# 1NC

## 1

### 1NC – Topicality

#### Topicality:

Our interpretation is that affirmative teams must defend the desirability of a topical plan:

#### a---‘USfg’ is the 3 branches.

U.S. Legal ’16 [U.S. Legal; 2016; Organization offering legal assistance and attorney access; U.S. Legal, “United States Federal Government Law and Legal Definition,” <https://definitions.uslegal.com/u/united-states-federal-government/>]

The United States Federal Government is established by the US Constitution. The Federal Government shares sovereignty over the United Sates with the individual governments of the States of US. The Federal government has three branches: i) the legislature, which is the US Congress, ii) Executive, comprised of the President and Vice president of the US and iii) Judiciary. The US Constitution prescribes a system of separation of powers and ‘checks and balances’ for the smooth functioning of all the three branches of the Federal Government. The US Constitution limits the powers of the Federal Government to the powers assigned to it; all powers not expressly assigned to the Federal Government are reserved to the States or to the people.

#### b---‘Its’ means belonging to the fed.

Updegrave ’91 [W.C.; August 19; Supreme Law.org, “Explanation of ZIP Code Address Purpose,” <http://www.supremelaw.org/ref/zipcode/updegrav.htm>]

More specifically, looking at the map on page 11 of the National ZIP Code Directory, e.g. at a local post office, one will see that the first digit of a ZIP Code defines an area that includes more than one State. The first sentence of the explanatory paragraph begins: "A ZIP Code is a numerical code that identifies areas within the United States and its territories for purposes of ..." [cf. 26 CFR 1.1-1(c)]. Note the singular possessive pronoun "its", not "their", therefore carrying the implication that it relates to the "United States" as a corporation domiciled in the District of Columbia (in the singular sense), not in the sense of being the 50 States of the Union (in the plural sense). The map shows all the States of the Union, but it also shows D.C., Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, making the explanatory statement literally correct.

#### c---‘Core antitrust laws’ are legal statutes.

Pfaffenroth ’21 [Sonia K, Justin P Hedge, and Monique N Boyce; July 1; Partner at Arnold and Porter, Former Deputy Assistant Attorney General for Civil and Criminal Operations for the Antitrust Division of the US Department of Justice; Counsel at Arnold and Porter; Senior Associate at Arnold and Porter; Mondaq, “United States: A Comparison Of Proposed Antitrust Legislation In 2021: Federal And New York State,” https://www.mondaq.com/unitedstates/antitrust-eu-competition-/1086194/a-comparison-of-proposed-antitrust-legislation-in-2021-federal-and-new-york-state#:~:text=At%20the%20federal%20level,%20there,;1%20(2)%20the%20Federal]

At the federal level, there are three core antitrust laws: (1) the Sherman Act, in which Section 1 outlaws "every contract, combination, or conspiracy in [unreasonable] restraint of trade," and Section 2 outlaws any "monopolization, attempted monopolization, or conspiracy or combination to monopolize";1 (2) the Federal Trade Commission Act, which prohibits "unfair methods of competition" and "unfair or deceptive acts or practices";2 and (3) Section 7 of the Clayton Act, which prohibits mergers and acquisitions where the effect "may be substantially to lessen competition, or to tend to create a monopoly."3 Criminal violations of the Sherman Act carry a maximum penalty of a $100 million fine for corporations, and a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison and a $1 million fine for individuals. A prevailing plaintiff in a civil suit can recover treble damages and attorneys' fees. But federal law currently does not provide for civil penalties when the government brings an antitrust case, only injunctive relief.

#### d---Anticompetitive practices are either horizontal or by a single firm.

FTC ’13 [Federal Trade Commission; carbon dated November 19, 2013; “Anticompetitive Practices,” https://www.ftc.gov/enforcement/anticompetitive-practices]

Anticompetitive Practices

The FTC takes action to stop and prevent unfair business practices that are likely to reduce competition and lead to higher prices, reduced quality or levels of service, or less innovation. Anticompetitive practices include activities like price fixing, group boycotts, and exclusionary exclusive dealing contracts or trade association rules, and are generally grouped into two types:

agreements between competitors, also referred to as horizontal conduct

monopolization, also referred to as single firm conduct

The FTC generally pursues anticompetitive conduct as violations of Section 5 of the Federal Trade Commission Act, which bans “unfair methods of competition” and “unfair or deceptive acts or practices.”

Key to limits and ground – they justify a proliferation of small, uncontroversial AFF’s that avoid core generics and water down the quality of debating.

#### Two impacts:

#### 1 – Competitive Equity – an unlimited, unpredictable topic disparately raises the research burden for the negative – treat this as a sufficient win condition because fairness is the logical structure that undergirds all impacts AND controls any benefit to debate.

#### 2 – Iteration – targeted research enables third and fourth-line testing necessary to motivate advocacy and argumentative reflection.

Iverson ’9 [Joel; 2009; Associate Professor of Communication at the University of Montana, Ph.D in Communication from Arizona State University Relations at the University of Sydney; Debate Central, “Can Cutting Cards Carve into Our Personal Lives: An Analysis of Debate Research on Personal Advocacy,” https://debate.uvm.edu/dybvigiverson1000.html]

Mitchell (1998) provides a thorough examination of the pedagogical implication for academic debate. Although Mitchell acknowledges that debate provides preparation for participation in democracy, limiting debate to a laboratory where students practice their skill for future participation is criticized. Mitchell contends:

For students and teachers of argumentation, the heightened salience of this question should signal the danger that critical thinking and oral advocacy skills alone may not be sufficient for citizens to assert their voices in public deliberation. (p. 45)

Mitchell contends that the laboratory style setting creates barriers to other spheres, creates a "sense of detachment" and causes debaters to see research from the role of spectators. Mitchell further calls for "argumentative agency [which] involves the capacity to contextualize and employ the skills and strategies of argumentative discourse in fields of social action, especially wider spheres of public deliberation" (p. 45). Although we agree with Mitchell that debate can be an even greater instrument of empowerment for students, we are more interested in examining the impact of the intermediary step of research. In each of Mitchell's examples of debaters finding creative avenues for agency, there had to be a motivation to act. It is our contention that the research conducted for competition is a major catalyst to propel their action, change their opinions, and to provide a greater depth of understanding of the issues involved.

The level of research involved in debate creates an in-depth understanding of issues. The level of research conducted during a year of debate is quite extensive. Goodman (1993) references a Chronicle of Higher Education article that estimated "the level and extent of research required of the average college debater for each topic is equivalent to the amount of research required for a Master's Thesis (cited in Mitchell, 1998, p. 55). With this extensive quantity of research, debaters attain a high level of investigation and (presumably) understanding of a topic. As a result of this level of understanding, debaters become knowledgeable citizens who are further empowered to make informed opinions and energized to take action. Research helps to educate students (and coaches) about the state of the world.

Without the guidance of a debate topic, how many students would do in-depth research on female genital mutilation in Africa, or United Nations sanctions on Iraq? The competitive nature of policy debate provides an impetus for students to research the topics that they are going to debate. This in turn fuels students’ awareness of issues that go beyond their front doors. Advocacy flows from this increased awareness. Reading books and articles about the suffering of people thousands of miles away or right in our own communities drives people to become involved in the community at large.

Research has also focused on how debate prepares us for life in the public sphere. Issues that we discuss in debate have found their way onto the national policy stage, and training in intercollegiate debate makes us good public advocates. The public sphere is the arena in which we all must participate to be active citizens. Even after we leave debate, the skills that we have gained should help us to be better advocates and citizens. Research has looked at how debate impacts education (Matlon and Keele 1984), legal training (Parkinson, Gisler and Pelias 1983, Nobles 19850 and behavioral traits (McGlone 1974, Colbert 1994). These works illustrate the impact that public debate has on students as they prepare to enter the public sphere.

The debaters who take active roles such as protesting sanctions were probably not actively engaged in the issue until their research drew them into the topic. Furthermore, the process of intense research for debate may actually change the positions debaters hold. Since debaters typically enter into a topic with only cursory (if any) knowledge of the issue, the research process provides exposure to issues that were previously unknown. Exposure to the literature on a topic can create, reinforce or alter an individual's opinions. Before learning of the School for the America's, having an opinion of the place is impossible. After hearing about the systematic training of torturers and oppressors in a debate round and reading the research, an opinion of the "school" was developed. In this manner, exposure to debate research as the person finding the evidence, hearing it as the opponent in a debate round (or as judge) acts as an initial spark of awareness on an issue. This process of discovery seems to have a similar impact to watching an investigative news report.

Mitchell claimed that debate could be more than it was traditionally seen as, that it could be a catalyst to empower people to act in the social arena. We surmise that there is a step in between the debate and the action. The intermediary step where people are inspired to agency is based on the research that they do. If students are compelled to act, research is a main factor in compelling them to do so. Even if students are not compelled to take direct action, research still changes opinions and attitudes.

Research often compels students to take action in the social arena. Debate topics guide students in a direction that allows them to explore what is going on in the world. Last year the college policy debate topic was,

Resolved: That the United States Federal Government should adopt a policy of constructive engagement, including the immediate removal of all or nearly all economic sanctions, with the government(s) of one or more of the following nation-states: Cuba, Iran, Iraq, Syria, North Korea.

This topic spurred quite a bit of activism on the college debate circuit. Many students become actively involved in protesting for the removal of sanctions from at least one of the topic countries. The college listserve was used to rally people in support ofvarious movements to remove sanctions on both Iraq and Cuba. These messages were posted after the research on the topic began. While this topic did not lend itself to activism beyond rallying the government, other topics have allowed students to take their beliefs outside of the laboratory and into action.

In addition to creating awareness, the research process can also reinforce or alter opinions. By discovering new information in the research process, people can question their current assumptions and perhaps formulate a more informed opinion. One example comes from a summer debate class for children of Migrant workers in North Dakota (Iverson, 1999). The Junior High aged students chose to debate the adoption of Spanish as an official language in the U.S. Many students expressed their concern that they could not argue effectively against the proposed change because it was a "truism." They were wholly in favor of Spanish as an official language. After researching the topic throughout their six week course, many realized much more was involved in adopting an official language and that they did not "speak 'pure' Spanish or English, but speak a unique dialect and hybrid" (Iverson, p. 3). At the end of the class many students became opposed to adopting Spanish as an official language, but found other ways Spanish should be integrated into American culture. Without research, these students would have maintained their opinions and not enhanced their knowledge of the issue. The students who maintained support of Spanish as an official language were better informed and thus also more capable of articulating support for their beliefs.

The examples of debate and research impacting the opinions and actions of debaters indicate the strong potential for a direct relationship between debate research and personal advocacy. However, the debate community has not created a new sea of activists immersing this planet in waves of protest and political action. The level of influence debater search has on people needs further exploration. Also, the process of research needs to be more fully explored in order to understand if and why researching for the competitive activity of debate generates more interest than research for other purposes such as classroom projects.

Since parliamentary debate does not involve research into a single topic, it can provide an important reference point for examining the impact of research in other forms of debate. Based upon limited conversations with competitors and coaches as well as some direct coaching and judging experience in parliamentary debate, parliamentary forms of debate has not seen an increase in activism on the part of debaters in the United States. Although some coaches require research in order to find examples and to stay updated on current events, the basic principle of this research is to have a commonsense level of understanding(Venette, 1998). As the NPDA website explains, "the reader is encouraged to be well-read in current events, as well as history, philosophy, etc. Remember: the realm of knowledge is that of a 'well-read college student'" (NPDA Homepage,<http://www.bethel.edu/Majors/Communication/npda/faq2.html>). The focus of research is breadth, not depth. In fact, in-depth research into one topic for parliamentary debate would seem to be counterproductive. Every round has a different resolution and for APDA, at least, those resolutions are generally written so they are open to a wide array of case examples, So, developing too narrow of a focus could be competitively fatal. However, research is apparently increasing for parliamentary teams as reports of "stock cases" used by teams for numerous rounds have recently appeared. One coach did state that a perceived "stock case" by one team pushed his debaters to research the topic of AIDS in Africa in order to be equally knowledgeable in that case. Interestingly, the coach also stated that some of their research in preparation for parliamentary debate was affecting the opinions and attitudes of the debaters on the team.

Not all debate research appears to generate personal advocacy and challenge peoples' assumptions. Debaters must switch sides, so they must inevitably debate against various cases. While this may seem to be inconsistent with advocacy, supporting and researching both sides of an argument actually created stronger advocates. Not only did debaters learn both sides of an argument, so that they could defend their positions against attack, they also learned the nuances of each position. Learning and the intricate nature of various policy proposals helps debaters to strengthen their own stance on issues.

#### Topicality is not exclusion, it is engaged criticism---equating topicality with violence and exclusion of Black Femmes reifies violent academic structures and precludes debates about controversies within communities of Black Women

Nash, 19—Professor of Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies at Duke University (Jennifer, “a love letter from a critic, or notes on the intersectionality wars,” *Black Feminism Reimagined: After Intersectionality*, Chapter 1, 33-58, dml) [language modifications denoted by brackets]

I discovered something about myself when reading a recently published edited volume: I am a “vocal critic of intersectionality.”1 To be hailed as one of intersectionality’s critics is to inhabit deeply uncomfortable terrain. Jasbir Puar notes that the “claim to intersectionality as the dominant feminist method can be produced with such insistence that an interest in exploring other frames . . . gets rendered as problematic and even produces woc [women of color] feminists invested in other genealogies as ‘race-traitors.’”2 Puar reveals that scholars who pose questions about intersectionality’s critical limits, or who “explore” other analytics, are often marked as traitorous. To have one’s work deemed criticism is to feel as though one has been removed—excommunicated, even—from the boundaries of black feminism precisely because one is imagined as inflicting harm on the very intellectual, political, ethical, and creative terrain that black women have labored to carve out. My impulse, then, was to understand “vocal critic” as much more than an intellectual critique: this was an allegation challenging my political commitments to the project of black feminism. My desire was to seek to defend myself from these charges, to insist that I admire intersectionality, that my work endeavors to be generative, not destructive.

This chapter aspires to suspend that critical desire, even as I am deeply intrigued by it. What are the intellectual and political conditions that permitted me to understand the word “critic” as an allegation? Why has the term “critic,” in the context of robust scholarly debate about intersectionality, taken on such a powerful charge? Rather than resist the term or refuse its interpellation, this chapter follows the word “critic” around the black feminist theoretical archive, endeavoring to carefully trace to whom it attaches, and what makes that attachment possible. My investment in tracking the meanings embedded in the term “critic” follows Claire Hemmings’s call to trace the “stories we tell.” In so doing, this chapter asserts that black feminist theorists emphatically retell a singular story about intersectionality: the analytic is the subject of vicious and inaccurate attacks, the victim of an intense “backlash” marked by “a remarkable degree of epistemic intolerance.”3 In this account, one group of scholars supports intersectionality— black feminists—and another powerful chorus of scholars is opposed to the analytic: the critics. This is a deeply compelling narrative: it has a victim (intersectionality; or, perhaps more broadly, black feminism) and a villain (the ubiquitous critic). The story also has a moral imperative: intersectionality must be saved, and black feminists must defend intersectionality from these unwarranted and misguided attacks. This affectively saturated narrative has come to animate the intersectionality wars, the contentious battles that swirl around intersectionality and that garner their urgency and ethical legitimacy from attempts to protect intersectionality from the “loveless and world-ending” figure of the critic.4

Yet, as I argue in this chapter, this compelling narrative is the site of various projections and fantasies. A close engagement with black feminist citational practices reveals that intersectionality’s critic, always constructed by black feminism as outside black feminism’s critical and ethical reach, is actually imaginatively produced by black feminists as they are locked into practices of holding on. In treating the critic as an imaginative projection, I am careful not to argue that black feminists are engaged in dreaming up something that is not there; instead, I consider how women’s studies’ positioning of black feminists as disciplinarians who demand that the field offer an account of black women actually gets performed by black feminists as they contend with intersectionality’s movement to the field’s center by guarding intersectionality from the phantasm of the critic. In other words, black feminists are enlisted in becoming precisely what the field imagines them to be—relentless, demanding, policing disciplinarians—as they expose and condemn the critics who are imagined to fail to adequately and fairly account for intersectionality, for black feminist theory, for black women’s intellectual production. The constant invocation of the malicious critic as a pernicious outsider becomes a crucial rhetorical, theoretical, and ethical strategy through which black feminists reassert their territorial claim to intersectionality and perform their collective desire to shield intersectionality from violent criticism. Ultimately, this chapter shows what happens when black feminists—who have long been part of a movement against captivity in its myriad forms—hold captive intersectionality in the face of an imagined dangerous critic.

In the first section of the chapter, I engage the intersectionality wars, arguing that the prevailing story I have traced here is the centerpiece of those wars. In the second section, I aspire to determine how black feminists decide who—or what—constitutes traitorous critical labor. In so doing, I argue that the critic’s production supports black feminism’s defensive posture and suggest that the psychic life of black feminism is, once again, worthy of sustained attention. In place of entrenching black feminism’s territorial relationship with intersectionality, one that responds to the analytic’s centrality to women’s studies through asserting a proprietary claim to the analytic and guarding it from imagined outsiders, this chapter asks what would happen if we—black feminists—considered intersectionality’s critics as figures who lovingly address us, who generatively bring (rather than destructively take), and who offer their participation in black feminism’s long-standing world-making project. This chapter, then, is an attempt to interrupt the black feminist disavowal of intersectionality’s critics, figures who are the absent-presences that haunt black feminist engagement with intersectionality, and to instead argue that the spectral figure of the critic might provide an opportunity to embrace precisely the letting go the book celebrates.

The Intersectionality Wars

At the 2014 American Studies Association (asa) conference, a panel entitled “Kill This Keyword” asked: “What kind of work do the commonplace keywords of current American studies endeavors do? (How) Can critical leverage, incisive edge, be returned to commonplace terms, or to the ideas to which they refer? What terms have fallen out of favor that might be reanimated in the face of the demise of another?”5 Panel members were invited to reflect on widely circulating scholarly terms like “precarity,” “neoliberalism,” and “affect,” and to determine if these terms should be “killed”— banished from our scholarly lexicon—or “saved.” Nothing generated more anxiety than intersectionality, which was immediately declared dead. Moments after a collective performance of intersectional fatigue, a scholar voiced discomfort with “killing” intersectionality because to do that would be to “kill” black feminism, or perhaps even to “kill” black woman as object of study. The room grew quiet at the prospect of symbolically killed black women. As intersectionality slipped into black feminism slipped into black woman, the analytic moved from dangerous to desirable, from peril to promise, and the audience that had been quick to kill had been convinced to rescue.

