

## ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation:           IN THE CLEARING: BLACK FEMALE BODIES,  
SPACE AND SETTLER COLONIAL LANDSCAPES

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This dissertation is an interdisciplinary project that introduces vocabulary, analytic units, and cultural landscapes that make it possible to conceive of slavery and settler colonialism as constitutive of one another. By focusing on Black female gender formation at the intersection of slavery and settler colonialism, this study argues that Black women's bodies function as sites where we can observe the power of slavery and settler colonialism simultaneously. Both the Slave Master's need for bodies and the Settler's need for space required the production of the Black female slave body as a unit of unending property. As a metonym for fungible property, the Black female slave body served as an apt metaphor for space within settler colonial imaginaries. Though largely omitted from the analytic frames of settler colonialism, Black women's bodies are materially and symbolically essential to the space making practices of settler colonialism in the U.S. and Canada.

Throughout this project, Black women function as tropes of spatial expansion, spatial limits and chaos. Black female bodies are material bodies that can either facilitate settler colonial expansion or impede the settler spatial order. As embodied and agentive subjects, Black women contest the dehumanizing spatial processes of property accumulation by establishing new relationships to space and spatial production. This dissertation uses material and cultural landscapes in order to stage these various contestations over space.

The landscapes in this study include: the hands of Black female slaves, “the settlement-plantation,” the Eliza Lucas Pinckney archive, the Moynihan Report, the “Black Matriarch,” and the coalitional politics of a “Black-Native Feminist Formation” in Toronto, Canada. I analyze these landscapes by using methods from discourse and textual analysis as well as autobiographical writing. I conduct textual analyses of the film *Daughters of the Dust*, the film’s sequel in the form of Julie Dash’s novel bearing the same title, the Eliza Lucas Pinckney archive and the Moynihan Report. Finally, I recollect the work of Black and Native women who were apart of INCITE Toronto from 2006-2008. This dissertation argues for more critical attention to the ways that Blackness, specifically Black femaleness, matters to settler colonial power.

IN THE CLEARING:  
BLACK FEMALE BODIES, SPACE AND SETTLER COLONIAL LANDSCAPES

by

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To

All my kinsfolks who decided that they would refashion their desires instead

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## Chapter One: Say My Name at the Crossroads

Let's face it. I am a marked woman, but not everybody knows my name<sup>1</sup>.

-Hortense J. Spillers

*[...] is the space between. Merely what is made as the trees are felled, the Natives raised like cane stalks and a fertile corner of a plantation is tilled and fenced in. [...] 's] coordinates have not yet been mapped or calculated. Science and cartography have not been able to capture what is growing in the clearing.*<sup>2</sup>

-Tiffany Lethabo King

I begin at a place where language ends and where new utterances must begin. I come to this project trying to find the language for my own presence in the New World. My name as slave, or Black female flesh, in the Western Hemisphere is well known by now. However, when I look for my name at the times when I am made to appear on the blood soaked “clearing,” I am at a loss for words<sup>3</sup>. At the clearing, the space of genocide and settlement is where I experience a form of aphasia. I do not have a location or a vantage point from which to orient and understand myself. I do not yet have a language that would allow me to name myself or how I am situated.

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<sup>1</sup> The opening line of Hortense Spillers' essay, “Mama's Baby, Papa's Mayber: An American Grammar Book,” *Diacritics*, Vol. 17, No. 2, Culture and Counteremory: The “American” Connection (Summer 1987), p. 65 introduces us to the way that Black female flesh functions as discursive construction so over determined from the outside that it is merely a “locus of confounded identities” rather than a subject that can be known. Spillers goes on to call the various and always shifting names that the “black woman” is called within public discourse forms of speech that render or signify her as “property plus.” In this project, I also introduce the Black female as a discursive space of “property plus” that has yet to be named within the context of Settler colonial power. Black female flesh is useful to the settler colonial project and marks her as property; however, we do not yet know her name on this landscape. We have ways to make the Black female legible within the discourse of slavery “Aunty” or “Sapphire” but not within the discourse of settler colonialism.

<sup>2</sup> These are my own ruminations on the lacuna that exists within discussions of conquest and settler colonialism about Blackness, specifically Blackness embodied as femaleness.

<sup>3</sup> Frank Wilderson III in his book *Red, White and Black: Cinema and Structures of US Antagonisms*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010) p. 207, argues that the word clearing needs to be understood in ways that reveal its meaning as both a verb and a noun. Wilderson argues that Settler grammatical structures privilege clearings as a noun as a way to focus on the inert “place name” where the Settler lives. However, clearing should also be understood as a verb; as in Native people were cleared from the land that made the clearing possible. In my work, the clearing takes on both parts of speech, the verb and the place name.

In order to develop a language I need memories and accounts of what happened and happens at the clearing. Could I see? How did I register the horror? Did I vomit, empty bowels? Did I, could I, run and hide? Did the balls of my feet push off of dust, grass, or slip in a thick mud? Whose blood was I soaked in? Is it my own? What odor seized my nostrils, turned into a rancid liquid and dripped down the back of my throat? I need to recreate some scenes. Who am I when the Settler slaughters the Native in order to know themselves and expand their territory?<sup>4</sup> Are my feet planted when the land becomes property and the settlement-plot or am I being dragged through the soil face down chained to a mule? What are my spatial coordinates?<sup>5</sup> When conquest, ongoing genocide and settlement are studied within the context of what we know as North America, how do we map the presence and understand the significance of Black female bodies on these landscapes? Practices of settlement and settling are my landscapes from which to theorize Black female gender formation in this dissertation.

Rarely are the spatial processes of settlement, which includes the clearing/genocide of Native bodies, the self actualization of the Settler and the making of property taken up when theorizing Blackness in the “New World.” Black Studies and Black Feminist Studies have developed rigorous modes of inquiry and analysis that result in multiple theorizations of how Black female gender formation occurs during slavery.

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<sup>4</sup> I have capitalized “Settler” throughout this dissertation because it functions as an ontological—world ordering—position and references more than just certain people. Settler references structural positions and relationships to others.

<sup>5</sup> Wilderson has argued that the Black has no spatial coordinates. Blacks represent states of “time and space incapacity” unlike humans (whites and sometimes Natives) who have “history and culture—time and space capacity.” See *Red, White and Black*, 2010, p. 231. However, throughout this project, I take up Black female embodiment and subjectivity in terms of space. I attempt to develop a language or way of theorizing Black female bodies and their relationship to the spatial process of settlement, the expansion of the Settler-self and the elimination of the Native.

Seldom do these disciplines and sub-disciplines consider the Black female figure in relation to settler colonial power.

*In the Clearing* asks, what happens when Black Studies, specifically Black Feminist Studies, maps the power relations of slavery/anti-Black racism and settler colonialism onto one another in order to theorize Black female gender formation?<sup>6</sup> What kinds of bodily formations and spaces emerge? *In the Clearing* poses these critical questions in order to plot the unique relationship that Black people have with Native peoples, White Settlers, settlement and the land. Moving toward a grammar of precision enables the articulation of Black political praxes that can respond to the ways that anti-Black racism is structured by settler colonialism. *In the Clearing* can also help us understand the ways that slavery/anti-Black racism structures settler colonialism.

Settler colonial power and anti-Black racism/slavery structure the social order in the US and North America. As an ongoing form of domination, settler colonialism requires the genocide of Native people in order for the Settler to accumulate Native people's land and turn the land into property<sup>7</sup>. Settler colonial relations are maintained

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<sup>6</sup> When I use the term Black Feminist Studies in this dissertation, I do so to reference an academic and disciplinary formation. In this project, I also draw heavily from Black Women's Social and Political thought, womanism and theoretical traditions that refuse to name themselves. Only when I am in dialogue with the established academic discipline of Black Feminist Studies and am referencing its scholarly works do I refer to Black women's thought, theory and praxes as Black Feminist.

<sup>7</sup> See Andrea Smith's, "Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy" in *Color of Violence Anthology: the INCITE Anthology*, eds INCITE: Women of Color Against Violence, (Cambridge: South End Press, 2006), p. 68. In "Heteropatriarchy and The Three Pillars of White Supremacy", colonialism is not distinguished from Settler colonialism. However, genocide constitutes and informs US colonialism. Genocide and colonialism are analyzed as manifestations of white supremacy. In the essay, Smith states, 'A second pillar of white supremacy is the logic of genocide. This logic holds that indigenous people must disappear. In fact, they must always be disappearing, in order to allow non-indigenous peoples rightful claim over this land.' While, Smith does not talk about Settler colonialism specifically, she does give colonialism the distinguishing feature of genocide in the US. 'The pillar of genocide serves as the anchor for colonialism—it is what allows non-native peoples to feel that they can rightfully own indigenous people's land. It is okay to take land from indigenous peoples, because indigenous peoples have

through various forms of repressive and discursive power. For example, the physical extermination of Native people is accompanied by the cultural genocide of Native peoples. Not just Native peoples, but their entire worldview must be erased from the face of the earth. One of the discursive forms of genocide and colonization in settler colonial states is the imposition and institutionalization of Western gender, heteropatriarchy and the notion of the individual or Enlightenment's human. The imposition of a Western gender order and its attendant racialized sexuality ushered in sexual violence as a tool of settler colonialism.<sup>8</sup> *In the Clearing* examines the spaces where both settler colonialism and slavery/anti-Black racism shape the landscape.

Looking for these locations and sites of analysis requires a new way of mining various bodies of literature. Reviewing the literature in Black Studies, Black Feminist Studies (Black/Feminist Studies), Native Studies, Native Feminist Studies (Native/Feminist Studies), and settler colonial studies, one encounters a coarse and inarticulate lexicon and language for explaining Blackness within the context of conquest/genocide in the "New World."<sup>9</sup> However, if we reread Black/Feminist Studies and Native/Feminist Studies in relation to one another through an analysis of space we can rethink approaches to theorizing the formation of the US and Settler states. When we pay close attention to their modes of inquiry, analytic units, and theoretical approaches

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disappeared.' This definition of colonialism is concerned with Native genocide, land theft, and the making of settler space in the US.

<sup>8</sup> Andrea Smith, *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2005).

<sup>9</sup> At times I want to think about Black Studies and Black Feminist Studies in relationship to one another. I also want to think about them as both being inarticulate in the face of settler colonialism. So in a discussion of the literature and a lack of language to name Blackness within settler colonial landscapes, I merge the two fields Black/Feminist Studies. I also do this to the fields of Native Studies and Native Feminist Studies in order to reference their lack of an available discourse about Blackness within settler colonial relations.

and read them in relationship to the production of space we can begin to make out multiple formations occurring on the landscape at the same time. I will proceed by explaining how a new approach to reading the literature within Black Studies may provide some helpful openings for this project.

Black Studies enables a discussion of the unique and un-analogous form of terror and domination that produced the Slave. The field has demonstrably argued that slavery is a dynamic process of inter subjective tension that produces the human master and Black non-human. The production of ontological states of being and non-being (in the form of actual and social death) is a preoccupation of the field. Understanding the conditions under which the human comes into being is both a political and ethical project. Black Studies, particularly Afropessimism, has used Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* as their ur-text in order to situate the origins and ongoing formation of the human as a process of negation.<sup>10</sup> The human can only exist through the violent negation and exclusion of the Black from the category of the Human. The human exists because there is a non-human Black. In fact the social world is organized and sustained through anti-Black racism.

Black Studies coaxes and appeals to my mode of inquiry to stay focused on questions of ontology and being-ness in the New World. Black Studies helps me

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<sup>10</sup> In *Red, White and Black*, Frank Wilderson defines Afro-pessimism as the study of 'Black positionality,' specifically as a world ordering position in which anti-Black racism is the foundation upon which the social world is built. Wilderson states that 'Afro-pessimism explores the meaning of Blackness not – in the first instance – as a variously and unconsciously interpellated identity or as a conscious social actor, but as a structural position of noncommunicability in the face of all other positions; this meaning is noncommunicable because, again, as a position Blackness is predicated on modalities of accumulation and fungibility.' p.58-9. Wilderson identifies Frantz Fanon, Hortense Spillers, Saidiya Hartman, Orlando Patterson, George Yancey, Lewis Gordon, Jared Sexton, Joy James, Kara Keeling, Achille Mbembe, David Marriott and Ronald Judy as Afro-pessimists.

navigate liberal humanist discourses. Sylvia Wynter's work to deconstruct and destabilize the epistemic and cognitive orders of Europe exposes how humanism over represents and naturalizes the production of human/non-human bodies and conquerable spaces.<sup>11</sup> Finally, Frank Wilderson's work helps me ask questions about the stable and autonomous liberal human's relationship to space.<sup>12</sup> If the human has spatial coordinates, can Blacks have spatial coordinates as non-beings? If Blacks have no spatial capacity, are Black bodies simply space or the material matter for making space rather than occupiers of space? Thinking with Black Studies about space takes us back to the question, can Black people be Settlers?

