's activities declined in 1926, Burroughs' labor organizing, and political activism continued within other commensurate organizations. In 1934, she co-founded the Cooperative Industries outside of Washington D.C. based on the ethic and principal of shared labor in providing educational, medical, and grocery services for the D.C. community. Many of the shareholders in the cooperative were Black women who were unemployed domestic workers and desired to labor outside of household employment. The cooperative provided services for Black and white D.C. communities as seamstresses, laundresses, bakers, cooks, nurses and clerks staffing a grocery store with plans for a credit union, shoe repair shop and a broom factory (Weinberg). One of the primary goals of the cooperative was for Black women to control their own labor production, create their own means of income, and invest back into their communities in a society that had denied domestic workers the right to file for unemployment benefits and a federal government that refused to invest in Black communities. Black women and other women of color would not gain equal access to the ballot box until the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Black women's labor organizing, however, helped establish a strong foundation from which Civil Rights leaders could make the argument for such an act.

[23] Scholars Deborah Gisele Thomas found 1,787 membership cards in 1998 whereas Mary Elizabeth Murphy found 1,820 membership cards in 2012 of the Washington D.C. chapter at the Library of Congress (283; 156). The NAWE was comprised of twenty-three chapters. The membership number cited in the article "Union for Negro Women Workers Gaining Ground" might include the number of members in the other chapters. In addition, due to a flood at the Library of Congress and a fire at the practice house in 1926, some of the NAWE membership records could have become lost or damaged. These multiple factors help explain the difference in membership reporting between the article and current archival evidence.

Conclusion: "Society Has Always Deemed to Look Down on Those with Caps and Aprons"

(Burroughs, "'The Social Security Act looks down on us who toil with our Hands' says Nannie Burroughs.")

29 The absence of Burroughs's historic undertakings in the first wave era repeats the same white suffragist practice of undervaluing Black women's domestic labors and political activism: domestic workers are still excluded from federal unionization in the United States, their labors still marginalized, and their rights curtailed. In 1937, the Social Security Administration Act was passed to aid the unemployed, excluding domestic workers from receiving benefits. Burroughs fumed to *The Pittsburgh Courier* that this exclusion displayed how domestic workers and their political power was again written out of the story. By considering household work invisible, Burroughs argued that equality can never be gained until domestic workers have full legal rights within America tying their labor to the ballot box (*The Pittsburgh Courier* 1937). Organizations such as The National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA) based in Washington, D.C., operate under the same principles that Burroughs operated the NAWE, asserting that domestic labor is of significant value and domestic workers should be granted the same benefits as other workers.

30 While Nannie Helen Burroughs and her colleagues did not author books espousing a formal theory about race, labor, and voting, their work in building solidarity with all Black women was based on early feminist organizing principles. Through the NAWE and NTS, Burroughs created an intersectional suffragist agenda that simultaneously challenged racial, class, and gender inequalities by centering domestic workers in a justice movement for all women and all Black workers. Burroughs was a clubwoman who did not unequivocally conform to respectability politics, or the idea that only elite and middle-class Black women could lead the Black race into political, social, and economic advancement. She believed in cross-class organizing choosing to collaborate with members of national club organizations and local organizers to challenge systemic barriers that prevented Black women from voting. Labor organizers such as Carter, Fouse, Henson, Hill, Holland and Walker are forgotten among the history books, but their vision moved a generation of Black women workers. It is up to us to construct a comprehensive narrative that recognizes how Black women labor organizers helped create a voting rights movement for *all* women.

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"Trans is Hot Right Now": On Cisgender Writers and Trans Characters in Jeanette Winterson's *Frankissstein* and Kim Fu's *For Today I Am a Boy*

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Abstract

Trans is "hot right now" (Winterson 1226). But who gets to write about trans issues? Winterson's and Fu's books follow in the upsurge of trans visibility in the mainstream media referred to as the "transgender tipping point" and marked by Laverne Cox's appearance on the cover of *Time Magazine* and prominent trans celebrity interviews on the Piers Morgan and Katie Couric shows in 2014. However, visibility can also be a "trap", as Gossett et al. have argued, in that they "accommodat[e] trans bodies, histories, and culture only insofar as they can be forced to hew to hegemonic modalities" (xxiii). Mia Fischer explains that "the popular assumption that the increased visibility of trans individuals in public discourse automatically translates into improvement in transgender people's daily lives" needs to be challenged (5). In addition to the disparity between visibility and real-life problems, the question of how trans people are represented is also problematic. As Brynn Tannehill put it, "when nearly every media portrayal of a transgender [person] is as someone who is incapable, sad, and/or pathetic, it makes it that much harder for us to be taken seriously and dig ourselves out of the hole we're in". I take Kim Fu and Jeanette Winterson as two recent examples of cisgender writers taking up trans characters, representing them in outdated and offensive ways, and basing their research about transness on sources – traditional trans memoirs, medical facts, and mainstream media – that replicate patterns which trans authors have identified as harmful. Following Jacob Hale's "Suggested Rules for Non-Transsexuals Writing about Transsexuals, Transsexuality, Transsexualism, or Trans," I propose five new rules cis fiction writers should adhere to when writing trans characters.

1 Trans is "hot right now" (Winterson 1226). But who gets to write about trans issues? Winterson's and Fu's books follow in the upsurge of trans visibility in the mainstream media referred to as the "transgender tipping point" and marked by Laverne Cox's appearance on the cover of Time magazine and prominent trans celebrity interviews on the Piers Morgan and Katie Couric shows in 2014. However, visibility can also be a "trap", as Gossett et al. have argued, in that they "accommodat[e] trans bodies, histories, and culture only insofar as they can be forced to hew to hegemonic modalities" (xxiii). Mia Fischer explains that "the popular assumption that the increased visibility of trans individuals in public discourse automatically translates into improvement in transgender people's daily lives" needs to be challenged (5). In addition to the disparity between visibility and real-life problems, the question of how trans people are represented is also problematic. As Brynn Tannehill put it, "when nearly every media portrayal of a transgender [person] is as someone who is incapable, sad, and/or pathetic, it makes it that much harder for us to be taken seriously and dig ourselves out of the hole we're in" (n.p.). I take Kim Fu

and Jeanette Winterson as two recent examples of cisgender writers taking up trans characters, representing them in outdated and sometimes offensive ways, and basing their research about transness on sources – traditional trans memoirs, medical facts, and mainstream media – that replicate patterns which trans authors have identified as harmful. Following Jacob Hale's "Suggested Rules for Non-Transsexuals Writing about Transsexuals, Transsexuality, Transsexualism, or Trans," I propose five new rules cis fiction writers should adhere to when writing trans characters.

2 Fu's and Winterson's approaches are different. Fu writes a compassionate but tragic Chinese-Canadian coming-of-age novel which places much of its focus on the tropes of suffering and being born in the wrong body. In *Frankissstein,* Winterson creates a trans character, Ry Shelley, as a logical addition to her portfolio of gender-bending characters, but Ry's fate in this novel is to be subjected to medicalization, sexual violence, and constant verbal abuse. Both Fu and Winterson embrace what I call the "transness as tragedy" approach and manifest characters who have little agency in the face of the near-comical amount of abuse which they stoically bear without protest. I will argue that these kinds of trans representations are problematic because both trans fiction and trans literature have moved on such approaches and Fu's and Winterson's characterizations perpetuate harmful stereotypes about trans people rather than portraying them as complex and multi-dimensional. Through an analysis of two different approaches to writing trans protagonists, one imagined as a novelization of a trans memoir and the other juxtaposing transness and transhumanism, I will map out the main problems cis writers run into when imagining trans characters.

Overview of Cis and Trans Approaches to Writing Transness

3 In rule number four, Jacob Hale states: "Don't erase our voices by ignoring what we say and write" (n.p.). Even though this rule was aimed at cis academics such as Bernice Hausman, who theorized trans subjectivity by selectively reading trans memoirs and medical texts only to come to transphobic conclusions, the essence of it works for Winterson and Fu as well. Trans writing is not limited to trans memoirs and medical texts by cis doctors whose only lens of trans people is pathology. A cis writer's toolbox needs to expand to trans writing, both theory, which provides access to debates about trans subjectivity and important guidelines about acceptable terminology and pressing issues, and the growing field of trans fiction and poetry, where one can

find acceptable models for trans representation. It is possible for a cis writer to write believable trans characters. The best such characters emerge when the aim is to construct a non-binary or gender-bending character rather than a trans character. Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1928) and Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) are good early examples of novels in which cross-dressing and a laisse-faire attitude to gender norms give the characters agency. Jeanette Winterson's *The PowerBook* (2000) and Jeffrey Eugenides's *Middlesex* (2002) are two contemporary examples of well-written gender-bending and gender-variant characters. The best example for a cis writer writing a trans character is Felicia Luna Lemus's *Like Son* (2007), in which the protagonist's transness is just a minor detail in their lives and their experience of 9/11 is the true focus on the novel. This can probably be attributed to the counsel of Lemus's former partner, T. Cooper, a trans novelist who takes the same approach in his work.

4 In contrast to what most cis authors are doing, in the past few years, publishing has seen a major shift with Metonymy Press's and Topside Press's efforts to publish trans women's fiction. Trans poetry, along with a proliferation of individual poet collections, is also shifting from mainly autobiographical themes to concerns linking trans lives and larger historical and pressing political concerns. These new trans novels are all set post-transition and prioritize taking up the lives of adult trans characters who already put their transition years behind them and now focus on the rest of their lives – the trans community, issues of discrimination, dating, career, and reconnecting with their families and cultural/ethnic heritage. Jia qing wilson yang's *Small Beauty* (2016) and Casey Plett's *Little Fish* (2018) center around a mourning period, a discovery of queerness in the family, and Chinese-Canadian or Mennonite heritage. Imogen Binnie's *Nevada* (2013) focuses on a road trip and creating a bond between older and younger generations of trans people, while Sybil Lamb's *I've Got a Time Bomb* (2014) is dystopian speculative fiction. Jordy Rosenberg's *Confessions of a Fox* (2018) is a reimagination of an 18th century novel. Variety abounds even with less than twenty novels in the genre.

In an adaptation of Hale's rules to fit cis fiction writers, I propose the following guidelines:

1. An author should focus on the social (rather than familial) injustices the character faces while maintaining a balance to ensure the work does not make the character tragic.
2. A better and safer option would be to make the character's transness just a detail in their lives and add complexity elsewhere – heritage, historical situation, relationships, etc.

3. Make trans characters complex characters with interests other than transitioning. Be familiar with the medical and socio-cultural context, but then disregard it and just write a character as layered and surprising as any cis character you could make up.
4. Know your boundaries. Steer clear of tropes such as half-man/half-woman, transness constructed through medical technology, focusing on the graphic details of surgeries, making transness tragic, and oversexualizing trans people.
5. Choose your sources wisely – if you aim to write contemporary trans literature, then read contemporary trans literature.

