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OF FLESH AND SPIRIT: RACE, REPRODUCTION, AND SEXUAL DIFFERENCE IN THE TURN TO PAUL

"There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise."

Galatians 3:28-29, NRSV

"The true Christian is one who knows how to rediscover the novelty of faith in the shadow of the ancient patriarch [Abraham]."

Stanislas Breton, A Radical Philosophy of Saint Paul¹

"Hagar, slave-girl of Sarah, where have you come from, and where are you going?"

Genesis 16:8, NRSV

Hagar, the slave girl of Sarah, is hidden in the shadow of Abraham's patriarchy and his re-narration within Pauline typology. The turn to Paul within political theology and continental philosophy has been most famously enacted by Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek.² Attempting to recover the radical potential in the figure of Paul and the unapologetic universalism he carries with him, the discourse surrounding Paul and the possibility of a radical politics has developed many offshoots. Yet the emergence of the discourse and its proliferations so often repeats the overshadowing of the two mothers of Abraham's children. Their absence creates a question: what should we make of the continued evasion around the difference that the flesh makes for debates surrounding universality and particularity, the law and faith, and the implications of the Christ-event for truth and history?³ To attend

¹ Stanislas Breton, *A Radical Philosophy of Saint Paul*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 94-95.

² See Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier, (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2003) and Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity*, (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 2003).

³ For a timely and compelling account of sexual difference in the turn to Paul, see Benjamin H. Dunning, *Christ Without Adam: Subjectivity*

to the shadows of Abraham's faith without an elision of the flesh and its attendant questions of sexuality, race, and gender, we must bring another form of examination to bear on the questions of truth, salvation, and its economy. This alternative line of questioning must foremost be attentive to the foundational role of sexual difference in interpreting the political nature of Pauline thought and our Christian inheritance, and yet it must also contend with the differing trajectories of sexual difference along lines of race and class.

Here, my focus is on Hagar, the slave-girl. Her status as property—an exchangeable object before the law—is a position of dehumanization and subjectivation. Yet, how might attention to the object train our eyes to see what specters lie in the shadow of Abraham? Through such consideration, Hagar's role as that figure who sutures the relations between the theological, the legal, and the economic comes into view. In particular, we can begin to ask: what lines are drawn between kinship, sovereignty, and economy in the figure of the slave mother? And how might the slave's fungibility also be that which threatens the very possibility of the relations between the political and the theological that she is meant to secure?⁴

Consideration of Hagar's position as both slave and mother and the conflict that emerges when Sarah wants to cast Ishmael and Hagar out of Abraham's household makes it clear that the slave's status before the law and her sexual difference gives a doubled valence to the terms *reproduction* and *inheritance*. The intertwined relationship between economy and kinship intensifies through attention to her position. Notably, though, Hagar is not an easy woman to get hold of. And it is precisely the difficulty that Hagar's flesh presents that makes her a necessary figure today for political theology. Indeed, it is her movement from within the position of the object that brings the limits of the law and grace into relief. Fugitive life under this threat is a not-quite-escape, a non-achievement, one which threatens the sovereignty of the law and contests the universal subject as the one whose legibility gives meaning to the law.⁵

and Sexual Difference in the Philosophers' Paul. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

⁴ For more on the slave's fungibility see Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

⁵ Yet this fugitive life also carries difficulties of its own and I want to be clear that I am not trying to romanticize the conditions of fugitivity. For more on these complexities, see the conversation between Fred Moten and Saidiya Hartman at the Duke Franklin Humanities Institute, The Black Outdoors: Fred Moten & Saidiya Hartman at Duke University, accessed January 18, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t_tUZ6dybrc.

The constellation of *flesh*, *reproduction*, and *inheritance* names a circuit within the structure of sexuality and kinship. This paper moves between the three—flesh, reproduction, and inheritance—taking up the circulation of sovereignty via the economy of kinship. This paper is thus thematically related and indebted to Delores Williams' work.⁶ The repetition of themes is meant to invoke and enable a rereading of her work, similar to the way that she invokes and rereads Hagar's biblical narrative—elaborating upon resonant themes, but not in a linear way.