Often in response to male centric discourse in African American and Black Studies, Black Women's Studies and Black Feminisms have required that we delve more deeply into ontological questions. Black feminism has enabled a discussion of both ontological difference and an interrogation of the interlocking social processes that result in the formations of difference. The close scrutiny of the process of Black gender formation under enslavement, on the part of scholars like Hortense Spillers, Saidiya Hartman, Jennifer Morgan and Katherine McKittrick, has allowed me to assert that the Black female slave body is an essential unit of analysis for understanding the production of Settler space. Black feminist thought has allowed me to think about how gender as a discourse produces Black female bodies as ever expansive forms of property that make

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<sup>11</sup> See Sylvia Wynter. "The Ceremony Must Be Found: After Humanism." *Boundary 2*, On Humanism and the University I: The Discourse of Humanism, (Spring-Autumn, 1984) Vol. 12/13, (12)3, (13)1, pp. 19-70 and "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, It's Overrepresentation—An Argument." *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, No. 3, Fall 2003, pp. 257-337

<sup>12</sup> Frank Wilderson, *Red, White and Black*

ideal symbols of spatial expansion. Materially, their actual bodies that produce the plantation as a space for the Settler to inhabit and self actualize.

Studies of Black female bodily formation particularly within the analytic frame of slavery provide me with the language, imagery and methods that bring together slavery and settler colonialism. Hartman's *Scenes of Subjection* focuses on the multiple, minute and everyday discursive and repressive processes of making Black bodies fungible forms of property.<sup>13</sup> Hartman has provided me with a mode of inquiry, in my interrogation of the practices of everyday space making, that allows me to hold the ontological position of the Black female slave in tension with the ongoing discursive and spatial processes that produce her. Jennifer Morgan's work *Laboring Women* makes Black female slaves during the period of settlement in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries an occasion for serious study. Due to her landscape or contextualization of gender formation within the period of colonial settlement—a spatial project—Morgan enables the Black female figure to briefly cross the stage of colonial settlement long enough for me to catch a glimpse of her during the clearing of the Native and the land. During this process of clearing, the Black female body becomes a unit of space and a form of non-human property. Katherine McKittrick has argued that the geographic processes of Transatlantic slavery embedded Black women in the landscape.<sup>14</sup> Thinking with McKittrick's (Black Feminist Studies) Black feminine geographic subject and Wilderson's (Black Studies) Black/Slave who has no place, I argue that the Black female makes the geographic possible but can never inhabit space or geography on the terms of the Settler/human.

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<sup>13</sup> Saidiya Hartman. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self Making in Nineteenth Century America*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>14</sup> Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and Cartographies of Struggle*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), p. xvii

The period of colonial settlement that makes the Black female slave a unit of space in my reading of Morgan's work is framed as a period constituted by genocide within Native Studies. In this field, colonization and settlement cannot be understood outside of conquest and genocide. Genocide and the attendant process of land theft by the Settler are central to the project of Native Studies. The recuperation of life through the ending of genocide, the return to an indigenous relationship to land—or Native sovereignty--inform this project. Native Studies argues that genocide constitutes the Native since conquest. Genocide as an ongoing process that shapes Native (non) existence has important implications for the ontological questions posed in this project.<sup>15</sup> The inseparability of genocide and settlement force me to orient my examinations of the production of space in ways that always index the disappearance of the native. The elimination of the Native also means the elimination of Native space and indigenous modes of relating to the land. Deterritorialization and reterritorialization are central analytics for Native Studies and that emphasis is brought to this project. In order to make space, people and their ways of existing are being erased.

Native feminisms have also brought acute attention to gender formation and sexuality in colonial conquest. Several Native feminist have argued that genocide and colonialism are structured through the Western imposition of gender categories and heteropatriarchy. The imposition of heteropatriarchy allowed for the gendered Native female body, and Native bodies in general, to become savagely “othered” and exterminated.<sup>16</sup> Recently Native feminist engagements with sexuality studies and their

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<sup>15</sup> See Ward Churchill. *A Little Matter of Genocide: Holocaust and Denial in the Americas 1492 to the Present*, (San Francisco: City Lights Publishers, 2001)

<sup>16</sup> See Smith, *Conquest*, 2005

critiques and contributions to settler colonial studies have developed a way of thinking about settler colonial power as subjectless.<sup>17</sup> Andrea Smith's intervention, in particular, has helped me to think about settler colonial power as a kind of productive and repressive power that could leave its trace in the space of slavery and anti-Black racism. Native feminist thinking that enables this kind of flexibility and fluidity breaks the hermeneutic seals that bound the spaces of Native genocide/settler colonialism and Black enslavement.

My own working definition of settler colonialism emerges from this body of material. I tend to privilege the conceptual and theoretical labor of Native feminist, as opposed to the newer field of settler colonial studies for a number of reasons. When I review the literature produced by Native feminist, I encounter a broader definition of settler colonialism. Settler colonialism within the work of Andrea Smith, Hunani Kay Trask and Marie Guerrero is at times used interchangeably with colonialism.<sup>18</sup> The elasticity of the terms colonialism and settler colonialism enables one to make conceptual links between conquest, genocide, heteropatriarchy, white supremacy, slavery and orientalism. We can think about these multiple forms of domination in relation to one another as opposed to being analogous. People of color and Black people can then start to think about these power formations in relation to one another rather than rank or compare them.

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<sup>17</sup> See Smith, "Queer Theory and Native Studies," 2010

<sup>18</sup> See Andrea Smith's, "Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy" in *Color of Violence Anthology: the INCITE Anthology*, eds INCITE: Women of Color Against Violence, (Cambridge: South End Press, 2006) , p. 67. Haunani-Kay Trask's, "The Color of Violence", in *Color of Violence Anthology: the INCITE Anthology*, eds INCITE: Women of Color Against Violence, (Cambridge: South End Press, 2006), 83; Marie Guerrero, "Civil Rights versus Sovereignty: Native American Women in Life and Land Struggles" In *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures* (eds.) M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Mohanty. (New York: Routledge, 1997), 103

This tendency to connect settler/colonialism to other forms of domination is particularly evident in Smith and Trask's contributions to the INCITE anthology. When Smith and Trask analyze colonialism and power they often gesture towards or explicitly advocate a politics of coalition.<sup>19</sup> This orientation towards coalition tends to inflect their theorizations of colonial and settler colonial power with an intersectional analytic that makes it possible for other forms of power, specifically slavery and capitalism to be in conversation with settler colonialism and genocide.<sup>20</sup> Though theorizations of settler colonial relations still tend to pivot around the Native/Settler binary, Native feminists are able to situate settler colonialism/colonialism in relationship to slavery. Within Native feminist thought, settler colonialism does not become a closed system or formation. Smith and Kauanui emphasize the contributions that Native feminisms make to theorizing sovereignty, nation-state and gender formation. Native feminist analytics are

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<sup>19</sup> For an example of this gesture towards coalition or a way of linking colonialism to other forms of oppression that people of color experience see Andrea Smith, *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2005).

<sup>20</sup> Smith also relates genocide and colonialism to other logics of white supremacy. Interrelation and perhaps a gesture towards intersectionality is evident in Smith's Three Pillars framework. Smith works to clarify in this essay that white supremacy does operate in a unitary manner. "This framework does not assume that racism and white supremacy is enacted in a singular fashion; rather white supremacy is constituted by separate and distinct, but still interrelated logics. Envision three pillars, one labeled Slavery/Capitalism, another labeled Genocide/Colonialism, and the last one labeled Orientalism/War, as well as arrows connecting each of the pillars together." Smith creates a diagrammatic of her pillars analogy. At certain moments the logics of colonialism, capitalism and Orientalism will intertwine and implicate and connect people of color. People of color are not theorized as innocent victims of the violence each logic produces, but are theorized as participants in one another's oppression. However, within this model, slavery and capitalism are not theorized as logics that constitute colonialism in the way that Native genocide is. See "Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy," p. 67. However, In this dissertation, I will work to theorize slavery and capitalism as formations that also constitute settler colonialism.

intersectional analytics that help advance dialogue and movements committed to global liberation.<sup>21</sup>

The emerging field of settler colonial studies is also an important site of engagement for this project. Often situated in the settler colonial states of Australia, Canada, Israel and South Africa the scholarship's emphasis is focused on the dynamic between the Settler and the Native. This binary orients discussions towards the conflict and crisis of the Settler order, specifically the subject formation of the Settler and the elimination of the Native. What I appreciate about the field is the unflinching focus on native elimination. Genocide and the Native/Settler conflict is brought into the contemporary moment. Patrick Wolfe, premier scholar and one of the founding members of the field has theorized that the genocide/ "invasion is a structure, not an event."<sup>22</sup>

The settler colonialism blog administered by Edward Cavanagh and Lorenzo Veracini, argues that settler colonial studies is important enough to justify a field of its own. The unique nature of settler colonialism is explained in the definition offered on the blog: "Settler colonialism is a global and transnational phenomenon, and as much a thing of the past as a thing of the present. There is no such thing as neo-settler colonialism or post-settler colonialism because settler colonialism is a resilient formation that rarely ends." Not all migrants are Settlers, as Patrick Wolfe has noted; Settlers come to stay. They are founders of political orders who carry with them a distinct sovereign capacity. And settler colonialism is not colonialism: Settlers want Indigenous people to vanish (but

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<sup>21</sup> In 2008, *American Quarterly* published a roundtable discussion entitled, "Forum: Native Feminisms Without Apology." See Andrea Smith and J. Kehualani Kauanui. "Native Feminisms Engage American Studies." *American Quarterly* 60, no. 2 (2008): 241-249.

<sup>22</sup> Patrick Wolfe. *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event* (London: Cassell, 1999), p. 3

can make use of their labour before they are made to disappear). Wolfe's work is significant in that it argues that there is no set or predictable way in which settler colonial logics of indigenous elimination and the accumulation of land will necessarily come about. The diffuse, and Foucauldian nature of the networks of power involved in settler colonial relations resonates with other poststructuralist analytics of power within cultural studies and critical theory.<sup>23</sup>

Wolfe and other scholars situating themselves within settler colonial studies rely heavily on Foucault's work in order to track how power and subject formation shifts over time. Foucault's genealogical approach to power provides an analytic frame that can trace the multiplicative and diffuse nature of power, specifically settler colonial power. As white scholars and Foucauldians their scholarship is able to travel and gain a currency that has been difficult for many Native scholars who have been making similar claims longer and explicitly naming settler colonial relations for years. Native scholars also tend to push the boundaries—sometimes exploding them—of decolonial imaginaries into

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<sup>23</sup> Surveying the essays in the first and second volumes of the journal *Settler colonial studies*, one finds several references to Foucault's force and influence within the fields of colonial and settler colonial studies. For example, contributing scholars to the journal such as Edward Cavanaugh, Scott Morgensen and even Michelle Erai, rely heavily on Foucauldian frames. Edward Cavanaugh's review of new literature in the field of settler colonial studies calls the use of Foucault familiar and expected. Remarking on Libby Porter's book: *Unlearning the Colonial Cultures of Planning*, Cavanaugh states, 'Using a familiar mix of Foucauldian and postcolonial theory, Porter argues that the discourse and practice of planning has created a hierarchisation of space that traps indigenous subjectivities (and is hence antithetical to Indigenous sovereignty and autonomy).' See Edward Cavanaugh. "Review Essay: Discussing Settler Colonialism's Spatial Cultures." *Settler colonial studies* 1, no. 1 (2011), p. 162. Scott Lauria Morgensen's ground breaking work has consistently argued that "Settler colonialism is exemplary of the processes of biopower theorized by Giorgio Agamben and Michel Foucault." See Scott Morgensen. "The Biopolitics of Settler Colonialism: Right Here, Right Now." *Settler colonial studies* 1, no. 1 (2011), p. 52

Michelle Erai in a review of the second volume of the journal remarked on the value of Foucauldian frames for making aspects of Maori masculinity accessible. Erai states, "The application of Foucault to a unassailable, authentic Maori-ness, an elitism mediated through post and neo-colonial subjectivities, and rooted in 'cultural truths' has described something that has always felt inherently and painfully out of my reach. See Michelle Erai. "Responding." *Settler colonial studies* 2, no. 2 (2012), p. 193.

places that settler colonial studies has yet to venture. Native feminists have often asked whether the settler nation or nation-states in general should even exist, which travels far beyond merely critiquing settler colonial states.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, settler colonial studies, unlike Native feminisms, posits settler colonialism as distinct, bounded, closed. At best Settler colonialism is in a dialectical relationship with colonialism, but it is not the same as colonialism.<sup>25</sup> It can and never should be used interchangeably, regardless of the spirit and intent in which it is used. Settler colonial studies as a field, creates disciplinary boundaries around settler colonialism and colonialism. It is difficult to think about settler colonialism's relationship to Blackness, and the relation of Blackness to settler colonialism within settler colonial studies. While Native Studies as a field has had to grapple with Blackness, whether willingly or reluctantly; settler colonial studies still struggles to do so in any sustained way. Within settler colonial Studies, I struggle to situate Black presence.