Queer literature has matured away from focusing only on coming out narratives and trans literature is doing the same. Cis authors should be particularly sensitive to treading into unfamiliar territory and facing a potential backlash from the very community many probably set out to help. Just as there exists a white savior syndrome, there is also cis savior syndrome, and it is equally as problematic.

Fu and The Wrong Body Narrative

5 In rule number three, Hale writes: "Beware of replicating the following discursive movement (which Sandy Stone articulates in 'The Empire Strikes Back,' and reminds us is familiar from other colonial discourses): Initial fascination with the exotic; denial of subjectivity, lack of access to dominant discourse; followed by a species of rehabilitation" (n.p.). There are two discursive movements that can be followed in Stone's writing: the trajectory from object of fascination to punishment, which Winterson uses, and the movement following all the "suspicious" tropes of trans memoirs that Stone points out and explains the origins of, and which both Fu and Winterson uncritically replicate. Considering that Fu is mimicking a traditional trans narrative, I will explain its origins and relevance. Most theorists (Prosser, Namaste, Butler) recognize that the first format trans life writing took was "the traditional trans narrative" which had to be told to a doctor to qualify for hormonal therapy and/or surgery. For many trans authors, writing an autobiography for the cis readership was the only way to get published, and for "public transsexuals," an autobiography, however sensationalist it turned out to be, meant a chance to tell their side of the story. Viviane Namaste introduces the idea of the "autobiographical imperative," the notion that trans individuals are allowed "to speak, but only insofar as they offer their personal autobiographies, and only as long as they respond to the questions posed by a non-transsexual

interviewer" (46). Prosser notes that "the nontranssexual readership that sustains the market for these autobiographies is surely motivated primarily by fascination, an interest in the transsexual precisely as prodigious other" (129). The "wrong body narrative" has been critiqued by Susan Stryker, Jay Prosser, Dean Spade, and others through arguing an alternate discursive framework. Trans novelists have embraced this progressive and logical approach, while the trans memoir genre and cisgender writers' depictions of trans characters mostly opt for the problematic outdated approach. In replicating the model of the trans memoir, Fu also replicates the idea that trans people (or in this case characters) are only allowed to speak if they speak about topics that satisfy cis curiosity.

6 Cisgender scholarship about Fu's book showed similar problematic dynamics of cis writers having conversations about trans characters placed in either queer or mainstream frameworks with no reference to trans studies or regard for trans voices. For example, Andrea Ruthven argues that Fu's novel "traces the process of gender dis-identification" instead of "lauding the achievement of a recognizable gender identity" (2). From Ruthven's perspective, Fu provides a delightfully queer trans contrast to the mainstream media coverage of trans celebrities who have succeeded in overcoming obstacles. However, this is a flawed argument because both the mainstream media directors of reality shows and Kim Fu are cisgender people curating their own versions of a trans perspective made by and for cis people. Trans literature and trans history did not start a few years ago when cisgender people started paying attention. Trans literature, predominantly in the form of memoir, can be traced back to the 1931 memoir by Lili Elbe, to 1950s pulp novels, to the novels of Leslie Feinberg, to the myriad of contemporary trans memoirs, and to the recent trans novel boom of the 2010s. The fact remains that the vast majority of trans literary production *is* about the process of dis-identification, or, in trans terms, dysphoria. Almost every trans memoir is full of familial rejection, bullying, and depression. In this light, Fu presents a very stereotypical image of a trans person rather than an innovative one. Ruthven argues that "rather than being a celebratory narrative of over/be-coming, Fu's novel wallows in the negative feelings, the rage, frustration, and sadness that characterize the protagonist's relationship with their body" (5). However, wallowing in dysphoric feelings is hardly progress in the portrayal of trans characters; it is a step backwards. Ruthven's arguments, as well as Fu's depiction of Audrey, only serve to show that cisgender narratives about trans people still prefer the trope of the long-suffering trans tragic hero as

somehow more “authentic” than a character like Fu’s other trans character, John, a well-adjusted, politically active trans person, who represents a growing number of trans people in the West.

7 Fu’s novel follows some aspects of the traditional trans memoir structure such as a dysphoric childhood, a move to the big city, and the image of the unhappy balding middle-aged man who puts on dresses in front of a mirror, but does well in challenging others, such as the predominant whiteness of trans memoir and the focus on medical transition. Traditional models of trans memoir generally follow a similar “basic outline” made up of three “acts”: “a “gender-dysphoric childhood,” a “move to the big city and the transformation,” and “the aftermath of the sex change” coupled with self-acceptance (Ames xii). In the first act, a staple of trans memoir is the first time a trans child, usually transfeminine, is discovered by an adult in the act of trying on dresses and putting on make-up. In Fu’s novel, Audrey, the youngest of four sisters, adopts the same attitude: in kindergarten, she draws herself as a mommy, and she desperately wants to become like her sisters. While Audrey’s father’s toxic masculinity threatens her very existence, the company of her sisters provides an environment of comfort, belonging, and acceptance.

8 Audrey’s path to womanhood again resembles traditional trans memoirs in that despite growing up with sisters who she strived to emulate, Audrey is depicted as being ignorant of how to make herself a “passing” woman and has old-fashioned ideas about what a woman should be. Although old-fashioned ideas about binary gender, manhood, and womanhood are often present in the childhood sections of trans memoirs, as they are in the childhood thoughts of any cisgender child, such problematic tropes should not be left unattended and unexplained in cisgender writing because they run the risk of becoming petrified ideas about how trans people view gender. For example, in Aleisha Brevard's second memoir, the author reflects on her ideas of femininity influenced by growing up in the 1950s, when her greatest fear was that she would “never be considered 'woman' enough to be a good wife” (49). At that time, Brevard had “no concept that the terms *feminine* and *independent* could be synonymous . . . like much of society, straight and gay, [she] thought a good woman must also be docile and long-suffering” (49). Fu’s novel is set in 1980s Canada and Audrey’s models of womanhood are her relatively traditional and submissive mother and her sexually adventurous sisters so the combination of both culminated in Audrey’s view of femaleness in terms of feminine clothing, loving domestic chores, and the desire to be objectified.

9 The idea of trans women as mindlessly adopting outdated stereotypes about femaleness has been at the forefront of trans-exclusionary radical feminist (TERF) arguments from the 1970s. Janice Raymond argued that gender confirmation surgery, which she saw as the technology through which trans women were created from men, endorsed "a femininity which, in many transsexuals, becomes a caricature of much that feminists have rejected about man-made femininity" (Raymond xviii-xix). Fu's portrayal of a transfeminine character who revels in cleaning and imagines being submissive to violent men is in line with the most damaging critiques of transness as a legitimate gender identity. Butler, among others, has dismantled the idea that trans women want to become caricatures and argued that "the transsexual desire to become a man or a woman is not to be dismissed as a simple desire to conform to established identity categories" (*Undoing* 4). Paraphrasing Kate Bornstein, Butler notes that transness "can be a desire for transformation itself, a pursuit of identity as a transformative exercise, an example of desire itself as a transformative activity" (*Undoing* 4). It is harmful to depict trans people as being "dupes of gender" not intelligent enough to decipher that there is more to womanhood than dresses and cleaning (Prosser 7). Audrey's desire to embody this passive femaleness through making herself feminine and submissive also results in some very risky and non-consensual sexual encounters.

10 Fu's choice of ending was pleasantly devoid of the surgical ending in Ames's formula and also veers away from what Raaz Link calls "the stereotypical progress narrative in which our hero finds queer salvation and 2.2 partners in an alternative community" (652/653). Ruthven similarly argues that "the novel willingly explores the possibility for an open-ended gender identity, one that rejects the homecoming narrative in favor of a more transnational concept of belonging" (2). However, it is critical to note that a cisgender writer like Fu is not the first person imagining trans endings alternate to medical transition or placing transness in a transnational context. Open-ended narratives independent of a transition narrative already exist in trans literature. Leslie Feinberg's *Drag King Dreams* (2006) maps out a trans identity inflected with Jewish heritage and resistance movements. Elliott Deline's *Show Trans* (2014) explores the possibility of a transmasculine character embracing elements of femininity after transition. Vivek Shraya, jia qing wilson-yang, and Kai Cheng Thom also place transness in a transnational context. In fact, trans authors of color regularly opt for the transnational as a way of escaping the constraints of the still predominantly white trans memoir. As Aren Aizura shows in *Mobile Subjects* (2018), even many trans memoirs have a transnational component in that the protagonists often travel in search of affordable surgery.

Open-endedness is also a definitive characteristic of trans novels, which begin post-transition and thus open up the possibilities for trans lives not bound up in dysphoria and medicalization. Audrey's trip to Germany to meet her sisters is also symbolic of a journey to a new identity which Prosser calls "transition as a geographic trope" (5). Although road trips are most often used as either a "symbolic representation of dysphoria" or post-transition identity quests common in trans novels, Fu's novel omits the process of travel altogether and instead paints a meeting of sisters in Germany as the beginning of Audrey's new life (Keegan 3). The focus on the affective community of sisterhood, albeit a non-trans one, is a commendable ending and one similar to the focus on trans sisterhood communities in trans novels such as Ryka Aoki's, Casey Plett's, and Kai Cheng Thom's but also presents a rare choice of ending in which a biological family accepts their trans relative.

Transgender as Transhuman

11 Just as Fu's Audrey remains isolated for much of her adulthood, Winterson's Ry is a trans character isolated in an unwelcoming cisgender world. While Audrey is pre-transition and divorced from medical discourse, Ry is steeped in the medical, technological, and transhuman. Both are equally harassed – Audrey as a child and Ry as an adult – and both make choices related to their sexuality that betray a lack of self-worth that makes them overly tragic. And yet the story set in the 1980s has a much happier ending than the technologically advanced present-day story. Winterson has been writing non-binary characters most of her career, but this is the first time she called a character trans. In *The Power Book*, Winterson's narrator wrote dozens of stories for her lover, imagining the two of them inhabiting different genders and time periods. In *Written on The Body* (1992), the narrator was also a nameless, genderless voice writing to their female lover. This worked well because Winterson could transcend lesbian literature while also crafting beautifully queer fantasies that allowed for gender play without being overtly heterosexual. If she had called her *Frankissstein* (2019) character trans and not tried to tackle trans-specific experiences about hormones and surgeries and bathrooms and sex, it would have resulted in a complex and out-of-the-box trans representation; however, the addition of details about Ry actually made the narrative transphobic. *Frankissstein* is set in two parallel worlds: the 19th century world of Mary Shelley and her process of imagining *Frankenstein*, and contemporary United States, where Ry Shelley, a trans doctor, falls in love with Victor Stein, a transhumanist AI scientist who is trying to download

the contents of a human brain. Each of the characters in Shelley's posse on Lake Geneva has a doppelganger in the 21st century and Ry's is Mary herself.