In the first part of this essay, "Of the Flesh", I engage Daniel Boyarin's and Hortense Spillers' work in order to consider the distinction between flesh and body and the importance of the distinction for rereading Paul's allegorical argument about Hagar and Sarah in Galatians 4. What does it mean that the children of Hagar are the children of the flesh? And how does this inheritance of the flesh figure into, what Spiller's calls, the "crimes against the flesh" enacted in the Middle Passage? In what sense is the political theology of Paul related to the disciplining of the flesh in the Middle Passage—a foundational event in the transformation of black people into property? A deeper consideration of the flesh shows how questions of reproduction and inheritance require a reconsideration of Williams' notion of *surrogacy* for its attempt to name the imposition of various forms of reproductive labor in slavery and its afterlife that mark black women.

In the second part of this essay, "Reproduction and Inheritance", I consider how reproduction and inheritance function in Hagar's and black women's situation, bringing the role of surveillance to the fore. Placing the flesh under sovereign control is the means by which the fruit of black women's labor is repeatedly stolen. This theft, as Williams' notes, is both economic and physical—the theft of both children and wages. In turning to the imposition of reproductive labor, the economic is close at hand.

Finally, I consider several questions that are raised when the attention given to the operation of *inheritance* is theologically founded as a structuring element of economy and kinship. How is the theft of Hagar's labor—as slave-mother—occasioned by God's covenant with Abraham? And how is it that both the fear of God's promise failing, and the fulfillment of God's promise, works to intensify control of Hagar? Abraham and Sarah must control Hagar's body in order to secure their line of inheritance, either through Hagar's forced impregnation or through her forced expulsion. Yet Hagar's escape to the wilderness, her return to Abraham and Sarah, and her expulsion back into the

⁶ Williams, Delores S. *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*. (Orbis Book, 1993).

wild suggests displacement and disinheritance as one of the characteristics of existence in the shadow of the law. Hagar's fugitivity both cuts and sutures covenantal lines of kinship and inheritance and it is in Hagar's fugitivity that a new name for God—*El Roi*, the God who sees—emerges. Does this God give sight in the shadows? Or does the name *El Roi* become an indictment of the surveilling power of the sovereign? These are the questions to which we now turn.

Of the Flesh

Delores Williams argues that we must consider the implications of Hagar's narrative and the conceptual apparatus she makes available for our analysis of black women's oppression today. In particular, Williams' wants to examine the embodied nature of the experiences of Hagar and black women precisely because of their difference as slaves who are women. But what is it about embodiment that is particularly useful for thinking about the nature of black women's oppression? How does this consideration open up the problem of theology and race? In my slant reading of Williams, the relation between the flesh and the body exposes the role of the allegorical/typological/analogue in producing the antagonism between black women and theology.⁷

But what is the flesh, and what distinguishes it from the body? In theological speech today, the two are often used interchangeably, invoking conversations of embodiment, sex, material living conditions—the fleshy stuff.⁸ But what if the collapse of the two inhibits the intention to examine material conditions? For our purposes of understanding, turning to Paul's use of typology illuminates how this distinction between the flesh and the body is enabled through the allegorical. The flesh is taken up as the body in order to make it the sign of a higher spiritual meaning.⁹ The body is quite important for Paul, then. Its usefulness is found in and through the discursive role it occupies contra the spirit. Thus, within its proper role as an incomplete sign of a transcendent spiritual meaning, the body is

⁷ As we will see in Boyarin's analysis, the distinction between allegory, typology, and analogy in Galatians is almost non-existent for Paul. Thus, I use them interchangeably here.

⁸ This is perhaps because of the work being done in black studies and critical theory around the flesh. Two recent books are often named as relevant examinations of the flesh: Mayra Rivera, *Poetics of the Flesh* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2015) and Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2014)

⁹ See Ashon T. Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016).

a deeply valuable discursive production that is refined from the raw material of the flesh.