The term “intersectionality wars” describes the discursive, political, and theoretical battles staged in this scene. Indeed, as this asa encounter makes visible, debates about intersectionality all too quickly become referendums on whether scholars are “for” or “against” intersectionality (rather than attempts to refine, nuance, complicate, or even think through intersectionality’s contours and migrations). And debates about whether one is “for” or “against” intersectionality almost always seem to become referendums on whether one is “for” or “against” black feminism, and perhaps “for” or “against” black [women] woman herself.6 These slippages—between black woman and black feminism, between intersectionality and black woman, between intersectionality and black feminism—animate the intersectionality wars because they ensure that discussing intersectionality’s critical limits is always already to debate racial politics and allegiances. Undergirding the asa scene, and the intersectionality wars more broadly, are the affective dimensions of the prevailing narrative I described earlier, one where intersectionality is under siege and must be saved, one where a group of critics who are characterized in various ways—ranging from misguided careerists to antiblack or antiblack feminist—have made it a mission to undermine black feminists’ intellectual contributions.

I am drawn to the term “intersectionality wars” because of its echo with feminism’s other wars, most particularly the sex wars. Waged in the 1980s, and reaching a feverish pitch around the time Barnard’s 1982 Scholar and Feminist Conference focused on “pleasure and danger,” the so-called sex wars seemed to be battles over pornography.7 These “wars,” though, were about much more than pornography; the “sex wars” were bound up with accusations of policing sexual minorities and attempts at censorship, especially in light of Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin’s attempt to pass antipornography legislation and the Feminist Anti-Censorship Taskforce’s decision to file an amicus brief in American Booksellers v. Hudnut. Even the casting of widely circulating and complex debates about pornography as a “war” suggests that feminists defined themselves exclusively as “for” or “against” pornography, eliding myriad feminist work that sought to stake out a complex analysis of pornography’s meanings, pleasures, and cultural significance. Similarly, the intersectionality wars seem to be fights over intersectionality’s meanings, circulations, origins, “appropriation,” and “colonization,” but these fights are actually battles over the place of the discipline’s key sign—black woman—in the field imaginary. These wars are fights over questions like: Will black women “save” so-called white feminism with an insistence on intersectionality as the analytic that will free feminism from its exclusionary past and present? Will black women undo feminism with a demand for a complex account for difference? Will black women’s efforts to discipline the field finally—and even redemptively—exculpate the field from its racist past? What is intersectionality’s ultimate theoretical and political goal?

If the “sex wars” were rooted in the sexual culture—and sexual panics— of the late 1970s and early 1980s, the intersectionality wars that I trace in this book are relatively recent battles, rooted in intersectionality’s “citational ubiquity,” its movement across disciplinary borders, across administrative/intellectual boundaries, and across academic/popular boundaries.8 I date the intersectionality wars to intersectionality’s institutionalization, to the rise of Kimberlé Crenshaw’s articles “Mapping the Margins” and “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex” to near-canonical status, and the movement of intersectionality to the center of women’s studies. I also date it to intersectionality’s circulation in popular feminist conversations as a way of signaling a critical practice attentive to (certain forms of) difference, as a way of disciplining so-called white feminism and white feminists, and as a strategy for naming ethical practices of feminism. As more scholars have laid claim to intersectionality, as more disciplines have come to value—at least rhetorically—intersectionality, the intersectionality wars have escalated, with black feminists increasingly stepping into the fray to defend the analytic from imagined misuse and abuse, from improper circulations and devaluations.

Like the sex wars, the intersectionality wars have been waged in contentious ways. The sex wars were played out through public confrontations— debates over Barnard’s “Pleasure and Danger” Diary, battles over the proposed antipornography legislation, civil rights hearings led by MacKinnon and Dworkin, and protests against antipornography legislation; the intersectionality wars have been played out in increasingly contentious scholarly battles waged at conferences, in journal articles, and at myriad symposiums celebrating intersectionality and its interdisciplinary cache. In describing these battles as contentious, I am particularly drawn to considering the tone of these scholarly debates as the location where the deep antagonisms of these battles are most visible. My turn to form—and to tone—is indebted to the work of Janet Halley, who argues that “political ideas have prose styles” and that “you can find out something about your political libido by feeling for whether you are turned on or off by a political idea’s way of addressing itself to you.”9 The intersectionality wars are produced through particular kinds of appeals that work on the reader’s “political libido” through language that underscores the violence inflicted on intersectionality by “critics.” In other words, these “wars” are waged through exposure: black feminists reveal the violence of critics’ work through language that is itself forceful. For example, Brittney Cooper describes Jasbir Puar’s work as an “indictment of intersectionality.”10 Nikol Alexander-Floyd argues that Leslie McCall’s widely cited article “The Complexity of Intersectionality” “disappears black women and their scholarly contributions; more pointedly, her analysis does violence to the progenitors of intersectionality by subverting their aims and objectives.”11 She also warns, “Barely a decade into the new millennium, a new wave of raced-gendered occultic commodification is afoot, one focusing not on black female subjectivity per se, but on the concept of intersectionality.”12 Sirma Bilge writes, “Intersectionality, originally focused on transformative and counter-hegemonic knowledge production and radical politics of social justice, has been commodified and colonized for neoliberal regimes.”13 The Crunk Feminist Collective notes, “Intersectionality without women of color is a train wreck. Call us parochial if you want to, but we should remember that in the case of both these theories, they grew out of the lived political realities of marginalized people.”14

I put these distinct quotes next to each other to call attention to something that permeates black feminist entanglement in the intersectionality wars: the language used to describe and capture the violence performed by intersectionality’s critics—disappearing, commodification, colonization, and “train wrecks”—suggests that criticism is a violent practice. The impulse undergirding these readings of intersectionality’s critics is prosecutorial: it exposes, indicts, and condemns. This reading practice works on readers’ “political libido” by representing an intersectionality under siege, rendered vulnerable by the labor of critics, and ultimately salvaged by the labor of black feminists themselves. The labor of black feminist scholarship, then, is to incite the reader to protect intersectionality from a set of forces— colonization, appropriation, gentrification—that are undeniably violent. It is intersectionality’s vulnerability that demands a protective response. In noting that this language works on the “libido,” my intention is not to suggest that it produces only political arousal—it might just as easily produce disgust, boredom, or unhappiness. Rather, my interest is in how these battles are waged in a language that reproduces intersectionality’s vulnerability in the service of enlisting readers in the battle to preserve and protect the analytic.

If the intersectionality wars are contentious, what precisely is being fought over? What are the battles that are unfolding under the sign of intersectionality?

Origin Stories

The intersectionality wars are often waged over competing origin stories that narrate the genesis of intersectionality. When I describe origin stories, I capture how black feminism often tethers intersectionality to a coherent, legible origin, describing a particular moment of intersectionality’s creation. Origin stories work by presuming that intersectionality emerged not through debate or collaboration but through a singular voice, historical moment, or foundational text. In this way, origin stories are distinct from intellectual genealogies that trace how concepts emerge from multiple traditions or that analyze how different theoretical traditions treat the same concept differently. Intersectionality’s origin stories circulate in (at least) two ways. First, they respond to women’s studies’ “whitening” of intersectionality by centering the analytic’s origin in black feminist studies.15 They often insist on intersectionality’s presence in black feminist theory well before the term was coined or emphasize intersectionality’s long roots in black feminist scholarship and activism. In so doing, they underscore both the term’s historical underpinnings and its fundamental connection to black feminist scholarship. Second, origin stories function as debates internal to black feminism about who coined the term, who its inaugural scholar is, and whose terrain intersectionality “originally” was.

What origin stories share, despite their varied investments in intersectionality’s “original” location, is an insistence on intersectionality’s place in black feminist thought, thus correcting the widely circulating notion that intersectionality is the “product” or intellectual contribution of women’s studies. They directly counter the “whitening of intersectionality,” which, as Sirma Bilge notes, refers not “to the race of intersectionality practitioners, but to the ways of doing intersectionality that rearticulate it around Eurocentric epistemologies.”16 One of the central ways this “whitening” unfolds, according to Bilge, is through the now commonplace claim that intersectionality was “in the air,” that it was nascent in women’s studies long before it was named.17 This proprietary feminist claim to the analytic ignores “the historical fact that intersectionality was developed by black women activists and intellectuals against white-dominated feminism, as much as against the male-dominated black liberation movement, against capitalism and heterosexism.”18 Anna Carastathis offers a similar critique of women’s studies’ historically inaccurate claims about intersectionality, noting that “the appropriation of intersectionality by ‘women’s studies’ and ‘feminist theory’ (which remain white-dominated discourses) can serve to obscure its origins in Black feminist thought.”19 The black feminist response to this “whitening” is to assert, as Jean Ait Belkhir does, that intersectionality is “one of the greatest gifts of black women’s studies to social theory as a whole.”20 In Belkhir’s account, intersectionality is not only a product of black feminist theory but also an indication of black feminist generosity, since intersectionality is a crucially important “gift” bestowed upon women’s studies by black feminists. For my purposes, what is fascinating about the response to women’s studies’ proprietary claims to intersectionality is black feminist theory’s own proprietary claims to the analytic. The subject of debate, then, becomes who truly owns intersectionality, who gets to claim the term as their property.

The labor of reiterating and emphasizing intersectionality’s rootedness in black feminist thought is a critical response to women’s studies and its imagined “appropriation” (a term I will discuss later in this chapter) of black feminist scholarship. It is also a practice of black feminist holding on, a corrective claim that retells intersectionality’s history in an ostensibly accurate way, one that honors the analytic’s location in black feminism and its intimate connection to black women’s intellectual labor. It is through corrective labor that defensiveness garners its affective and political charge; it offers the promise of speaking on behalf of black women, black women’s intellectual production, and black feminism in the face of critical practice that is imagined to efface black women. Thus, black feminist origin stories counter a circulating (institutionalized) feminist origin story with a counter–origin story, one that emphasizes the analytic’s “subaltern and liminal origins.”21

While origin stories are a strategy for countering women’s studies’ narratives about the analytic, they often produce their own sets of debates and contests. Indeed, black feminists also consider intersectionality’s history among themselves, often posing the question: Who invented the term “intersectionality”? As I mentioned in the introduction, within black feminism, origin stories are often amplified in disciplinary-specific ways. Black feminist social scientists, for example, regularly perform intersectional origin stories through Patricia Hill Collins’s work on the “matrix of domination,” while black feminist humanists often perform these origin stories through Crenshaw’s work on intersectionality.22 Still others perform their origin stories through engagement with the historical underpinnings of intersectionality, emphasizing earlier intersectional innovators like the Combahee River Collective, Deborah King, Frances Beal, and/or Anna Julia Cooper. Oftentimes these appeals to earlier black feminist scholarship seek to locate intersectionality’s arrival in a moment that long predated the arrival of anti-essentialist feminism or to complicate the narrative that antiessentialist feminism only arrived in the 1970s. Importantly, all these origin stories perform political work—they take complicated intellectual genealogies and reduce them to a single story, engaging in corrective labor that rewrites circulating narratives about intersectionality. They emphasize that “intersectional ideas have repeatedly been misconstrued or treated reductively” and thus historicize the analytic while asking why “intersectionality concepts have had to be reiterated for well over a century.”23

Even as these debates unfold in disciplinarily specific ways, it is crucial to note that Crenshaw’s work has remained a touchstone. Some black feminist scholarly work describes her two articles as the site where intersectionality “was introduced and later elaborated.”24 For example, Devon Carbado notes that Crenshaw’s “Demarginalizing” article “introduced what would become an enormously influential theory—intersectionality,” Vrushali Patil describes intersectionality as “delineated by Kimberlé Crenshaw and elaborated by subsequent authors,” and Barbara Tomlinson notes that the analytic was “emanating” from Crenshaw’s work.25 In other words, a substantial part of the labor of black feminist origin stories is to center Crenshaw, to insist on her fundamental centrality to intersectionality’s intellectual genealogy, and to emphasize her role as creator of the analytic. According to this rich body of scholarship, Crenshaw’s articles are intersectionality’s urtexts, and Crenshaw is intersectionality’s creator.

Yet other black feminist work seeks to challenge and to correct the centrality of Crenshaw to intersectional histories. Collins, for example, upends the “stock” intersectional origin stories that emphasize Crenshaw because, in those accounts, “Crenshaw was Columbus. . . . She came back from the native lands from far, far away with the gift of intersectionality. Wow, she brought us a present!”26 For Collins, prevailing narratives of intersectionality’s origins obscure the analytic’s true birthplace: social movements and activism. In their collaborative work on intersectionality, Collins and Bilge emphasize that intersectionality has undergirded black feminist practice for generations, including the work of Frances Beal, Sojourner Truth, Anna Julia Cooper, Toni Cade Bambara, and the Combahee River Collective. According to this counter–origin story, one attentive to intersectionality’s long historical roots, intersectionality was always present in black feminist work, particularly black feminist activist work, even if was not named as such. This impulse toward historicizing intersectionality is not to capture the variety of kinds of intellectual and political labor black feminists have engaged in but instead to emphasize that black feminists have done intersectionality for decades. Yet this historical narrative—one that emphasizes intersectionality’s long presence—has another effect, which is to suggest that all black feminist intellectual and political work has always been intersectional.

My reading of these widely circulating, albeit disciplinary-specific, competing black feminist origin stories presents a different account of debates over intersectionality’s histories than Robyn Wiegman’s work, which argues that black feminist engagements with intersectionality’s genealogies break “with the general habits of feminist critical practice, which routinely confer on the namer much more than citational status and rarely posit a scholar’s articulation of a term in the lower register that ‘coinage’ infers.”27 Wiegman suggests that black feminist work on intersectionality “refuses the lure of the signature in favor of a history of collective critical and political endeavor.”28 The insistence on citing scholars before Crenshaw is treated as indicative of a (radical?) refusal of the singular, a critical practice that relishes the collective and disrupts the logic of “coinage.” Yet, I argue that black feminist defensive work too rarely “refuses the lure of the signature,” even as black feminist scholarship is divided over whether the analytic originated with Crenshaw, Collins, Higginbotham, Combahee, or Cooper, and too often is seduced by the narrative of singularity. While some black feminist scholars locate intersectionality before Crenshaw, the preoccupation with locating intersectionality in a singular moment, and the ongoing battles over who coined it, reflect the profound “lure” of the origin narrative, particularly in the context of the intersectionality wars. Insisting on intersectionality’s “correct” origins and its long-standing practice is an effort to carefully guard the analytic from abuse.

Ultimately, if origin stories offer a single narrative that performs its own elisions, they also participate in—rather than critically disrupt—the intersectionality wars. In their insistence on correcting feminist narratives by insisting on intersectionality’s roots in the bodies of black women, they continue the battle over ownership and territoriality that plagues these wars, rather than critically interrogating how and why women’s studies has “laid claim” to intersectionality, and examining when, how, and why intersectionality has come to have value for women’s studies. These questions engender a critical shift within black feminist debates; rather than insisting on correct citational practices and “accurate” genealogies, they ask us to consider how and why citing intersectionality became the gold standard of feminist work, and even to consider what it is we mean when we talk about intersectionality and its value.

Appropriation

Undergirding the debate about the “whitening” of intersectionality is a broader claim: that intersectionality is terrain that has been taken over— colonized—by (white) women’s studies. Black feminist scholars regularly mobilize language like “gentrification,” “appropriation,” “commodification,” and “colonization” to describe how intersectionality “travels” in troubling ways. The intersectionality wars are often waged through attempts to highlight—and police—intersectionality’s “appropriations.” These scholars insist on reading the analytic’s movements across disciplinary borders, and its movement to the center of women’s studies, as evidence of misuse, wrongful circulation, and theft. If intersectionality has been taken—or, perhaps in the language of these scholars, stolen—then the task of black feminism is to expose the theft and to reclaim proper ownership of the analytic. The language of “appropriation” and “commodification” performs this exposure and reveals the necessity of a black feminist reclamation of the analytic. For example, Alexander-Floyd warns, “Barely a decade into the new millennium, a new wave of raced-gendered occultic commodification is afoot, one focusing not on black female subjectivity per se, but on the concept of intersectionality.”29 Alexander-Floyd’s insights—linking intersectionality’s circulation to a form of “occultic commodification”—are a point of departure not simply for considering intersectionality’s current iterations in women’s studies but also for uncovering the feelings that intersectionality’s institutionalization engenders in black feminist theory and in black feminists. If intersectionality has been commodified, it is to suggest that the analytic, the result of intellectual labor, has been imbued with value, and that it has been rendered a product for sale (or for theft) in the marketplace of ideas. Here, intersectionality comes to stand in for black women—both of which are sites of magical value and incessantly devalued. It is this paradox, what Rachel Lee terms the space of “fetishized marginality,” that the language of appropriation underscores.30

Feminist scholarship pointing to problems of commodification often highlights how intersectionality’s circulation allows scholars to pretend to engage in intersectional labor. Rachel E. Luft and Jane Ward, for example, write: “When not joined to intersectional practice, intersectional intonations function as a kind of credentialing, an appropriation used to mask an anti-intersectional orientation. . . . [T]he language of intersectionality can serve to inoculate against charges of racism. It distracts from the speaker’s resistance to the struggle for racial justice, like other liberal and/or colorblind disclaimers. A generation and more ago, the primary intersectional error was omission. Today it is joined by appropriation, and the failure is one of justice, of commitment to feminist, racial, economic, and sexual social transformation.”31 Like Bilge, Luft and Ward advance a historical argument: if, in feminism’s past, intersectionality emerged to remedy “omission,” an inattention to women of color, in feminism’s present, intersectionality has been “appropriated,” stripped of radical meaning and instead used to “credential” and to “mask an anti-intersectional orientation.” Similarly, Carastathis bemoans “the appropriation of intersectionality by ‘women’s studies’ and ‘feminist theory’ (which remain white-dominated discourses),” arguing that the mobilization of the term “can serve to obscure its origins in Black feminist thought.”32 In other words, intersectionality is used to disguise, to cover, and to “mask” “white-dominated discourses.” Intersectionality not only is severed from its “true” origins but also is used to undermine its very project.