12 Ry's naming and deadnaming are harmful practices that continually undermine Ry's gender. Ry explains to random strangers he meets for the first time that Ry is short for Mary, thereby exposing himself to 300 pages of jokes and jeers. In a crowd of potentially unfriendly strangers, it is very unlikely that a trans person would so openly offer their dead name, "the name that a transgender person was given at birth and no longer uses upon transitioning" ("Dead name"). The repeated revelation of Ry's dead name by Ry himself functions as a reminder of the connection to Mary Shelley, but it is also an unlikely invitation to stares and offensive comments about him not being a real man—something no trans person would openly invite from hostile cis strangers. Winterson also follows in the path of cisgender journalists who still, as Fischer notes, "continue to rely on nontransgender 'experts' as proxies rather than letting trans people tell their own stories, which often individualizes struggles and failures but does not address the systemic nature of intersecting oppressions" (17). Although Winterson tries to get around this issue of expertise by making Ry a doctor as well, that decision also cements the contentious connection between transness as based in medicine and ignores the social context of trans people's lives. Although Fu refers to Audrey as Peter during almost the entire novel – an approach that resonates strongly with cis reactions to trans people in its insistence of framing Audrey as a boy who felt he was a girl – at least one could argue that the transition narrative and the presence of the family somehow justify it. In contrast, Winterson's deadnaming functions as a punchline.

13 In a *Guardian* interview with Lisa Allardice, Winterson responds to the "trans question" with: "Transgender is interesting because gender is so annoying and so boring and has caused so much trouble . . . I don't really think of myself as female or male, I just think of myself as me. I'm not even sure I see myself as human. I don't feel particularly human." But the issue with Winterson's embracing of gender-fluid or perhaps even non-binary or trans gender identity is that although she knows the discrimination that comes from growing up gay, she cannot transfer that to another context such as trans or African-American, because her understanding of those other contexts is limited. In a similar interview, Kim Fu, a first-time author and Chinese-Canadian cis woman, responds more cautiously about appropriation: "Whenever I'm asked about that disconnect, I think about books by white writers that feature Asian characters – the questions I have, as an Asian-Canadian, for those writers: about appropriation, authenticity, and the

responsibilities that come with portraying underrepresented people" ("Kim"). Fu argues that she wrote "a singular, individual character, one who feels real and true to [her], with no intention of representing the experiences of a diverse, heterogeneous group of people as a whole" and that she doesn't think "there is one core, unifying trans narrative" ("Kim"). Nevertheless, a cisgender person's "truth" of a marginalized person and their experience is a problematic place to start.

14 Winterson's "truth" of transness is similar to TERF notions of transness as constructed through technological advancements, an outdated idea of trans people as half man/half woman, and an overt focus on and exoticization of trans genitals. There is evidence that Winterson did do some research about trans terminology because she knew to have Ry identify as "trans" instead of transgender and used the correct term for "top surgery" rather than calling it a sex change (although she says "lower surgery" instead of "bottom surgery"). However, Ry says things a cis person might think a trans person would say, such as "when I was entirely a woman" (Winterson 1472), "when I was female," "as a woman," "I am fully female. I am also partly male" (Winterson 1222), and "I am a woman. And I am a man" (Winterson 1517). Ry is a man in his 30s or 40s living in the UK. He has no background at all, but we do know he is a doctor and well-educated, although he does not seem to read much outside of his field. It is unlikely this trans man who changed his name and his pronoun, had top surgery, and has been on testosterone for years would be saying "I am/was female". If they believed that, it is more likely that they would identify as non-binary or gender-fluid. The man/woman idea continues through a focus on Ry's genitals and how they changed through taking testosterone. Winterson, as many cis people who are curious about trans people, places too much focus on genitals. In one of the most well-known examples of well-meaning cis journalists asking invasive questions of their trans guests, Katie Couric kept insisting that actress Laverne Cox and model Carmen Carrera talk about if they had bottom surgery even after Carrera cautioned her the topic was too personal (Steinbock 51). Similarly, in Piers Morgan's interview with Janet Mock, he kept insisting on the stock phrase "born a boy" even though Mock's memoir attempted to dismantle this phrase as problematic and "sought to capitalize foremost on the sensationalism of surgical transition" (Steinbock 52). In many ways, *Frankissstein* is a combination of these two cis-focused ideas of transness as epitomized though genitals and betweenness. While newspaper stories covering trans issues show some progress "including a decrease in misgendering, focus on genitals, and deadnaming," Winterson makes these three negative practices the focus of her descriptions of Ry, thereby showing her lack of knowledge

about trans issues (Fischer 17). *Frankissstein* often reads like a cis person's fantasy of what they would want a trans person to talk about in response to invasive cis questions.

15 Unlike Fu's grounding in trans memoir and transition, Winterson follows the technological approach to transness and links it explicitly to transhumanism and posthumanism. The trans in transhuman is the same trans as in transhuman – it was "shorthand for *transitional human,"* a term coined by futurist F. M. Esfandiary (Transhumanist). However, the transition is also in the shift from "the centrality of the human toward making room for more highly evolved forms or species enhanced through technological innovation" (Campbell 282). Posthuman enhancements usually include extending life span, enhancing mental and physical capabilities, and embracing new biotechnologies. The link between posthumanism and transness has been made before, by Martine Rothblatt, a trans transhumanist whose Cartesian and gender-constructivist views reflect Victor Stein's in their total dismissal of the body in favour of the superior mind. Transness could fit into the category of posthuman if we consider posthumans as "'individuals who suppress biological determinism'" by going beyond traditional boundaries of gender, sexuality and species" (Campbell 282, paraphrasing Moore). However, if an enhancement in the posthuman sense is something that potentially help all humans increase the capabilities of their bodies, then trans technologies do not fit that category because they do not translate into the cisgender context. The problem with seeing trans people as posthuman individuals is that they can be celebrated by certain groups of people for being cyborgs and showing the power of technology, they can at the same time be viewed through the lens of technology as dehumanized, as science gone too far.

16 The fraught history of seeing trans subjectivity as inherently tied to technology stems from the radical feminist discourse of trans women as threats to lesbian communities. In early TERF discourse, trans women were seen as men who were enabled to masquerade as women through the use of technology. In "Sappho by Surgery," Janice Raymond argues that "transsexually constructed lesbian-feminists" are still men trying to trick, divide, and destroy feminist communities. Raymond dismisses transsexuality as an identity category and thinks that "since all transsexuals have to 'pass' as feminine in order to qualify for surgery, so-called lesbian-feminist transsexuals either had to lie to the therapists and doctors, or they had a conversion experience after surgery" (134). According to Raymond, trans people use technology to change their bodies and then use them as a tool for deception. Trans studies have embraced feminist and queer theory from their inception and used them to refute TERF arguments. Pointing to Judith Butler's

invocation of the categories of 'butch' and 'femme' as 'not simple assimilations of lesbianism back into terms of heterosexuality' but categories that 'recall the heterosexual scene but simultaneously displace it', Sandy Stone refutes the argument that trans women are imitations of cisgender women (230). Susan Stryker similarly responds to accusations of trans women's 'constructedness' and reclaims 'monster,' a derogatory term used by Mary Daly (244). When Winterson makes the uncomfortable connection between Frankenstein's monster and trans people, she is not the first to do so; she is again writing into a TERF legacy. Stryker calls Daly's characterization of trans women "as the agents of a 'necrophilic invasion'" an "explicit" connection between Frankenstein's monster and transsexuality, while she sees Raymond's claim that transsexuality should be "mandat[ed] out of existence" as a reverberation of Victor Frankenstein's words about the monster who reproaches him with his creation (245). Stryker finds "a deep affinity" with the monster in Shelley's *Frankenstein* because "like the monster, [she is also] too often perceived as less than fully human due to the means of [her] embodiment" (Stryker 245). For TERFs, the unnatural constructedness of trans bodies is proof that they do not belong in the same biological category as women and therefore cannot hope to share women-only spaces.

17 *Frankissstein* is set up so that each character from Shelley's world has a parallel in the contemporary world, but there is no double for the monster, which begs the question: who is the monster? Dr. Stein dabbles in cryogenics and uploading the contents of a human brain as data, but he never invents anything that gets much of a reaction from the other characters as a monstrosity. The sexbots come closest to monstrosity, to necrophilia and deadness coming to life, yet they have no consciousness or agency. Ry is the only character who, with the help of medical technology, creates something that is the focus of fascination and cringing throughout the novel – he reinterprets himself as male-bodied. Ry, like Shelley, "writes" himself into being, but where, then, is his own "vampire," his own "spirit set loose form the grave"? (Shelley, as cited in Stryker 245). The only possible location is what the other characters in the novel see as his "alter ego" of a trans man, a monstrous double of someone who "used to be a woman". Even though the two characters could also be interpreted as sharing the monster designation in their quests to achieve transhuman status, they are not the same because Stein is never perceived as a passive body that gets abused, fetishized, and upon which surgeries are performed. Ry is a doctor only in theory – we never see him anywhere near his place of work; it is Stein who assumes the role of scientist and fetishizing cis researcher in observing Ry and making comments such as "you are both exotic and real"

(Winterson 1853). Ry is rendered completely passive – he serves as the link to a UK lab where Stein can get body parts, he lets Stein do whatever he wants to him, and he lets people bombard him with offensive comments. Adding to the implication of trans monstrosity, Dr. Stein, who did not create Ry, becomes fascinated with him precisely because of his transness, which he perceives as transhumanist, as hybrid, as Ry 2.0. On one occasion, Stein tells Ry: "And you, Ry, gorgeous boy/girl, whatever you are, you had a sex change. You chose to intervene in your evolution" (Winterson 1851). For Stein, who pays no mind to gender and race politics, Ry is a "what" rather than a "who". The fact that Stein is simultaneously excited and repulsed by Ry, that he sees him as a transhuman experiment, and his own sexual liaison with him as experimentation with his own (thus far heterosexual) sexuality, recreates the relationship between Dr. Frankenstein and his monster – the scientist and the body altered by science. The implication that trans people are monstrous but sexy is transphobic and dangerous because so many trans women are murdered each year precisely by cis men who cannot come to terms with their simultaneous desire and disgust for trans women and end up resolving their frustration by murdering them after sex.

18 Like the fetishized trans sex workers who end up dead, Ry gets raped at the end of the novel. The fact that the rape takes place in a public bathroom is not accidental. Bathrooms are a space of anxiety for many trans people, who are often "read as out of place in the gender normative landscape" of the either-or choice of bathroom (Cavanagh 63). In the mainstream media, the focus around trans people using public bathrooms mainly revolves around the anxieties of cis people sharing bathrooms with trans people. As Westbrook and Shilt have argued, "the mainstream media portrayed trans-women as dangerous to heterosexual men because they use their feminine appearance to trick men into homosexual encounters" (52). Trans men are "policed differently," Westbrook and Schilt note, because trans men's "perceived lack of a natural penis renders them, under the logic of vulnerable subjecthood, unable to be threatening" (52). Furthermore, in men's bathrooms, trans men "enter a liminal state, in some ways, as they cannot hurt men (making them women), but are not seen as needing protection from men (making them part of a "pariah femininity" [Schippers 2007] that no longer warrants protection" (Westbrook and Schilt 51). In Winterson's novel, the bathroom is not a space that demonstrates Ry's discomfort, but a space where Ry, after a narrative full of abusive misgendering, receives no protection from men and instead gets punished for existing in this liminal space by getting raped by a cisgender man.