Daniel Boyarin notes these workings of the body and the flesh in his text *Paul: A Radical Jew*. Boyarin examines Paul's declaration of a universal subject in Galatians. The announcement in 3:28 that there is no longer slave or free, male or female, Jew or Greek is both compelling and difficult to see enacted in the historical performance of Christianity. Paul's vision of the Christ event as that which instantiates a new community and incorporates both Jews and Gentiles runs into the difficulty the flesh presents for its universal claim—a difficulty that is exacerbated and proliferated throughout Christianity's history. This difficulty, Boyarin argues, is centered around the source of the community's distinctiveness. "As long as participation in the religious community is tied to rites which are special, performed by and marked in the body, the religion remains an affair of a particular tribal group, 'Israel in the Flesh.'"¹⁰ The problem of how to include Gentiles in the community of the Jews, then, is the predicament that leads to Paul's typology. In order to affirm the possibility of universal participation in the new life that Christ makes available, some solution must be found to this fleshly dilemma. For Boyarin, the question of sexual difference and ethnicity must be foregrounded. The mark of circumcision in particular is "the most complete sign of the connection of the Torah to the concrete body of Israel."¹¹ The fleshly mark of circumcision thus generates an anxiety around the particular and universal which Paul attempts to mediate through the allegorical. The allegorical enables the universal to become that which transcends the particularities of the flesh.

By substituting a spiritual interpretation for a physical ritual, Paul at one stroke was saying that the literal Israel, 'according to the flesh,' is not the ultimate Israel; there is an allegorical 'Israel in the spirit.' The practices of the particular Jewish People are not what the Bible speaks of, but faith, the allegorical meaning of those practices. It was Paul's genius to transcend 'Israel in the flesh.'¹²

Yet this allegorical move carries with it an ascription of value to the flesh and the spirit. The flesh becomes that which must be made into an allegory for something spiritual and thus universal. By transforming the flesh into the body, Paul's allegory serves to install a hermeneutical sedimentation wherein

¹⁰ Boyarin, Daniel. *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity*. University of California Press, 1994, 36.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid, 37-38.

materiality and particular difference is transcended by the spiritual.¹³ We see in Paul, then, that without an understanding of the *true* meaning which the body signifies, the marks of ethnicity and gender make a difference that can entrap one in slavery to the flesh, obstructing one's freedom to participate in Christ's universal body. We see this more clearly in the allegorical pinnacle of Galatians chapter 4: Paul turns to Abraham, Hagar, Sarah, and their respective sons as an analogy that solidifies the necessity of the flesh's supersession by the spirit.

Tell me, you who desire to be subject to the law, will you not listen to the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and the other by a free woman. One, the child of the slave, was born according to the flesh; the other, the child of the free woman, was born through the promise. Now this is an allegory: these women are two covenants. One woman, in fact, is Hagar, from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the other woman corresponds to the Jerusalem above; she is free, and she is our mother.

...

Now you, my friends, are children of the promise, like Isaac. But just as at that time the child who was born according to the flesh persecuted the child who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also. But what does the scripture say? 'Drive out the slave and her child; for the child of the slave will not share the inheritance with the child of the free woman.' So then, friends, we are children, not of the slave but of the free woman." (Gal. 4:21-26, 28-31, NRSV)

Note the marked and unmarked women. Hagar, the slave woman, is named—a name that marks her enslaved difference. Sarah's unnamed presence works as an absence. Sarah is the woman whose unnaming signals the woman's proper disappearance in the shadow of the patriarch, Abraham. Her worth, implied by Paul, is in bearing the child of the promise—the free child. She occupies a position of passive labor where passage through Sarah makes available passage into the

¹³ Ibid, 36.

universal body. But it is the marked flesh of the slave that *actively* labors here for Paul. The biological kinship referred to in the phrase ‘according to the flesh’ signals an incomplete existence for Abraham’s descendants. For Paul, “being born according to the spirit is the true meaning of descent from Abraham, of which being born according to the flesh is only the signifier.”¹⁴ In light of the *true* meaning of inheritance, being born according to the spirit, Paul depicts those who affirm the necessity of circumcision as the children of the slave woman in order to convince the Galatians not to return to the flesh and the exclusion from the promise that it represents. The effects of this reversal are worth attending to.