While commodification is one rhetorical device through which defensiveness is ethically mobilized, colonization is another. The language of colonization, often paired with commodification, positions intersectionality as a territory that has been wrongfully, problematically, and even violently taken by outsiders. Bilge writes, “Intersectionality, originally focused on transformative and counter-hegemonic knowledge production and radical politics of social justice, has been commodified and colonized for neoliberal regimes.”33 Here, Bilge is engaged in an origin story (intersectionality once was radical and “transformative” and has been stripped of its political edge) and a story about wrongful possession, but she is also engaged in a story about theft, about the reclamation of the analytic by outsiders. In this act of colonization, intersectionality paradoxically works to enable scholars who are not “actually” performing intersectional work to make intersectional claims, or to disguise their work in the guise of intersectionality, all the while maintaining the status quo. Colonization allows scholars to lay claim to intersectionality, and the idea of virtuous feminist labor that attaches to intersectionality, without actually performing the demanding work of intersectional work. The language of colonization also points to the necessary decolonial labor of black feminist theory. To return intersectionality to black feminists, and to black women, is to effectively undo long-standing practices of feminist colonialism. It is, then, a practice of justice.

Yet the language of appropriation leaves two central questions unanswered. First, it is unclear how “appropriation” is different than the “travel” or migration of theories. Intellectual ideas circulate; of course, their circulation is made possible by structures that confer value on certain concepts and devalue others, by the institutional and geographic contexts in which ideas emerge. But this work has yet to distinguish appropriation from the variety of uses to which any theory will be put by scholars of differing theoretical and political traditions. Second, where this scholarship succeeds is in its rigorous display that the capacity to call one’s work intersectional is a claim to value, hence the ways that scholars who perform a variety of forms of theorizing have attempted to make use of the term “intersectional” to describe their work. However, this body of scholarship has yet to clearly reveal—and then dismantle—the system of value that aligns “intersectional” with “good feminist work,” that presumes that intersectional scholarship is politically virtuous. Instead, it reinvests in intersectionality’s value by attempting to limit who can rightfully access the analytic.

I have carefully mapped the terrain of the intersectionality wars, revealing that while they seem to be waged over origin stories and accounts of appropriation, they are undergirded by a common and compelling narrative. This is a story of villains (critics) and saviors (black feminists). The intensity of the intersectionality wars is made possible because of the affective pitch of this story, and at stake in the intersectionality wars is black feminist labor to speak for black feminist theory, to speak for black women’s intellectual labor, to speak for black women. This “speaking for” takes the form of advocating for intersectionality in the face of myriad challenges levied at the analytic.

Intersectionality’s Critics

The remainder of this chapter turns to the figure of the critic, who is represented as both ubiquitous and destructive, relentlessly attacking intersectionality in precisely the moment that the analytic has achieved “success” and interdisciplinary cache.34 To be clear, my interest in carefully tracing how the term “critic” circulates in black feminist scholarship is not to imply that there are no criticisms of intersectionality. Indeed, there are a number of “critiques” of the analytic that have circulated in scholarly literature across the humanities and social sciences, ranging from a sense that the analytic is too focused on the race/gender intersection, to the notion that the analytic is tethered to fixity rather than motion, to the idea that it relies on precisely the categories it could—and should—disrupt.35 The emergence of so-called post-intersectionality, especially in the context of the legal academy, suggests that a number of scholars have raised important questions about intersectionality and its applicability and have imagined refashioning intersectionality to unleash its utility and analytic power.36

I also read the black feminist preoccupation with the critic as apart from scholarly engagement with intersectionality’s institutionalization. For example, Maria Carbin and Sara Edenheim note that intersectionality “has moved from being a sign of threat and conflict to (white) feminism to a consensus-creating signifier that not only made the concept successful but also enabled an institutionalization of a liberal, ‘all-inclusive’ feminism based on a denial of power as constitutive for all subjects.”37 Their insight centered on intersectionality’s “consensus-creating” status invites rigorous feminist engagement with how and why intersectionality has come to occupy the center of US women’s studies (and, according to them, European women’s studies as well). My interest is in something different: not in a set of critical queries posed about intersectionality and its “successes” but in how the critic has emerged as a singular figure who is imagined to be both outside of intersectionality and destructive to the analytic.

What marks the critic? What are her critical practices? The critic, according to black feminist scholarship, is marked by her “cavalier treatment” of intersectionality and by the production of work that is “damaging to feminist antisubordination scholarship and activism.”38 The critic’s work is destructive precisely because it is “insipid, apolitical, one dimensional, anodyne.”39 If the critic is engaged in a violent act, she is also involved in a trendy practice, since critique has become “all the rage.”40 As May argues, “Intersectionality critiques have become something of their own genre—a form so flourishing, at times it seems critique has become a primary means of taking up the concept and its literatures.”41 Critique thrives, then, because of institutional politics that value dissent more than generative critical practice; intersectionality’s critics, then, are careerist. As Tomlinson notes, “Rhetorical misrepresentations of intersectionality emerge in part from professional pressures, reward structures, and credentialing mechanisms. Scholars are eager to publish. Displacing and supplanting previous knowledge conforms to the structures of professional reward. Scholars may exaggerate criticisms to draw on the prestige of the appearance of novelty and innovation in ways that are destructive rather than constructive and competitive rather than contributive.”42 Rather than posing important questions about intersectionality and its limits, the critic’s queries about intersectionality are motivated by an unrelenting willingness to yield to the demands of the corporate university. While the critic’s work is “produced under the dispassionate guise of theoretical disagreement,” it actually “broadsides against black feminist theorizing.”43 Critique is not only oppositional to intersectionality but oppositional to the project of black feminism more broadly.

While black feminists have carefully pointed out the ubiquity of critiques, there has been considerably less care in naming the critics who supposedly proffer and circulate these critiques. For example, Tomlinson regularly names “the critic,” describing the myriad forms of violent work this subject performs:

Critics may argue, for example, that intersectionality should be set free from the identities of the marginalized women of color who originated it. Critics may claim that intersectionality has not yet revealed as much as it ought to about identities or has not examined the most important identities, one’s own identity, enough identities, too many identities, or identities in a complex enough way (Staunæs 2003; Prins 2006; Taylor, Hines, and Casey 2011). They may assume that intersectionality is legitimated by an individual’s conscious awareness and balancing of individual aspects of identity rather than revealing structures of power (Carastathis 2008; Weston 2011). In consequence, critics may assume, rather than argue, that eliminating subordination is no longer necessary or no longer a feminist goal (Hancock 2007a; Nash 2008), treating intersectionality’s originating interest in structural power as readily disposable and self-evidently no longer of concern. Critics may even argue as if intersectionality’s critique of structural power interferes with its more important use for developing general theories of identity (Prins 2006; Nash 2008).44

I linger in two moments in Tomlinson’s description of the critic’s varied and dangerous labor—first, the ubiquity of the term “critics.” Critics are presumed to be monolithic in their labor; all critics (who are named in clustered parenthetical citation to collapse any distinction or variation in their work and to shore up a vision of the monolithic and dangerous critic) perform the same intellectual and political work. Indeed, all critics seem to perform all of the labor that Tomlinson references: effectively undermining intersectionality’s antisubordination efforts and ensuring intersectionality’s vulnerability.

Second, though “critics” are mentioned in parenthetical citations, it is often unclear how they perform the labor they are alleged to engage in, and which critics engage in which problematic practices. Instead, the reader encounters a list of critics’ names that conjures the ubiquity of all of the problematic work critics perform. Take, for example, the contention that “critics may assume, rather than argue, that eliminating subordination is no longer necessary or no longer a feminist goal.” How do the critics parenthetically cited perform that work? Do we do it in the same way? Through what kind of work have we ventured that the task of antisubordination is over? How do critics “assume” rather than “argue” this claim? The practice of parenthetical citations, which clusters scholars whose work on intersectionality is actually quite complex and varied, secures the notion of an intersectionality under siege, vulnerable to the all-encompassing labor of critics.

While Tomlinson’s analysis produces the critic as ubiquitous through a citational practice that collapses differences among scholarly projects, May’s work presents the critic’s labor as so odious that any feminist scholar or activist would have to reject it. She notes that critique can “feel remedial in nature, even quasi-Eugenic.”45 Indeed, she argues that many of the ways that intersectionality has been critiqued “evoke the hyper-surveillance and micro-aggressions faced by women of color in the culture at large but also in the academy.”46 As is the case with Tomlinson’s account, absent from this analysis is precisely what these critiques are and who is proffering them. Yet the notion of critique as a practice that bolsters and enforces “hypersurveillance” and racist “micro-aggressions” necessarily requires the reader to reject critique and to align herself with black feminist attempts to safeguard the analytic. Similarly, May notes, “Intersectionality turns up regularly in the critical literatures as akin to a destructive, unruly Sapphire figure (who needs to be tamed/taken down); a theoretically unsophisticated concept (while, at the same time, often lauded as experience’s poster child); a dated idea in need of a makeover; or a deficient body of thought in need of a remedial/eugenic cure.”47 In May’s account, critiques of intersectionality are deeply racist, transforming the analytic into an “unruly Sapphire figure” in need of disciplining. This account operates on the reader’s “political libido” by enlisting the reader to recognize the deeply racialized work of critiquing intersectionality.

Finally, some “pro-intersectionality” scholars insist that critiques of intersectionality are so commonplace, so “standard,” that they need not be cited at all. Devon Carbado, for example, examines “standard criticisms” of intersectionality that permeate feminist conversations about intersectionality. This list includes the following:

1 Intersectionality is only or largely about Black women, or only about race and gender.

2 Intersectionality is an identitarian framework.

3 Intersectionality is a static theory that does not capture the dynamic and contingent processes of identity formation.

4 Intersectionality is overly invested in subjects.

5 Intersectionality has traveled as far as it can go, or there is nothing more the theory can teach us.

6 Intersectionality should be replaced by or at least applied in conjunction with [fill in the blank].48

The only “critique” that warrants engagement with the work of a specific scholar is the sixth, about which Carbado notes:

This brings me to the final criticism, which is not a criticism at all but rather a suggestion (against the backdrop of the preceding criticisms) that scholars should replace intersectionality with, or at least apply the theory alongside, some alternative framework. Among the candidates that advocates of this view have marshaled to perform this work are “cosynthesis” (Kwan 1997); “inter-connectivity” (Valdes 1995, 26); “multidimensionality” (Valdes 1998; Hutchinson 1999, 9; Mutua 2006b, 370); and, most recently, “assemblages” (Puar 2007). Proponents of these theories implicitly and sometimes explicitly suggest that each has the inherent ability to do something—discursively and substantively—that intersectionality inherently cannot do or does considerably less well.49

Carbado’s approach to describing intersectionality’s critique—simply listing a set of widely circulating criticisms without reference to specific scholars— suggests that these criticisms are so familiar that they are simply truisms. If each “criticism” references a rich body of debate within the field of intersectionality studies, Carbado elides those debates, instead presenting each as a way in which intersectionality is undone by critics.

Though these scholars offer varied descriptions of critique, all have positioned their scholarship as a way of protecting intersectionality from the dangerous and destructive task of the critic, as a project of speaking on behalf of intersectionality. In other words, these texts perform the prevailing narrative that marks black feminist theoretical engagement, one marked by a problematic villain who systematically undoes intersectionality, often with questionable intellectual motives. In this account, the critic is ubiquitous, omnipresent, powerful, and dangerous, and the task of black feminist theory is to rescue (something I take up more in the next chapter).

Yet, despite the contention that the critic is ubiquitous, that intersectionality is quite literally under siege, the texts share a lack of specificity about the figure of the critic as each presumes the critics’ omnipresence yet refuses to name specific critics, or to attach particular critical labor to particular scholars. There is, though, one critic who is named repeatedly in black feminist scholarship that guards intersectionality: Jasbir Puar. Puar is often figured in both scholarly and popular work as the paradigmatic critic of intersectionality.50 Carastathis, for example, treats Puar’s work as “the most influential critique of intersectionality,” and Patrick Grzanka calls Puar one of “intersectionality’s most committed critics.”51 In his cogent analysis of intersectionality and black feminism, James Bliss describes Puar’s scholarly contributions as critiques:

Over the past decade, Jasbir Puar has offered a field-defining series of critiques of intersectionality through her explication of assemblage theory. . . . Puar critiques intersectionality as, first, anachronistically located in and of regimes of discipline; second, collusive with the post-9/11 national security state; and, finally, regressively attached to identity. . . . [M]y interest lies in what falls outside of Puar’s description of her critique of intersectionality: namely, an anxiety that manifests as hostility toward the project of a radical Black feminism. What critical readers of Puar have caught in her several interventions on intersectionality is a tendency to align Black feminism with state violence generally, and the post-9/11 US imperial project specifically, something far different from an anxiety about the political stakes of leaving intersectionality behind. . . . While not at all limited to Puar, it is this animating desire to displace Black women and Black feminist theorizing that troubles the turn to assemblage theory.52

Here, Puar’s engagement with assemblage as an alternative conception of theorizing relationality, subjectivity, and sensation is imagined less as a generative intervention and more as a practice of unsettling intersectionality. Indeed, in Bliss’s retelling of Puar’s contributions, Puar is figured as largely invested in dismantling intersectionality, a project that “manifests as hostility toward the project of a radical Black feminism.” Similarly, Tiffany Lethabo King reveals that Puar’s work is “one of the most well-circulated critiques in the humanities” and notes that “without trying to, Puar’s nonpost-intersectional critique is immensely effective at encouraging people to consider transcending and moving past intersectionality.”53 Puar is not only the analytic’s key critic but also foundational to a larger devaluation of intersectionality.

I attend to scholars’ preoccupation with Puar as critic not as part of a project of rescuing Puar from the title of “critic” but to interrogate both what it means that her work has come to stand for a set of practices that undermine intersectionality, that her name has come to signal myriad scholarly attempts to unsettle intersectionality, and what it means that the critic is imagined to be a ubiquitous figure, and yet the only critic regularly cited is Puar. While some insist that attention is given to Puar because she has offered, in Amy L. Brandzel’s words, “one of the most thorough critiques of intersectionality,” my provocations here are designed to ask about the institutional politics that have made it such that Puar’s work stands for a critique of intersectionality.54 What is it about both Puar and black feminist theory that has enabled the notion of Puar as the critic to circulate and to flourish? What role does Puar—as paradigmatic critic—play in enabling the intersectionality wars to flourish?

Puar’s status in the literature on intersectionality as the critic is particularly surprising because of her own uneasiness surrounding intersectionality, and her desire to think anew about relationality in ways that intersectionality may not (or may!) be able to accommodate. Indeed, it is crucial to read Puar’s engagement with intersectionality twice—first in Terrorist Assemblages and then, later, in “‘I Would Rather Be a Cyborg Than a Goddess.’” Terrorist Assemblages ends by setting assemblage, the analytic Puar champions, against intersectionality. Puar writes:

As opposed to an intersectional model of identity, which presumes that components—race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, age, religion— are separable analytics and can thus be disassembled, an assemblage is more attuned to interwoven forces that merge and dissipate time, space, and body against linearity, coherency, and permanency. . . . We can think of intersectionality as a hermeneutic of positionality that seeks to account for locality, specificity, placement, junctions. As a tool of diversity management and a mantra of liberal multiculturalism, intersectionality colludes with the disciplinary apparatus of the state—census, demography, racial profiling, surveillance—in that “difference” is encased within a structural container that simply wishes the messiness of identity into a formulaic grid.55

Here, Puar offers an account of intersectionality that underscores its collusion—or potential collusion—with the state, the fact that it is (or can be) enmeshed with logics of counting, numeracy, measurement, and fixity.

In “‘I Would Rather Be a Cyborg Than a Goddess,’” though, Puar carefully traces her ambivalence about how intersectionality has come to be deployed in the space of institutionalized women’s studies. She writes, “But what the method of intersectionality is most predominantly used to qualify is the specific ‘difference’ of ‘women of color,’ a category that has now become, I would argue, simultaneously emptied of specific meaning on the one hand and overdetermined in its deployment on the other. In this usage, intersectionality always produces an Other, and that Other is always a Woman Of Color (woc), who must invariably be shown to be resistant, subversive, or articulating a grievance.”56 The critical questions she poses about intersectionality and its usages center on its dominance in women’s studies, its place as the field’s prevailing method, and the fact that questioning intersectionality results in precisely what has happened to Puar, the placement of the theorist (and her frameworks) as “traitorous.” Here, what Puar performs is less critique than a critical inquiry surrounding intersectionality’s circulation and institutionalization.

Why, then, are Puar’s ambivalent engagements with intersectionality’s racial and institutional politics forgotten in the service of representing her work exclusively as damning critique? How can we make sense of how a scholar’s ideas change, shift, transform, and are presented differently? In other words, how can we track the evolution or shift of Puar’s work on intersectionality from Terrorist Assemblages to “Cyborg” with a deep recognition of the fact that our collective scholarly endeavors are rooted in larger disciplinary conversations that might result in different presentations in our ideas or shifts in our thinking? While my endeavor here can only be speculative, it is worth noting that one of intersectionality’s only named critics—and the analytic’s imagined preeminent critic—is not black and is often positioned as either a nonblack feminist, an antiblack feminist, or a queer theorist (rather than a feminist). The practice of reinscribing Puar as intersectionality’s quintessential critic, then, has the potential effect of shoring up the notion that intersectionality and “black woman” are synonymous, and that intersectionality’s critics are outsiders both to the analytic and to black feminism. Here, I want to linger in a consideration of the fact that Puar’s status as critic—as the critic—is secured and sutured through both her body and her imagined identity. In so doing, I trace how a potent “critique” of intersectionality might be argued to flourish precisely because it was articulated by a nonblack woman of color feminist, and I ask how black feminists have constructed Puar as the paradigmatic critic because of her imagined status as an outsider to black feminism (a status that is conferred not simply because of her scholarship but because of certain readings of her imagined identity).