19 The most puzzling thing about the rape is that it happens at the end of the novel and it does not foster character development or further the plot in any way. In keeping with the Ry/monster theory, like the angry villagers in Shelley's novel who chase the monster with torches because they do not understand it, the faceless rapist who does complete the deed is symbolic of the global transphobic angry mob that misunderstands transness and wants to extinguish it. Unlike Stryker's reclaiming of the term monster for trans studies and endowing it with "its affect, transgender rage," Ry never gets the chance to express any rage – he is conceived as a victim upon whom transphobic rage is released (247). Once the rape is over, neither Ry or the narration mention it again. Instead, Ry comments that this is not even the first time it happened and in the next scene seemingly forgets all about it and replaces it with sexual thoughts about Dr. Stein – a very unlikely reaction to rape. In contrast, when Leslie Feinberg described a brutal rape scene of a trans person at a police station in *Drag King Dreams*, it was to show that discrimination against trans people is institutionalized in the U.S. and that there is no protection under the law. Feinberg's scene showed the character struggling to recover and turn to find community, others who have experienced similar assaults. With compassion, Winterson goes on at length about Mary Shelley's lack of choices as a 19th century woman who has lost three children and has to put up with her husband's affairs and his friends' mocking her for alleged inferiority to men. Yet, Shelley is not raped to drive home the point that women are victims of misogyny and patriarchy. So why is Ry? The lack of any wrap-up or compassion in the rape scene leaves an uncomfortable feeling that this is just an unfortunate staple of trans people's lives and a yet more uncomfortable sense that Winterson thinks he might have deserved it – science gone too far.

20 Fu and Winterson approach their trans characters differently. Fu writes with the aim of expressing a "truth," albeit her own, about a trans experience, and of inciting compassion for her trans character in her predominantly cisgender readers. Adhering to Hale's rule of reading trans writers, Fu nevertheless sticks to a memoiresque structure and repeats many of its tropes about trans people as tragic figures. Winterson's approach to her trans character would have been promising if she had either followed Hale's rule of reading trans writers or, paradoxically, not read anything at all and stuck to her own pattern of gender-bending characters with no references to transition, the medical, or to genitals. In a cis writer's hands, the connection between transness, technology, and monstrosity becomes an uncomfortable addition to TERF rhetoric. Writing about minority characters comes with a responsibility, and with the proliferation of trans literature and

trans activists' efforts to educate cis people on what matters to trans people, hopefully that responsibility becomes more apparent.

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Queering Solidarity:
South Asian Diasporic Activism and Solidarity in US and UK Racial Justice Struggles

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Abstract

This article explores the linkages between queerness, racialisation, activism, and community care in the South Asian diaspora. It examines activism, organizing, and social movement work practiced by queer diasporic South Asians in the UK and the US. By understanding South Asian activist relationship to, and solidarity and partnership with, Black liberation activism, this article conceptualises a framing of queer South Asian diasporic solidarity. This solidarity is framed through contrasting articulations of joint struggle, allyship, and kinship in queer communities. To articulate this struggle, the article contrasts histories of South Asian racialisation, politicisation, and queerness in the UK and the US, and synthesises first-person activist accounts of modern-day queer South Asian activists in the diaspora. Finally, it argues that queer feminist South Asian activists in both countries are employing a model of queered solidarity with Black activists and Black liberation, though in differing forms in each country, that centres queer intimacies and anti-patriarchal modes of organising for liberation across queer communities of colour.

Introduction

1 South Asian activism in the US and UK diaspora has been growing in visibility and prominence in the past decade. Asian diasporic activists are participating in movements for economic and racial justice alongside a burgeoning Black Lives Matter movement and the expansion of mutual aid networks during the COVID-19 pandemic (Arora et al np). Many of those leading South Asian diasporic activism and solidarity are queer women, trans*[1] people, and non-binary people, from caste[2]-oppressed, working-class, and/or other marginalized backgrounds (Soundararajan np).

2 As these queer Asian diasporic movements grow, activists are exploring differing modes of solidarity with Black communities and other communities of colour. Some revisit the model of joint struggle, echoing Britain's 1970s-1990s "Political Blackness" movement (Sivanandan 137), where British-Asians and Black-British communities organised together against racialized state violence. Some employ allyship to interrogate the model minority myth's construction of South-Asian-Americans as handmaidens to white supremacist empire. And others integrate queer models

[1] Transgender people across the gender spectrum. See glossary, Butler (2011), and Pearce et al (2020).
[2] A system of hierarchy and oppression in India; see Zwick-Maitreyi et al (2018).

of kinship, healing, and care to sustain activists of colour in the face of constant threats to health and survival. In formations like #SouthAsiansforBlackLives, in working-class Asian organising groups, and alongside Black activists in multiracial coalitions and issue-organisations, South Asian activists' queer solidarity (Gopinath 11, Bhardwaj np) through transnational activist and kinship praxis. Activists link casteism and anti-Blackness; connect neoliberalism, Hindu fascism, and white supremacy; combat racialized capitalism and hetero-patriarchy; target Asian capitalists and fascists; organise transnationally online; and build new forms of queer family and community.

3 To understand queer South Asian diasporic solidarity, this paper explores the following major questions. First, how does solidarity between diasporic South Asians and Black communities in the US and UK communities manifest? How is queerness a central part of this solidarity? How does it interact with each country's history of racialisation and politicisation? In responding, this paper argues that a uniquely queer – and particularly queer femme – model of South Asian diasporic solidarity does exist. However, this solidarity has emerged and developed in differing ways in the US and the UK, linked to divergent histories of migration, racialisation, and politicisation in their South Asian communities. In both spaces, however, I argue that queer South Asian solidarities combine elements of Kelley's (155) conceptualisation of solidarity as joint struggle or comradeship, and contrasting modes of solidarity through allyship for Black liberation (Bae and Tseng-Putterman np, Erskine and Bilimoria 319). This rise in racial justice organising and solidarity practices reflects increased leadership by queer, feminist, caste-oppressed, working-class, and otherwise marginalised diasporic SA, and shows an adoption of Cohen's (439) radical queer of colour politics and Muñoz's (12) queer of colour disidentification and resistance by diasporic Asian trans, non-binary, and women activists.

4 This argument is drawn in five major sections. The first section draws an understanding of queer, gender, racial, and political identity in the South Asian diaspora in the UK and US. Next is a theoretical framework of solidarity, particularly through a queer lens. The third section, History, Identity, Solidarity, explores how diverging histories of Asian racialisation and racial identity formation, like the UK's Political Blackness movement and the US's model minority myth, have impacted modern solidarity practices by queer, lesbian, and feminist South Asians in the diaspora. The fourth section, Hybrid Solidarity, examines how solidarity practices incorporate both allyship and joint struggle. The final section, Queer Solidarity, explores how this mode of solidarity is queered through intimacy, kinship, and family relationships, particularly between queer and

lesbian femmes and trans and nonbinary queer Asians. The conclusion connects these themes across queer diasporic South Asian activism, and assesses the potential for future South Asian and Black collaborative activism and solidarity.

Methodology

5 This article draws on a combination of secondary and primary research. The secondary research centres analysis of activist and scholarly writing by queer activists of colour and South Asian activists in the diaspora. The primary research was conducted through semi-structured interviews with 14 queer South Asians in the US and the UK who were involved in activism that also included or partnered with Black activists and/or activists of African descent. Most of those interviewed identified as women, and many identified as lesbian in addition to all identifying as queer. Interviews were arranged based on personal relationships and snowballing. I also conducted participant research in meetings, events, direct actions, and other queer and South Asian diasporic activist spaces. This research took place from September 2019 to September 2020, during the course of my Masters research, and included in-person components as well as video-call components, particularly during lockdowns that ensued after the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

6 This research draws deeply on many years of my positionality as an insider-outsider in queer and South Asian diasporic activist spaces. As an organiser and activist myself, I engage in co-production of knowledge with my activists through ethnographic interviews, growing our queer kinship bonds to build intimacies, discussions of organising strategy, and shared visions for liberation (Minai and Shroff np, Shah 48). Each of the interlocutors have been pseudonymised to protect their identities and safety, though some organisational details have been retained when requested by participants. Throughout this research, I actively centred diverse queer diasporic women, non-binary, and trans* voices in order to displace the het-cis[3] male gaze from diaspora studies and prioritise marginalized voices (Gopinath 192). I have particularly attempted to centre the voices of caste-oppressed, Muslim, working-class, and other marginalised queer diasporic Asian in order to reject casteist and colonial violence often perpetuated in Savarna explorations of subaltern activism (Soundararajan & Varatharajah np). Through doing this, I aim to hold space for these queer and feminist activists and writers to speak for themselves.

[3] Heterosexual and cissexual; see glossary, Butler 2011, and Pierce at al 2020.

Conceptualising Queer South Asian Diaspora Politics

7 Studying queer South Asian diasporic activism requires an understanding of diaspora itself, and its politicisation. Raman (np) defines diaspora as the movement of peoples from the homeland to a new land, centring the movement of communities of colour from countries of origin to the Global North. Many Asian and other racialised communities migrated from South to North[4] in response to demand for cheap labour after their countries were pillaged by empire (Silver & Arrighi 55). Their experiences of racialised capitalism grew identities that developed in resistance to enforced subjugation, commodification, and empire (Robinson 5, James 23). Early Asian diasporic communities were no exception to these identity formations in resistance (Gopinath 10).

8 I posit that this identity of resistance hinged on racialisation created in the North, or what Mishra calls "the attribution of meanings and values to different groups, based on physical appearance, skin colour, and other factors, both by formal institutional as well as social processes" (73-74). Kelley (161) emphasises that these processes of racial grouping derive from systems of social inequality. Hall (223) describes that racialised diasporas develop hybrid identities, both in longing for and exile from the homeland, and in creating new cultures through processes of "creolisation" (223). Diasporic Asians navigate multiple identities in ways that both diverge from and parallel Black diasporic experience, recalling DuBois's (15) double consciousness in Black versus white spaces, and Fanon's (23) "white mask" in Black diaspora. In the US and the UK, Gilroy (16) writes that the colonial, indigenous, formerly enslaved, and diasporic meet to form new cultures. Through these meetings, Asian and other racialised diasporas create what Brah calls "diaspora space" (81) that manoeuvres these complexities of identity and racialisation. By drawing on conceptualisations of Black and Asian diasporic racialisation together, I recognise the particularity of Black diasporic experience (Wilderson 32) and the connections and divergences between Black and Asian diaspora (Gilroy 27).