While, I have argued that within Black Studies, Native Studies, and settler colonial studies there are silences and inarticulate speech acts, I cannot pretend that there

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<sup>24</sup> See Andrea Smith's "American Studies without America: Native Feminisms and the Nation State." *American Quarterly* 60, no. 2, (2008), p. 312. In this article Smith presents a vision of 'indigenous sovereignty and nationhood predicated on interrelatedness and responsibility.' This vision stands 'in opposition to nation-states which are based on control over territory.' Further she asks the question, should we presume that the US will always exist? Decolonization within settler colonial studies often fall short of imagining the destruction of the nation-state. For example, Lorenzo Veracini problematically defines decolonization—or states what it is not—on behalf of indigenous communities. Further he argues that the Settler-indigenous relationship must continue to end settler colonialism, and that demands for the Settler to "go away" can be equated with Native genocide. See Lorenzo Veracini. "Introducing settler colonial studies." *settler colonial studies* 1, no. 1 (2011), p.7

<sup>25</sup> Sometimes settler colonial forms operate within colonial ones, sometimes they subvert them, sometimes they replace them. But even if colonialism and settler colonialism interpenetrate and overlap, they remain separate as they co-define each other."Cavanagh and Veracini argue adamantly that settler colonialism and colonialism are not the same. They may "interpenetrate and overlap" but they need to theorized in their own right. See Edward Cavanagh and Lorenzo Veracini,, definition of settler colonialism, <http://Settlercolonialstudies.org/about-this-blog/>, 2010

has been no mention of the intersecting lives and experiences of Black and Native peoples. Certainly Black people have crossed the minds of Native scholars and Native life has interested the Black scholar. Within Black Studies and Native Studies, some scholars have developed approaches to understanding how the lives of Black and Native peoples in the Americas intersect.<sup>26</sup> Most of the scholarship produced by these fields is generated by the disciplines of History, Literature and Sociology. Additionally most of these disciplinary engagements with the issue tend to produce “discovery narratives.”

By “discovery narratives,” I mean these disciplines attempt to uncover and or prove the existence of histories of Black and Native co-existence, intermarriage, alliance and or conflict. My work benefits immensely from the archival, historical, literary and sociological work that historicizes and theorizes the ways that Black and Native lives are intertwined in the Western Hemisphere. However, I am concerned with the analytic and conceptual frames that make Black people and Native people and slavery and Settler colonialism appear as if they are isolated communities and discrete historical processes. Rarely do scholars ask why it is that an intersectional frame needs to be applied—after the fact—in order to discover always already interconnected experiences and power formations. The conceptual tools of “discovery” assume a binary that must be overcome. A part of my work’s theoretical contribution is examining how this binary or chasm is produced.

My scholarship attempts to identify the epistemic, analytic, pedagogical and institutional traditions that have sequestered settler colonialism, Native Studies, slavery and Black Studies to separate and bounded realms of study that then have to be brought

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<sup>26</sup> See Tiya Miles and Sharon Holland, *Crossing Waters, Crossing Worlds: The African Diaspora in Indian Country*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

back together. My work poses the following questions: how might examining the ways that Black femaleness is formed at intersection of slavery and settler colonialism tell us more about how the landscapes of slavery and settler colonialism are created? What analytical tools and vocabulary do we need to develop in order to simultaneously bring into view the productive and repressive powers of settler colonialism and slavery/anti-Black racism? How are the imagined and material spaces that are currently over determined by a discourse of conflict (genocide, sovereignty) between white Settlers and Natives also shaped by Black presence? How are the landscapes and analytics of slavery that currently are over determined by Master and Slave relations also structured by Native genocide and settler space making practices. Finally, I ask, how do we develop methodological tools to track the co-constituting nature of power relations over time?

For a method, I turn my attention to bodies and space. An interdisciplinary spatial methodology can help us develop simultaneous vision. Scholars within social and critical geography argue for sustained attention to the dialectical process of the production of space and subjects.<sup>27</sup> A spatial analysis allows us to pay attention to interlocking systems of power as they simultaneously produce bodies and space. Attending to space, particularly cultural landscapes, also creates conceptual space to think about the ways that multiple temporal periods and forms of power coexist as palimpsests.<sup>28</sup> When we confront the challenge of bringing together disappearing Native bodies that are supposed to be eliminated and fungible Black bodies that are supposed to multiply, we encounter

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27 Sherene Razack. *Race, Space and the Law: Mapping White Settler Society*. (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2002).

28 Richard Schein, "A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting an American Scene." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 87, no. 4 (1997): 660-680.

divergent analytical lines. Traditional disciplinary approaches that separate History, Sociology and English must overcome these divergent analytics and bodies. Within traditional disciplinary approaches to discovering the points of contact, intersectionality becomes an applied project rather than a way of thinking and theorizing. I privilege a spatial analysis because of the kind of conceptual and analytical bridging that it enables. This analytical bridging allows me to disrupt some of the epistemic, intellectual, pedagogical and institutional traditions that have sequestered Black/Feminist Studies, Native/Feminist Studies and settler colonial studies. By focusing on the production of bodies and landscapes as dynamic formations, I overcome the trap of looking for static and inert artifacts and time bound events and interactions between people that may or may not bump into one another. Instead, I track the Black female body as a process that is constituted by and constitutes landscapes. My mapping of the Black female body and settler colonial landscapes is a form of critical geography.

Critical geography as a field encourages interdisciplinary approaches to geographic inquiry. Due to critical geography's fluid engagement with a number of disciplinary methods, I am able to analyze novels, films, a federally sponsored sociological study, engage in a critique of the field of ethnography and re-inhabit ceremonies in order to analyze how space and subjects are produced. In addition to the myriad possibilities offered by its expansive methodological approaches, critical geography has also produced a body of scholarship on race and space that explicitly engages Black geographies.

The work of Katherine McKittrick, Clyde Woods and Ruthie Gilmore has provided a way of thinking about Blackness as always already in conversation with the

production of space in North America.<sup>29</sup> Black and Critical geographies have already made the argument that Black people are embedded in the spatial projects of the Americas. I will expand on these contributions by arguing that the production of settler space in the Americas, which is often over determined by Native and White bodies and spaces, is also a spatial practice that requires the production of Black bodies.

Finally, my interdisciplinary method is committed to a simultaneity of vision. This simultaneous and syncretizing way of seeing and knowing is an epistemic tradition of Black and Women of Color cultural workers, spiritualists and intellectuals. The texts and sources that I use to see and think with in new ways require new reading practices and methodologies. My method of analyzing texts and discourse relies on non-traditional epistemologies that challenge Western modes of knowing. These epistemologies and new ways of seeing often require new temporal frames. *In the Clearing's* decolonial sense of time relies on the palimpsest and other non-chronological modes that can appear to congeal centuries and eras into a viewable frame. This projects temporality seeks to make eras and events that seem remote and unrelated into proximity.

Most of the primary texts that I use in this project are creative and cultural projects. As creative and artistic productions, the ways that they produce knowledge often work outside of the epistemological frames of coloniality. Art tends to push us to think outside of the typical regimes of representation and the conventional links and relationships produced between the signifier and signified that converge at the sign.

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<sup>29</sup> See Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods. *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*. (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2007). Ruth Wilson Gilmore. "Fatal couplings of power and difference: Notes on racism and geography." *The Professional Geographer* 54, no. 1 (2002): 15-24.; Clyde Woods. "Life after death." *The Professional Geographer* 54, no. 1 (2002): 62-66.

For example, Julie Dash's cinematic eye is used to expose the limits of sight as the primary mode of perceiving and knowing. Dash's projection of Black woman's bodies on film and the landscapes requires that we decolonize our retinas and use our eyes, ears, and other senses in new ways. Decolonizing sight through a Black women's cinematic eye enables one to see familiar landscapes in new ways. Julie Dash's film and novel, *Daughters of the Dust*, will act as primary texts that teach us how to see both settler colonial and slave-making power at the same time. While Dash's cinematic vision is used for a new kind of multi-sensory sight, her novel is used to challenge textual hierarchies and the authority of settler colonial narratives.

Dash's novel is used to re-read an archive of a Settler. Her novel is employed to rewrite the narrative of settlement and challenge the archive as the originary and legitimate site of knowledge production. I also use the multidisciplinary texts (poems, essays, fiction, polemics) found in the anthology *The Black Woman* in order to re-theorize space. *The Black Woman* contains theorizations of space at the intersection of settler colonialism and anti-Black racism/slavery that emerge from Black women's everyday experiences.

Finally, I recollect the ceremony work of Black and Native women in the group Toronto INCITE as another site of knowledge production. The space of the ceremony produces ways of knowing that exceed and often defy Western reason. As I re-inhabit the ceremony space, I also reconsider whether my method can be described or contained by the practice of ethnography. While this project uses interdisciplinary methods, it also begins to engage a discussion of transdisciplinarity that may help advance the work that scrutinizes the formation of the disciplines. Interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary

methods also force us to consider new ways of conceptualizing, talking about and imagining space, bodies and power. My method allows us to see the ways that different forms of power bleed into and co-constitute one another.

We must consider that Settler colonialism shapes and constitutes Black life, specifically slavery and its afterlife in America. While slavery and anti-Black racism should be active and robust analytic frames that guide Black Studies and help us understand Black subjectivity in the Western Hemisphere, settler colonialism also structures Black life. The genocide of Native peoples, the perpetual making of Settler space and Settler subjectivity—as unfettered self actualization—do not immediately stop existing as forms of power when they run into Black bodies. The way that settler colonial power looks and manifests itself just changes; it does not stop.

Settler colonialism, as a subjectless discourse, is a form of productive power that touches all that live in the US and Settler colonial nations.<sup>30</sup> Though it touches and shapes everyone's life it does so in very different ways. For the purposes of my own research I am arguing that settler colonialism's normalizing power enacts genocide against Native peoples (disappears Native people) but it also shapes and structures anti-Black racism. The ontological positions that were created by slavery, specifically the

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<sup>30</sup> I draw upon Andrea Smith's notion that the normalizing power of settler colonialism structures all of society not just those who are indigenous. See Andrea Smith, "Queer Theory and Native Studies: The Heteronormativity of Settler Colonialism," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 16.1-2, (Winter 2010), p.44. For the purposes of my own research I am arguing that settler colonialism's normalizing power enacts genocide against Native peoples (disappears Native people) but it also shapes and structures anti-Black racism. Settler colonial power which works through the institutions, everyday cultures and spatial practices of slavery create the plantation as a key spatial unit of Black captivity and Native disappearance. Settler colonialism's use of the slave body to make settled space (the plantation) also produces Black bodies as property. Post emancipation, settler colonialism seeks to eliminate the Black body from the Settler's landscape. Settler colonialism seeks to eliminate the Black body. Black bodies are contained (mass incarceration), killed and on rare occasion assimilated into settler civil society.

Slave are still alive and well however, settler colonial power intersects with, works through and structures the repressive and productive power that makes the Black captive fungible and socially dead. Throughout, *In the Clearing* poses the question, in what ways does settler colonial power help structure slavery and anti-Black racism?