Paul’s desire for a universality that is both revealed in a particular Jewish tradition and extended to the Gentiles becomes surprisingly undone when Hagar is considered. In the Genesis narrative, Hagar’s status as a gentile slave is made clear throughout the text. In reading Paul’s announcement of Christ’s universal community, it would seem the distinction between slave and free, male and female, Jew and Greek are abolished. Yet, in order to articulate how the universal community is a spiritual reality that supersedes the flesh, *Paul requires the distinction between the slave and the free to be upheld*. Hagar’s slaveness must be taken as something essential to her person—something which can be transmitted to her children—in order to distinguish the inheritance of the flesh from the inheritance of the promise. The universality intended to abolish the distinction that separated a Gentile slave mother like Hagar from the community established in Christ actually becomes the means by which her figuration as slave and her reproductive labor are re-entrenched as both innately available for use and innately a threat to the child who *properly* inherits the promise.

Thus, we see that the very same discursive moment ... which produced the devaluation of the ethnic body—Jewish—as corporeal, produced also the devaluation of the gendered body—female—as the corporeal, and this is how the Universal Subject becomes male and Christian. For Paul, the ‘Jewish Question’ and the ‘Woman Problem’ were essentially the same.¹⁵

And we might add to Boyarin that it is through the fungibility of the flesh of the slave woman that the devaluation of the ethnic body and female body is even possible to articulate. Thus,

for Paul the term *flesh* enters into a rich metaphorical and metonymic semantic field

¹⁴ Ibid, 33.

¹⁵ Ibid, 38.

It [is] the working out and through of these multiple semantic possibilities [of the flesh] that generated Paul's major semantic innovations.¹⁶

The entrance of flesh into the Christian metonymic and metaphorical field might well be considered the inheritance of Christian theology. As Boyarin notes, the allegorical becomes the primary means by which supersessionist claims are made by a Christian community that is increasingly (in late antiquity) Gentile. Indeed, the repetition of the allegory is required to secure the truth of the universal against the difference the flesh marks. It is my contention that this allegorical inheritance figures greatly into the transformations of the flesh that ground the invention of blackness.

In Hortense Spillers' writing, the modern management of the flesh - wresting it into the metaphorical and metonymic semantic field - occurs in and through the body as subject to the Middle Passage, slavery, and its afterlife. As Ashon Crawley notes, for Spillers, "the 'body' that comes after flesh is produced through rhetoric, through discourse, through—what Judith Butler would say—discursive practice."¹⁷ This discursive practice constitutes a range of misnamings or markings of black women. The accumulation of these misnamings are layers of cultural sedimentation that must be shaken off in order to consider what the invention of the black woman is about. In her consideration of the position of black women's function in the national projects of modernity, Spillers considers the crimes against the flesh that capture the flesh within the mark of blackness. Looking to the beginning of her seminal essay, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," the lineage of this marking is declared in a striking announcement of the necessary function naming black women has within the US project.

'Peaches' and 'Brown Sugar,' 'Sapphire' and 'Earth Mother,' 'Aunty,' 'Granny,' God's 'Holy Fool,' a 'Miss Ebony First,' or 'Black Woman at the Podium': I describe a locus of confounded identities, a meeting ground of investments and privations in the national treasury of rhetorical wealth. My country needs me, and if I were not here, I would have to be invented.¹⁸

This investment of the body with rhetorical wealth is nothing other than the investment of the black woman's body with signifying the role of the flesh in the story of Christian

¹⁶ Ibid, 68.

¹⁷ Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath*, 59.