9 South Asia's own bordering by British Raj papered over vast internal differences that replicate in diaspora (Behera 129). Colonial continuity and casteist hegemonies in diaspora can create normative identities that centre and solidify Indian upper-caste Hindu dominance (Bose & Jalal 3). These dynamics are critical to recognise when looking at kinship and organising structures in the diaspora. While I use the term South Asian to recognize varied heritages across Afghanistan

[4] See Mohanty 2003:505 for more on the terminology of North and South.

Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka (SOARC np), and migration patterns or forced indenture through Africa, East/Southeast Asia, and the Caribbean (Raman np), my interlocutors explore these contestations in this term and their usage of "Desi" as an identifier across borders (Maira 13).

10 I argue that queerness fundamentally shifts the racialisation and politicisation of diaspora space. In her work on queer Asian diasporas in the US and the UK, *Impossible Desires,* Gayatri Gopinath writes: "'Suturing' 'queer' to 'diaspora' . . . becomes a way to challenge nationalist ideologies by restoring the impure, inauthentic, nonreproductive potential of the notion of diaspora" (11). Queerness can function as a tool in Asian diaspora to reject nationalism, particularly Hindu fascist nationalism, and to reject attempts to assimilate Asian into the white nation. Gopinath adds a gendered lens where queer diasporic femininity, and lesbianness, disrupts "heteronormative and patriarchal structures of kinship" (11) alongside nationalism through feminist practices. This echoes Wilson's (133) and Brah's (43) explorations of gendered diasporic British-Asian activism where Asian womanhood gave rise to politicization and power, not subjugation.

11 Similarly, Muñoz (8) and Anzaldúa (32) argue that queerness, and particularly lesbianism and queer femininity, open a liminal space across bordered cultural worlds. By disidentifying, as Muñoz says, with dominant Asian diaspora, and by operating in Anzaldúa's *nepantla* (a Nahuatl word for in-betweenness), queer South Asian activists subvert dominant cultural norms, encode new meaning and identity through performance, and find home in the in-between of borders and cultures through *mestizaje*. Gopinath (194) and Patel (422) articulate that queer diasporic Asian mobilize culture and activism to build new homes. This echoes Hall's hybrid diasporic identities and sees racialisation and politicisation as interlinked for queer diasporic SA.

12 The modern activists I interview echo this lens of gender and queerness in performance and activism. They reject binary gender and eschew trans-exclusive radical feminism (Pearce et al 888). Instead, they grow queer and gendered Asian diasporic spaces that hold the spectrum of gender and femininity in political activism, and adopt Ahmed's (15) idea of queer as phenomenology, or an anti-normative, destabilising, and hopeful way of seeing the world.

13 Destabilising the world through queerness also draws from radical queer-of-colour and queer Black feminist politics. As Cohen argues, this is "a politics where nonnormative and marginal position[s] . . . [are] the basis for progressive transformative coalition work" (438). This

confronts Puar's (72) homonationalism, where queers conform to be accepted in the nation-state, and Dasgupta (68) and Rao's (14) indictment of classist homonormativity as homocapitalism. Instead, queer and gendered diasporic Asian activism mobilizes the "radical potential of queerness to challenge and bring together all those deemed marginal and all those committed to liberatory politics," (Cohen 440) sparking racial solidarity.

14 Modern diasporic Asian activists also see struggles as interlinked. Echoing the Black feminist Combahee River Collective, activists "struggl[e] against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking" (272). For modern queer Asian activists, liberation is unattainable without racial, gender, class-based, and queer justice, meaning they must organise intersectionally across diverse identities (Crenshaw 1241).

15 Finally, I examine queer South Asian activism through a lens of queer erotics, or the pleasure in activist work, queer love, and sexuality that Lorde (59) describes as fundamental to Black-American lesbian resistance. These ideas also figure heavily in Brown's *Pleasure Activism* (4), which many of my interlocutors referenced. Queerness in diasporic Asian resistance is both a sexuality, identity, and politics, shifting world-view, and organising practices to embrace rage, joy, relationship, and healing together. Through building these relationships with other diasporic queers of colour in the UK and US, queer diasporic Asian grow new politics through a solidarity of queer-of-colour kinship that recognises that gender, sexuality, race, and diasporic home go hand in hand.

Varied Racial Solidarities and Identities

16 Analysing South Asian diasporic solidarity with Black liberation requires a conceptualisation of Blackness and Black liberation itself. I echo Gilroy's (3) conceptualisation of British Blackness, as well as frameworks for American Blackness as an identity influenced by resistance to internal colonization and slavery (Kelley 72, Robinson 5), to define Black communities as members of the African diaspora present in the Global North through migration and/or the transatlantic slave trade. Debates range around what constitutes Blackness, as evidenced in the ADOS (#AmericanDescendantsofSlavery) movement (Adjei-Kontoh np) and modern examinations of Political Blackness (Mehri np). In this paper, I examine South Asians as separate from Blackness (I do not use the Politically Black sense of the word), but I recognize that Blackness is varied, diverse, and contested. As the Black Panthers and BLM argue, Black

liberation encompasses wide issue-oriented and systems-oriented struggles, including education, food, health, housing, prison and police abolition, gender justice, queer justice, and more that affect Black peoples' ability to live with dignity and thrive (Umoja 154, Clark et al np). As the Panthers' Shakur (62) and BLM's Garza (np) emphasise, Black liberation does not focus only on criminal justice: it requires systems transformation.

17 Next, to conceptualise solidarity with Black liberation struggles, I examine several different formations of solidarity that have shifted widely from the French Revolution's *solidarité* to multiple present senses (Gaztambide-Fernandez 65). I first examine Robin D.G. Kelley's framing of solidarity as transformation and world-making, broadly termed "joint struggle" (Kelley 583). Solidarity is not just shared principles that inspire action: it is action itself, where groups' liberations are "bound up with one another," as Lila Watson (np), an Indigenous/Aboriginal elder, articulates. Groups may struggle with one another, but they are linked through ideology, dialectics, and praxis (Kelley 90). This also draws on notions of class solidarity in the Marxist sense, Weber's political solidarity through shared interest, and collaborations between workers in unions and social movements through social movement unionism (Waterman 278). Gramsci's (342) united and popular fronts also invoke this joint struggle, where varied groups have diverse identities and employ diverse tactics, yet collaborate through shared identity in struggle as "comrades" (Robinson 54). In the Asian context, in the UK's Political Blackness movement, British-Asians identified with Afro-Caribbean communities and organised together, with success and challenges explored further later (Sivanandan 150). Kelley calls this solidarity "worldmaking" (73) – groups converge across identity due to shared struggle that breeds a greater identity of resistance. Here, solidarity is not a market exchange that requires equal repayment for tactical support: it is collaboration in shared liberation.

18 A contrasting framing is solidarity as allyship, where one group supports the liberation of another but also works to dismantle their own privilege (Leonard & Misumi 61, Erskine & Bilimoria 338). White anti-racist organising heavily draws on this interpretation (Berg & Carbin 135, Bae & Tseng-Putterman np). Dismantling hierarchical structures and privileges, like McIntosh's (188) invisible knapsack, becomes key to solidarity work. Allyship draws on morality (Scholz 2), mobilizing white guilt (Steele 4) and white fragility (DiAngelo 7) into being allied with the directly-impacted, who is the other (Kluttz et al 65). This also echoes Afro-Pessimism's notions of anti-Blackness's inevitability (Wilderson 346), meaning that non-white groups are never similar

comrades but always allies in the fight against Black people's global subjugation. As Asian diasporic groups – particularly those with caste and class privilege – wrestle with Asian anti-Blackness (Iyer np) and complicity in white supremacy (Prashad 16), some employ an allyship model that sees Asian as privileged allies rather than comrades in shared struggle.

19 Many of the queer diasporic Asian movements I examine employ a feminist lens on solidarity. Feminist solidarity argues that that Kelley's shared struggle and Marxist and Gramscian class analysis require a gendered lens and an analysis of gender oppression and heteropatriarchy (Hooks 1981). Black feminists like Davis (5) and the Combahee River Collective (np) racialise feminism by seeing race, gender, and class as inseparable in oppression. Instead, they form a triple jeopardy of intersecting experiences (Crenshaw 1241) that can yield solidarity through shared gendered experiences. Mohanty (21) and Hooks (15) posit transnational feminist solidarity where this shared experience resonates globally, uniting women's local struggles into international fights against racial capitalism and heteropatriarchy. Cornwall (168) argues this gendered solidarity can be a myth or construction, and feminists of colour like Swaby (25), Cohen (144), and Anthias and Yuval-Davis (7) reveal where feminist solidarity has silenced women of colour's experiences. However, Mohanty's (22) feminist solidarity, identifying racism, imperialism, and heteropatriarchy as co-constitutive, still resonates with many queer and lesbian Asian activists.

20 Finally, I articulate a uniquely queered model of activism that queer South Asian groups employ, particularly when organising in queer-of-colour space. This queer activism also builds off of Black feminist and Black lesbian thought: drawing from Cohen (440), the Combahee River Collective (np), and Lorde (59), queer feminist Asian groups in the diaspora echo that excluding queerness and lesbians "occlude[s] forms of heteropatriarchy [that] den[ies] people identifications and freedoms" (Kelley 587). Particularly, Lorde's (92) queer solidarity offers an embodied struggle that mobilizes shared anger and shared passions at shared targets, echoed in Spira's (140) examinations of queer intimacies in solidarity between queer Chilean and Black-American feminists in the 1970s. These ideas of queer solidarity have been echoed by Garza, Cullors-Khan, and other queer Black leaders of BLM, provoking similar conceptualizations in Asian solidarity (Kelley 587). This queer solidarity thus subverts borders (Muñoz 12), makes diasporic Asians unruly rather than aspirationally white (Das Gupta 537), and build a solidarity that establishes care and kinship between the non-normative (Cohen 465).

Histories of Solidarity: Political Blackness and the Model Minority Myth

21 Effectively applying these varying modes of solidarity to modern queer Asian and Black movements in UK and US diaspora requires an examination of the histories of solidarity in these countries. These histories vary greatly. In the UK, Political Blackness emerged in the 1970s as an early experiment in solidarity as shared struggle. It emphasised state violence and similar negative racialisations of Asian and Afro-Caribbean migrants (Sivanandan 137). In *Cartographies of Diaspora*, Brah (1996) describes how her Gujarati-Indo-Ugandan identity shifted towards a militant Black political identity in response to both ghettoization and demonisation, nurtured by a movement of united diasporic Black and Asian communities who supported each other and resisted white fascist violence. Through Political Blackness, second-generation Asian and Black youth waged varied campaigns and built diverse grassroots organisations challenging racialised policing, immigration, and labour systems from the 1970s-1990s, as Ramamurthy (2013) explores in *Black Star*. Feminist Political Blackness groups like AWAZ, Southall Black Sisters, and OWAAD articulated gendered theories of systems-change (Swaby 22). Political Blackness movements embraced socialism and organised with decolonial Marxist movements globally (Ramamurthy 2013).