This project ultimately argues that slavery and anti-Black racism are not adequate to fully understand the material and discursive processes that create Blackness in all of its embodied genres in North America. Slavery and anti-Black racism are also not the only repressive powers that make the Black body abject, fungible and situated at the outer limits of being-ness. Both slavery and settler colonialism structure modernity and need to be fully conceptualized as forms of power that help constitute Blackness.

Conceptualizing the ways that settler colonialism and slavery co-constitute one another is an essential component of this dissertation.

### **Landscapes and Bodies**

This study identifies landscapes where we can observe the power of settler colonialism and slavery converging at the site of the Black female body. Depending on the landscape/context, I will focus on the salience of either slavery or settler colonialism during a particular situation. I do not, however set up a causal relationship. I am not interested in arguing that the plantation or slavery produces settler colonialism or that settler colonialism produces the plantation and slavery. As I make sense of each landscape in my project, settler colonial power may appear to be in the foreground at one scene and then may seem to be slavery's background at another location. What I am interested in is making settler colonial power visible when we think slavery and its repressive and productive (discursive) power is the only force operating at the scene. At

the same time, I am also working to reveal that anti-Black racism's productive and repressive power are also in play when the settler is eliminating the Native and clearing the land. Settler colonialism and slavery do not exist in any predictable dialectical relation to one another. Their interplay and coordinates are at times unpredictable. I try to capture moments when their intertwined power materializes as bodies and landscapes.

In order for the scope of my project to be manageable, I focus on the significance of Black female bodies to both slavery and settler colonialism. However, the question that is foregrounded in this project is: what do Black women have to do with Settler colonialism? This is the question that is asked the least within the fields of Black Studies, Native Studies and settler Colonial Studies. Therefore this is the question that weighs on this project. It is also a question that I was forced to ask myself as I contemplated the (im)possibility of a coalition between Black and Native Women for a two year period (2006-2008) in Toronto, Canada. While living in Toronto, I was often required to situate myself in relationship to Native peoples, White Settlers and Turtle Island. I often lacked the language to do so.

Native feminist Bonita Lawrence also struggled to name the unique relationship that Black people have to Native peoples and the land in the settler colonial nation-state of Canada. Her aphasia also brought me to this project. In 2006, I attended a conference in Toronto where I heard a Native feminist call Black people "Black Settlers." I surmise that this was partly due to frustration and partially due to a lack of language.<sup>31</sup> This

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<sup>31</sup> In 2006, I attended a conference called *Diasporic Hegemonies: Race, Gender, Sexuality and the Politics of Feminist Transnationalism* at the University of Toronto (October 19-21, 2006). During the concluding plenary Bonita Lawrence was trying to communicate to scholars specializing in African Diaspora studies the need for a more rigorous engagement with the ways in which Black people become implicated in maintaining the Canadian settler state's project of Native genocide. In what appeared to be a moment of

project is largely animated by this curious conjunction, “Black Settler,” which I argue misnames Black people’s relationship to Settlers, settlement and Native peoples. The aphasic condition that Lawrence, Native feminisms and even Black Studies suffer from is what this project seeks to rectify. Black women, like myself, need a way to name ourselves amidst settler colonial relations that shape our everyday experiences.

Settler colonialism and its various forms of power are often only theorized through the Native/Settler binary. A sole focus on the antagonism between the Native and the Settler obscures the ways that settler colonial power functions and maintains itself off the frontier and away from the bodies of the Native and the Settler. The off-the-frontier manifestations of settler colonialism’s productive and repressive power, specifically at the location of Black female bodies, are the sites of analysis that this project aims to bring into focus. This dissertation tracks and plots how Black female bodies make the settlement of colonial landscapes both possible and impossible.

### **Black Female Bodies**

*In the Clearing* examines the Black female figure as a trope for both unfettered and impeded spatial expansion in the settler colonial states of the U.S. and to some extent Canada. I examine the construction of Black female bodies during slavery and after Emancipation. I argue that Black female slave bodies are valuable to both the project of settler colonial spatial expansion and slavery’s production of fungible forms of property.

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frustration and I argue a lack of available language, Lawrence referred to Black people residing in Canada as “Black Settlers.” Later, in a 2009 article co-authored with Zainab Amadahy she would retract her use of the term “Black Settler” and argue that Blacks cannot truly be Settlers as people forced to take part in settlement processes. See Bonita Lawrence and Zainab Amadahy, “Indigenous People and Black Peoples in Canada: Settlers or Allies?” in *Breaching the Colonial Contract: Anti-Colonialism in US and Canada*, Editor, Arlo Kemp, (Toronto: Springer Press, 2009) My project analyzes the relationships between Black bodies, settlement, the land, Native peoples and Settlers.

During slavery they represent ever expanding bodies and land. For example, during slavery the making of Black female slaves facilitates the production of Settler space, the clearing of Native land and the accumulation of property. The figure of the Black female for the Settler functions as a metonym for unending increase, expansion and malleability (a kind of Hartmanian fungibility) that enables the Settler to imagine land, property and sexuality as spatial concepts that denote expansion and settlement.<sup>32</sup>

The Black female form in the New World appears as a metaphor for terra nullius, the plantation (or the planting of settlements), unfettered access to property, and the unending reproduction of bodies and land. When the Settler surveys the Black female body, the Settler can imagine their land, territory, property and spatial coordinates expanding. The construction of the Black female slave body as fungible and a site of accumulation is as much a product of the Settler's imagination as it is the slave master's.<sup>33</sup> Black female bodies during slavery become metaphors for unending increase in bodies, land and space. The power of the concept of property, particularly the fungible slave, marks the Black female body a site where the convergence of settler colonialism and slavery become viable and coherent. Property as a concept of unending possibility

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<sup>32</sup> I explore this concept more in chapter one. In chapter one I argue that the Black female body during the periods of colonial settlement in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries is actually imagined as space. The Black female body is in a sense a state of flux, malleability and perpetual increase. Much like Hortense Spillers argues in *Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book*, "the female body and the male body become a territory of cultural and political maneuver." (see p. 67, Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book", *Diacritics* 17, No. 2, Summer 1987). I, like Spillers, argue that at times that female gender is applied to the Black body in order to make property and central to my project make the plantation plot, or settled space for the Settler/Slave Master.

<sup>33</sup> Settler colonial power which works through the institutions, everyday cultures and spatial practices of slavery create the plantation as a key spatial unit of Black captivity and Native disappearance. Settler colonialism's use of the slave body to make settled space (the plantation) also produces Black bodies as property. Post emancipation, settler colonialism seeks to eliminate the Black body from the Settler's landscape. Settler colonialism, post emancipation, seeks to eliminate the Black body. Black bodies are contained (mass incarceration), killed and on rare occasion assimilated into Settler civil society.

that cognitively orders the mind of the Settler and master enables their surveying eyes to see the potential yield of both bodies and land as commodities when viewing the Black female body.

Post Emancipation (off the plantation) however, in slavery's afterlife<sup>34</sup>, Black female bodies are constructed and represented as impeding spatial expansion and frustrating efforts to turn Black female flesh into property. Black female bodies are seen as reproducers of surplus populations that get in the way of expansion and the accumulation of capital. Off the plantation, Black female bodies must be contained. These unruly and excessive—as opposed to productive—Black female bodies that appear in my work do so as tropes of disorganization, unfit mothers, a threat to the built environment and chaos inducing transnational subjects working with Native women in the space of coalition. The ways that these Black women's bodies disrupt settlement (and its discourses) and settler colonial landscapes beg for a new grammar in which to theorize the presence of Black bodies in Settler colonial nation states. By using cultures and practices of everyday life and the social production of space as modes of analysis, I am able to theorize the ways that Black female bodies function as a location where slavery (anti-Black racism) and settler colonialism meet.

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<sup>34</sup> Scholars who would name themselves or write within the tradition of Afropessimists use the term "slavery's afterlife"/afterlife of slavery as a way of talking about how the relationship between the slave and their status as fungible property did not substantively change after emancipation. Many Afropessimists rely on the work of Saidiya Hartman. Saidiya Hartman argues in *Scenes of Subjection*, that emancipation functions as "both a breach with slavery and a point of transition to what looks more like the reorganization of the plantation system than self-possession, citizenship, or liberty for the "freed." See Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self Making in Nineteenth Century America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 12

## “The Black Female Body”

Throughout this project I repeatedly use the term, “the Black female body.” At times, I also refer to the “Black female slave body,” and “Black female bodies.” Though the term, “the Black female body” and other derivatives may seem reductive and empty, I use the term to denote an open and dynamic location where multiple meanings and associations are made, remade and disassembled.<sup>35</sup> However, when I am referring to agentive and embodied subjects—including myself—I use the term Black woman or women. As a sign, idea, symbol and representation, “the Black female body” functions as a spatial trope throughout this project. “The Black female” form is an imagined space of unending possibility—or useability—within the imaginaries of slavery and settler colonialism. Its unending potential also contains a capacity for chaos and disorder, particularly when Black women live outside of settler colonialism and slavery’s property-making mandate. The Black female body as a spatial trope has the potential for order or chaos.

Sheri L. Parks argues that the “Sacred Dark Feminine” has functioned as a Jungian archetype worldwide.<sup>36</sup> Given its associations with creation and origin myths as

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<sup>35</sup> For scholarship on the significance of the Black female body as a flexible sign, See Deborah Willis and Carla Williams. *The Black female body*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002); Ifi Amadiume. *Black Womanhood: Images, Icons, and Ideologies of the African Body*. Edited by Barbara Thompson. (Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, 2008), p. 65. In *Black Womanhood* there are multiple discussions of the ways that the image of the Black female body is taken up within a number of worldviews. For example, Mami Wata’s Black female embodiment as a water goddess in West Africa reframed through the lens of Capitalism is transformed into a representation of flexibility, exchange and liquidity. On April 24, 2009, I attended a talk given by Nicholas Mirzoeff entitled *Immersion: Visuality from Slavery to Katrina*. Mirzoeff plays with the idea that white people misappropriated the Mami Wata figure/cosmogram and applied its fluidity, collapsing of spheres and boundaries and imagery of water as a metaphor for the liquidity and flexibility of capital.

<sup>36</sup> Sheri L. Parks. *Fierce Angels: The Strong Black Woman in American Life and Culture*. (New York: Ballantine Books, 2010), p. 5 ‘As a central image passed down the line of generations in various forms’

well as its links to the theory of dark matter or energy in science; I argue that the Black feminine figure is also an ideal trope for space.<sup>37</sup> She is an ideal trope for space, specifically in the context of settler colonialism. Parks asserts that “English colonists, many of them Protestant, also inherited a rich archetypal concept of the Black feminine.”<sup>38</sup> Whether this concept was hardwired into the psyches of English colonists or not, the Black female body did come to function as symbol for expansiveness and increase that advances the Settler’s desire for the accumulation of land and space. While “the Black female body” does not function as a stand in for Black people (men, children, and other gender variation), Black female embodiment is centralized in this study because of its malleability. The Black female body as sign/symbol/archetype has a representational and theoretical flexibility that is invaluable to this project’s examination of space and power. Additionally, the biopolitical/necropolitical project of managing the Black population which organizes both slavery and settler colonialism is especially interested in Black (reproductive) femaleness.

In this study, Black female bodies and their landscapes appear as unstable and dynamic formations. As formations they are in states of flux. It is important that the reader pays attention to the ways that the Black female form can shift our attention and help us perceive the ways that power presents and hides itself in the landscape.

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this archetype that contains the characteristics of balance, paradox, fluidity and energy is so commonly occurring that Jung argued that it is hardwired in humans.’

<sup>37</sup> Parks documents the various uses of the Dark Sacred Feminine in ancient myth to science. See *Fierce Angels*, p. 2. I extend on the generative capacities of the Dark Sacred Feminine and conceptualize Black femaleness/femininity as space in a settler colonial context.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12

## Chapters

Throughout, the figure of the Black female functions as a punctum point, that disrupts “colonial regimes of visibility” which direct us to see settler colonial power and the power that makes the slave as distinct and unrelated.<sup>39</sup> I argue that the visual/conceptual regime of settler colonialism attempts to create landscapes that make slavery seem unrelated to and separate from settler colonial power. My work disrupts a number of cognitive maps and frames that work to sequester Native Studies, Black Studies and settler colonial studies. Each chapter introduces sites of analysis, new vocabulary and connects theoretical traditions and methods that enable Black female bodies which are rarely imagined on settler colonial landscapes to be placed within its analytical frames.