¹⁸ Spillers, Hortense J. *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture*. University of Chicago Press, 2003, 203.

universality and political subjectivity. That which the mark/name signifies is precisely the symbolic, grammatical, and ontological accumulation that haunts black flesh. And again we must note the doubled inference that speech about the black body produces. The *investment* of the black body with its particular rhetorical *wealth* is the process by which black flesh is *devalued* and *reinvested* as property. Here, the question of the metonymic properties of the black body must become a question of how the invention of the black body repeats the severance of the flesh and the spirit through "crimes against the flesh" as a means to secure economic and rhetorical wealth.¹⁹

The tools of disciplining the flesh that Spillers notes—whips and coffles and chains and rope—are the technologies by which the flesh is converted to the body, is found spiritually available for the imposition of value, and made ready for exchange on the market. The conversion of black people to property that occurs in the Middle Passage works like Pauline conversion, creating a scale of valuation from the flesh to the spirit. Solidifying the definition of the flesh requires its transformation into a body whose meaning reinstalls the "dominant symbolic activity ... [that] remains grounded in the originating metaphors of captivity and mutilation" as essential.²⁰ The repeated acts of misnaming ('Sapphire,' and 'Jezebel,' etc.) crystallize the meaning of blackness as that devalued flesh which is always available for conversion into the black body. Black flesh is here something of a natural resource. Naming is the operation by which the resource of black flesh is translated into the body in order to situate it within an abstracted realm of unassailable values. Repeating the transformation of flesh into capital—into the captive body—this stasis of meaning and value imposed upon the name "blackness" is what we might call anti-blackness or anti-flesh. For, this naming is in service to *writing over* the life that the body hides—it is a violence that seeks to evacuate the flesh of its social life.

¹⁹ Ibid, 206.

²⁰ See the larger quote in Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe" *Black, White, and in Color*, 208: "This captive body, then, brings into focus a gathering of social realities as well as a metaphor for *value* so thoroughly interwoven in their literal and figurative emphases that distinctions between them are virtually useless. Even though the captive flesh/body has been 'liberated,' and no one need pretend that even the quotation marks do not *matter*, dominant symbolic activity, the ruling episteme that releases the dynamics of naming and valuation, remains grounded in the originating metaphors of captivity and mutilation so that it is as if neither time nor history, nor historiography and its topics, show movement, as the human subject is 'murdered' over and over again by the passions of a bloodless and anonymous archaism, showing itself in endless disguise."

Spillers recounts this violence against the flesh—the cuts, lacerations, bruises, severances—and considers these inscription “hieroglyphics of the flesh”. In the face of these hieroglyphics—these cuts and woundings—there is a loss of translation. Spillers’ distinction between the flesh and the body thus serves to make explicit the discursive residue whose accumulation makes the black body that which hides the flesh, occluding crimes against black flesh and securing the “true” meaning and (de)valuation ascribed to the name *blackness*. Spillers understands the flesh as inseparable from human personality and social life—it is what is violated when the violence of conversion occurs—and so reads the flesh as prior to the body. The body in Spillers’ view is the discursive marking and branding of the flesh. The body is the flesh as it has become layered with the sedimentation of cultural mythos. Thus, the ‘raced’ body is subject to devaluation through its inescapable relation to the marked body of the slave woman.²¹ The advent of the universal subject in modernity conjures again—is a repetition of—the fungibility that Hagar’s slaveness makes available for Paul’s allegory. At the same time, the appearance of the unmarked racial subject in white produces the disappearance of the black flesh within the marked body and a repeatedly assumed transcendent valuation along the color line.

What does it mean to distinguish the flesh from the body, then? Is it simply a rhetorical trick meant to intensify the consideration of materiality and the common critique of Christianity as aiding disembodiment? In light of Hortense Spillers and Daniel Boyarin I read this distinction between the flesh and the body as necessary for seeing how the distinction between the flesh and the spirit is enabled by the *body's situation in the allegorical*, constituting a flight of speech from the material to the spiritual. That is, Paul and the slaveholding Christianity of modernity are invested in the body as a discursive production, which signifies the spiritual meaning that transcends the flesh. For my ends, then, differentiating between the flesh and the body *is* meant to intensify the consideration of the physical and material person and their (de)valuation that is disappeared through the reading of the body as spirit and the disappearance of the flesh. This brings us back to Williams’ text, which asks us to consider the particularity of black women’s oppression. To consider this, we must think about the transformations black flesh undergoes such that black women’s oppression is marked as it is. What spiritual, psychic, and material investments does the naming of black women reveal?