22 However, Political Blackness's unity also rested on tensions. Many Asians felt Blackness did not adequately describe their cultural experience: instead, it was "a political colour that could only exist in a white world" (Mehmood 5), and an enforcement of a negative racial identity that was centred on whiteness (Modood 876). Communities formed ties through segregated worksites, and racially-specific organisations like the Asian Youth Movements often claimed Political Blackness but worked with little relationship to Black communities (Ramamurthy 2013). This allowed instances of anti-Blackness by Asians to go unchecked, leading to fragmentation under state pressure (Mehri np, Sivanandan 137). Swaby (19) documents the rupturing of racial solidarity in feminist Politically Black spaces in ways that contest Asian identity. Some Afro-Caribbeans called including Asian women within OWAAD a "mistake" (Swaby 22), and Asian women called conversations around who was Black a "broken record" (Swaby 23) that inhibited organising and political discussion. Lesbianism created further fractures: queerness was relegated to the private, and heterosexual Politically Black feminists argued that women could organise around queerness "autonomously" (OWAAD Draft Constitution, np). These fault-lines inhibited Cohen's (465) queer solidarity and heightened divisions within Political Blackness, contributing to the

movement's ultimate fracturing by the state as multiculturalism overtook shared identity and shattered the broad Black political identity (Sivanandan 138).

23 In interviews, modern queer British-Asian organisers recalled Political Blackness negatively. Samia called it "minefield, a mess" and Trisha said it was "something that comes up to cause problems." When discussing OWAAD, Samia said, "OWAAD fell apart . . . It was a super homophobic coalition . . . these [Politically Black concepts] are not concepts that anyone is trying to revive in my organising today." Amar said Asians had had "weaponized anti-Blackness" to be "closer to whiteness," facilitating "wealth creation" by choosing "Apne (ours)" over "wider solidarity." Nik said "Political Blackness had its time and place" and argued that Asian activists became "complacent", echoing Sivanandan (137) that Asians exchanged radicalism – and Blackness – for material gain. In Samia, Nik, and Trisha's assessments, while histories of racial solidarity between Asian and Black communities existed, its fragmentation along identity lines, and rising depoliticization and class mobility for Asian communities, meant that modern solidarity had to take radically different forms.

24 Conversely, in the US, the model minority myth's construction of Asians as hard-working, palatable, and closer to whiteness than Blackness (Espiritu 2) inhibited solidarity between Asian and Black communities. This has caused modern queer South-Asian-American organisers to parse history for examples of South-Asian-American activism and racial justice collaborations in order to dismantle the model minority myth (Prashad 142). Thara, a queer Indian-American organiser, stated that "the model minority myth kept us safe in exchange for our dignity" where white American rhetoric and desires stripped Asian of history and culture. S, a queer Indian-American advocacy worker, artist, and disability justice organiser argued that the myth was "told BY the model minorities . . . to oppress each other." In this way, South-Asian-American colluded with a system of racial hierarchy that allowed them to profit off of anti-Blackness. This allowed South-Asian-American to argue their whiteness in order to gain rights, like in Bhagat Singh Thind's seminal 1923 Supreme Court case for citizenship where he argued that upper-caste status made him Aryan and therefore white (Snow 280).

25 This overshadowed working-class Asian – mostly Muslim and caste-oppressed communities – who found homes in Black-American and Mexican-American communities and practiced solidarity not only through politics but in their personal lives and relationships as well (Bald 2013). Bald uncovers histories of *Bengali Harlem*, and Slate (15) details solidarities between

Quit India organisers like Kamaladevi Chatthopadhyay and Ram Lohia, and Black Power and Civil Rights activists like Bayard Rustin and W.E.B. Du Bois. These stories have been popularised in modern Asian popular education curricula like "#SouthAsians4BlackLives (SA4BL)" and the "Black Desi Secret History" archive. Har, a trans-femme Sikh-American youth organiser, noted, "I was taught history that was literally Black and white…[but] I now know the legacy of Asian participation in the racial justice movement." Haleema, a popular educator with SA4BL, argued that this lack of nuanced history shifted solidarity practices: "We had to shed our complexities to fit into the model minority myth, so [we]…focus on South-Asian-American history first. Then… institutional and interpersonal anti-Blackness, and finally solidarity." This echoes Leonard & Misumi (61)'s solidarity as allyship and Erskine & Bilimoria's (338) white anti-racist solidarity, arguing that South-Asian-American must smash the model minority myth's anti-Blackness (Iyer np) in order to build solidarity.

26 As modern Muslim, Sikh, Dalit Bahujan, working-class, and queer South-Asian-American note, these moments of solidarity have come particularly from South-Asian-Americans at the margins. The model minority myth particularly allowed those with pre-existing class and caste privilege in the subcontinent to consolidate power and wealth, as in the UK: immigration reform in the 1970s privileged the migration of technically-skilled Asian who dominated cultural life and often subjugated working-class South-Asian-Americans in the US. Thus, as in the case of Asian worker-organisers splitting off from upper-caste-led domestic violence support organisation Sakhi (Das Gupta 537), or upper-caste restaurateurs' abusive labour practices of Dalit and working-class Asian (ASATA np), marginalised Asian often found more solidarity with Black-Americans than with privileged SAA, leading to longstanding and organic alliances. As Sharmin, an organiser with caste abolitionist group Equality Labs, said,

> Dalit leaders have always had deep relationships with Black leaders…from the Dalit Panthers, to Ambedkar, to collaborations between Black and Dalit feminists against police and caste violence . . . [these are] authentic relationships that weren't transactional but were rooted in transformative solidarity…they allowed us to jump into formation to do abolitionist solidarity work with M4BL and BLM when moments of atrocity arose.

While privileged South-Asian-Americans aligned themselves with whiteness and profess the importance of allyship in solidarity today (Iyer np), marginalised South-Asian-American trouble the model minority myth to create authentic spaces for solidarity as joint struggle with Black-

Americans against white and upper-caste supremacy alike. This joint struggle utilises political education as well to acknowledge and dismantle the model minority myth's roots in anti-Blackness, as Haleema noted. It also recognizes, as Sharmin said, that when supporting Black-led struggle, South-Asian-American must also practice "solidarity as goodwill . . . following the leadership of Black organisers" where "ego has to take a step back." This employs a combination of Kelley's (597) joint struggle plus elements of allyship to create a robust hybrid solidarity from the margins against anti-Blackness, casteism, heteropatriarchy, and racial capitalism.

Hybrid Solidarity: Combining Joint Struggle and Allyship

27 In the UK and the US, queer diasporic Asian activists in each country incorporate both elements of allyship and joint struggle into their solidarity practices with Black activists. The ways that these elements are incorporated vary based on each country's history of racialisation and solidarity, and on the makeup of the spaces that Asian activists occupy. In abolitionist organising work in the UK, Samia, a queer Bangladeshi activist, noted that "prison abolition was "led throughout its history by Black women" and hence felt that allyship through "taking a back seat, letting others lead" would be more appropriate. Similarly, Trisha, a queer British-Indo-Guyanese organiser, said calling herself Black "would be offensive," adding that, "abolition… is about white supremacy and specifically anti-Blackness so at the centre of the work is Black people and solidarity." At the same time, both Samia and Laxmi, a lesbian British-Indo-Ugandan, noted their involvement in organising around the Grenfell[5] housing fire in the UK as an example of joint struggle with Black communities and activists, but one that also brought in other communities who were implicated through class. Laxmi said, "In the ends, it's about class…Blacks and Asians work together, but there's Turkish, Algerian, others involved" and said for her anti-racist activism, "I can't meaningfully describe that as a Black-South Asian coalition" as other groups of colour were equally involved as well.

28 Class figured heavily for organisers from both countries as reasons for joint struggle with Black communities. Har, a trans-femme Punjabi-Sikh-American, said class "polarised me around the model minority myth." Nik, a trans-femme British-Indian agreed that "my mom not speaking English, not being integrated, being broke, I saw that as a class thing." Many activists centred Cohen's (465) radical, working-class queer-of-colour coalitional politics in their organising,

[5] See Bhandar, B., 2018. Organised state abandonment: The meaning of Grenfell. *Sociological Review Blog.*

combining shared struggle along with allyship against anti-Blackness. Nik described being agitated into organising by "falling into a house of QTPOC organisers" who were not Asian, and applying these learnings radical politics to her Desi community work later. Similarly, Sasha, a queer Sri-Lankan-American, described learning both from working-class Black organising as well as from working-class Desi organising in the US, like the Taxi Worker Alliance, and applying it to her solidarity work against prison expansion and in working-class pan-Asian communities. Trisha said intersecting race, class, and queer identities (Crenshaw 1990) moved her from "reformist to abolitionist" in her organising.

29 US groups use Freire-inspired political education to build Kelley's joint struggle and to act as allies who dismantle anti-Blackness. DRUM-NYC, a working-class, largely Muslim-Asian group, connects South-Asian-American experiences of subcontinental state violence and Islamophobic surveillance to American institutional anti-Blackness. Like the AYMs, DRUM's director Fahd described needing "solidarity with our own" to create "solidarity with others" (Ahmed interview, np). Solidarity led DRUM members to reject anti-bullying legislation that would increase policing in schools and thereby harm Black comrades. Sasha, a queer Lankan-American organiser and the director of CAAAV, a pan-Asian base-building group, echoed:

> Transformative Solidarity from DRUM distinguishes between showing solidarity, in a transactional way, versus embodying it, versus whole communities making decisions at real material cost to them… at CAAAV, our members won't take this thing that's beneficial for us if it's harmful for others.

Transformative solidarity represents a hybrid solidarity: it includes Kelley's levels of solidarity from market exchange, to comradeship and world-making, but also includes elements of allyship and sacrifice. CAAAV members supported Akai Gurley, a Black man murdered by an Asian-American policeman (Fuchs np), over communal ties, invoking world-making and Watson's (np) "liberations as connected".

30 US activists also drew distinctions between privileged South-Asian-Americans espousing allyship models of solidarity, and Dalit and working-class South-Asian-Americans employing hybrid models that emphasised joint struggle. 2020's BLM movement politicized many privileged South-Asian-American who were silent during its 2013-2017 uprising, and yielded outpourings of "#SouthAsians4BlackLives" social media posts, artwork, and upper-caste-led trainings on the model minority myth. Upper-caste South-Asian-American leaders exhorted South-Asian-American to dismantle anti-Blackness (Iyer np) but disregarded caste. Thenmozhi Soundararajan

(np), the leader of Equality Labs, and other Dalit and Muslim-SAA issued blistering rebuttals exposing privileged SAA's silence on Hindutva, the Kashmiri occupation, caste-violence, and working-class SAA's experiences (Rathi np). Har explained, "it's easier . . . for South-Asian-American to stand in solidarity with Black Lives, because . . . the blame is on white supremacy," whereas "caste involve[s] challenging family, customs" echoes this point. These rebuttals reveal splits. Instead of allyship, queer, Dalit, Bahujan, Muslim, and working-class South-Asian-Americans practice "solidarity from the margins." This often begins in Asian-specific groups but culminates in Gramscian united front coalitions with Black-led organisations.