My consideration of Puar’s status as an outsider to black feminism unfolds alongside how my own work gets described as “critique.” Our respective “critical” projects are differently described, circulated, and received in the field. While some of my earlier work, particularly my article “Rethinking Intersectionality,” is described as a “critique” of intersectionality, it is largely understood as emerging in and through an affection for black feminism (and for black women’s intellectual production), a fact that might be tethered to my own scholarly work but also to the ongoing collapses between racially marked subjects’ bodies and their objects of study. When, for example, Brittney Cooper describes my work, she situates it as a black feminist critique of intersectionality, one that, then, emerges from “inside” the imagined location where intersectionality was born.57 My location as a black feminist, and as a black woman (and, of course, these two identities are often collapsed), means that my critiques of intersectionality are imagined as practices of love and affection rather than hostility, and are thus treated with a kind of generosity.

I understand my own treatment—one marked by a sense that the work I do is animated by an investment in black feminism—as markedly different than how Puar’s ambivalent engagement with intersectionality is received. Indeed, the notion of Puar as an outsider to black feminism has been echoed by larger critiques of her work as antiblack; one critique of Terrorist Assemblages noted that the book has an “anxious intent to sidestep blackness,” positioning Puar as a stranger to the intellectual and political projects of black studies. Egbert Alejandro Martina notes, “For Puar, intersectionality is a stand-in for an unacceptable radical Black feminist politics. Beneath the terrorist is the queer, and beneath the queer is the Black, a mode of being too monstrous even for Puar to pretend to encounter in good faith,” and suggests that underpinning Puar’s questions about intersectionality is a larger “hostility” toward black feminism.58 Puar’s status as nonblack feminist, as someone outside of the tradition from which intersectionality emerged, can deepen the conception of intersectionality’s critiques as particularly problematic because they are born beyond the critical practice of black feminism and are motivated by hostility and animus.

If Puar’s critiques are imagined to emerge from a nonlocation in black feminism, she is also often positioned as an outsider to the feminist project itself, with her roots in queer theory underscored. Lynne Huffer, for example, notes that Puar “shifts her focus away from intersectionality to queer assemblage. . . . In doing so, she directly challenges the unquestioned stability of the subject implicit in feminist intersectionality theory.”59 Rather than reify an imagined distinction between feminist theory and queer theory, I ask how Puar’s imagined location within queer theory, a tradition that is still often described as outside of feminist theory, amplifies the conception of her “critique” as formed by an outsider, and thus makes intersectionality particularly and problematically vulnerable. Puar is treated as not just a queer theorist but also a queer of color theorist, part of a vibrant cohort of interdisciplinary scholars who have considered “social formations as the intersections of race, gender, sexuality and class, with particular interest in how those formations correspond with and diverge from nationalist ideals and practices.”60 If black queer studies “throws shade on the meanings of queer,” queer of color studies, in Jafari Allen’s words, “takes seriously Third World or women of color feminist politics of, for example, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Chrystos, Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, Norma Alarcon, Chela Sandoval, and others who consistently made connections in their local scholarship, artistry, and activism, with state practices and sites within and beyond their own ethnic or racial borders.”61 Indeed, queer of color critique has insisted on the centrality of woman of color feminisms—particularly black feminism—to queer theory, and thus emphatically placed scholars like Lorde, Anzaldúa, and Moraga in the queer canon. Roderick Ferguson and Grace Hong write: “Much of what we now call ‘women of color feminism’ can be seen as queer of color critique, insofar as these texts consistently situate sexuality as constitutive of race and gender. . . . Women of color feminism and queer of color critique reveal the ways in which racialized communities are not homogeneous but instead have always policed and preserved the difference between those who are able to conform to categories of normativity, respectability, and value, and those who are forcibly excluded from such categories.”62 For Ferguson and Hong, women of color feminists—including Lorde—are queer theorists whose work indexes a commitment to “set about creating something else to be,” and whose theoretical contributions examine the intimate relationship among race, gender, and sexuality.63 Yet it is crucial to underscore that queer of color theory often claims its intimacy with black feminist theory through a retrospective gaze rather than through engagement with contemporary black feminist scholarship. Queer of color theory’s citational trajectory is primarily tethered to black feminist work from the 1970s and early 1980s, and it sutures the (queer of color) present to an earlier moment in black feminism’s past, not to black feminism’s unfolding present. Indeed, queer of color critique often moves sideways to intersectionality, insistently not engaging it and embracing seemingly anti-identitarian analytics generated by black feminists “earlier” than Crenshaw and intersectionality. By sideways, I refer to a citational practice that does not reject intersectionality or its “inaugural” scholar, Kimberlé Crenshaw, but instead adopts some of intersectionality’s core investments while disidentifying with intersectionality itself, and while situating other scholars—particularly Lorde—as intersectionality’s early (or perhaps earliest) practitioners. I term this “reading sideways” because I argue that this strategy produces a new genealogy that neither rejects nor accepts intersectionality but instead sidesteps it entirely. Reading sideways, then, is a performance of ambivalence made manifest through silence. Puar is located in a queer of color tradition that embraces black feminism, but only black feminist work from an earlier historical era than intersectionality. It is this location as a queer of color scholar, as part of a tradition that has sidestepped intersectionality, that also allows black feminists to position Puar as an outsider to intersectionality, a critic who might be easily represented as having an investment in rendering intersectionality vulnerable.

In revealing that the critic is rarely named—and, when she is, is so often Puar—I seek to suggest that black feminists produce the critic rather than expose the critic. Indeed, while the critic is regularly described by black feminists as an omnipresent threat, she is actually one scholar who is relentlessly cast as an outsider to intersectionality and to black feminist theory, a framing of her work that requires a refusal to engage her [their] scholarship on intersectionality’s complex institutional locations and racial politics. The figure of the critic is, then, an imaginative projection of black feminist defensiveness, a figure that animates and justifies the defensive affect even as that figure is a fantasy, rather than an actual threat. The constant production of the threatening critic makes the labor—the moral thrust—of black feminism abundantly clear: to rescue black feminist territory, to protect it from these outsiders who neither understand nor value the intellectual and political labor of black feminism.

Love Letter from a Critic

This chapter began with my anxieties about being hailed as a critic. It has unfolded as a rumination on the figure of the critic, an imaginative villainous projection who I argue is central to the intersectionality wars, and thus animates the defensive territoriality that I term “holding on,” the structure of feeling that undergirds contemporary US black feminism. The critic is the outsider, the hostile stranger, who seeks to encroach on territory, on property, on hard-earned intellectual turf that is not hers [theirs]. But why would the practice of constructing the critic be appealing to black feminists? Why repeatedly produce the figure of the critic, and why participate in the intersectionality wars?

Part of my contention is that the figure of critic locks black feminism into the logic of what Alison Peipmeier terms “besiegement.” She writes, “As wgs practitioners debate the focus of the field, recount its history, or plan for its future, they present themselves as fighters and the discipline of wgs as under fire—besieged.”64 For Peipmeier, besiegement affects how women’s studies narrates itself, producing a story in which feminist scholars located in women’s studies are “academic outlaws, or at least outsiders.” Yet as Peipmeier begins to probe this narrative, she asks how much of an outsider women’s studies can be when its classes regularly fill, when it often has core and affiliated faculty, and when it hosts myriad events on campus. How can an institutionalized field retain its claim to outsiderness when it is so deeply embedded in the university? And why do scholars laboring in women’s studies retain a deep commitment to naming their marginalization when they have often secured institutional recognition, visibility, and resources? Indeed, Peipmeier reveals that the narrative of besiegement is necessary to women’s studies’ conception of itself even as that account no longer always captures women’s studies’ institutional situatedness. Following Peipmeier’s work, I ask how the figure of the critic, and the narratives of “besiegement” it can produce, is an alluring one for black feminism, particularly when the critic is imagined primarily as Puar, a figure represented as outside of the boundaries of black feminism and perhaps outside of the boundaries of feminism more broadly. The image of a vulnerable intersectionality, a literal space that needs to be protected from colonizers and gentrifiers, positions black feminism as not only an intellectual and political tradition but also an ethical intervention that speaks on behalf of black women, in the service of protecting their intellectual labor. There is nothing more virtuous, then, than protecting intersectionality from the critic. Yet this same alluring narrative locks black feminism into a problematic location in women’s studies, one that makes the theoretical tradition primarily oriented toward protecting its turf. Indeed, the kind of paranoid readings advanced by black feminist practitioners invested in exposing the critic play out in the context of a field that continues to offer black feminist theory an incredibly limited role in the intellectual and political project of the field—a corrective. If the tradition is designed merely to correct, rather than to exist as its own vibrant field of debate, then it is logical that black feminists find themselves mired in the impasse of the present, one marked by the intersectionality wars that again attempt to tether black feminism to one intellectual product—intersectionality—and to reduce and collapse “black woman,” “black feminism,” and “intersectionality.”

As I indicated in the opening paragraphs of this chapter, I enter this debate not merely as a scholar invested in a robust black feminist theory but also as a scholar whose name is often included in the list of “critics.” This chapter, then, has for me prompted a desire not to upend the category of the critic, but to spend time with the villain in black feminism’s prevailing narrative, to sit with the imagined colonizer, appropriator, gentrifier, and critic. Indeed, this chapter is a rumination on what black feminists can garner from sitting with, sitting beside, this disavowed figure. My investigation has prompted in me a desire to envision a black feminism that can love the critic and can interpret the critic as engaged in a loving practice rather than a malicious one, a generative act rather than a destructive one. Rather than attempting to rescue intersectionality from imagined outsiders who purport to damage and defang the analytic, I invite us to treat the critic as giving us an offering, a way of picturing black feminism’s relationship with intersectionality and with the field of women’s studies otherwise. The critic’s offering might even include compelling black feminist theory to come to terms with its own narrative about a dangerous outsider determined to undermine our theoretical innovations.

What is it that the critic might offer? And how might black feminists cultivate the critic, effectively seeing what she offers not as a threatening gesture, but as a kind of love letter, one that, in Lauren Berlant’s words, offers us a chance to imagine “becoming different”?65 Part of the critic’s offering is a rigorous engagement with the psychic structure of our tradition, a structure that has empowered us to locate danger everywhere. The critic’s offering also includes compelling black feminist theory to come to terms with our prevailing story about a dangerous outsider determined to undermine our theoretical innovations, and our current preoccupation with narrativizing our field around a sense of our besiegement. The critic also offers us a chance to refuse the lure of territoriality, a form of imagined agency that always brings us to an impasse rather than liberating us from the destructive intersectionality wars. Instead, what might be possible if we began to imagine new forms of agency, and perhaps even embraced—rather than relentlessly rejecting—the vulnerability that intersectionality’s movements can make some of us feel. Part of this offering is also compelling a critical attention to how we, black feminists, construct who is “inside” and “outside” the boundaries of our own creative, political, and intellectual tradition, pushing us to interrogate how our anticaptivity project has become its own boundary-policing exercise. Ultimately, what the critic sends us is not a threatening world-ending message, but an invitation to embrace the possibility of other ways to be and feel black feminist.

## 2

### 1NC – Kritik

#### The 1ac’s resistance is framed by its imagination of a realm of discourse or knowledge that adheres to the form of given economies of desire. The aff is powerful precisely because it depicts a master who has access to certain privileges over subjects who are denied. However, desire organized thusly resists a master, without resisting mastery, and thus subscribes to a futile but nonetheless teleological project of overcoming the lack.

Rogers 15. Juliet Brough Rogers, professor of political science at the University of Melbourne (Australia), “A Stranger Politics: Resistance in Psychoanalytic Thought and Praxis” in Jacques Lacan: Between Psychoanalysis and Politics, Routledge, 2015: 186

The conundrum of change in psychoanalysis (and beyond) highlights the first of two particular problems of, and with, resistance that appear when the subject attempts such a change of rules. First, change rarely (if ever) involves the creation of what Douzinas (2013: 141) calls ‘a new political subject’. That is, subjects are always already subjected – let us say occupied – a priori and thus all imaginations of resistance are framed in a priori discourse. As such, the subjects’ imaginations, including their imaginations of the results of revolution – or of a new mode of being – are always colonized with what is available to them. This is why – for Žižek (2007) and for Lacan (2007) – in post-revolutionary states, what the subject will get is more of the same. The second problematic that haunts acts of resistance, and of more specific concern to psychoanalytic practice, is that any employment of violence as a means to an end, and particularly as an effort toward a violent unsettling of the regime, can only be understood as the effort to capture a definitive answer to the insistent and formative question to the Other, expressed by Lacan (2006) as,‘che vuoi Autre?’ – ‘what do you want from me?’ In some cases this may be a violent effort toward capture, exercised to the point of a defiance of the existence of the question. What this means is that one acts, violently, in order to produce a known future, as the answer. The two problematics of resistance overlap because the answer is always imagined in the terms/signifiers available from the past. That is, the answer appears in the frame of the categories which produce the subject, and thus recruits the first problematic: ‘you are (always) already subjected’. I’ll tackle these problematics in turn. First, ‘you are already subjected’. If we even partially accept Judith Butler’s (1997: 6) treatise on the formation of subjectivity as a series of ‘passionate attachments’ to ‘subjection’,10 then it is difficult to understand how the subject might be what Douzinas (2014) described as ‘re- or de-subjectivised’ in the first site of becoming a resisting subject.11 For the political subject of democracy, recognition is, as Claude Lefort (1989) has told us well, the condition of being a subject. This means recognition within the signifiers – let us call them biopolitical categories – allocated to the identity of the subject of democracy. The stage of political recognition is populated by signifiers which broker little dissent – by others and even by the self. In Butler’s terms, we are ‘passionately attached’ to our gender, imaginations of health, rights, and, in Lacan’s terms, the ‘goods’ – as objects and as ideas – which offer us the imagination of recognition. We are occupied as subjects through our own occupation with a recognizable identity before democracy, with the qualities (objects) that reflect that identity. This occupation allows for little, if any, dissent as to the naturalness, goodness, and reality of the signifiers that produce the subject – as signifiers which adhere fundamentally to economies of desires: as desires for recognition of identity and rights, as desires for capital. That is, the subject is occupied a priori with these categories and recognizes (and demands recognition) via these categories. If we accept the premises of subjection framed above then the argument follows that the resisting subject is still a subject, but one who looks for recognition beyond the common political forms. That is, we can say that the resisting subject is still ‘passionately attached’ to the ideas and objects which offer recognition, but these may be recognition by an alternative political party, a Cause or, in Lacanian psy- choanalysis, we would say s/he attaches to (another) Master’s discourse. They may resist one Master, but they chose another Master. They do not resist mastery. And here we have the basic difficulty with theories and actions of resistance. These difficulties are that somehow, in some way, any acts of resistance always become modes of, in Lacan’s terms, the desire for (another) Master (2007). Resistance, understood this way, is a state of being that is always already subjectivized within the parameters of its own claims, or within the parameters of the subject’s imagination of its goals. This is the obvious reference made by Lacan in his comments to the students who participated in the ‘resistances’ of 1968 in France (and elsewhere). As he says, ‘What you aspire to as revolutionaries is a Master. You will get one’ (Lacan 2007: 207).14 The provocative comment to the students – some of whom have come to listen to him and some who have come to (apparently) resist him – is a comment on their acting out the discourse of the Master that they imagine they can overcome, through listening (or even objecting) to another Master, namely, Lacan. In this attempt at resistance which falls prey to its own conditions of subjection, we can say that the subjectivity of the resisting subject – the student – is preoccupied with the signifiers available to resist, where the best they can hope for is to be re-occupied by the imagination of securing (another) truth. This hope, at least for the students in France at this time – understood through Lacan (and his discussions in 1969) – is the hope for the Other’s knowledge. A knowledge which the subject presumes the Other has. A knowledge which is imagined to be able to be accessed and had. A knowledge which is presented as the answer to the question ‘che vois Autre?’ And here appears the second psychoanalytic concern with resistance: resistance as a belief in an access to an answer, or, in its most extreme or crude terms, resistance as psychosis. Resistance, understood as a desire for a Master, becomes a performance of what the subject imagines is the answer. The answer as a closed course of action with a fixed teleological imagination, such that the resisting subject might say: ‘If I do this I will be this’, or ‘if I do this then the final result will be this’, or, in its psychotic form, ‘if I do this the world will be this’. It is important to stress, however, that this may not follow for all acts of resistance – which I will postulate later – but when Lacan says of the students in France that what they want is a Master, this form of psychotic achievement of an answer is precisely what he is referring to. Theirs is the desire for a discourse that holds within it the knowledge that the subject imagines is required (and can be acquired/obtained/had) to achieve a perfection of the signifier, an imagination that the subject can acquire, what Lacan (2007: 14–15) describes as the ‘Other’s jouissance’. The students, in Lacan’s suggestion, want to resist in order to obtain the answer when it is the existence of an answer at all they are supposedly resisting.