This dissertation is divided into two parts. Part one theorizes Black female gender formation on what I call the “settlement-plantation.” Chapters Two and Three argue that this particular raced and gendered slave body as well as the location of captivity the – “settlement-plantation”—are spaces where we can see the simultaneous power of slavery and Settler colonialism. In fact, the Black female slave body is a unit of the “settlement-plantation.”

Chapter Two analyzes Julie Dash’s film, *Daughters of the Dust*. In this chapter, I read the indigo stained hands of Nana Peasant as an optic that simultaneously marks the

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<sup>39</sup> Amar Wahab, “Race, Gender and Visibility: Regulating Indian Women Subjects in the Colonial Caribbean,” *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies*, Issue 2, 2008, p. 1 Wahab argues that “colonial regimes of visibility...discursively construct, position and regulate colonial subjects” as they produce “a seemingly coherent, intimate and consensual code of social relations”. Similar to Wahab, I argue that the “visual [and conceptual] contract” of Settler colonialism attempts to produce narratives that Settler colonialism and slavery as incommensurable and disparate power formations.

violence of slavery and the violence required to clear the Native body, settle Native land and cultivate indigo. I argue that these indigo hands index slavery but also exceed the frame of slavery and direct our gaze to conquest/settler colonialism as another frame to consider. Chapter Three re-reads a portion of Eliza Lucas Pinckney's archive, in the form of her *Letterbook*, through Julie Dash's novelic adaption of her film *Daughters of the Dust*. In my re-reading, I explore the ways that Eliza Lucas Pinckney secured her ontological position as a Settler-Master (human) through settling the land and "settling" her slave Elizabeth Peazant. Settlement is redefined as a space producing and subject producing act that is always happening in relationship to the self actualization of the Settler, the death of the Native and the negation of the Slave.

Part two theorizes Black female gender formation off the site of the "settlement-plantation." This section of the dissertation tracks the Black female body as a form of spatial chaos that threatens the settler colonial social-spatial order. Chapters Four and Five locate the simultaneous power of slavery/settler colonialism within post-Emancipation discourses like the "Black Matriarch," Black female criminality and within the context of Black and Native women's coalition work. Chapter Four analyzes the Moynihan Report as more than a sociological text that merely reproduces discourses of Black deviance; and re-conceptualizes it as a spatial document that also naturalizes Native genocide and white Settler gender and sexuality. In Chapter Five, I re-inhabit Black feminine spatial disorder as I recollect my experiences with the INCITE Toronto group from 2006 to 2008. Through an autobiographic practice of remembering and re-inhabiting the ceremony work the Black and Native women of INCITE enacted, I reflect

on the ways that our bodies reconfigured conventional notions of political work, Women of Color feminisms and coalitional politics.

This dissertation concludes with a discussion of politics and orienting frames that take up a Lordean notion of chaos, Fanon's end of the world, a politics of refusal, queer failure and Black and Native women's ethics of flux. In the conclusion, I expound on the notion of flux as an ontological state of fungible Black femaleness on settler colonial landscapes and as a viable political praxis. Being in flux helps us disrupt relationships to one another that are always already violently entangled by the virtue of residing in the Western hemisphere. Flux also helps us create new and life-affirming relationships that our current spatial desires within settler colonial forms of sociality prevent us from fully imagining.

## Chapter Two: Reading Nana Peasant's Palms: Seeing the Settlement-Plantation

Once you feel de rhythm, you mind tell you how to see.<sup>1</sup>

--Ben, *Daughters of the Dust: A Novel*

And I think the challenge of *Daughters of the Dust*, for any spectator, is to be able to look at blackness with a new eye.<sup>2</sup>

--bell hooks, "Dialogue Between bell hooks and Julie Dash"

I begin this chapter with a meditation on sight. In the West, sight has been deemed the originating locus or site of knowledge production. Julie Dash's character Ben, in her novel *Daughters of the Dust*, allows us to reconsider how one gains or comes into knowledge. Ben shares with his cousin Amelia, who comes from New York initially to study her Gullah family in the Sea Islands, the kinetic power of the ritual comp se.<sup>3</sup> Ben tells Amelia about the different senses involved in the West African derived form of sparring, dance and ritualistic movements that he practices with his male family members. Explaining how the senses work when one engages in comp se, Ben tells her that "you feel de rhythm" and then "you mind tell you how to see."<sup>4</sup> One feels, the mind processes the feelings, and comes to know something. After one has felt, the mind then tells the eyes how to see.

This arrangement, or rearrangement, of the senses is interesting for a number of reasons. For one, many different senses are marshaled in order to enable one to see.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The character Ben, who is the protagonist Amelia's cousin in the novel *Daughters of the Dust*, makes this statement about how the senses function when engaged in the West African traditions of Comp se. Julie Dash, *Daughters of the Dust: A Novel*, (New York: Vintage, 1997), p. 165

<sup>2</sup> Julie Dash, "Dialogue Between bell hooks and Julie Dash," in *Daughters of the Dust: The Making of an African American Woman's Film*, (New York: The New Press, 1992), p. 40

<sup>3</sup> An African derived martial arts and dance form that West Africans derived. Its art/military form was retained by Blacks who became slaves in the Gullah Sea Islands of the Western Hemisphere. Dash depicts a few renditions of the art form in both the novel and her film.

<sup>4</sup> Dash, *Daughters of the Dust: A Novel*, p. 165

<sup>5</sup> Oyeronke Oyewumi. *The Invention of Women: Making An African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997)

Additionally, seeing is not privileged as the sense that instantiates knowing or cognitive activity. Sight is only possible after one has felt. The body's feeling of the rhythm tells the mind what the eyes are able to see.

In this chapter, I explore the possibility of decolonizing sight. Decolonizing sight requires that we understand what directs our sight. It also means that we interrogate a social world ordered by conquest. What kinds of inner eyes direct the way that we view bodies and space in settler societies?<sup>6</sup> How have the ways that we have been taught to survive, self actualize and know ourselves in settler societies shaped the ways that we look, see and know? In this chapter, I focus on the visual orders and optic regimes of settler colonialism as sites of knowledge creation and power that skew our vision. In this chapter, we will be developing new ways of looking at old landscapes.

I draw upon the creative work of Julie Dash and Catherine McKinley, and the scholarly writing of Sylvia Wynter, Jennifer Morgan, Saidiya Hartman, Hortense Spillers, Frank Wilderson and Oyeronke Oyewumi in order to challenge the visual and cognitive regimes of the settler colonial order. These cultural producers and theorists help us apprehend, conceptualize, and develop inner eyes that help us visualize the ways that Blackness and slavery shape the settler colonial landscape. They help us bring the plantation and the body of the slave back into settler colonialism's analytic frames. These new units of analysis and conceptual tools can help change our inner eyes so that

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<sup>6</sup> Sylvia Wynter borrows the term "inner eyes" from Ralph Ellison's novel *Invisible Man*. Wynter uses the term to explain the kinds of conceptual frames and what Wynter calls "order of consciousness" that direct our vision or sight in America. See Sylvia Wynter, "On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory, and Re-Imprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, of Desetre: Black Studies Toward the Human Project," in *Not Only The Master's Tools: African American Studies in Theory and Practice*, ed. Lewis Gordon (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2006), p. 146

we can see how settler colonialism and slavery structure one another. They make simultaneous vision possible.<sup>7</sup>

Simultaneous vision is difficult to obtain. It requires that we retrain our thought, inner eyes and eyes to adjust their focus in order to attend to the ephemeral and moving traces of power that at times recede or disappear into the background or a realm of the seemingly invisible depending on the landscape. The power of settler colonialism's and slavery's spatial and ontological formations does not appear on the landscape with equal intensity, in the same hue, or equally positioned on the landscape. At times the productive and repressive power that makes the slave will be the foreground color and the power of settler colonialism will provide a bit of texture. The texture in the background is just as crucial as the foreground color.

My reorganization of these units of analysis is what is new. Scholars of slavery and settler colonialism have inherited analytic units like the plantation, the homestead/settlement, the Master, the Settler, the Slave which often work to sequester Native Studies, Black Studies, settler colonial studies and scholarship on slavery. I want to reframe some of the key analytics from each of these fields of study by looking at them simultaneously. However, what happens when we think about the plantation as a result of settler colonial spatial patterns? What is possible when we ask, how is Native subjectivity and space obliterated by the plantation? What is possible when ask, how is

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<sup>7</sup> Simultaneous vision is the ability to see multiple things happening at one time. I developed this term in order to talk about the possibility of seeing slavery and settler colonialism as modes of power that function at the same time. Later in the chapter, I will discuss further the way that this form of sight is a decolonized form of vision and how it is linked to a critique of the Western notion of sight as the locus of knowledge.

the slave master also a settler? Reframing allows us to view key units of analysis in new ways and think about them as co-constituting one another.

The amalgamations and hybrids that I introduce include: the conceptualization of conquest-slavery as an assemblage of productive and repressive power, the settlement/plantation as a hybrid spatial unit, and the settled-slave as a bodily formation at the intersections of conquest-slavery. I also borrow the ontological category of the Settler-Master from scholar Frank Wilderson in order to argue that the master and the settler were not only intimate friends but in fact are the same person.<sup>8</sup> These hybrids and amalgamations are all mediated by space and the where of racial-sexual difference.<sup>9</sup> Each of the four amalgams is formed due to contestations over and the need for expansion, specifically the expansion and accumulation of property. As modern conflicts over the control of land and bodies, these new analytics are best understood if analyzed through the production of settler and master spaces and spatial practices. These spaces and spatial practices happen at various scales. Functioning at the scale of the hemisphere, the settlement/plantation-plot, the slave body, the Native body and the Settler-Master (or human subject) position; all of these locations reference a spatial struggle. Additionally, as contested sites they also index sites of contradiction, instability and agentive possibility.

Paying attention to the ways that turning Black female bodies into slaves functions as a mode of space-making in the Western hemisphere, specifically in settler

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<sup>8</sup> Wilderson, *Red, White and Black*

<sup>9</sup> Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and Cartographies of Struggle*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

colonial states, is important for African Diaspora Studies.<sup>10</sup> According to McKittrick, due specifically to transatlantic slavery Black female bodies are already a part of the geography of the New World.<sup>11</sup> It has been well established that transatlantic slavery embedded Black female bodies into its geographic processes as it crossed oceans, planted settlements and plantations and built prisons and other spaces of Black internment in the afterlife of slavery. Slavery's geographies are easily mapped onto Black bodies. However, settler colonialism's geographies are often theorized as if they never meet up with the Black figure, specifically its embodiment as Black and female.<sup>12</sup>

In the way that McKittrick argues that the geographic processes of slavery were interconnected with the category "black woman," I argue that settler colonialism's space making and geographic processes are also intertwined with the formation of the Black female body in the Western hemisphere. The Black woman is a construction—or effect—of the power of the settler and the geography of the homestead as much as she is a discursive and material necessity for the slave master and the space of the plantation plot. We need more analytic frames to conceptualize the multiple ways Black women spatialize various forms of power in the Western hemisphere. The category "Black

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<sup>10</sup> See Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and Cartographies of Struggle*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006). McKittrick's central argument is that Black women are always already geographic subjects.

<sup>11</sup> McKittrick explains this link to us. "Transatlantic slavery incited meaningful geographic processes that were interconnected with the category of "black woman": this category not only visually and socially represented a particular kind of gendered servitude, it was embedded in the landscape. *Demonic Grounds*, p. xvii

<sup>12</sup> Tiya Miles and Sharon Holland make similar claims when they assert that "the persistent presence, symbolic resonance, and multifaceted meanings of Africa-derived people and cultures within the spaces of Native America often go unrecognized." See Tiya Miles and Sharon Holland, "Introduction," in *Crossing Waters. Crossing Worlds: The African Diaspora in Indian Country*, ed. Tiya Miles and Sharon Holland (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 3

woman” is not only of analytic import to slavery, but is also an analytical necessity for the settler colonial order as well.