31 Other queer Asians join multiracial issue-oriented organisations, melding Kelley's comradeship with Bae & Tseng-Putterman's indictments of Asian-practiced white-allyship. Priyanka, a queer Asian-American, said "it doesn't matter whether I'm in India fighting for my identity...or here doing Black solidarity work organising with renters...colonialism and empire are oppressing my people too." Unlike privileged Asian-American spaces replete with "toxic heteropatriarchy...elitism and Brahminism," she found "transformative justice, queer leadership" in multiracial issue-organising. As queer and lesbian diasporic Asians describe, solidarity deriving from privileged allyship does not transform systems, whereas joint struggle solidarity from the margins does.

32 In the UK, activists described taking up differing spaces in organising based on their positionality in the space. At Sisters Uncut, Samia described "a vocal contingent of people of colour," where she felt "solidarity [through] tackling whiteness in the group," invoking Kelley's joint struggle in attempts to shift Sisters' multiracial space. At CAPE (Campaign Against Prison Expansion), however, Samia and Trisha felt Leonard & Misumi's (61) Asian allyship was more appropriate. In practice, this meant CAPE chose campaigns that centred Black people's experiences in the prison system, and non-Black allies, including both Asians and white activists, contributed labour but took less visibility in press or direct actions. Similarly, at LGSM, Amar said solidarity included "self-interest" and "smashing borders," but in practice, LGSM took on allyship roles like logistics and fundraising to support Black-led organising by groups like African Rainbow Family, a UK-based Black migrant group, and BLM-LDN. Unlike in Political Blackness, while Asians and Black activists work side-by side, Asians, like whites, are sometimes seen as allies against prisons and state violence – not equally-affected comrades. Nik described her South Asianness as "coming out" of her queerness. Echoing Rao's (10) homocapitalism, she said

"cynical" older Asian activists, "normativeness in South Asian culture," and "queers in suits working for capitalism" disillusioned her from many Asian-specific spaces. All these cause modern queer British-Asian activists to choose multiracial spaces rather than centring Asian racialisation.

33 Many of the British-Asian organizing spaces that do exist are disproportionately queer-led. Nik described Facebook groups like "Desis Organise," "DesiQ," and "Asian Solidarity – BLM" which emerged after the murder of George Floyd, being led by queer Asian friends. Nijjor Manush, a British-Bangladeshi group, and Wretched of the Earth, a BIPOC-only climate justice collective, often employ queer and feminist politics and have significant queer British-Asian membership. "South Asians Organise," convened after the UK's 2020 BLM protests, is facilitated by queer British-Asians. In organising against PREVENT, a British counter-terrorism system that disproportionately surveils British Muslims (Qureshi 191), Laxmi said "a lot of people involved are queer, of all racial backgrounds." She said the "visible critique of the state" and "anti-colonial and anti-imperial organising" created a sense of "home," echoing Gopinath's (194) articulation that normative Asian spaces lacked this. Instead, queer British-Asians find "home" in multiracial – and often queer – spaces that centre Cohen's (465) radical queer politics over Asianness.

Queer Kinship and Solidarity

34 In both countries, queer diasporic Asians appeared to be disproportionately present in organising space, and in solidarity work. Har told me, "queer South-Asian-American are overrepresented in organising spaces" and posited that the model minority myth makes QT-South-Asian-Americans "relegated to the sidelines." S said "my queerness came before my South Asianness" and first led them to organising, and Thara said "being Queer and South Asian [includes] losing a feeling of belonging" that was connected to "carv[ing] my identity as POC on the heels of queer black feminism," echoing Gopinath's indictment of heteronormative diasporic South-Asian-American space and Maira's analysis of South-Asian-American-performed Black culture. Instead, queer Asians grow queer-of-colour solidarity through Cohen's radical queer politic and Lorde and Anzaldúa's third world sisterhood. Sharmin noted longstanding Black-Dalit "authentic relationship" and Preet said "queer solidarity…[is] relationship-building."

35 Queer Asian spaces have developed alongside queer Black groups that have burgeoned during BLM. Many are led by lesbians, non-binary and trans Asians, and Dalit, working-class, Muslim Asians, like South Asian Queer and Trans Collective's leaders. Subtle Queer Curry Traits and South Asian Punx provide queer Asian space online. Arts collectives like YKR and Yoni Ki Baat showcase queer-SAA stories. Queer South-Asian-American artists like Alok Menon and Fatimah Asghar are highly visible. Preet said "queer South-Asian-American people [are] unapologetically be[ing] themselves, occupy[ing] space," and MH said queer South-Asian-Americans being "more bold and visionary . . . comes from the demands of Black folks," echoing BLM's queer Black femme leadership (Kelley 587).

36 Many of these queer-of-colour spaces emphasise community care as solidarity. As Amar said, "We care for each other as a point of principle…that's what we think of as activism." Amar, Trisha, Nik, Har, and others mentioned healing justice, cultural organising, and care work as central to their activism. They described doing this alongside Black comrades and friends through a queer lens that centred care over destruction, invoking Lorde's (60) queer erotics and Brown's (2019) pleasure activism. Amar said, "many of us have lost support networks" and said "the construction of found families" to guard against "dangers [like] homelessness, mental health" was also a way to "reject kinship systems in South Asia . . . modelled on heteronormative structures." Trisha agreed that "queer people have to build our own families," which for her "was POC and usually queer." The bonds that Amar and Trisha described forming with queer Black activists at groups like LGSM and Sisters were, as Fortier (424) and Muñoz (12) describe, examples of building lesbian and queer-of-colour family as political acts and solidarity itself. Nik said she came to Misery, a UK-based QTPOC mental health collective, because her "frontline, black bloc work" work was "triggering and traumatic" and not compatible with "my mental health," but "finding care work" allowed her to be "revolutionary" because "trans survival is a radical act." Practicing care with queer Black comrades is politics and solidarity itself for Asian activists, echoing Brown's (192) treatise on the politics of feeling good in political work. Through these QTPOC care spaces, queer Asians reimagining family and centre health as, as Amar said, the "liberation that we need."

37 These spaces for lesbian and queer-of-colour care happen across activist issue-campaigns. In the US, Sharmin works in caste abolition, Har in anti-school-to-prison-pipeline youth organising, Thara in anti-oppression facilitation, Priyanka in housing, S in disability justice. In the UK, Amar focuses on queer-led anti-deportation work, Trisha on prison abolition, Samia supports

abolition and survivor support work, Nik on arts and culture, care, mental health, and Laxmi on anti-surveillance and racial justice spaces.

38 Speaking to this breadth, Sasha clarified, "being queer in non-queer spaces …doesn't feel invisiblising," but was "strategic" to prevent "utopian bubbles getting crushed." Priyanka added, "queerness…informed how I practice solidarity . . . to break systems down, vision and dream." As Gopinath (14) articulates, these queer visions are at the heart of queer Asian solidarity. Har concurred:

> Patriarchal organising treats the work like it is war. Queerness shows how organising is also a project of conceiving, creating, birthing a new transformative world…queer people always have had to do that. There is more camaraderie and intimacy to organising brought by queerness, more dreaming and visioning. (Har interview, 2020)

This visioning lends itself to solidarity with a Black liberation movement that is unapologetically queer and femme, and also oriented around activism as pleasure rather than martyrdom. As Thara said, "I exist because my ancestors had the audacity to exist . . . remembering [that is] integral to being a queer Asian because we were queer before we were colonized." Queerness is the vehicle for solidarity between South-Asian-American and Black activists through a tapping into Asian history, an acknowledgement of shared marginality, and a centring of visions of transformative queer liberation.

Conclusion

39 Racial justice activism and solidarity by diasporic queer Asians differ between the US and the UK. While Political Blackness first yielded joint struggle and then devolved into multiculturalist splits, triggering modern movements that often avoid Asianness as a central identity, the model minority myth centred privileged Asians but is being troubled by modern-day Dalit, Muslim, working-class, and queer Asians. But beyond these differences, there exists a queer diasporic Asian solidarity, centred on kinship, shared struggle, and care.

40 Queer Asians disidentify (Muñoz 12) with the state and with normative diaspora, shifting racialisation. Solidarity with Black activists rejects homonationalism (Puar 2006) and queer classism (Dasgupta et al 2018), mobilising Cohen's radical queer-of-colour politics by embracing a diasporic South Asian identity that, as Gopinath (194) describes, does not revolve around patriarchy or homeland. Queer diasporic Asian embrace Lorde's queer erotics, melding activism

with pleasure, creation, and healing. This queer solidarity combines elements of Kelley's (73) joint struggle and comradeship with elements of Erskine & Bilimoria's (338) allyship and Iyer's (np) and Prashad's (2000) indictment of Asian anti-Blackness by renegotiating relationships to nation, culture, race, and home through solidarity practices. Queer Asian solidarity rejects the model minority myth's and Hindutva's upper-caste supremacy (Prashad 182). It embraces Black kinship in an alternate understanding of Asian identity that yields politicisation from the margins (Gopinath 195). And it centres femmeness and transness to embrace a gender-variant mode of feminist care.

41 As in Mohanty's (2003) feminist transnationalism and Cohen's (1997) queer solidarity, queer diasporic Asian see the deep connections between fighting anti-Black and xenophobic violence in the Global North, combatting Hindutva and caste-violence in the subcontinent, and dismantling racial capitalism globally. At the core of these fights is queer relationship. As many interlocutors said, centring anti-patriarchal visioning and systems change displaces nationalistic and patriarchal norms of South Asianness (Gopinath 11) and create new queer intimacies between diasporic queers of colour (Spira 140). Queer diasporic Asian "queer solidarity" through Lorde's (60) politic of queer erotics, creation, and joy, and through building deep relationships with Black comrades. Unlike in Political Blackness, this solidarity is expansive and rejects one sole radicalism; unlike the model minority myth, Asian identity is not founded on anti-Blackness. Instead, this queer solidarity represents a shifting of Asian politicisation and racialisation away from Hindutva, white supremacy, and fascism, towards an emergent queer and feminist Asian politics of anti-normativity, kinship, abolition, and joy.

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Burn It Down! Feminist Manifestos for the Revolution, edited by Breanne Fahs, Verso, 2020

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1 Manifestos clarify antagonisms; they articulate points of conflict by exposing opposing forces. Manifestos of feminism – the practice, theory, and movement opposed to patriarchy – reveal the roots of patriarchy and the ways this very long crisis occludes equality. *Burn it Down! Feminist Manifestos for the Revolution*, edited by Breanne Fahs, accomplishes this by encouraging us to focus our attention beyond the mechanisms of representation and negotiation, and toward the political itself: the dynamics of social power. The arguments here range from the specific to the systemic, representing feminism's diversity and confirming feminism's crucial role in all struggles for social justice.