#### Their commitment to a politics of critique, disorientation, and interruption papers over the patriarchal economy of desire that forms the substrate of hegemonic politics. The ultimate function is to sustain the order of mastery that produces the conditions of possibility for imperialization

Lundberg 12 [Christian O. Lundberg, Director of Cultural Studies and Associate Professor of Rhetoric at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2012, *Lacan in Public: Psychoanalysis and the Science of Rhetoric*, pub. University Alabama Press, p. 165-175]

Contemporary and classical liberal democratic theories presume that the demand is a way of exerting agency and, further, that the more firmly the demand is lodged, the greater the production of an agential effect. The Lacanian framing of the demand sees the relationship as exactly the opposite: the more firmly one lodges a demand, the more desperately one clings to the legitimate ability of an institution to fulfill it. Hypothetically, demands ought reach a kind of breaking point where the inability of an institution or order to proffer a response should produce a reevaluation of the economy of demand and desire. In analytic terms, this is the moment of subtraction, where the manifest content of the demand is stripped away and the desire that underwrites it is laid bare. The result of this “subtraction” is that the subject is in a position to relate to its desire, not as a set of deferrals, avoidances, or transposition but rather as an owned political disposition. As Lacan frames it, demanding subjects are either learning to reassert the centrality of their demand or coming to terms with the impotence of the Other as a satisfier of demands: “But it is in the dialectic of the demand for love and the test of desire that development is ordered. . . . [T]his test of the desire of the Other is decisive not in the sense that the subject learns by it whether or not he has a phallus, but in the sense that he learns that the mother does not have it.”39 The point of this disposition is to bring the subject to a point where they might “recognize and name” their own desire and, as a result, become a political subject in the sense of being able to truly argue for something without being dependent on the other as a support for or organizing principle for political identity. Thus, desire has both a general status and a specific status for each subject. It is not just the mirror that produces the subject and its investments but the desire and sets of proxy objects that cover over this original gap. As Easthope puts it: “Lacan is sure that everyone’s desire is somehow different and their own—lack is nevertheless my lack. How can this be if each of us is just lost in language . . . passing through demand into desire, something from the Real, from the individual’s being before language, is retained as a trace enough to determine that I desire here and there, not anywhere and everywhere. Lacan terms this objet petit a . . . petit a is different for everyone; and it can never be in substitutes for it in which I try to refind it.”40 Though individuated, this naming is not about discovering a latently held but hidden interiority, rather it is about naming a practice of thinking the uniqueness of individual subjects as a product of discourses that produce them. Thus, this is an account of political subjectivization that is not solely oriented toward or determined by the locus of the demand but that is also determined by the contingent sets of coping strategies that orient a subject toward others and a political order and serve as the condition of possibility for demands. As Lacan argues, this is the point where a subject becomes a kind of new presence or a new political possibility: “That the subject should come to recognize and to name his desire; that is the efficacious action of analysis. But it isn’t a question of recognizing something which would be entirely given. . . . In naming it, the subject creates, brings forth, a new presence in the world.”41 Alternatively, subjects can stay fixated on the demand, but in doing so they forfeit their desire, or as Fink argues, “an analysis . . . that . . . does not go far enough in constituting the subject as desire leaves him or her stranded at the level of demand . . . unable to truly desire.”42 A politics defined by and exhausted in demands is by definition a hysterical politics. The hysteric is defined by incessant demands on the other at the expense of ever articulating a desire that is theirs. In the Ethics of Psychoanalysis, Lacan argues that the hysteric’s demand that the Other produce an object is the support of an aversion toward one’s desire: “the behavior of the hysteric, for example, has as its aim to recreate a state centered on the object, insofar as this object . . . is . . . the support of an aversion.”43 This economy of aversion explains the ambivalent relationship between hysterics and their demands. On one hand, the hysteric asserts their agency, even authority, over the Other. Yet, what appears as unfettered agency from the perspective of a discourse of authority is also simultaneously a surrender of desire by enjoying the act of figuring the other as the one with the exclusive capability to satisfy the demand. Thus, “as hysterics you demand a new master: you will get it!” At the register of manifest content, demands are claims for action and seemingly powerful, but at the level of the rhetorical form of the demand or in the register of enjoyment, demand is a kind of surrender. As a relation of address the hysterical demand is more a demand for recognition and love from an ostensibly repressive order than a claim for change. The limitation of the students’ call on Lacan does not lie in the end they sought but in the fact that the hysterical address never quite breaks free from its framing of the master. The fundamental problem of democracy is not articulating resistance over and against hegemony but rather the practices of enjoyment that sustain an addiction to mastery and a deferral of desire. Hysteria is a politically effective subject position in some ways, but it is politically constraining from the perspective of organized political dissent. If not a unidirectional practice of resistance, hysteria is at best a politics of interruption. Imagine a world where the state was the perfect and complete embodiment of a hegemonic order, without interruption or remainder, and the discursive system was hermetically closed. Politics would be an impossibility: with no site for contest or reappropriation, politics would simply be the automatic extension of structure. Hysteria is a site of interruption, in that hysteria represents a challenge to our hypothetical system, refusing straightforward incorporation by its symbolic logic. But, stepping outside this hypothetical non-polity, on balance, hysteria is politically constraining because the form of the demand, as a way of organizing the field of political enjoyment, requires that the system continue to act in certain ways to sustain its logic. Though on the surface it is an act of symbolic dissent, hysteria represents an affirmation of a hegemonic order and is therefore a particularly fraught form of political subjectivization.

#### The alternative is to vote neg on presumption – the fantasy will reveal itself as long as we continue asking questions to expose their concealment of the lack

Dean 6 [Jodi, Professor of Political Science at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, *Zizek’s Politics,* Taylor & Francis: London and New York, 2006, p. xvii-xx]

By inserting popular culture into his writing, and himself into popular culture, Zizek enacts the way enjoyment colors or stains all thinking and acting. What this means, as I set out in detail in Chapter Three, is that there is a deep nonrational and libidinal nugget in even the most rational, formal ways of thinking. Again, it is not simply that popular culture is at the core of the theoretical enterprise of his books—it is that enjoyment is. Enjoyment is an unavoidable component of any philosophical effort (though many try to deny it). Zizek thus emphasizes the inevitable stain on philosophy, on thought, as he tries to demonstrate a way of thinking that breaks with (Zizek often uses Lacan's term traverses) the fantasy of "pure reason."

This leads to another key element of Zizek's thought: the possibility of taking the position of the excess. As I explain in discussions of his readings of St. Paul and Lenin, Zizek theorizes revolutionary politics as occurring through the occupation of this excessive place. Paul endeavors to put the Christian message to work, to establish new collectives beyond old oppositions between Greeks and Jews. Lenin also breaks with the given, arguing against all around him and against Marxist orthodoxy that the time for revolution is now, that it cannot be predicted, awaited, but must be accomplished with no assurances of success. Like Paul, he puts truth to work, organizing it in the form of a revolutionary political Party.

Zizek emphasizes that Lacan conceptualized this excessive place, this place without guarantees, in his formula for "the discourse of the analyst" (which I set out in Chapter Two). In psycho-analysis, the analyst just sits there, asking questions from time to time. She is some kind of object or cipher onto which the analysand transfers love, desire, aggression, and knowledge. The analysand, in other words, proceeds through analysis by positing the analyst as someone who knows exactly what is wrong with him and exactly what he should do to get rid of his symptom and get better. But, really, the analyst does not know. Moreover, the analyst steadfastly refuses to provide the analysand with any answers whatsoever. No ideals, no moral certainty, no goals, no choices. Nothing. This is what makes the analyst so traumatic, Zizek explains, the fact that she refuses to establish a law or set a limit, that she does not function as some kind of new master.7 Analysis is over when the analysand accepts that the analyst does not know, that there is not any secret meaning or explanation, and then takes responsibility for getting on with his life. The challenge for the analysand, then, is freedom, autonomously determining his own limits, directly assuming his own enjoyment. So, again, the position of the analyst is in this excessive place as an object through which the analysand works through the analytical process.

Why is the analyst necessary in the first place? If she is not going to tell the analysand what to do, how he should be living, then why does he not save his money, skip the whole process, and figure out things for himself? There are two basic answers. First, the analysand is not self-transparent. He is a stranger to himself, a decentered agent "struggling with a foreign kernel."8 What is more likely than self-understanding, is self-misunderstanding, that is, one's fundamental misperception of one's own condition. Becoming aware of this misperception, grappling with it, is the work of analysis. Accordingly, second, the analyst is that external agent or position that gives a new form to our activity. Saying things out loud, presenting them to another, and confronting them in front of this external position concretizes and arranges our thoughts and activities in a different way, a way that is more difficult to escape or avoid. The analyst then provides a form through which we acquire a perspective on and a relation to our selves.

Paul's Christian collectives and Lenin's revolutionary Party are, for Zizek, similarly formal arrangements, forms "for a new type of knowledge linked to a collective political subject."9 Each provides an external perspective on our activities, a way to concretize and organize our spontaneous experiences. More strongly put, a political Party is necessary precisely because politics is not given; it does not arise naturally or organically out of the multiplicity of immanent flows and affects but has to be produced, arranged, and constructed out of these flows in light of something larger.

In my view, when Zizek draws on popular culture and inserts himself into this culture, he is taking the position of an object of enjoyment, an excessive object that cannot easily be recuperated or assimilated. This excessive position is that of the analyst as well as that of the Party. Reading Zizek as occupying the position of the analyst tells us that it is wrong to expect Zizek to tell us what to do, to provide an ultimate solution or direction through which to solve all the world's problems. The analyst does not provide the analysand with ideals and goals; instead, he occupies the place of an object in relation to which we work these out for ourselves. In adopting the position of the analyst, Zizek is also practicing what he refers to as "Bartleby politics," a politics rooted in a kind of refusal wherein the subject turns itself into a disruptive (of our peace of mind!) violently passive object who says, "I would prefer not to."10 Thus, to my mind, becoming preoccupied with Zizek's style is like becoming preoccupied with what one's analyst is wearing. Why such a preoccupation? How is this preoccupation enabling us to avoid confronting the truth of our desire, our own investments in enjoyment? How is complaining that Zizek (or the analyst) will not tell us what to do a way that we avoid trying to figure this out for ourselves?11

## Case

### 1NC – Case

#### Engaging the state can remedy psychic violence and spirit murder

Nash, 19—Professor of Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies at Duke University (Jennifer, “love in the time of death,” *Black Feminism Reimagined: After Intersectionality*, Chapter 4, 121-126, dml)

This book began with substantial engagement with intersectionality’s origin stories, examining how the question of where the analytic came from, who coined it, and who deserves “credit” for its rise and circulation have come to predominate in black feminist scholarship. Curiously, though, none of these widely circulating origin stories contend with intersectionality’s connections to the juridical, or think deeply about intersectionality as a legal project. Though this book eschews simple origin stories that presume that intersectionality has a singular history, in this section, I advocate for remembering intersectionality’s connections to critical race theory, and thus its intimate relationship with remaking law. I invest in this project because intersectionality has been swept into a larger black feminist conversation that presumes the violence of the juridical, ignoring both intersectionality’s loving investment in the juridical and the juridical as a potential site of loving practice. Put differently, in this section, I emphasize intersectionality’s location in critical race theory, in Left legal projects, to move beyond the now knee-jerk Left (and black feminist) sense that radical and transgressive projects are necessarily antistate. In place of this now familiar political terrain, I seek to ask different questions: Is it simply collusion or “cruel optimism” for black feminists to seek engagement with the state?31 Can we imagine black feminist engagements with the state as taking forms other than seeking redress and demanding visibility? Are there ways to imagine black feminist legal engagement that circumvent the uncomfortable and problematic position of being “at home with the law”? How can black feminists reimagine law as a site for staging productive intimacies and enacting radical vulnerabilities?

In its juridical iteration, intersectionality emerged in a moment where critical race theorists offered analytical tools to upend prevailing fictions of law’s objectivity, to reveal the quotidian nature of racism and sexism, and to argue for fundamental transformations in legal pedagogy. Critical race theory, then, was born of a sustained attention to law’s failures, even as it contained—at times—certain kinds of faith in law’s potentiality and promise. Critical race scholars were a post–Brown v. Board of Education generation who witnessed the end of the Warren court’s promises of integration and inclusion. They saw affirmative action rolled back, transformed from a substantive remedy for past and ongoing discrimination to a promise of “diversity” to benefit white students who would be changed into global citizens ready for corporate employment thanks to their “exposure” to socalled racial difference.32 They witnessed the ratcheting up of standards for proving employment discrimination from racially disparate effects to discriminatory intent, effectively making it harder for minoritarian plaintiffs to prevail in discrimination suits. They emphatically asked, then, whether the goal of antiracist legal scholars should be inclusion in white institutions or whether it should be, for example, the creation of robustly funded and supported black institutions. They interrogated whether the Warren court’s landmark decision in Brown would have better served its black plaintiffs if it equally funded black schools, rather than championing desegregation and then mandating integration at “all deliberate speed.” They debated whether affirmative action should be supported if the only logic to support it is “diversity,” where students of color provide a pedagogical value for white students. Critical race theory, then, was never an embrace of an ethic of inclusion, or even a form of advocacy for new forms of redress. Instead, it was undergirded by an investment in revealing that racial progress was the result of “interest convergence” rather than a genuine investment in antisubordination, and by a fundamental belief that law would look and feel different if it “looked to the bottom.”33

While critical race theorists offered critical interrogations of law’s imagined progress, treating it as evidence of US self-interest rather than a genuine investment in racial redress, they also routinely offered ways of imagining law otherwise, refashioning antidiscrimination law, conceptions of evidence, property, and contract. They imagined a form of law that eschewed color blindness and argued that any legal regime that sought to contend with American racial violence had to be deeply color-conscious to exact meaningful remedies. They advanced new methods—narrative, parable, allegory, speculative fiction, storytelling—in an effort to jam the fictions of objectivity and neutrality and to expose that law is itself a racial project, never removed from the racial regimes it purports to disrupt. In other words, they sought to use their locations in the legal academy and in the legal profession to radically remake law, to push the boundaries of how legal doctrine could be written, imagined, and enacted. They aspired to make law into something unrecognizable and unimaginable, to push at its very parameters in the pursuit of a “jurisprudence of generosity.”34

My entry point for thinking through law as a site of black feminist love-politics is through the work of Patricia J. Williams. Her book The Alchemy of Race and Rights is complex in its form and its argument—it is memoir, “diary,” legal treatise, and critical theory at once. Williams presents herself as professor, consumer, daughter, granddaughter, train rider, and “crazy” black woman exhausted from the ordinary and spectacular raced and gendered brutalities of American life and the project of teaching law at a historically white law school. The project, then, is a rumination on the felt life of racial and gendered violence, and a critical analysis of the myriad spaces where this violence unfolds, from the media onslaught against Tawana Brawley to the experiences of being a black female faculty member at a law school.

Williams’s inquiry, though, is not simply about documenting the ubiquity of racial and gendered violence but also about engaging and describing the lived experience of racialized and gendered vulnerability, what she terms “spirit murder.” For Williams, “spirit murder” is the psychic and spiritual wounding that unfolds as a result of racial violence. “Spirit murder” describes the wounds left on the flesh, psyche, and even soul of those who experience violence and the wounds, often invisible, that haunt perpetrators of violence, including a willingness to accept, and to render unseen, those who are dispossessed. Williams’s task, then, is to imagine what law could look and feel like if it accounted for “spirit murder,” a form of violence that she argues includes “cultural obliteration, prostitution, abandonment of the elderly and the homeless, and genocide. . . . What I call spirit murder—disregard for others whose lives qualitatively depend on our regard—is that it produces a system of formalized distortions of thought.”35 Williams argues that “we need to elevate spirit murder to the conceptual—if not punitive— level of a capital moral offense. . . . We need to eradicate its numbing pathology before it wipes out what precious little humanity we have left.”36 Williams’s conception of “spirit murder” imagines law’s capacity to remedy forms of violence against the psyche and soul, a terrain that has been unimaginable to law precisely because of its commitment to remedying only visible and legible harms, and law’s ability to be mobilized “conceptually”— but not punitively—to respond to violence. In other words, the endeavor of the text is to imagine a legal project capacious and creative enough to attend to what it has always ignored: the violence inflicted on the psyche. Williams effectively invites us to imagine how we might feel differently toward each other, and toward law itself, if we had legal obligations toward mutual regard, if we knew that law took seriously spirit murder.

If Williams seeks to use law to exceed what it aspires to do, to respond to the “cultural cancer” of spirit murder, her book also contains a resounding, and even surprising, redemption of rights as a key strategy for reforming law. An embrace of rights might sound like a deeply conventional strategy, mobilizing law to do what it has long claimed to do on behalf of racialized and gendered minorities: confer rights. Despite her lengthy engagement with state violence, her exacting critique of how law permits rather than redresses spirit murder, Williams ends not with an abandonment of the state but with a deep affection for what rights could accomplish. She writes:

The task is to expand private property rights into a conception of civil rights, into the right to expect civility from others. . . . Instead, society must give them [rights] away. Unlock them from reification by giving them to slaves. Give them to trees. Give them to cows. Give them to history. Give them to rivers and rocks. Give to all of society’s objects and untouchables the rights of privacy, integrity and self-assertion; give them distance and respect. Flood them with the animating spirit that rights mythology fires in this country’s most oppressed psyches, and wash away the shroud of inanimate-object-status, so that we may say not that we own gold but that a luminous golden spirit owns us.37

If critical legal studies called for the abandonment of investment in rights, treating rights as relatively unsuccessful in securing social change and as promoting problematic conceptions of individualism, Williams makes a plea for a dramatic expansion of rights and a surprising reconceptualization of the labor of rights. Rights, she argues, should not be the purview of those who can explicitly and legibly name harm. Cows, history, and rocks should have rights, including rights to “privacy, integrity and self-assertion.” Rights should not be “reified” but generously bestowed upon everyone and everything; rights should not be used to shore up ideas of property and ownership, to allow us to claim that “we own gold,” but instead to ensure a deep spiritual connection between us. In so doing, law could remake “society,” transforming its investments in rights as something that protects property holders into rights as something that can ensure our mutual accountability, and reminds us of the “luminous golden spirit [that] owns us” all.

It is easy to read Williams as optimistically rehabilitating rights from the critical legal studies’ critique of rights, and problematically investing in precisely the doctrinal formulation that has consistently failed minoritarian subjects. In this reading, Williams is imagined as paradoxically investing in precisely the site of violence she carefully documents with far too little explanation for how rights can circumvent the problems of racism and sexism she delineates. Yet I read Williams’s visionary account of rights differently. For her, law can be mobilized not to produce new causes of action, to simply make visible new wounded subjects who can make appeals to redress, but to imagine new and radical vulnerabilities. As it is currently structured, property deeply organizes sociality, and law operates to protect property from trespass and theft. Thus, law operates to create categories like property holder (owner) and trespasser (thief), and to organize the social world around proximities to ownership. Williams uses her capacious conception of rights to imagine another way of organizing sociality: around vulnerability. Indeed, Williams asks: How are we bound up with others? What is our responsibility to ensuring the vital “spirit” of others, and to demanding the protection of our own “spirits”? What happens when we harm things that can’t articulate injuries (trees, rocks, rivers) but can only make that injury visible and oftentimes in ways that we refuse to recognize, or that might even make that injury visible in another time, in decades or centuries when we are not even here to be accountable? What happens when we take responsibility for our capacity to wound and for the histories of wounding and violence that have unfolded, often in our names? And what happens when law becomes a critical tool in making visible mutual vulnerability, in insisting that we recognize that we can “undo each other,” and in demanding that we take seriously our indebtedness to each other? For Williams, then, expanding rights becomes a strategy for transforming law to be a space that enshrines a vision of interdependence and shared vulnerability.