²¹ Ibid, 203.

Reproduction and Inheritance

What does the slave woman produce? What does she reproduce? Reproduction as a condition of enslavement doubles over the laboring body. Thus, turning to reproduction here is meant to consider the traces of several lines of the unthought. In the first instance, reproduction brings black flesh into view as the site of surveillance. Its management is central to the reproduction of private property—the reproduction of wealth, which creates an apparatus of accumulation through inheritance.²² Management of blackness, or the disinherited, is necessary because blackness as the disinherited is that which threatens to transgress the law—a law that secures the disinheritance of the slave and the inheritance of the promise.

Williams' concept of *surrogacy* thus names a convergence of flesh, spectacle, and management. These three entwine through technologies of gender and sexuality to produce racial capitalism and its accumulations.²³ Surrogacy imposes a range of substitutions. Most notably here, Hagar comes to forcibly bear the weight of reproducing an heir for Abraham and labors as a caretaker in her position as Sarah's handmaid. Focusing on reproduction unveils the processes of repetition, performativity, and desire that animate the apparatus of surrogacy. Where, in the first section of this essay, attention to reproduction and its relation to surrogacy enable us to gather a view of the discursive machinery of anti-blackness, white supremacist patriarchy, and capital, in this view, reproduction also allows us to consider the agents and actors within this structure: how surveillance is produced, flesh is managed, and property is accumulated—but never in a straight line. Through the enactment of an encounter with various displacements, dispersions, and de-sedimentations, a difficulty is created in tracking the relations of domination. But this difficulty also highlights the instability of the slave as a figure. She moves within her objectivity. She speaks. She makes herself fugitive. Williams notes this defiant movement:

Powerlessness defies power and thus affects the welfare of the family and the slave. Hagar, the surrogate mother, runs away into the wilderness. Her leaving means that Sarah cannot become a mother as she had planned. There will be no son to carry on Abraham's posterity and inherit the family fortune. This could signal the extinction of the family line, a

²² For a recent consideration of the relationship between blackness and surveillance see Simone Browne, *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2015).

²³ For an extended discussion of *surrogacy*, see Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 22–24.

very serious matter for Abraham and Sarah.²⁴

Hagar's running, her fugitivity, disrupts kinship, economy, and the static meaning assumed in the figure of the slave when valued in relation to the spirit. That her powerlessness generates defiance suggests what power powerlessness holds in its movement. The welfare of the family and the slave is threatened by this running, the resistance of the object. Her movement further threatens the maternal as the reproduction of Sarah and Abraham's status. She threatens the reproduction of the law that imposes motherhood onto her body—the same imposition that enables the transference of inheritance to continue unbroken. In her movement, Hagar exposes the risk of extinction carried in the body of the slave. The burden of God's call on Abraham and Sarah compels them to secure the reproduction of the inheritance through the body of the slave and the management of her flesh. Hagar's fugitivity thus exposes the break in the kinship line that occurs in the movement of the slave, running out of the frame of the law.²⁵ The control and surveillance Abraham and Sarah exert over Hagar is shown to be dependent on the policing and constraining of her mobility, that is, shown to be dependent on (i/e)nsuring her flesh is secured as an object. Breaking with this security, the object runs. And, when the object runs, she runs right into the limit of the law. This running into the limit is not the overcoming of the law, but its opening. The law is thrown into crisis by its exposure in Hagar's movement. The law must be refigured and reconsidered in light of her fugitivity. But this is not a heroic kind of fugitivity. The risk of being in the wilderness exposes the precariousness of liberation as a non-achievement—something one must repeatedly fight for—and the precariousness of liberation for Hagar's person.²⁶ Attention to the flesh requires an understanding of freedom as nothing other than otherwise material conditions.²⁷ It cannot be forgotten that

²⁴ Williams, Delores S. *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*. Orbis Book, 1993, 19-20.