### **Remixing Analytic Frames, Spaces and Bodies in the Hemisphere**

The space of the Western hemisphere sets the stage for Sylvia Wynter’s deconstruction of the overrepresentation of the inaugural moments of the New World. In her essay, “1492: A New Worldview”, Wynter presents a new way of viewing the violence that ushers in modernity. What is particularly fruitful is Wynter’s conceptualization of how power is spatialized and structures conquest.<sup>13</sup> Wynter reorganizes the traditional spatial and temporal frames we use to talk about conquest. By starting on the shores of what is today’s Senegal and extending the inaugural moments of conquest back half a century to 1441, Wynter pushes back the curtains and positions Blackness, which was previously positioned just off stage, directly on the stage of the epic drama of Conquest. According to Wynter, Blackness or the construction of Blackness is required to establish the terms of conquest. The epistemological revolution of Enlightenment’s natural man, specifically liberal humanism’s (hu)man and its non-human negation, requires the presence of the Negro. Wynter insists that we consider a “triadic model” (White-Native-Black) rather than a dyadic model (White-Native) to understand the relations and conflict between humans that would bring forth the notion of the modern human and inform conquest.<sup>14</sup> Wynter’s work pushes us towards a more intersectional analysis of settler colonialism. This kind of analysis of conquest, moves

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<sup>13</sup> See Sylvia Wynter, 1492: A New World View, in *Race, Discourse and the Origin of the Americas*, eds. Vera Lawrence and Rex Nettleford, (Washington, DC: Smithsonian, 1994). Wynter’s simultaneous sight or way of understanding conquest provides important analytic interventions that help us reframe conquest as an era that introduces an epistemological revolution and new forms of repressive and discursive power.

<sup>14</sup> Wynter, 1492: A New World View, p. 5

Blackness into our visual and conceptual frames and offers a new and simultaneous view of the originary violence of conquest.

Wynter's conceptual rearrangements (simultaneous-vision) helps my own project reconceptualize how to think about power in settler states. Wynter introduces expansion, spatial and ontological orderings and classifications as the primary *modus operandi* of the epistemic revolution that gave birth to modern political man in Western Europe. In Wynter's essay, "On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory, and Re-Imprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, of Desetre," she argues that the epistemic revolution that toppled the hegemony of the church in Europe enabled the human to create another hierarchical system based on ordering the natural realm.<sup>15</sup>

Territorial and spatial expansion as modes of existence that ensure the security of the modern state and modern (natural) man certainly structure the ways that Europe would engage both Black and Native bodies in its travels.

If we can read Blackness into conquest through Wynter, we can also think about Blackness as a product of the project of spatial expansion. The places and spaces of Blackness in the New World are often over determined by the space of slavery and the place of the plantation. Though only referred to nominally in "The Ceremony Must Be

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<sup>15</sup> See Sylvia Wynter, *On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory, and Re-Imprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, of Desetre: Black Studies Toward the Human Project* in ed. Lewis Gordon, *The Master's Tools* p. 138 Wynter argues that, Man as a new political subject rather than a theological subject had new, this-worldly goals. Man's this-worldly goals include 'securing the order and stability of the state, as well as of legitimating its global imperial expansion of conquest and expropriation of the lands of non-Christian, non-European peoples as lands classified in Christian theological terms as *terra nullius* (i.e. nobody's land); with this new this-worldly goal itself coming to reoccupy as the primary goal, the earlier, then primary, other-worldly goal of the Church.' The emergence of the State and political man's this-worldly, earthly and natural sensibilities required that the natural world including land and bodies be orderly and coherent. Man as a political subject had to ensure the State's "order, stability and territorial expansion as the now-terrestrial embodiment of the 'common good,' in the reoccupied place of the Church.

Found: After Humanism,” the spatial configuration of the encomienda/plantation archipelago is introduced by Wynter.<sup>16</sup> Wynter argues that modern political man had to find ways to (over)represent or construct a natural separation between rational man and the irrational other. Important to this process of differentiation is space.

The spatial separation, specifically the internment of bodies that lacked reason/rationally was critical in a new social order that was undergirded by bodily or homo-ontological principles of sameness and difference.<sup>17</sup> The space of otherness that was once mapped on the cosmos under the theocentric order of the Church is now mapped onto the land and bodies of the Other. In order to over represent or present as natural, absolute and essential difference as the “law of nature”, this difference had to be present spatially and bodily. Wynter explains the function of the encomienda/plantation system in “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Truth/Power/Freedom,”

With, in consequence, the institution of the encomienda system, which attached groups of Indians to settlers as neo-serf form of labor, together with the institution of the slave plantation system manned by “Negroes” coming to centrally function so as to produce and reproduce the socioeconomic and ontological hierarchies of the order as if they indeed had been mandated by the ostensibly extrahuman agency of “natural law.”<sup>18</sup>

The divisions between the human and non-human as well as between order and chaos had to be reproduced materially in order for their descriptive and over represented borders to exist. While Wynter’s mentioning of the encomienda/plantation as a spatial configuration and repressive and discursive practice is only brief, it acts as an important

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<sup>16</sup> Sylvia Wynter, The Ceremony Must Be Found: After Humanism, *Boundary 2*, On Humanism and the University I: The Discourse of Humanism, (Spring-Autumn, 1984) Vol. 12/13, (12)3, (13)1, pp. 19-70, p. 35

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, p. 34

<sup>18</sup> Sylvia Wynter, Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, It’s Overrepresentation—An Argument, *CR: The New Centennial Review*, Vol 3, No. 3, Fall 2003, pp. 257-337, p. 297

point of departure for introducing a new unit of space. Wynter merges the *encomienda*, a settler colonial spatial formation, with the plantation, a spatial formation of slavery. The *encomienda*/plantation brings the two forms of power together. Wynter's merging of two spatial and subject/ontology producing formations creates a discursive moment where we can think about the plantation as having a relationship to the space of Native genocide, exploitation and settlement. A macro level hemispheric frame makes the simultaneous sight that is needed to see micro level processes of creating the hybrid *encomienda*/plantation and its bodies possible. We needed to move out in order to zero in.

Multiple units and scales of space index the simultaneity of settler colonial power and slave making power in this chapter. The scalar moves that I make throughout this chapter travel from the spaces of the hemisphere to the nation to the settler's and slave master's spatial, economic and ontological formation the settlement/plantation, to the space of the body of the Black female slave. Throughout this chapter, I give sustained attention to the processes of producing space, humans and non-humans at two scales: the settlement/plantation and Black female slave body. The settlement/plantation is the staging ground or location where the Black female slave body is produced and it is simultaneously a product of the Black female slave body. My simultaneous vision will rest on the Black female slave body as a site of spatial possibilities and foreclosures. Both the violence of modernity as well as its undoing will be explored through the Black female slave body as a site of spatial possibility and impossibility on the settlement/plantation. The Black female body functions as a site where the spatial order of the master and settler is realized as well as where it unravels.

The best representation of the Black female body functioning in this way is Julie Dash's character Nana Peasant. The Black female body, stained indigo, in Julie Dash's movie is also the site where body-centric notions Western notions of gender are also deconstructed and undone. The Black female slave body can be an ambiguous and opaque space that requires the decolonized vantage of simultaneous sight to begin to apprehend its analytic and spatial power.

### **Scales and Units of Space: Encomienda/Plantation to the Settlement/Plantation**

As a unit of space, the encomienda/plantation functions as a space of productive power for Wynter. From the encomienda/plantation of Wynter, I will move to the hybrid space of the settlement/plantation. Within this Wynterian hybrid spatial formation, I want to focus on the repressive and productive power that clears/kills the Native, makes the slave fungible or a pure state of flux, and produces the Settler-Master who we know as the human. In order to make these moves, I construct my own hybrid space, the settlement/plantation.

Within my own hybrid formation, the settlement becomes a primary site of productive power for Native bodies rather than the encomienda. The settlement in this project is an ongoing formation that exists into the present day. Most importantly, the settlement is the site of the clearing-in its verb form—of the Native and the site of self actualization for the settler.<sup>19</sup> At the site of the settlement, Native space and time is obliterated (as body and landscape) and the settler comes to know himself and gains spatial coordinates. I therefore focus on the gratuitous violence of genocide at the site of

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<sup>19</sup> Frank Wilderson argues that clearing in its verb part of speech is rarely used in Anglo American English in order to disavow genocide. See Frank Wilderson, *Red, White and Black: Cinema and Structures of US Antagonisms*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010) p. 207

the settlement rather than the conditional and temporary experience of Native enslavement on the *encomienda*.<sup>20</sup> The etymology of the word plantation in the context of the Caribbean and the Western Hemisphere in the 17<sup>th</sup> century refers to the establishment of settlements.<sup>21</sup> The settlement in the grammatical structures of 18<sup>th</sup> century settlers referred to both the elimination of Native space and time and the enslavement of Blacks.

The settlement-plantation simultaneously functions as a space that eliminates Native existence and produces the slave as non-human property. The settlement-plantation functions as a spatial unit that turns Black bodies into non-human bodies. The settlement/plantation also turns Black non-human bodies into property and into forms of space or spatial potential. The settlement-plantation and the Black female body are in a dialectical tension. Within colonial and post colonial studies, the plantation is often theorized as a symbol of civilization and colonial order.<sup>22</sup> The settlement/plantation is also a transferable form of disciplinary and spatial power that is used to make colonial and settler colonial space even when the white, Settler-Master is not present.

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<sup>20</sup> In this project, I focus on the modes of power, specifically the gratuitous violence that constitutes the Native and the Black as dead or non-being in order that the human (Settler and Master) can come into existence.

<sup>21</sup> Eliza Lucas Pinckney, *Eliza Lucas Pinckney Letterbook*, ed. Elise Pinckney (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972). In this letterbook, Eliza Lucas Pinckney in the 18<sup>th</sup> century colloquialism of refers to the process of creating a plantation as “settling plantations.”

<sup>22</sup> See Laura Lovett, “African and Cherokee by Choice: Race and Resistance under legalized Segregation”, *American Indian Quarterly*, Vol. 22, No. ½ (Winter-Spring, 1998) as well as Amar Wahab Amar Wahab, *Colonial Inventions: Landscape Colonial Inventions: Landscape, Power and Representation in Nineteenth Century Trinidad*, (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010). Both scholars argue that the plantation functioned as visual/symbolic space of colonial order. Lovett explicitly argued that the plantation stood in counter distinction to the “wilderness” of Indian territory. Within some plantation discourses Black bodies were viewed as more disciplined/civilized than Natives due to their residence on the plantation.

For example, the Diamond Hill settlement/plantation that historian Tiya Miles examines in *The House on Diamond Hill* is one example of the way that the settlement and the plantation function as this type of traveling disciplinary unit. The Diamond Hill settlement/plantation was owned by the Cherokee slave master, Chief Vann. While the Diamond Hill plantation itself is not a site of bodily elimination for the Cherokee, it is a site of discursive, cultural, symbolic, and spatial erasure. *The House on Diamond Hill* helps us discuss the ways that slavery as an institution functions as a form of settler colonial power that both make slaves fungible, socially dead and obliterates Cherokee ways and worldviews.<sup>23</sup> The space of Black social death travels through and structures the elimination of Native epistemologies, space and time.

The Diamond Hill plantation reveals a moment in history when the Cherokee articulated sovereignty as their grammar of suffering. This grammar of suffering a return of land and nation required the enslavement of the Black in order to make the Native Human. In the next chapter, my reading of the presence of the Cherokee, St. Julien Last Child in the film *Daughters of the Dust*, allows us to listen to what the grammar of suffering of the descendant of the genocided Cherokee peoples sounds like.<sup>24</sup> This grammar of suffering does not result in becoming a master and making a plantation plot in order to join civilization. The plantation, or the settlement/plantation clears/kills St.

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<sup>23</sup> Tiya Miles. *The House on Diamond Hill: A Cherokee Plantation Story*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010)

<sup>24</sup> In *Red, White and Black*, Frank Wilderson makes distinctions between the two forms of Native/"Savage" grammatical structures of suffering. One version of the "Savages" grammar of suffering is sovereignty—under which Diamond Hill Plantation would have come about. The other grammar of suffering is genocide. Genocide as a grammar of suffering would call for the abolition of genocide which would require the destruction of the world as we know it ---or decolonization. I borrow the adjective "genocided" that Frank Wilderson uses throughout the text *Red, White and Black*.