I begin my investigation of the possibility of rooting black feminist lovepolitics in law with Williams’s visionary work because it reveals the potential of black feminist legal scholarship that fundamentally reorients law around ethics of vulnerability. This is work that expresses a fundamental faith in law’s capacity to perform different kinds of justice work, even as it recognizes how law is often mobilized as an agent of inequality and injustice. Like Williams’s radical remaking of rights, Crenshaw’s conception of intersectionality tugs at the seams of law, working within its confines to radically unleash its transformative capacity. As I explained earlier in the book, intersectionality is primarily remembered for its now widely circulating accident metaphor, where discrimination is imagined as traffic flowing through an intersection. It can move in one direction, another direction, or both, and an “accident” can occur on either street or in the intersection. According to this logic, discrimination can be race-based, gender-based, or race-and-gender-based, yet the possibility of raced and gendered discrimination is rendered impossible by antidiscrimination law that actively refuses to account for this form of violence. As Crenshaw notes, “Judicial decisions which premise intersectional relief on a showing that Black women are specifically recognized as a class are analogous to a doctor’s decision at the scene of an accident to treat an accident victim only if the injury is recognized by medical insurance.”38 Intersectionality, then, spotlights law’s refusal to see black women’s race- and gender-based injuries.

#### Their method is worse for community formation, reifies spirit murder, and actively strengthens hegemonic structures by marginalizing the people who were never here to defer to in the first place.

Táíwò, 20—assistant professor of philosophy at Georgetown University (Olúfémi, “Being-in-the-Room Privilege: Elite Capture and Epistemic Deference,” The Philosopher, vol. 108, no. 4, dml)

I think it’s less about the core ideas and more about the prevailing norms that convert them into practice. The call to “listen to the most affected” or “centre the most marginalized” is ubiquitous in many academic and activist circles. But it’s never sat well with me. In my experience, when people say they need to “listen to the most affected”, it isn’t because they intend to set up Skype calls to refugee camps or to collaborate with houseless people. Instead, it has more often meant handing conversational authority and attentional goods to those who most snugly fit into the social categories associated with these ills – regardless of what they actually do or do not know, or what they have or have not personally experienced. In the case of my conversation with Helen, my racial category tied me more “authentically” to an experience that neither of us had had. She was called to defer to me by the rules of the game as we understood it. Even where stakes are high – where potential researchers are discussing how to understand a social phenomenon, where activists are deciding what to target – these rules often prevail.

The trap wasn’t that standpoint epistemology was affecting the conversation, but how. Broadly, the norms of putting standpoint epistemology into practice call for practices of deference: giving offerings, passing the mic, believing. These are good ideas in many cases, and the norms that ask us to be ready to do them stem from admirable motivations: a desire to increase the social power of marginalized people identified as sources of knowledge and rightful targets of deferential behaviour. But deferring in this way as a rule or default political orientation can actually work counter to marginalized groups’ interests, especially in elite spaces.

Some rooms have outsize power and influence: the Situation Room, the newsroom, the bargaining table, the conference room. Being in these rooms means being in a position to affect institutions and broader social dynamics by way of deciding what one is to say and do. Access to these rooms is itself a kind of social advantage, and one often gained through some prior social advantage. From a societal standpoint, the “most affected” by the social injustices we associate with politically important identities like gender, class, race, and nationality are disproportionately likely to be incarcerated, underemployed, or part of the 44 percent of the world’s population without internet access – and thus both left out of the rooms of power and largely ignored by the people in the rooms of power. Individuals who make it past the various social selection pressures that filter out those social identities associated with these negative outcomes are most likely to be in the room. That is, they are most likely to be in the room precisely because of ways in which they are systematically different from (and thus potentially unrepresentative of) the very people they are then asked to represent in the room.

I suspected that Helen’s offer was a trap. She was not the one who set it, but it threatened to ensnare us both all the same. Broader cultural norms – the sort set in motion by prefacing statements with “As a Black man…” – cued up a set of standpoint-respecting practices that many of us know consciously or unconsciously by rote. However, the forms of deference that often follow are ultimately self-undermining and only reliably serve “elite capture”: the control over political agendas and resources by a group’s most advantaged people. If we want to use standpoint epistemology to challenge unjust power arrangements, it’s hard to imagine how we could do worse.

To say what’s wrong with the popular, deferential applications of standpoint epistemology, we need to understand what makes it popular. A number of cynical answers present themselves: some (especially the more socially advantaged) don’t genuinely want social change – they just want the appearance of it. Alternatively, deference to figures from oppressed communities is a performance that sanitizes, apologizes for, or simply distracts from the fact that the deferrer has enough “in the room” privilege for their “lifting up” of a perspective to be of consequence.

I suspect there is some truth to these views, but I am unsatisfied. Many of the people who support and enact these deferential norms are rather like Helen: motivated by the right reasons, but trusting people they share such rooms with to help them find the proper practical expression of their joint moral commitments. We don’t need to attribute bad faith to all or even most of those who interpret standpoint epistemology deferentially to explain the phenomenon, and it’s not even clear it would help. Bad “roommates” aren’t the problem for the same reason that Helen being a good roommate wasn’t the solution: the problem emerges from how the rooms themselves are constructed and managed.

To return to the initial example with Helen, the issue wasn’t merely that I hadn’t grown up in the kind of low-income, redlined community she was imagining. The epistemic situation was much worse than this. Many of the facts about me that made my life chances different from those of the people she was imagining were the very same facts that made me likely to be offered things on their behalf. If I had grown up in such a community, we probably wouldn’t have been on the phone together.

Many aspects of our social system serve as filtering mechanisms, determining which interactions happen and between whom, and thus which social patterns people are in a position to observe. For the majority of the 20th century, the U.S. quota system of immigration made legal immigration with a path to citizenship almost exclusively available to Europeans (earning Hitler’s regard as the obvious “leader in developing explicitly racist policies of nationality and immigration”). But the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act opened up immigration possibilities, with a preference for “skilled labour”.

My parents’ qualification as skilled labourers does much to explain their entry into the country and the subsequent class advantages and monetary resources (such as wealth) that I was born into. We are not atypical: the Nigerian-American population is one of the country’s most successful immigrant populations (what no one mentions, of course, is that the 112,000 or so Nigerian-Americans with advanced degrees is utterly dwarfed by the 82 million Nigerians who live on less than a dollar a day, or how the former fact intersects with the latter). The selectivity of immigration law helps explain the rates of educational attainment of the Nigerian diasporic community that raised me, which in turn helps explain my entry into the exclusive Advanced Placement and Honours classes in high school, which in turn helps explain my access to higher education...and so on, and so on.

It is easy, then, to see how this deferential form of standpoint epistemology contributes to elite capture at scale. The rooms of power and influence are at the end of causal chains that have selection effects. As you get higher and higher forms of education, social experiences narrow – some students are pipelined to PhDs and others to prisons. Deferential ways of dealing with identity can inherit the distortions caused by these selection processes.

​But it’s equally easy to see locally – in this room, in this academic literature or field, in this conversation – why this deference seems to make sense. It is often an improvement on the epistemic procedure that preceded it: the person deferred to may well be better epistemically positioned than the others in the room. It may well be the best we can do while holding fixed most of the facts about the rooms themselves: what power resides in them, who is admitted.

But these are the last facts we should want to hold fixed. Doing better than the epistemic norms we’ve inherited from a history of explicit global apartheid is an awfully low bar to set. The facts that explain who ends up in which room shape our world much more powerfully than the squabbles for comparative prestige between people who have already made it into the rooms. And when the conversation is about social justice, the mechanisms of the social system that determine who gets into which room often just are the parts of society we aim to address. For example, the fact that incarcerated people cannot participate in academic discussions about freedom that physically take place on campus is intimately related to the fact that they are locked in cages.

Deference epistemology marks itself as a solution to an epistemic and political problem. But not only does it fail to solve these problems, it adds new ones. One might think questions of justice ought to be primarily concerned with fixing disparities around health care, working conditions, and basic material and interpersonal security. Yet conversations about justice have come to be shaped by people who have ever more specific practical advice about fixing the distribution of attention and conversational power. Deference practices that serve attention-focused campaigns (e.g. we’ve read too many white men, let’s now read some people of colour) can fail on their own highly questionable terms: attention to spokespeople from marginalized groups could, for example, direct attention away from the need to change the social system that marginalizes them.

Elites from marginalized groups can benefit from this arrangement in ways that are compatible with social progress. But treating group elites’ interests as necessarily or even presumptively aligned with full group interests involves a political naiveté we cannot afford. Such treatment of elite interests functions as a racial Reaganomics: a strategy reliant on fantasies about the exchange rate between the attention economy and the material economy.

Perhaps the lucky few who get jobs finding the most culturally authentic and cosmetically radical description of the continuing carnage are really winning one for the culture. Then, after we in the chattering class get the clout we deserve and secure the bag, its contents will eventually trickle down to the workers who clean up after our conferences, to slums of the Global South’s megacities, to its countryside.

But probably not.

A fuller and fairer assessment of what is going on with deference and standpoint epistemology would go beyond technical argument, and contend with the emotional appeals of this strategy of deference. Those in powerful rooms may be “elites” relative to the larger group they represent, but this guarantees nothing about how they are treated in the rooms they are in. After all, a person privileged in an absolute sense (a person belonging to, say, the half of the world that has secure access to “basic needs”) may nevertheless feel themselves to be consistently on the low end of the power dynamics they actually experience. Deference epistemology responds to real, morally weighty experiences of being put down, ignored, sidelined, or silenced. It thus has an important non-epistemic appeal to members of stigmatized or marginalized groups: it intervenes directly in morally consequential practices of giving attention and respect.

The social dynamics we experience have an outsize role in developing and refining our political subjectivity, and our sense of ourselves. But this very strength of standpoint epistemology – its recognition of the importance of perspective – becomes its weakness when combined with deferential practical norms. Emphasis on the ways we are marginalized often matches the world as we have experienced it. But, from a structural perspective, the rooms we never needed to enter (and the explanations of why we can avoid these rooms) might have more to teach us about the world and our place in it. If so, the deferential approach to standpoint epistemology actually prevents “centring” or even hearing from the most marginalized; it focuses us on the interaction of the rooms we occupy, rather than calling us to account for the interactions we don’t experience. This fact about who is in the room, combined with the fact that speaking for others generates its own set of important problems (particularly when they are not there to advocate for themselves), eliminates pressures that might otherwise trouble the centrality of our own suffering – and of the suffering of the marginalized people that do happen to make it into rooms with us.

The dangers with this feature of deference politics are grave, as are the risks for those outside of the most powerful rooms. For those who are deferred to, it can supercharge group-undermining norms. In Conflict is Not Abuse, Sarah Schulman makes a provocative observation about the psychological effects of both trauma and felt superiority: while these often come about for different reasons and have very different moral statuses, they result in similar behavioural patterns. Chief among these are misrepresenting the stakes of conflict (often by overstating harm) or representing others’ independence as a hostile threat (such as failures to “centre” the right topics or people). These behaviours, whatever their causal history, have corrosive effects on individuals who perform them as well as the groups around them, especially when a community’s norms magnify or multiply these behaviours rather than constraining or metabolizing them.

For those who defer, the habit can supercharge moral cowardice. The norms provide social cover for the abdication of responsibility: it displaces onto individual heroes, a hero class, or a mythicized past the work that is ours to do now in the present. Their perspective may be clearer on this or that specific matter, but their overall point of view isn’t any less particular or constrained by history than ours. More importantly, deference places the accountability that is all of ours to bear onto select people – and, more often than not, a hyper-sanitized and thoroughly fictional caricature of them.

The same tactics of deference that insulate us from criticism also insulate us from connection and transformation. They prevent us from engaging empathetically and authentically with the struggles of other people – prerequisites of coalitional politics. As identities become more and more fine-grained and disagreements sharper, we come to realize that “coalitional politics” (understood as struggle across difference) is, simply, politics. Thus, the deferential orientation, like that fragmentation of political collectivity it enables, is ultimately anti-political.

Deference rather than interdependence may soothe short-term psychological wounds. But it does so at a steep cost: it can undermine the epistemic goals that motivate the project, and it entrenches a politics unbefitting of anyone fighting for freedom rather than for privilege, for collective liberation rather than mere parochial advantage.

How would a constructive approach to putting standpoint epistemology into practice differ from a deferential approach? A constructive approach would focus on the pursuit of specific goals or end results rather than avoiding “complicity” in injustice or adhering to moral principles. It would be concerned primarily with building institutions and cultivating practices of information-gathering rather than helping. It would focus on accountability rather than conformity. It would calibrate itself directly to the task of redistributing social resources and power rather than to intermediary goals cashed out in terms of pedestals or symbolism. It would focus on building and rebuilding rooms, not regulating traffic within and between them – it would be a world-making project: aimed at building and rebuilding actual structures of social connection and movement, rather than mere critique of the ones we already have.

The water crisis in Flint, Michigan presents a clear example of both the possibilities and limitations of refining our epistemic politics in this way. Michigan’s Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ), a government body tasked with the support of “healthy communities”, with a team of fifty trained scientists at its disposal, was complicit in covering up the scale and gravity of the public health crisis from the beginning of the crisis in 2014 until it garnered national attention in 2015.

The MDEQ, speaking from a position of epistemic and political authority, defended the status quo in Flint. They claimed that “Flint water is safe to drink”, and were cited in Flint Mayor Dayne Walling’s statement aiming to “dispel myths and promote the truth about the Flint River” during the April 2014 transition to the Flint River water source. That transition was spearheaded under the tenure of the city’s emergency manager Darnell Earley (an African-American, like many of the city residents he helped to poison). After the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) circulated a leaked internal memo from the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in July of 2014 expressing concern about lead in Flint water, the MDEQ produced a doctored report that put the overall measure of lead levels within federally mandated levels by mysteriously failing to count two contaminated samples.

The reaction from residents was immediate. The month after the switch in water source, residents reported that their tap water was discoloured and gave off an alarming odour. They didn’t need their oppression to be “celebrated”, “centred”, or narrated in the newest academic parlance. They didn’t need someone to understand what it felt like to be poisoned. What they needed was the lead out of their water. So they got to work.

The first step was to develop epistemic authority. To achieve this they built a new room: one that put Flint residents and activists in active collaboration with scientists who had the laboratories that could run the relevant tests and prove the MDEQ’s report to be fraudulent. Flint residents’ outcry recruited scientists to their cause and led a “citizen science” campaign, further raising the alarm about the water quality and distributing sample kits to neighbours to submit for testing. In this stage, the alliance of residents and scientists won, and the poisoning of the children of Flint emerged as a national scandal.

But this was not enough. The second step – cleaning the water – required more than state acknowledgement: it required apportioning labour and resources to fix the water and address the continuing health concerns. What Flint residents received, initially, was a mix of platitudes and mockery from the ruling elite (some of this personally committed by a President that shared a racial identity with many of them). This year, however, it looks as though the tireless activism of Flint residents and their expanding list of teammates has won additional and more meaningful victories: the ongoing campaign is pushing the replacements of the problematic service lines to their final stage and is forcing the state of Michigan to agree to a settlement of $600 million for affected families.

This outcome is in no way a wholesale victory: not only will attorney fees cut a substantial portion of payouts, but the settlement cannot undo the damage that was caused to the residents. A constructive epistemology cannot guarantee full victory over an oppressive system by itself. No epistemic orientation can by itself undo the various power asymmetries between the people and the imperial state system. But it can help make the game a little more competitive – and deference epistemology isn’t even playing.

The biggest threats to social justice attention and informational economies are not the absence of yet more jargon to describe, ever more precisely or incisively, the epistemic, attentional, or interpersonal afflictions of the disempowered. The biggest threats are the erosion of the practical and material bases for popular power over knowledge production and distribution, particularly that which could aid effective political action and constrain or eliminate predation by elites. The capture and corruption of these bases by well-positioned elites, especially tech corporations, goes on unabated and largely unchallenged, including: the corporate monopolization of local news, the ongoing destruction and looting of the journalistic profession, the interference of corporations and governments in key democratic processes, and the domination of elite interests in the production of knowledge by research universities and the circulation of the output of these distorted processes by established media organizations.

Confronting these threats requires leaving some rooms – and building new ones.

The constructive approach to standpoint epistemology is demanding. It asks that we swim upstream: to be accountable and responsive to people who aren’t yet in the room, to build the kinds of rooms we could sit in together, rather than merely judiciously navigating the rooms history has built for us. But this weighty demand is par for the course when it comes to the politics of knowledge: the American philosopher Sandra Harding famously pointed out that standpoint epistemology, properly understood, demands more rigour from science and knowledge production processes generally, not less.

But one important topic stands unaddressed. The deferential approach to standpoint epistemology often comes packaged with concern and attention to the importance of lived experience. Among these, traumatic experiences are especially foregrounded.

At this juncture, scholarly analysis and argument fail me. The remainder of what I have to say skews more towards conviction than contention. But the life of books has taught me that conviction has just as much to teach, however differently posed or processed, and so I press on.

I take concerns about trauma especially seriously. I grew up in the United States, a nation structured by settler colonialism, racial slavery, and their aftermath, with enough collective and historical trauma to go round. I also grew up in a Nigerian diasporic community, populated by many who had genocide in living memory. At the national and community level, I have seen a lot of traits of norms, personality, quirks of habit and action that I’ve suspected were downstream of these facts. At the level of individual experience, I’ve watched and felt myself change in reaction to fearing for my dignity or life, to crushing pain and humiliation. I reflect on these traumatic moments often, and very seldom think: “That was educational”.

These experiences can be, if we are very fortunate, building blocks. What comes of them depends on how the blocks are put together: what standpoint epistemologists call the “achievement thesis”. Briana Toole clarifies that, by itself, one’s social location only puts a person in a position to know. “Epistemic privilege” or advantage is achieved only through deliberate, concerted struggle from that position.

I concede outright that this is certainly one possible result of the experience of oppression: have no doubt that humiliation, deprivation, and suffering can build (especially in the context of the deliberate, structured effort of “consciousness raising”, as Toole specifically highlights). But these same experiences can also destroy, and if I had to bet on which effect would win most often, it would be the latter. As Agnes Callard rightly notes, trauma (and even the righteous, well-deserved anger that often accompanies it) can corrupt as readily as it can ennoble. Perhaps more so.