²⁵ See Moten, Fred. *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*. U of Minnesota Press, 2003.

²⁶ As Saidiya Hartman so eloquently states, "The enslaved knew that freedom had to be taken; it was not the kind of thing that could ever be given to you. The kind of freedom that could be given to you could just as easily be taken back. Freedom is the kind of thing that required you to leave your bones on the hills at Brimsbay, or to burn the cane fields, or to live in a garret for seven years, or to stage a general strike, or to create a new republic. It is won and lost, again and again. It is a glimpse of possibility, an opening, a solidification without any guarantee of duration before it flickers and then is extinguished." In *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), 170.

²⁷ Crawley's conception of the "otherwise" is useful here. Crawley, *Black pentecostal Breath*.

the risk the fugitive poses to sovereignty is also a risk to the self.

Just as the welfare of Abraham's family is insecure at this point, so is Hagar insecure. She has run off into the wilderness as a lone woman without family support or protection. Courageous though her liberation action may be, Hagar is without the support and physical sustenance a pregnant woman needs.²⁸

Hagar's precarity keeps the negotiations of risk that structure her position at the fore. Thus, we must understand that Hagar's movement harbors a potentiality and indeterminacy. Hagar's movement troubles the constraint of mobility that surveillance and control attempt to secure. In making herself insecure, Hagar makes the family and the slave insecure. The notion of *surety* thus emerges within the field made visible by Hagar's fugitivity. Folded into Abraham and Sarah's negotiation of where or with whom responsibility for Hagar lies is the negotiation of to whom Hagar is indebted, to whom her reproduction is obligated, and who is responsible for (i/e)nsuring that Hagar will fulfill this obligation. Securing the slave's flesh is thus the manner of (i/e)nsuring the payment of the debt the expected progeny will fulfill. In her movement, not only has Hagar unlatched the surety of Abraham and Sarah's negotiation of responsibility for Hagar's mobility, she has also unlatched the surety, as in certainty, with which the slave's liberation is figured as a final achievement in black liberation theology. Indeed, Williams' consideration of Hagar's return suggests there is a need for a community in order for the individual figure of Hagar to truly flourish. Hagar's movement between survival and liberation suggests the performance and thought of life occurs *within* this movement. Rather than moving beyond or outside the law in the wilderness, Hagar moves under the shadow of the law. In escaping to the wilderness, the law is not overcome. Instead, it is transfigured into an object for considering the ethical in relation to the life she carries on the run. As a fugitive slave mother, her mobility causes an insecurity in the law.

Williams' use of Hagar's story, framed by a focus on reproduction, works as a recomposition of the biblical narrative, generating a new sound through its naming of God from the flesh's fugitivity. Williams' repurposing of Hagar's story elaborates upon the effect of black theological articulation as it relates to white theological narration of supersession, value, and patriarchal methods of surveillance and control. Hagar's place as one who both renames God "The one who sees" and names the

²⁸ Williams, Delores S. *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*. Orbis Book, 1993, 20.

site of encounter with God in the wilderness suggests spaces of black performativity as the grounds for black theological utterance and the grounds for critique of white supremacist capital patriarchy. Is not the novelty of faith in the shadow of Abraham's patriarchy Hagar's naming of God as the one who sees? that Hagar names God "El Roi," (God of seeing) suggests her naming is a cut in the optics of Abraham and Sarah, for whom the ocular is the means of securing Hagar's constrained mobility. Rather than running in a straight line from Abraham, in Hagar's naming sight becomes turned in on itself, undoing itself as the affirmation of security and becoming, instead, the indictment of such surveillance. Hagar mobilizes the slave, and performs both the object's (momentary) detachment from the securing lines of kinship and throws the economic dependence on the life of the slave into relief.