2 Traditional anthologies assemble a genre's greatest hits that represent a fair cross-section of perspectives, but Fahs has assembled something different. Conflict provides the organizing principle for Fahs's curation and for the subject of the manifestos themselves. Using Mary Ann Caws' vocabulary, Fahs names their rhetoric "againstness." A "feminism of againstness," Fahs explains, "values complaint, rage, tension, new forms of solidarity, and radical social change" (45). Here, the feminist manifesto "is not only a weapon against patriarchy but a weapon against the worst aspects of feminist politics – it refutes liberal tendencies of moderation and incremental, slow, 'wait and be patient' modes of reform" (46). *Burn it Down!* successfully advocates for "a new vision of feminism that poses itself as oppositional and defiant" (45). Reading these otherwise disparate perspectives that collectively reject a liberal paradigm evinces the necessity for a radical transformation, now more than ever.

3 *Burn it Down!* supports Chantal Mouffe's critique of liberal tendencies that "envisage the field of politics as a neutral terrain in which different groups compete to occupy the positions of power," a dynamic which always becomes "simply a competition among elites" (*Agonistics* 18). We see the consequences of liberalism in the recent renewal of right-wing populism, which Mouffe traces back to "liberalism's central deficiency": "flattening out antagonistic distinctions between political positions in pursuit of a "consensus at the center" (*On The Political* 10, 66). Mouffe defines the object of a genuinely democratic politics as "the confrontation between conflicting hegemonic projects, a confrontation with no possibility of final reconciliation," which "cannot take

place without defining an adversary" (*Agonistics* 25). Mouffe describes againstness as "the 'moment of the political,' the recognition of [the] constitutive character of social division and the ineradicability of antagonism" (25). *Burn it Down!* incites these moments by identifying the content and contours of patriarchy's roots.

4 Laboria Cuboniks names this social order's "centrifugal referent" heteronormativity (323), and Emi Koyama calls out the "patriarchal binary gender system" that enforces reverse essentialism, normativity, and the "heterosexist patriarchy" (199, 213). For ACT UP, "every sector of the straight establishment," including the privileges and images of straight people, are the "enemy" (84, 73). Leanne Betasamosake Simpson points to the "heteropatriarchy of colonial society" (694) and Linda La Rue highlights "sexual colonialism" (672). Radicallesbians focus on the caste system of gender roles and the psychological "cords" of "male-defined response patterns" (109). Betty Dodson writes against "the forces of sex-negativity" (813). Silvia Federici breaks down "capitalist relations" and "capital's plan for women" (295), while Frances M. Beal and Black Lives Matter conjoin capitalism and racism. Susan Hawthorne targets "dominant culture stupidities" (725) as others name these stupidities more specifically: marriage and funeral rites for He-Yin Zhen, traditional womanhood for Kathie Amatniek Sarachild, the biological family for the Gay Liberation Front and Shulamith Firestone, reducing industries for Judy Freespirit and Aldebaran, "the ill-omened debris of romanticism" for Valentine de Saint-Point (836), and the "twin lies of patriotism and the cult of things" for D. M. D. (338).

5 Collections are always subjectively complied and I miss a few personal favorites, though their absence does not detract from this collection's success. Victoria Woodhull announced her candidacy for President of the United States (with Frederick Douglas nominated as Vice President) in 1870 with a challenge to racism, poverty, and the disenfranchisement of women in her "Woodhull Manifesto." Julia Ward Howe's 1870 "Mother's Day Proclamation" and the International Congress of Women's 1915 "Resolutions" are early examples of a global feminism and both are primarily opposed to war. Carol Hanisch's 1969 "The Personal is Political" provides a lucid review of second-wave feminists' mantra, one of the greatest discoveries of the twentieth century. INCITE! are contemporary feminists who fight violence against women of color, and their "Principles of Unity" lists the causes and consequences of this violence.

6 I also miss Julia Serano's "Transwoman Manifesto," which would have made a strident companion to the included excerpt from Koyama's "The Transfeminist Manifesto" and help

further offset a few transphobic slurs in *Burn it Down*: "The Effeminist Manifesto" considers "the recent androgyny fad" to be part of "our oppression which The Man has foisted upon us" and trans women to be "an insult to women since they overtly parody female oppression and pose as object lessons in servility" (172, 171), while Valerie Solanas imagines that a trans woman "loses his [*sic*] desire to screw…and gets his [*sic*] dick chopped off in hopes of deriving a continuous, diffuse sexual feeling from 'being a woman'" (468-9). Transgender identities and experiences have never supported any of the villains arraigned in the rest of these manifestos, but Trans-Exclusionary Reactionary Feminists (TERFs) keep insisting they do. I use 'Reactionary' instead of the more popular 'Radical' because all the reactionary movements I know of are transphobic and because TERFs' tenets are classically reactionary. As Serano points out, the logic designating some women as fake "require[s] one to give different names, meanings, and values to the same behaviors depending on whether the person in question was born with a female or male body. . . . In other words, they require one to be sexist" (52). The concept of feminism may be large enough to include TERFs, but they are the opposite of radical.

7 Ultimately, the benefit of this collection is the combination of radical perspectives it encourages our minds to synthesize. These perspectives identify points of conflict from all over the social terrain, which helps us understand the ways social subordination and subjugation work. We are not capable of comprehending, let alone anthologizing, the social itself, but surveys like *Burn it Down* help map its antagonisms. Hegemonic regimes like patriarchy are complicated and this complexity allows lots of opportunities for ignorance and confusion about what it does and how to recognize its effects. Radical perspectives clarify these regimes. The root of the word 'radical' is the word 'root' itself, and *Burn it Down* identifies the most important roots of patriarchy, providing those who struggle against it the direction for its extirpation.

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Sara K. Howe; Susan E. Cook (ed.), *Representing Kink. Fringe Sexuality and Textuality in Literature, Digital Narrative, and Popular Culture.* Roman & Littlefield, 2019.

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1 By its title alone *Representing Kink* questions the notion that kink is in and of itself the representation of BDSM, leather, and latex by which it prominently is sold. Kink is always already a deviation from what is considered the norm, which lead to the normative representation we have of it today. Hence this collection of articles unravels the lens through which kink is viewed in two major ways, firstly, by engaging with a wider range of kinks not represented in BDSM and leather communities and, secondly, by analyzing fan-fictions of popular movies and TV-series, which subvert popular characters and images from the bottom-up. Instead of engaging with a top-down representation of kink, the majority of the nine articles collected in this book engage with the bottom-up expression of desire. These expressions are found in digital narratives unfiltered and uncensored by publishing houses and institutions that provide alternate readings of popular fictions. Kink, in this sense, can therein also be viewed as something already latent within popular culture.

2 Another reason that *Representing Kink* is such a thought provoking investigation on fringe sexuality, is because it puts the ethics of analysis before morals. Where morality puts principles before matter, ethics implies that one must investigate the matter to understand the principle of what one is dealing with. As the first two articles of this collection deal with the upsetting subject matter of rape role play and fantasies, the difficult analysis of these subjects give a productive evaluation of their principles topics. Analyzing rape role plays in independently published taboo erotic romances written by female authors, Sara K. Howe's "Playing Rough," shows how a difficult ambiguity of desire is in play in these fictions. Jane M. Kubiesa's "Violating the Vampire," on the other hand, looks at the rape fantasies in Twihard fan fiction (fan fiction surrounding the Twighlight-franchise), providing a deeper insight into how these fantasies are structured, the narrative that carries them, and the social constructs underlying these desires, e.g. the notion of a 'animalistic' male desire and a 'passive' female desire. Both articles are highly informative for research on rape culture and researchers investigating sexuality in popular present day fiction.

3 Though the first two articles are, by topic, the most difficult to engage with, they are not the sole productive efforts of this collection. Fe Lorraine Reyes article "A Kink of One's

Own," contrasting the prior articles, investigates how a feminist position and voice in the work of Kathy Acker uses kink to subvert patriarchal norms of desire. The last six articles go further, showing how the realm of popular culture and kink overlap and converge, rendering kink innate to the realm of popular culture. Sean Shannon's "It's a (Bound and Gagged) Living: *Sweet Gwendoline* and the 'Danger Girl' Archetype" for instance gives a perfect example of this by showing how John Coutts used the archetype of the 'danger girl' to illustrate images of fetish and bondage legally, evading censorship. The 'danger girl', a damsel in distress ending bound and gagged by enemy agents of popular spy narratives, is shown to be both a trope and an expression of a kink. Images of popular culture, therein, are shown to be more ambiguous in what they display.

4 Digital fan-fictions also create ambiguities of popular images by rewriting, kinking, and queering characters from popular movies and TV-series. Whitney S. May's "'To Test the Limits and Break Through'" illustrates this by analyzing fan-fiction surrounding Disney's movie *Frozen*, while Jonathan A. Rose's "Breaking the Scales" does the same with fan-fiction surrounding the TV-Series *Supernatural* and the *Harry Potter*-franchise. Both articles provide excellent examples on how fans re-imagine the protagonists of these narratives in the image of their desire, by, for instance, interpreting them as gay characters. Rose's article also evaluates fan-fiction that imagines favorite characters with 'excess body fat,' and attributing that characteristic with positive attributes. Kinks, by this example, are also shown to embrace attributes and desires otherwise shunned in U.S. society, enforcing a constructive self-confidence rather than a destructive feeling of shame.

5 Before evaluating this collection's contribution to academic research, it should be said that it is not the first book to make kink its main subject matter. Ummni Khan's *Vicarious Kinks, S/M in the Socio-Legal Imaginary* (2014) illustrates how S/M was prominently viewed as misogynistic by anti-porn feminists and how underlying that representation was a desire to victimize the S/M practitioners. Catherine Scott's *Thinking Kink, The Collision of BDSM, Feminism and Popular Culture* (2015) likewise sheds light on this conflict on a superficial level, while showing the representation of BDSM in popular culture. Ariane Cruz's *The Color of Kink, Black Women, BDSM, and Pornography* (2016) investigates the features of race play in BDSM and pornography. The focus of these three monographs is limited to the field of BDSM, the cultural discourse surrounding porn, and feminist discourses putting both these expressions of desire into question.

6 *Representing Kink* stands out from these monographs on three accounts. Firstly, it takes digital narratives of fan-fiction into account and, therefore, self-articulated desires rather than

marketed representations, secondly, by not limiting its investigation of kink to the realm of BDSM, and, thirdly, by showing how kink is not the polar opposite of popular culture but a potential laying latent within it. This, overall makes *Representing Kink* an outstanding collection of articles that, by taking digital narratives into account, opens up a whole new avenue of research. It contributes to the research fields of queer theory, sexuality studies, feminist studies, literary studies, and porn studies by showing how kink encompasses the creative, subversive force of desire capable of transforming normative images of the self. Understanding kink as swerve, i.e. a motion, rather than through the legal definition of deviancy, *Representing Kink* provides a deeper understanding of desire that is refreshingly new and highly educational.

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