Contra the old expression, pain – whether borne of oppression or not – is a poor teacher. Suffering is partial, short-sighted, and self-absorbed. We shouldn’t have a politics that expects different: oppression is not a prep school.

When it comes down to it, the thing I believe most deeply about deference epistemology is that it asks something of trauma that it cannot give. Demanding as the constructive approach may be, the deferential approach is far more demanding and in a far more unfair way: it asks the traumatized to shoulder burdens alone that we ought to share collectively. When I think about my trauma, I don’t think about grand lessons. I think about the quiet nobility of survival. The very fact that those chapters weren’t the final ones of my story is powerful enough writing all on its own. It is enough to ask of those experiences that I am still here to remember them.

Deference epistemology asks us to be less than we are – and not even for our own benefit. As Nick Estes explains in the context of Indigenous politics: “The cunning of trauma politics is that it turns actual people and struggles, whether racial or Indigenous citizenship and belonging, into matters of injury. It defines an entire people mostly on their trauma and not by their aspirations or sheer humanity”. This performance is not for the benefit of Indigenous people, but “for white audiences or institutions of power”.

I also think about James Baldwin’s realization that the things that tormented him the most were “the very things that connected me with all the people who were alive, who had ever been alive”. That I have survived abuse of various kinds, have faced near-death from both accidental circumstance and violence (different as the particulars of these may be from those around me) is not a card to play in gamified social interaction or a weapon to wield in battles over prestige. It is not what gives me a special right to speak, to evaluate, or to decide for a group. It is a concrete, experiential manifestation of the vulnerability that connects me to most of the people on this Earth. It comes between me and other people not as a wall, but as a bridge.

#### Monopoly capitalism worsens every form of oppression and antitrust advocacy strengthens every angle of resistance.

Greer and Rice, 21—co-founders and co-executive directors of Liberation in a Generation (Jeremie and Solana, “Anti-Monopoly Activism: Reclaiming Power through Racial Justice,” <https://www.liberationinageneration.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Anti-Monopoly-Activism_032021.pdf>, dml) [language modifications denoted by brackets]

Since the founding of the nation, people of color have been living an economic nightmare. People of color have persistently lagged behind white people in nearly every economic category, including employment, income, education, small-business ownership, home ownership, and asset-ownership. This is the result of the rise and reach of concentrated wealth and power, including monopoly power.

The Racial Wealth Gap

Economic racial disparities do not happen by accident. Rather, they are the product of centuries of systemic racism and have been built into the design of our economic system, which has created what we at Liberation in a Generation call the Oppression Economy. The Oppression Economy uses the racist tools of theft, exclusion, and 31 exploitation to strip wealth from people of color, so that the elite can build their wealth. In this Oppression Economy, racism is profitable, and it fuels a cycle of oppression 32 that depresses the economic vitality of people of color, suppresses our political power, and obstructs our ability to utilize democracy to change economic rules that make racism profitable in the first place.

Racial wealth inequality is the consequential disease caused by the Oppression Economy. Today, racial wealth inequality has reached astronomical levels and will continue to rise if nothing is done. Without drastic policy action it will take 228 years for average Black wealth and 84 years for average Latinx wealth to match the wealth that white households hold today. Further, if nothing is done—or we attempt to return 33 to “normal” and fail to distance racism34 after COVID-19—Black and Latinx wealth will reach zero sometime in the middle of this century. These disparities are driven by 35 36 two reinforcing phenomena connected to the issue of corporate concentration: 1) the systematic withholding of wealth from people of color and 2) the gross concentration of wealth held by the corporate elite.

Between 1983 and 2016, which coincides with the rise of corporate and monopoly power, average Black and Latinx wealth was dwarfed [outpaced] by the wealth accumulated by white households. In fact, average Black wealth decreased by more than 50 percent over this period. This is the result of a long history of economic oppression that has 37 actively blocked people of color from building wealth or has stripped their wealth through theft and predation. The beneficiaries and perpetrators of this ever-growing gap are the corporate elite who set the rules of the economy. The corporate elite’s actions have led to people of color being paid less for their labor and having to pay more for the basic necessities of life. Here are a few metrics that speak to this reality.

• Black, Indigenous, and Latinx women earn between 55 cents and 63 cents for every dollar earned by white men.38

• Low income people of color often pay a 10 percent poverty premium for essential goods and services.39

• Black and Latinx households are far more likely than white households to be unable to pay their monthly bills or cover unexpected expenses.40

• Black households are more likely to be denied mortgage credit and end up paying more when they are able to access credit.41

• Black households, in particular, suffer from a crippling debt burden composed of an array of predatory credit products (e.g., student, small-dollar, auto, and home loans).

The phenomenon fueling racial wealth inequality is the concentration of wealth in the hands of a small number of individuals. Today, the wealthiest 400 people in the US hold more wealth ($3.2 trillion) than the entire Latinx population ($2.4 trillion)and 43 more than 70 percent of the Black population combined ($4.41 trillion). While the 44 average wealth of Black people has decreased since the 1980s (as cited earlier), the average wealth of those on Forbes’s list of the 400 wealthiest people increased from $600 million in 1982 (adjusted for inflation) to $8.0billion in 2020.. You might be 45 asking, what does the Forbes 400have to do with monopoly? Well, it is a who’s who of corporate monopolists.

The people on this list are some of the most egregious perpetrators of driving down wages, expanding income inequality, degrading the health of workers, desecrating the environment, fleecing consumers, perpetuating racial residential segregation, driving community disinvestment, avoiding taxes, and corrupting our democracy. These monopolists utilize ruthless business practices to perpetuate their unquenchable thirst for maximized profits and for control of major segments of the US economy—and people of color bear the brunt.

America’s Legacy of Racism Drives and Sustains Corporate Concentration

The confluence of monopoly power and racial inequality is not new. The construction of an economy that relies on unchecked capitalism to create the modern-day monopolist relies on the construction and maintenance of America’s racial caste system. The legacy of theft, exclusion, and exploitation of people of color by corporate monopolists has been with us since the founding of the nation. In fact, prior to the Civil War, southern plantation owners were the equivalent of the modern-day Fortune 500 monopolists. The Mississippi Valley had more millionaires per capita than anywhere in the country, making it the Silicon Valley of that period. Prior to the Civil War, the combined value of America’s approximately 4 million slaves was $3.5 billion, making it the largest single financial asset in the entire economy, bigger than all manufacturing and railroads combined.46

As the roots of this problem run deep and disproportionately impact people of color, so too must the solutions. Today’s corporate monopolies are built on the foundation of an economy that also stole land from Indigenous people through genocide and forced removal, and built a labor market on the bodies of enslaved Black people. Nothing in our economy is race-neutral, including our work to dismantle monopoly power and the racial wealth inequality it causes, so we must seek race-conscious solutions.

Scholars have developed a catalogue of research confirming what many people of color experience on a daily basis: Corporations have seized control of many aspects of our lives that were once intended to serve the public good over private sector interests. Examples include the growth of charter schools and for-profit colleges as an alternative to public schools; the growth of private health insurance and private hospitals; the growth of private prisons and paid services in prison, such as phone calls and health care. However, more research is needed that connects the economic conditions of people of color to the growth of monopoly power, a call to action we further explore in Section 6.

Connecting Monopoly Power to Other Movements

There is no silver bullet to slaying the monster that is systemic racism. Leaders of color across the country are actively organizing people of color to advance bold and transformational economic and racial justice policies. These leaders are doing the hard work of transforming our economic systems by advancing liberatory policies such as a Homes Guarantee and a federal jobs guarantee; and by dismantling systems of oppression, including police and prison abolition, ending voter suppression, and curbing corporate power. To this end, anti-monopoly policy and advocacy work can be a powerful tool to advance these transformative, activist-led movement priorities.

To win the battle to advance movement priorities, we must seek to pull every lever of power at our disposal and to directly confront one of their most ardent political opponents: corporate monopolies. The Action Center on Race and the Economy (ACRE) is deftly integrating anti-monopoly tactics to advance their racial and economic justice mission. In advancing police abolition, for example, they highlight the fact that big banks (as discussed in Section 1) finance “police brutality bonds” that fund the payment of police department settlements for acts of police brutality.47 Additionally, they have highlighted for grassroots leaders of color the connections that corporate monopolies have to anti-Muslim bigotry, the Puerto Rican debt crisis, and pharmaceutical prices.48

Corporate monopolists, including big banks, big tech, and big pharma, are often primary opponents in the battles for bold, transformational movement priorities. For example, activists for bold environmental justice policies, such as the Green New Deal, have encountered strong opposition from fossil fuel monopolies, such as Exxon, Shell and BP; but also, Wall Street bank monopolies financing fossil fuel monopolies, in addition to other monopolies in the airline industry. In another example, Wall Street 49 monopolies have aggressively clashed with affordable housing advocates as their investments have displaced residents of color from their homes and businesses and have also gentrified communities of color from Harlem to Oakland and Detroit to New Orleans. Directly challenging the monopoly power of these corporations could prove to be a useful tactic for activists of color to further movement priorities.

#### Their method must account for the context and consequences of theoretical uptake outside of debate, and how institutions respond—otherwise they reproduce material exclusion. Empowering collective legal actions is emancipatory—social oppression determines psychic oppression, not the other way around.

Nayak and Sheehy, 20—senior lecturer in social work at the University of Salford AND graduate student in International Labour and Trade Union Studies at Ruskin College, citing numerous scholars internally (Suryia and Chris, “Black feminist methods of activism are the tool for global social justice and peace,” Critical Social Policy, 2020, Vol. 40(2): 234–257, dml) [this card references sexual violence]

Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward: ‘the chief question to be examined must inevitably be the relationship between what the protestors do, the context in which they do it, and the varying responses of the state’ (Fox Piven and Cloward, 1979: xx)

Suryia Nayak: In my experience, the context and responses of the establishment become dislocated from the thinking and shaping of our activist actions. Consequently, too often, the constraints on our activist actions and outcomes become internalized; this fuels burn-out, reinforces feelings of failure and risks cessation. The relationship between the establishment and what we do as activists is complicated by the inherent tension that it is the establishment that we are both dependent upon and fighting against. Context includes our personal domestic responsibilities like paying bills, raising our children, being unwell and generally staving off pressures on multiple fronts. Context also includes prevailing social structures such as, patriarchy, racism and capitalism. The constraining dynamics between, what we do, context, and the responses we receive, must be explicit in evaluating all of our activist work. Recriminations, fragmentation and exhaustion must be re-positioned from ourselves to the source of the problem, namely context and establishment responses. Angela Davis: ‘In the heat of our pursuit of fundamental human rights, black people have been continually cautioned to be patient. We are advised that as long as we remain faithful to the existing democratic order, the glorious moment will eventually arrive when we will come into our own as full-fledged human beings. But having been taught by bitter experience, we know that there is a glaring incongruity between democracy and the capitalist economy which is the source of our ills.’ (Davis, 1971: 39, emphasis in original)

Chris

Sheehy: The incongruity is that the establishment uses all manner of force when the oppressed lose their ‘patience’ and respond in the same vein. A meagre amount, if any, commitment is given to interrogating injustice.

The activist refuses to be indifferent to the acts and alienating consequences of structural oppression. The activist is hungry to challenge the words and actions of the powerful. In addition to offering individual support, proportionate to loss, and context, the activist, imagines social transformation, and organises using ideological persuasion, negotiation, advocacy, protest, education, and militancy, to achieve change (Sewell, 2003; Schock, 2015).

June Jordan: ‘Nevertheless, people lose their jobs or their lives and still the reaction is cooperative. We try to speak clearly and to spare the feelings of the listener. We shave and shower and put on a clean shirt for the meeting. We volunteer to make phone calls, or coffee, or submit to the outcome of a vote about what shall I do. I have been raped: Who will speak for me? What are the bylaws? The courtesies of order, of ruly forms pursued from a heart of rage or terror or grief defame the truth of every human crisis. And that, indeed, is the plan: To defuse and to deform the motivating truth of critical response to pain’ (Jordan, 1981: 178)

Suryia Nayak: One of the earliest messages given me in ending violence against women and girl campaigns and services, was, that our refusal as women of colour to remain silent goes against every message, strategy and plan this oppressive world has for us. We are not meant to realise our power to resist and transform. We are swimming against the tide. It is little wonder that the truth of women’s pain is defused, defamed and deformed – the function of which is to shut us up. In the 2012 ‘Declaring the Activism of Black Feminist Theory’ gathering in Manchester, Black women asked why people could not hear what they were saying, ‘Do I need to be more articulate? Is it the words I am using? How can I say it clearer? How do I make it more accessible? Kimberlé Crenshaw replied, ‘the problem is not a matter of how your message is transmitted, the problem is a refusal of the message.’ The point is, re-position the problem!

I am reminded of the tension between talking about what needs to be done and actually doing what needs to be done! Of course, strategies, policies and mechanisms of accountability and quality assurance are necessities, particularly in a commissioned funding economy. In my experience within Rape Crisis centres, there must be vigilance around the balance between holding onto non-hierarchical Black feminist collective working practices and the requirement to construct governance structures that fit with the likes of the Charity Commission and funding bodies. In order to sustain ourselves, each other and our activism, the ‘motivating truth of critical response to pain’ must shape everything we do and say. This keeps the relationship between what we do, contexts in which we do it, and the responses we receive, explicit; this requires a level of conscious rigorous consistency and discipline of thinking. I argue for ‘[p]utting a hypervigilant anti-racist remembering to work’ (Nayak, 2017: 205). I have found that having Black feminist texts like Lorde’s ‘Sister Outsider’ (1984) and the Combahee River Collective Statement (1977) present and referred to at activist meetings, gatherings and discussions, function as invaluable orientating touch-stones.

Chris Sheehy: Revisiting our own and others’ past activism is essential; not a sentimental melancholic missing to longingly retire to past familiar struggles for reminiscence sake. Revisiting activist struggles across a temporal spectrum is for reflexive scrutiny, to identify the elements of the current crisis. This historical comparative method reveals what has been achieved and what still has to be done. Scrutiny has to enable an intersectional acuity that goes beyond a single issue frame: a Black feminist intersectional lens (Kanneh, 1998).

Patricia Hill Collins: ‘What criteria, if any, can be applied to ideas to determine whether they are in fact Black and feminist?’ (Hill Collins, 2000: 18)

Suryia Nayak: Black feminist ideas are constituted of the dialectic and the dialogical; the dialectic is that Black feminist concepts are born out of Black women’s intersectional experiences of racist oppression, in order to confront that very same intersectional racist oppression. The dialogical is that Black feminist ideas are born out of a continual dialogue with struggles for intersectional anti-racist social justice – and this is what sets Black feminist methodologies of activism apart from other methodologies.

Solidarity: Organizing across difference

Chris Sheehy: History is a ‘moment’ in time. This ‘moment’ is characterised by crisis: lack of solidarity across differences; inability to organise due to the perceived enormity of the task; struggling conceptually; and the establishment failing the poorest and powerless (Fanon, 2008; Jones, 2015; Sassoon, 2014).

Building inclusive, active coalitions is urgently required. Despite the crisis, the losses, the failed attempts, dialogue across difference must continue. I am conscious of having this dialogue with Black women, me a white woman, each living a different experience, and communicating with one another about oppression, power, vulnerability, and imagining change about what is to be done, separately, and in alliance, and what we can win!.

Barbara Smith: ‘The only way that we can win – and before winning, the only way we can survive is by working with each other, and not seeing each other as enemies’ (Taylor, 2017: 64)

Chris Sheehy: You imagine the gains of struggle across difference when taking a socialist stance. ‘Not seeing each other as enemies’, does not negate differences, deny apprehensions and discord, or suspend healthy scepticism. Black Trade Unionists positively use models of separate organising, separate reflective spaces, to advise specific strategies for specific intersectional oppressions.

Claudia Jones: ‘We can accelerate the militancy of Negro women to the degree with which we demonstrate that the economic, political and social demands of Negro when are not just ordinary demands, but special demands flowing from special discrimination facing Negro women as women, as workers, and as Negroes . . . Yes, and it means that a struggle for social equality of Negro women must be boldly fought in every sphere of relations between men and women so that the door of Party membership doesn’t become a revolving door because of our failure to conduct the struggle’ (BoyceDavies, 2008: 29)

Chris Sheehy: My own activism included casework, organising, and supporting Black Trade Unionists’ grievances concerning intersections of racism, which disproportionately also denied the professional recognition our Black members deserved. Black members spoke about racism and how their voices were ignored, their research marginalised, their right to promotion ignored, and their Black Feminist scholarship attacked. Black members endured a shortage of Black representatives available as caseworkers, when it was important to have access to experienced skilled Black representatives who recognised the specificity of racism. I viewed equality cases as structural oppression, and was simultaneously tenacious to ensure that individual equality cases had the strength of our union to overcome the toughest resistance, made their way on to the collective bargaining table, and were escalated and prioritised within the national Union. We represented all cases from Black members to ensure the best possible advice and strongest action. Our Black members’ cases became collective campaigns, locally, regionally, and nationally; and became Union legal priorities. My experience of working on cases of intersectional racisms is that they should receive expert legal advice as early as possible, to develop case law in this area. This would then constitute an intersectional strategic approach, which simultaneously addresses racism, identity and context. An intersection of strategic approaches to intersectional racism, including, from the local and national to the global, would build a context of remedy; thereby serving the need of the individual bringing the case and future collective protection for the broader membership to import a preventative function, provoking change in all workplaces. To date, I have not attended one formal employee complaint where an intersectional lens was suggested, other than when I forced the issue. Without the entirety of the workplace having proper access and ongoing inclusion, a Trade Union is lost. My learning is, when a member is assisted and welcomed; when representations of the diversity of membership is publicised; when word of mouth recommendations testify that equality is fought for vociferously; this begins to assist in building hard won solidarity across intersectional differences.

Activism includes the headache of resourcing; logistics; logistical arguments; long hours; mental and physical exhaustion; lack of sleep; witnessing hostility; prematurely ending of action; bureaucratic controls; and vicarious trauma. In my experience, activism across difference is complex to organise but vital for building solidarity.