Julien Last Child's relatives and removes others in the film. They cannot be recuperated through sovereignty but only through joining with Blacks.<sup>25</sup>

While always keeping the genocide (or present absence) of Native people in the frame, this chapter will focus primarily on the settlement/plantation as a space that discursively and materially makes the slave. In order to understand the coordinates, dimensions, productive and repressive power of this hybrid formation I turn to the body that it produces. I focus specifically on the indigo stained body of the character Nana Peasant in Julie Dash's film *Daughters of the Dust* because it is precisely this body that helped bring the settlement/plantation into view. I argue that Nana Peasant's body makes the violent transformation of Native space, the land and the transformation of the body of the slave into non-human flesh visible. Nana's body, stained with the chemical components of the indican plant is a hybrid body produced at the intersections of two violent forms of power, settler colonialism and slavery. Nana's hands and body are also a spatial conundrum.

Rather than foreground the spatial analytics of Lefebvre, I focus on the Black feminist theorizing of Julie Dash, Jennifer Morgan, Saidiya Hartman, and Hortense Spillers. Foucauldian frames are useful for articulating the kinds of processes that make space, bodies and produce ontological difference over time. Foucauldian and post structuralist frames are helpful for tracking how power formations show up or reproduce themselves in different contexts often in disguise. Similarly, frames of the everyday which straddle the structural and post structural are also helpful to this investigation of

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<sup>25</sup> Frank Wilderson, argues that becoming Black or embracing genocide as a grammar of suffering on the part of the Native would enable the Native community to join the "ontological legion of the dead." For Wilderson, Black and Native communication is only possible under these conditions. See *Red, White and Black*, p. 235

the repressive and productive power of the settlement/plantation. For example, Lefebvre's work is particularly helpful in that it helps spatialize quotidian micro practices of the expansion of the settlement/plantation and the accumulation of various forms of property, specifically the Black female slave. Lefebvre directs our attention to the mode of production and human reproduction as social practices that create the experience of space or an inert and material spatial order.<sup>26</sup> This Lefebvrian analytic that attends to the practices/performances of the everyday, specifically production and reproduction, are key sites of analysis that map onto the analytic frames that Black feminists have always used to theorize gender formation within slavery. Further, Black feminist analytics of space exceed some aspects of Foucauldian frames. Feminist analytics like the ones of Hartman and Morgan combine subject formation and structural analyses in order to explain the production of spaces, bodies and ontological positions. Within Black feminist frames, ontology can be taken up as an everyday production of space.

Like many Black feminists before her, Jennifer Morgan's book *Laboring Women* explores the construction of the Black female captive as a productive and reproductive body under the mode of production and space making processes of slavery. For Morgan, the mode of production and reproduction are already a priori frames of analysis for examining the everyday practices of making the Black female body a slave as well as unit of space. In *Laboring Women*, Black women are already contextualized as spatial subjects as they are essential to the settlement of land during the colonial period in the coastal regions of the South and the West Indies. In fact, the Black female body must be discursively constructed in order to make it possible to even conceive of planting

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<sup>26</sup> Henri Lefebvre. *The Production of Space*, (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 1991)

settlements during the “first generations of settlement and slaveownership” in South Carolina and Barbados.<sup>27</sup>

Morgan argues that this historical moment of settlement required particular symbolic constructions and particular uses of the Black female body.<sup>28</sup> The Black female body as a bodily formation comes into existence in order to make plantation space, populate the plantation space with workers and commodities and order the plantation as a non-Native realm of existence. Black female slave bodies are the embodiment, both discursively and materially, of settler colonial space making units. Morgan’s historicization as well as the modes of inquiry of other Black feminist theorists already contains a spatial analysis. I reiterate McKittrick’s eloquent argument, but in this case applied to the settler colonial scenario, that Black women are already “embedded in the landscape.”<sup>29</sup> Julie Dash’s character Nana Peasant becomes an iconic representation of this embeddedness.

### **The Simultaneous Optics of Julie Dash**

In 1992, filmmaker Julie Dash spoke with Houston Baker about her film *Daughters of the Dust*. During the interview she explained why the actor Cora Lee Day, who played Nana Peasant, and other Black women actors who depicted former slaves appeared on screen with indigo stained hands. Dash replied to Houston’s inquiry by saying “It was important for me to show these indigo-handed people as a reminder, that

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<sup>27</sup> Jennifer Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004)

<sup>28</sup> See Morgan, *Laboring Women*, 26. ‘Because England’s contact with West Africa took place in a historical moment marked by the determination to ‘plant’ valuable American colonies with equally valuable workers” the discursive constructions of Black women’s bodies as especially fecund (which entails labor without pain) and also capable of work is possible.’

<sup>29</sup> McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, p. xvii

these were the scars of slavery, this blueness. I needed to physically show the scars in a different way, because film is like poetry. You want to say something that has been said before, but in a different way.”<sup>30</sup> Dash shares that she wanted to provide a different way of seeing the physical scars of slavery. She wanted to present a poetic optic in her film of the physical scars of slavery through indigo-handed people.

However, as we will see, Dash’s intention for the visual reference of indigo exceeds scarification. This chapter’s focus on developing a new optic or simultaneous-vision that enables one to see what the limits of modernity’s privileged epistemology of sight hides requires that I move toward Black women’s artistic and cultural production as a space where we can see differently. Dash and other cultural producers present new epistemologies, in fact create sight and knowledge where there was not any before. I use the work of Dash because before I “saw” what I “saw” in her work I had no way of articulating it using language alone, specifically academic discourse. I was drawn to Dash’s film because she presented potent and penetrating visual moments that enabled the ineffable entanglements of modernity to finally be re-presented.

*Daughters of the Dust* was the first African American woman’s film to be theatrically released. Opening in theaters in 1992, the film’s narrative is centered on the Peasant Family who live on the Sea Isles, or Gullah Islands, off of the coast of Georgia. The film depicts the twenty-hour period prior to the Peasant family’s migration to the mainland. The opening scenes of the film take place on the water. Close to the beginning of the film, we are traveling on the river in a boat.

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<sup>30</sup> In her 1992 interview with Houston Baker, Dash states that she wanted to reference the scars of slavery differently than the iconic keloids on the back of a slave that had been whipped. See Julie Dash and Houston Baker, “Not Without My Daughters: A Conversation with Julie Dash and Houston A. Baker, Jr.”, *Transition*, No. 57, (1992): 164

Members of the Peazant family including Viola and Yellow Mary are accompanied by companions Trula and Mr. Sneed in the boat as they glide through a green river. Viola is talking about the salt water Africans that were shipped to the island right before the Civil War. We then see a wooden carving of the chest, upper arms, neck and head of Black male figure floating on the water. We hear drums and what sounds like a female vocalist singing a Yoruba chant. We move into a dark forest. Then find ourselves in a graveyard and there sits an elder Black woman in front of a grave marking with a tin pail in her lap. This mid range shot of the woman allows us to get a glimpse of her surroundings and hands. Clapsed together and holding the bucket to her chest, we can see that her hands are stained. They almost mimic the color of her dark blue dress. The woman begins a monologue by stating “mi life not done done.”<sup>31</sup> She then reflects upon her family members and community’s plans for moving north. She indicates that she is upset about their move and will not be traveling with them. We also find out that when they come to say goodbye to her, she will give them a piece of her mind. She ends her monologue with “Ima work pon a plan.”<sup>32</sup>

Shortly after this monologue, we get a glimpse of Nana’s blue hands. As the character Nana Peazant delivers a monologue and we are also presented with a montage of the family and community making preparations for their migration. We see various images of children and adults waking from sleep, men working in the front yards, and other interior and exterior spaces that look like they are in a state of transition. We also

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<sup>31</sup> My transcription of the dialogue of the characters varies from the lines of the script in the screenplay. I present what I heard here rather than what is actually written in the screen play. In the screen play you find “my life is not yet....”. Actors do not read or produce the lines verbatim. I also do this in order to capture and depict my own sensorial experience with the film.

<sup>32</sup> My own transcription of Cora Lee’s monologue as Nana Peazant.

see other blue handed women engaged in various acts. The blue on their hands is more pronounced and sharper than the blue on Nana Peazant's hands. We have a clearer shot of the blue that stains these women's hands partially due to fact that the montage is shot as a series of close ups. Additionally, the hands that are removing wax from an infant's ear, doing a teenage girls hair, ironing white fabric and holding a piece of bright red fruit are presented against another body or object that creates contrast. The indigo-stained and weathered hands are caring for or tending to soft new skin, neatly patterned hair, crisp white cloth and nourishing red fruit.

The indigo-blue that bled into the cuticles and nail beds of Nana Peazant seized my eyes. This indigo-blue at once evoked beautiful henna and at the same time a bone soaking violence that arrested me. I had viewed the film about six or seven times before seeing the blue-stained hands this way. This time around, these indigo stained hands functioned in a way that disrupted the visual regime of plantation slavery. The plantation landscape was transformed into a settlement-plantation. These Black female bodies became a location where the plants, land and nature merged with human flesh. The sight of these bodies with blue hands, the indican plant's bio chemical components at one with human molecules cracked my eyes. While I knew that these were the hands of women who had been forced to work the indigo fields, this time around the visual of the hands stained blue exceeded the capacity of the cognitive frames I had previously used to register the violence inflicted on these bodies by slavery. These were not just the "scars of slavery."<sup>33</sup> I saw a saturated and leaky image. There was something more here.

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<sup>33</sup> Julie Dash explained her choice of using indigo on the hands of these women as a new way of showing the scars of slavery in both an interview with Houston Baker, "Not Without My Daughters."

I saw something more than scars that bore witness to the violence of slavery. I saw another kind of power being evoked. This time, I saw the slave being made a non-human thing, in fact a hybrid flesh-land thing, but I also saw the land being violently and radically altered. The violence that had been done to the land was also visible in the palms, fingers, lines and nail beds of Nana Peasant. This visual moment radically transformed the way that I had been thinking about and looking for the relationship between the Black female slave body and its relationship to space, slavery, Native people and settler colonialism. For the first time, I saw slavery and settler colonialism as forms of power that worked through one another. Simultaneously, I saw the genocide and removal of the Cherokee Nation, the process of converting the swamp land into the plantation-plot, and the process of human Black bodies merging with the chemical components of a plant. I could see the multiple violences of settler colonial genocide and the clearing of the land in an unlikely place. I saw them in the pores, lines and nail beds of the hands of Black female slaves. Black female bodies became a space where the violence of slavery and anti-Black racism intersected with the violence of settler colonialism. They became a scale of the settlement-plantation.

Using the Black female body as a location where one can theorize how two unwieldy and diffuse forms of ongoing power converge makes the analytic work of looking for intersections feasible. I knew that slavery and settler colonialism touched and were constitutive of one another however, I did not have the theoretical language or analytic frames to help me track down where and how this intersection took and takes place. I no longer needed to set up a casual relationship between settler colonialism and slavery. There was no need to force a reading of Black bodies within a settler colonial

frame, nor have slavery function as the originating point of settler colonialism. I did not need to read Native genocide always through the making of the plantation and the slave.

Using settler colonialism as a subjectless discourse is helpful however, using it without also conceiving of slavery/anti-Black racism as a fluid, unstable and ever morphing power that also worked in ways that impacted the land, Native people and white subjectivity set me up to create a causal relationship.<sup>34</sup> Dash's optic of the hybrid space of the indigo stained hand where slavery and settler colonialism meet led me back to the Black body. Black fungibility has been a key analytic and space from which to think about how productions of Blackness meet up with other repressive and productive forms of power. The Black body as a dynamic formation that has multiple relationships to settler colonialism and slavery depending on the context provides me with a flexible site from which to theorize. The capacity of Black flesh to become property in various and unending forms enables one to link Blackness to settler colonialism and various forms of power.

Dash's poetics are important. They are what make the ineffable in the academic theory of History, Black Studies, Native Studies and Agricultural Science say-able and visible. As an artist Dash could make the invisible visible in her film. Dash's consultant, the historian and Gullah expert, Margaret Washington Creel insisted that though indigo would not have remained on the hands of the slaves that worked the indigo processing

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<sup>34</sup> Andrea Smith, "Queer Theory and Native Studies: The Heteronormativity of Settler Colonialism," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 16.1-2, (Winter 2010), p.44. Smith introduces the possibility of using settler colonialism as a way of tracking power rather than as a discourse populated by subjects and identities.

plants, the indigo was still poisonous.<sup>35</sup> Washington Creel's insight into the chemical elements of indigo and the incapability of indigo to stain the body is an example of why it is necessary to be aware of the limitations of the archive, particularly the body as merely an archive or repository of colonial violence.<sup>36</sup> Dash's re-presentation of the invisible consequences of forced labor on indigo plantations through the embodied performances of mutation seen on the actors' stained hands is a wonderful illustration of how the repertoire can make the hidden transcript of colonial violence visible. Dash's film as a cultural production helps us think about how we might make the hidden power and violence of coloniality and slavery visible. The creation of this kind of vision or optic is why I position Dash as a decolonial theorist.