And here is where the question of inheritance comes to the fore. How can we read the issues of inheritance that emerge in determining the promised son as also being active in racial capitalism's function? How is black disinheritance both a theological disinheritance and material disinheritance through the enduring mark of the slave mother? We can consider the conditions under which Ishmael becomes a threat to Isaac's inheritance and Sarah's antagonism with Hagar comes to a head as structurally related to contemporary issues of racial capitalism and white supremacist patriarchy. For instance, in what sense is black men's figuration as a threat to white women animated by black women's violation via surrogacy? The threat of blackness is here (un)gendered in this relation between the figure of the slave-mother and the threatening figure of the slave-mother's son. Black people's figuration as threats to private property, the threat of the object in rebellion to the subject, is fear around the property stealing itself away—the theft of the inheritance that blackness disinherits. This criminality is thus predicated on black women's figuration as threats to private property in their always indecent flesh. Such indecency threatens the law of private property in its performance of fugitivity and reproduction of the criminal. Not simply reproduction as a biological birthing, but reproduction as a recomposition of knowledge, of imagination, of forms of being whose fleshliness calls the coercive and compulsory imposition of the distinction between the flesh and the spirit into question.²⁹

A consideration of inheritance illuminates how the separation of

²⁹ See Silvia Federici's work for more on the relationship between reproduction and capital, especially in *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle*, (Oakland, CA: Brooklyn, NY: London: PM Press, 2012) and *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*, (Autonomedia, 2004).

the flesh and spirit results in the problem of revelation and its interpretation. What is revealed in the Christ event? To emulate Paul's faithfulness to the Christ event is to interpret revelation as that event which instantiates the supersession of the flesh, the Jews, the Law, etc., by the spirit, the Church, grace. Such an uncritical emulation extends the white supremacist supersession outlined in works by Willie Jennings, Vincent Lloyd's, and J. Kameron Carter's.³⁰ But we might take the implications of this problem further, into the question of value and how it structures life. The black body's relation to value—its signification of the way value runs along the color-line (measuring worth from black to white, devalued to invaluable, slave to free)—renders race constitutive of the market order. The market as place and idea is where a transubstantiation of people into chattel occurs. Additionally, this transubstantiation is also the sublation of the market into the divine order. To produce the body's function as that which solidifies the *real* meaning of human flesh is to make a claim about where value comes from and where it lies—it comes from God and lies with the spirit, of which the body is a sign. The body, then, acts as the vehicle of meaning that is carried by the spirit and testifies to the truth of a divine racial order. It is a divine order that determines how bodies are valued and justifies the modes of discipline by which the flesh must be made a body.³¹

³⁰ See Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven Conn.: Yale University Press, 2011), Vincent Lloyd, *Race and Political Theology* (Stanford University Press, 2012), and J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account*. OUP USA, 2008.

³¹ In light of the name of God as that which divinely founds a racialized order, what does it mean for James Cone to reread revelation in the wake of slavery? What does it mean to say that "Revelation is a black event" and rename God as black? Indeed, this fundamental equivalence between saying God or Jesus is black and God or Jesus is Jewish reveals the Christ event as an event of the flesh that can't be sublated into a *higher* meaning of the Spirit. But the desire to solidify pure being as unmarked by difference is sought in the transformation of the flesh into the body and its allegorization into a real and static spiritual meaning. This is to say that Williams and Cone (and the respective projects that proliferate in their wake) deal a destabilizing blow to the translation of blackness as given/imposed by white Christianity/modernity. And Williams does this work doubly by locating the haunt of gender difference and sexuality within Cone's work as an instance of unfaithfulness to blackness (understanding it now as a (un)gendered mark). See James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Orbis Books, 2010), 30. See also Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (Orbis Books, 1997).

Conclusion

In light of this passage through Hagar's story yet another time, what seems to emerge is the crucial difference that the flesh makes. It is difficult to overstate the importance of the insight Williams makes into the relations between Hagar's and black women's situation. That the difference of the slave-mother is both marked and disappeared into the universal at one and the same time continues to haunt political theology and our contemporary society. Considering the present state of black women's labor, the exacerbating economic inequality of our society, and the criminalization of black women's wombs and children suggests the mark of the slave-mother still requires troubling. This is the work we must now begin to undertake again.

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