Suryia Nayak: Speaking as a woman of colour, for whom Trade Union advocacy and support was instrumental in confronting racism, I ask, can the racial grief of Black women speak? The difference between mourning and melancholia is that mourning is a grief that can be gotten oven. In contrast, melancholia is a grief that cannot be gotten over. I believe that, as long as there is racism, there is no getting over the grief racism causes. So, in this racist world, I am in racial melancholia. The multiple interconnected losses of racism are far reaching. My racial melancholia, shaped by daily micro-aggressions of intersectional racism, and the specificity of formally confronting racism through available institutional processes, include: finding out, who is there for me/us and who is not; finding out, what is bearable in terms of being knocked down, disappointed and exhausted and being able to rise up again; and, finding out, how easily my self-confidence can take a bashing. Mindful that it is not the job of Black people to educate white people about racism, I was conscious of the delicate balance of exposing my levels of vulnerability and teaching white Trade Union activists about the intimate details of the damaging psychological impact of intersectional racism.

Combahee River Collective: ‘As Black feminists we are made constantly and painfully aware of how little effort white women have made to understand and combat their racism, which requires among other things that they have a more than superficial comprehension of race, color, and Black history and culture. Eliminating racism in the white women’s movement is by definition work for white women to do, but we will continue to speak and demand accountability on this issue’ (Combahee River Collective, 1977: 270). Suryia Nayak: In my experience, this was and continues to be an extra task for Black Trade Union members in relation to white Trade Union representatives, on whom I was reliant for their skills of negotiation and advocacy; a task, white Trade Union members, and white people generally, don’t confront. Furthermore, I recognize that working with cases of racism isn’t easy for antiracist white Trade Union representatives, who have the challenge of not retreating into defensive responses, but have to hold the emotional and material pain of the issues of racism they are working with for Black members.

Barbara Smith: ‘There are ethical principles that you can see in any significant political intervention in history. You will see – one of the things that you should see in positive movements move forward toward justice – not toward power – because there are many interventions that were just about the accrual of power, where you didn’t really have that mentality and that principle of "We must all be in this together." But if it’s a forward movement towards justice, you will see that people with different backgrounds and different places in a social structure actually at times come together’ (Taylor, 2017: 64–65)

Suryia Nayak: I believe that showing and articulating my vulnerability due to my experiences of intersectional racism, strengthened the quality of my interactions with the white Trade Unionist who was helping me, which in turn strengthened the quality of how we were able to represent my grievances. Once I batted away insidious creeping suspicion that predominantly white Trade Unions use cases of racism, including my own, for the status, profile and power-base of the Trade Union movement, I do believe that we had solidarity across our differences in a united demand for justice.

Audre Lorde: ‘Our future survival is predicated upon our ability to relate within equality. As women, we must root out internalized patterns of oppression within ourselves if we are to move beyond the most superficial aspects of social change . . . The future of our earth may depend upon the ability of all women to identify and develop new definitions of power and new patterns of relating across difference. The old definitions have not served us, nor the earth that supports us . . . the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house [ ] Change means growth, and growth can be painful. But we sharpen self-definition by exposing self in work and struggle together with those whom we define as different from ourselves, although sharing the same goals. For Black and white, old and young, lesbian and heterosexual women alike, this can mean new paths to our survival’ (Lorde, 1980: 123)

The interregnum

Antonio Gramsci: ‘The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born: in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear’ (Gramsci, 1971: 276).

Chris Sheehy: I understand the term ‘interregnum’ to mean, a gap, a pause, an ‘in between’ position, loss of confidence in the old. The conditions of an ‘interregnum’ are consistent with an established power dying, not dead, and hence ‘crisis’and fracture. The transformation of social, political, economic relations is yet to be initiated, plans for transformation will meet resistance, and repressive reaction before the old order replaced.

Suryia Nayak: Taking the concept of the ‘interregnum’ into the lived experience of activism, we must think about an ‘interregnum’ functioning intersectionally on a material, structural, psychological, macro and micro level. The importance of placing the idea of an ‘interregnum under the lens of intersectionality, is that inhabiting an ‘interregnum’ space is inevitably a multidimensional context. In this intersectional frame, the sum of the variables is greater than the sum of the material (resources), plus the structural (institutional/organizational apparatus), plus the psychic (the emotional toll), and these operate simultaneously on a macro (national and international) and micro (daily interactions) dimension; where the macro level is re-produced on a micro level. The lens of intersectionality, offers high resolution pictures of the multifaceted nuances of the difficulties felt in a borderland space, where ‘the old is dying and the new cannot be born’. This level of scrutiny is vital for building strategies to survive and transcend the ‘interregnum’ borderlands. For example, in the early 1990s, I worked to establish a Black women’s Rape crisis service in a predominately white women’s service. Drawing on the legacy of Black feminism with the support of a Black feminist activist called Andrea Tara-Chand, I had an objective, yet to be ‘born’, and sure enough, just as Gramsci warned ‘in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear[ed]’ (Gramsci, 1971: 276). On a macro organizational level, morbid symptoms were manifest in the membership and structure of this Rape Crisis collective. Within months of designing and delivering a Black feminist Rape Crisis volunteer training course, one by one, for their own legitimate reasons, the existing white women volunteers and paid workers of this established Rape Crisis service left. In addition, the new Black women members questioned the viability of the existing collective structure in regards to transparency of power and responsibility.

I hung onto the belief that these ‘morbid symptoms’ were not a measure of the legitimacy or value of the objective, methodology and outcome of creating a Black women’s Rape Crisis service. As Black women, the internalised ‘injurious interpellations’ (Butler, 1997: 104) of racism can too quickly become equated with the morbid symptoms of being in the in- between space of giving birth to a new way of doing things. It is no coincidence that the final stages of labour, before giving birth, is called the ‘transition’ phase; contractions are intense and the woman’s body makes the shift, from opening the cervix, to the beginning of the baby’s descent. It is a painful, exhausting stage, typified by physical symptoms of shaking, nausea and vomiting, interwoven with feeling overwhelmed.

On a micro level, such was the power of this Black feminist Rape Crisis consciousness raising process, that the Black women on the course, including Andrea and myself, experienced our own personal, psychological ‘interregnum’ and our own particular ‘variety of morbid symptoms’. For example, we all started to question, the power dynamics in our marriages and personal relationships; our silences; the inadequacy of language to express our sensuality and sexuality; the putting up with aspects of our lives that went beyond compromises; and our internalised racist hatred and harm of self and each other. On a collective and personal level, this was/is not an easy questioning – hence the ‘morbid’. The training created a space of thinking and feeling as Black women together, where old, established patterns of thinking and feeling were fading; for example, the equation of ‘vulnerability as weakness’ and the yet to be born, equation of ‘vulnerability as strength’. Through deep connection with the activism of Black feminist theory, we gained increasing confidence in questioning the ‘cannot’ in our lives and ultimately Gramsci’s idea that ‘the new cannot be born’.

Antonio Gramsci: ‘The question I ask is ‘[w]ill the interregnum, the crisis whose historically normal solution is blocked in this way, necessarily be resolved in favour of a restoration of the old?’ (Gramsci, 1971: 276).

Chris Sheehy: To avoid ‘a restoration of the old’, we use this interregnum to build something solid, to struggle for socioeconomic and political justice, Globally. Our songs and beliefs are hopeful, but, in truth, there isn’t the solidarity that is anywhere near what is required.

Dan Gallin: ‘Comrades: The European labour movement is today the target of an onslaught not experienced since the 1930s. This is not a passing phase. There will not be a return to what was considered normal social relations in the thirty years after the war. The project of contemporary capitalism is the destruction of the labour movement, in Europe in North America and eventually everywhere else. Their project is the reorganization of world society without organized labour. What they want is a society of slaves.’ (Gallin, 2014: 258)

Chris Sheehy: We undermine fellow workers across the world, we buy cheap disposable clothing, made in unsafe sweat shops, where workers receive barely enough to exist, then we discard the same products, our planet is further threatened. As a Health and Safety Rep, recalling dialogue with comrades seeking justice since Bhopal, reminds us, we fail to organise around workers safety globally. Our comrades, in the sweat shops are driven harder, and we are further alienated from one another. We, as workers witness other workers and their communities’ suffer for profit. Deregulated corporate production of antibiotics, clothing and chemicals, means that safety is compromised to secure profit. The premises go on fire, exits are not visible, cheap goods are piled high and block exits, workers die, families and communities are devastated, the planet suffers, we all suffer further alienation, and solidarity moves further from our grasp.

Angela Davis: ‘But having been taught by bitter experience, we know that there is a glaring incongruity between democracy and capitalist economy, which is the source of our ills . . . The people do not exercise decisive control over the determining factors of their lives. Official assertions that meaningful dissent is always welcome, provided it falls within boundaries of legality, are frequently a smokescreen obscuring the invitation to acquiesce in oppression’ (Davis, 1971: 39).

Suryia Nayak: The ‘smokescreen’ is not just a mechanism of the oppressor; smokescreens are alive within spaces of activism. It brings to mind Bhabha’s’ idea of ‘sly civility’ (1994: 93–102), whereby, well intentioned mission statements, posters on walls, books on shelves and fair trade products in kitchens, constitute smokescreens that obscure silent ambivalence towards the giving up of privilege. In my experience of feminist collective working, where anti-hierarchical structures are a defiance of patriarchy, the ‘invitation to acquiesce in oppression’ (Davis, 1971: 39) is a tricky ‘smokescreen’, because it functions under the guise of feminist equality. However, the division of labour: who washes up; empties bins; photocopies; and lifts boxes, in contrast to, who chairs meetings; who takes and is given space to have voice; and who represents the organization externally, replicate unequal relationships of power and appropriation that collective working is meant to address. In short, activist or not, we are all implicated, because oppressive social structures create oppressive psychic structures (Nayak, 2015: 1, 51; Oliver, 2001: 34).

#### This means voting aff forecloses the active engagements necessary for combatting the oppression of queer and black women.

Mathews, 20—PhD in political science and MA in sociology from Clark Atlanta University (Tayler, “Queering Black Feminism The Political Thought of Cathy J. Cohen,” National Review of Black Politics, Vol. 1, Number 2, pp. 291–310, dml)

Black queer feminism is a particular strand of Black feminism. The underlying paradigm of Black queer feminism is derived from Black feminist thought, a social and political theory with its own epistemological and ontological assumptions, as well as a worldview that originates from the experiences and subjectivities of Black womxn. Black queer feminism further derives its explanatory power from Black queer and trans thought, although it must be stressed that Black feminism and Black queer and trans thought cannot be neatly separated (Green and Bey 2017; Carruthers 2018; Ferguson 2018). As mentioned earlier, Black womxn are not a monolith: just as all Black womxn are not feminists, all Black feminists do not share the same ideological space (nor are they all womxn). Indeed, it is most accurate to speak of Black feminisms, a multifaceted ideological and theoretical space in which there are numerous (and sometimes conflicting) beliefs, ideals, and political commitments. Certainly, what is today named as Black queer feminism is not new (Carruthers 2018; Cohen 2019a). Its theoretical and activist lineage can be traced to Black lesbian feminists such as Audre Lorde, Barbara Smith, Cheryl Clarke, and Pat Parker, among others (Cohen 2019a); and Black trans womxn such as Marsha P. Johnson (Tourmaline 2013; Willis 2019). Black feminisms encompass a range of theories and methods across multiple academic fields in addition to and in concert with ideas that arise directly from community organizing.

Cathy J. Cohen’s theorizing on Black feminism and queer politics demonstrates what Julia Sudbury and Margo Okazawa-Rey (2016: 3) conceptualize as activist scholarship: “the production of knowledge and pedagogical practices through active engagements with, and in the service of, progressive social movements.” Cohen makes “interdisciplinary trouble” (Alexander-Floyd 2013) across the fields of political science, Black queer studies, Black Women’s Studies, Black studies, and “women, gender and sexuality studies.” As a Black lesbian feminist, she has been at the forefront of Black queer studies by intervening in the persistent queer masculinist focus on “Black gay exceptionals” (Cohen 2004: 28). Cohen’s political thought contributes an alternative frame of reference that is not only essential for advancing scholarship on Black politics but is equally useful for engaging in Black queer feminism as a praxis within and beyond academia. Her work is unmistakably leftist, foregrounding racial oppression and economic exploitation alongside processes of gender and sexual normalization.

Through Cohen’s ideas one discovers that Black queer feminism adds greater nuance to our understanding of gender, sexuality, race, and class. Cohen’s political thought broadens where we locate power struggles, exposes oppressive systems, and inspires counter-hegemonic knowledge that challenges the rigidity of what and who counts as “legitimate” subjects for political science inquiries. Below, I employ the constituent elements that characterize a frame of reference (Barker, Jones, and Tate 1999) to synthesize Cohen’s political thought in an effort to outline a Black queer feminist frame of reference. The assumptions, concepts and categories of analysis, levels of analysis, and questions vis-a`-vis Black queer feminism are presented. These elements assist in conceptualizing Black queer feminism while illuminating the sociopolitical context of nonnormative Black political experiences.

Assumptions

When exploring the possibilities of a Black queer feminist frame of reference through the works of Cohen, one ascertains quickly that this frame is premised upon an analysis of power. Specifically, Black queer feminism accentuates relationships to normative power: “normative meaning the structured nature of power that comes from traditional institutions like the state and the government ...[the] economic system and capitalism ...[and] from practices of identity that are thought to be normal” (Cohen 2017). Within this frame it is assumed that politics and analyses should be organized around the most marginal within Black communities and the larger body politic. That is, all “those who stand on the (out)side of state-sanctioned, normalized, White, middle- and upper-class, male heterosexuality” (Cohen 2004: 29), those with the least influence over the hegemonic apparatuses that dominate their lives. Cohen’s political thought inspires us to think beyond the current sociopolitical organization in order to address unjust distributions of power, access, and resources. She rejects assimilationist strategies that seek to move those on the margins into “dominant institutions and normative social relationships,” arguing alternatively for radical and transformational politics that strive to shift the “values, definitions, and laws [that] make these institutions and relationships oppressive” (Cohen 1997: 444–45).

Furthermore, Cohen complicates assumptions concerning the structures governing individuals and groups within Black communities. In addition to the oppressive systems of white supremacy, racial capitalism, and heteropatriarchy, there is also the struggle against institutionalized heteronormativity that attempts to regulate and constrain nonnormative conceptions and expressions of gender and sexuality. Heteronormativity “privilege[s] heterosexuality and heterosexual relationships as fundamental and ‘natural’ within society” (Cohen 1997: 440) while also enforcing a strict cisnormative gender binary. Heteronormativity operates by way of sociopolitical normalizing processes, the precepts of conservative cisheterosexist moral beliefs, and is sanctioned by the heteropatriarchal state.

Concepts and Categories of Analysis

Cohen foregrounds ideas that add depth to extant concepts and categories of analysis. Cohen’s broad assertion regarding the concept queer has led her to argue for queer as a verb; that is, the queering of politics and analyses. This idea of queering informs much of Cohen’s political thought. Although other scholars also view gender categories and identities as political, when discussing Black womxn, scholars most often conceptualize gender as a binary comparative category of analysis against (presumably cisgender and heteronormative) Black men or white womxn. Cohen’s theorizing on gender moves us beyond these conventional notions. To queer gender is to emphasize that even within gender categories there is nuance, fluidity, and various connections to power. Cohen remarks that “the possibilities that come from a Black queer feminist analysis” are in the recognition that “queer, at its best, can move us away from the simple binaries of difference, binaries of man/woman, straight/gay, I dare say even cis/trans which sometimes can flatten the complexity of our relationship to power and our relationship to each other” (Cohen 2018). Oversimplified conceptions of gender and sexuality are not merely the result of individual lack of imagination. These conceptions stem from efforts of white supremacist state power and dominant institutions to oppress our collective imaginations and agency (Cohen 1997; Cohen and Jackson 2016).

One need not claim queer as a personal identity to practice Black queer feminist politics. Many nonqueer self-identified people are nevertheless queered by racial capitalism and the state (Cohen 2019a). “The radical potential of queer politics,” says Cohen (1997), is in its ability to unite those on the outside of hegemonic state and capitalist power, those who share a common material reality in that “numerous systems of oppression interact to regulate and police” their lives (441). It is this shared, though nuanced and multifaceted, plight that can generate the “radical coalition” and collective resistance to bring about change (452). By opening up to the idea of an active queer, rather than limiting queer to a static identity, radical reinterpretations can occur. When analyses are queered, for instance, concepts like deviance become filled with possibility. For Cohen, what is pejoratively labeled as deviant behavior may in fact hold tremendous potential for social movements. When deviance is combined with the intent to challenge unjust power distributions it is “transformed into politicized resistance” (Cohen 2004: 38). In fact, intentionality is an orienting idea underlying Black queer feminist politics. As Cohen explains, “Black queer feminism is an intentional radical politics, pushing back against dominant and community-based identities and institutions that prescribe and reify hetero-gendered, or normalized understandings of family, of sex, of desire, or joy, and the presentation of self, including gender” (Cohen 2018).

Levels of Analysis

When using Black queer feminism to frame studies on Black womxn, gender, and sexuality politics, multiple levels of analysis can be employed. Cohen’s political thought emphasizes that unjust power at the macro level originates in the sociopolitical structure in which harms such as “exploitation and violence [are] rooted in state-regulated institutions and economic systems” (Cohen 1997: 442). At the meso or community and group level, Cohen theorizes that within both Black and LGBTQ communities, and of course Black LGBTQ communities, there are multiple stratifications and relationships to power (Cohen 1997, 2004; Cohen and Jackson 2016). Intracommunity power distributions impact how and if community members can access key resources and relationships within and outside of one’s various groups (Cohen 1999). When examining politics at the individual level, it is helpful to return to Cohen’s articulation of deviance. Micro choices can engender both meso and macro effects such that “it is possible that through deviant choices individuals open up a space where public defiance of the norms is seen as a possibility and an oppositional worldview develops” (Cohen 2004: 41). This multilevel approach to analyzing Black politics found within a Black queer feminist frame of reference lends scholars another foundation that enables alternative knowledge about the scope, possibility, and relevance of political science.