As an imaginative and creative artist she found ways to make an invisible poison render itself bare and mark the body for all to see. Dash's Black feminist and decolonial cinematic eye that uses sight as a mode of knowledge making also pushes back against sight as a site of epistemic truth. Within cinema studies, the cinematic or cine-eye has been posited as a type of vision that emancipates the human eye. Dziga Vertov argued that the cine-eye exceeded the human and camera eye due to its freedom from the constraints of "time and space."<sup>37</sup> Able to "juxtapose any points in the universe," supposedly the cine-eye can make visible things that "are inaccessible to the normal

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<sup>35</sup> The Making of Daughters...get foot note Julie Dash, *Daughters of the Dust: The Making of An African American Woman's Film*, (New York: New Press, 1992), 31

<sup>36</sup> Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003) Taylor argues that an embodied practice of the repertoire is critical to hemispheric practices of memory work in the hemisphere. The repertoire provides a way of overcoming the various limitations of the archive.

<sup>37</sup> Dziga Vertov: The Cine-Eyes. A Revolution, "Kinoki. Perevorot", *Lef*, 1923, no. 3 (June/July), pp. 135-43, eds Richard Taylor and Ian Christie in *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896-1939*, pp. 89-94, p. 93

eye.”<sup>38</sup> The cine-eye though heralded as a technological advance that enables sight still cannot make all things visible. The kind of knowing that the camera, or cine-eye could render bare for the eye is still only partial. Sight as an all knowing epistemology is not challenged or interrogated by the technological revolution of cinema.

For instance, the cine-eye in and of itself still cannot tell us what happened to the bodies of slaves who worked indigo. What kinds of slave bodies are produced by the simultaneous violence of slavery and settler colonialism? As Washington Creel attests to, this question cannot be answered relying on sight as the entry point to knowing. Often knowledge of this nature is the embodied, oral and performative knowledge of the genocided and socially dead.<sup>39</sup> Often what eyes can not see mutilated and oppressed subaltern communities know and experience. Washington Creels’ knowledge of the poisoning and death of slaves who worked on indigo plantations had to be brought into view as a form of subjugated knowledge by a filmmaker committed to decolonizing sight. Dash had to manipulate sight, and make stained bodies appear where they would not have. This visual intervention made knowable the material aspect of the labor used to plant the settlement.

The human or cine-eye can not possibly see the way that bodies merge with the indican plant as they turn it into the commodity indigo. The invisible portion of the conversion process, the slave’s deadly contact with the fermentation and lye application process that transforms the plant (indican C<sub>14</sub>H<sub>17</sub>O<sub>6</sub>) into the commodity dye (indigo C<sub>16</sub>H<sub>10</sub>N<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub>), rendering it an exchangeable product that can be given measureable and

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid

<sup>39</sup> In *Red, White and Black*, Wilderson uses genocided as an adjective to describe the ontological position of the Savage.

nominal value in dollars, remains elusive until Dash brings it into the light.<sup>40</sup> While using sight and the visual, Dash also critiques the regime of the visual in Western knowledge systems. Extending our vision into the realm of the invisible, Dash brought hybrid bodies, a deadly yet profitable process, the space of the settlement/plantation and its interlocking power into view.

I use the analytic tools offered by a film scholar and cultural critic working along the multiple antagonisms that structure the US settler state. I am looking for moments when I can see the production of space and ontological categories rather than Dash's intent. I am interested in what it is that Dash makes possible for me to see and experience on a landscape that hides multiple processes, forms of power and bodies. Similarly, Frank Wilderson is interested in how Black films and filmmakers are able, whether they intend to or not, to make the "ensemble of questions of the slave" audible.<sup>41</sup>

I am interested in Black filmmakers of the 1970s, like Charles Burnett, Haile Gerima, Julie Dash, Ivan Dixon, and Jamaa Fanaka, not as auteurs, or brilliant individuals, but as cinematic prisms. I believe that regardless of the political views these filmmakers may or may not hold, their bodies and their aesthetic sensibilities became ciphers for a rather special intense, and rare phenomenon of Black people on the move politically.<sup>42</sup>

I am reading for the kinds of "cinematic prism" Dash's films and specifically shots of the indigo stained female ex-slaves can represent if we are trying to track settler colonial power and slave making power as intertwined processes.<sup>43</sup> The bodies of characters like Nana Peasant, and other blue-handed women allow us to see what is hidden from the all-seeing western eye. Rather than use a Foucauldian influenced

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<sup>40</sup> Chemical formulas for indican and indigo. See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indican> (Indican), [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indigo\\_dye](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indigo_dye) (Indigo).

<sup>41</sup> Wilderson, *Red, White and Black*, p. 125

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, p. 124

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*

Saidian colonial discourse analysis, I use Dash's optic of the blue handed women to deconstruct the settler colonial plantation regime. Dash becomes a guide as I make sense of the way that the space of the settlement/plantation orders and others the bodies of the Black and the Native through their relationship to the natural world and space. The process of making space for the Settler and Master requires that certain bodies become non-human and placeless.<sup>44</sup>

The indigo-stained body is made non-human as it converts nature—the indican plant—into a commodity. It loses its human capacity to maintain the boundary between the human body and the earth. Its status as property and thing-ness is further reified by its relationship to making space. During the process of making space, the Black female body becomes a fluid space of flux where boundaries break down. Within liberal humanism, this kind of violable body is a non-human body that cannot control nature. The Black female body becomes a part of the earth and settled space.

Finally, the Settler-Master through the process of making space and settling becomes human and transcendent. The Settler body is also a paradoxical one. As the settler is able to acquire space and place in order to become a stable liberal human subject with spatial and temporal coordinates, they are also able to distance themselves from the dead body of the Native and the non-human, indigo stained body of the slave.<sup>45</sup> The stable Settler body is alive, coherent and also transcendent compared to the Native (always slipping into death) and the Black (always sliding into non-beingness). Through the process of planting or settling the plantation plot, the Settler gains life unlike the

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p. 195

<sup>45</sup> Frank Wilderson's argues that humans have a "cartography of coherence." Humans are granted the coherence of time/space, the soul, the body, the group, the land, and the universe. See *Red, White and Black*, p. 181

Native and a safe human distance from nature which marks him/her as human in comparison to the slave.

Working at the scale of the body we can see the ways that the body's relationship to land, or the non-human natural world, enables discursive constructs of ontological positions. What kinds of beings are bodies whose human boundaries are unstable and collapse allowing the chemical components of the indican plant to seep in? What kind of being cannot control and maintain the boundaries between the human and the land? Are they human? However, the stable Settler-Master is continually able to transcend genocide and abjection/fungibility because it has the Native, the Black and the land. The Settler is an ontological position of unfettered self actualization which we will explore in the next chapter.

It is not Dash's intent to render Black women as non-human in her film.<sup>46</sup> However, Dash does provide a way for us to understand the way the cognitive orders of humanism attempt to demarcate the boundaries between beings and non-beings. I am interested in what this hybrid human-plant body registers on many levels. Within the visual, representational and discursive regime of the Settler-Master this hybrid being, though sentient, is not human. Enlightenment's liberal humanism constructs the human as stable, inviolable and in control of the boundaries that exist between the human-cultural world and the natural world. Within liberal humanist frames this hybrid body could represent the outmost regions of the human or even the non-human. I call this hybrid body the "Settled-slave." The Settled-slave's body references the multiple forms

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<sup>46</sup> At the symposium "We Carry These Memories Inside of We," Julie Dash cautioned the audience that scarring her characters with the stains of slavery did not work to make them non-human. In no way did she intend to dehumanize her characters.

of power, settlement and enslavement that produce their body. The Settled-slave also references the violent space making processes that constitute its body.

The penetrating, surveying gaze of the Settler-Master is looking for property. The Settler-Master's inner eyes see the Black female slave body as a form of expansive non-human property.<sup>47</sup> Hands that lose their human coordinates and boundaries and become indigo represent ultimate ontological difference and thing-ness, in other words Blackness. Saidiya Hartman argues that "the givenness of blackness results from the brutal corporealization of the body and the fixation of its constituent parts as indexes of truth and racial meaning."<sup>48</sup> The scar of blue becomes evidence of Black people's inherent biological, ontological difference rather than evidence of the brutality of forced labor and torture. Blue also indexes death. Slaves actually died due to their exposure to lye and the other deadly consequences of indigo processing. Because Black people were seen to be non-human and fit for working in the noxious fumes of the indigo processing section of the plantation they subsequently suffered from exposure to toxins and died.

Dash's choice to make the indigo visible on Black female slave bodies that are forced to merge with the land reinforces the idea that the black body is experientially and discursively other. Using Dash's poetics, both materially and visually or performatively the Black female slave becomes the epitome of accumulation, fungibility and malleability.

As flesh that loses human coordinates, and becomes one with the plant, the Black female slave body is a space in the making. As spatial potential her body is always in a

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<sup>47</sup> In the essay by Sylvia Wynter, "On How We Mistook the Territory for the Map," Wynter borrows Richard Wright's term the inner eye to talk about other factors like racism which help determine what structures sight and what one sees.

<sup>48</sup> Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, p.57

state of flux. She is a coherent reproductive machine that gives birth to commodities in one moment. And in the next moment, she is fluid cells that can become one with a plant to convert indican into a commodity. The spatialization of her flesh into a liminal space or void—not human or plant—may be why settler colonial studies finds her intelligible and difficult to name within its discipline. The Black woman as an analytical unit may be too unstable for settler colonial studies to get their head around. However, if we use Dash’s poetic optic, we can see that Black female slave bodies on the indigo plantation function as a metaphor for unending increase, expansion, and malleability. As a metaphor, which represents pure potential, the Settler-Master is able to imagine the Black female form as land, property and sexual/reproductive capacity which denote spatial expansion. The Black feminine body in the New World is a metaphor for terra nullius, the plantation (or the planting of settlements), unfettered access to property, and the unending reproduction of bodies and land.

Functioning as a metaphor for unending increase in bodies, land and space the discursive production of Black female flesh is a site where we can observe anti-Black racism and settler colonial power touching in the creation of ever expansive potential. Settler colonial power is fundamentally about the making of property out of land and bodies, specifically Black bodies. The enactment of property as a process of clearing and excluding Native bodies and making Black bodies fungible is the point of coalescence or the nodal point in this project. Black female bodies are the sites where multiple enactments of property occur. In this project Black female bodies become central to this linking of settler colonialism to slavery. While not a stand in for Black people, Black women are an important bodily and discursive site of fluidity where gendered, sexual,

and bodily difference become visible as formations that order settler colonial practices of making space and property.

### **Western Gender Formation: Gender as a Settler Colonial Category**

When we take another look at the Black female slave body, specifically Nana Peasant's hands stained blue, is it possible to think differently about her relationship to the Western discourse of gender? Her indigo stained palms can become a site from which we can approach gender-as-genealogy.<sup>49</sup> The stains on Nana Peasant's hands reference the context in which she and other Black women slaves come in contact with various discourses of gender that assign various meanings to the Black female body. As Michelle V. Rowley argues, gender formations should be recognized as historically and contextually constructed social relations that are consolidated through regimes of representation and institutional power.<sup>50</sup> Gender signifiers carry multiple, contextual and historicized references with them.<sup>51</sup> Theorists need to attend the moments when discursive terms like female and woman are applied to different bodies. The primary question that gender-as-genealogy as a mode of inquiry and method poses is: when is gender called forth and what is it doing? Black female slave bodies have long been sites for examining gender formation. Performing this genealogical work to figure out the ways that gendered tropes, signs and discourses circulate around Black female slave bodies should also be attempted at the intersections of settler colonialism and slavery. Focusing on hands stained with indigo can also compel us to ask, how space-making processes position various bodies in relationship to the multiple meanings that gender and

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<sup>49</sup> Michelle V. Rowley, *Feminist Advocacy and Gender Equity in the Anglophone Caribbean: Envisioning a Politics of Coalition*, (New York: Routledge, 2011) p. 22

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>51</sup> Rowley, p. 13

nature as discourses confer? In other words, is it profitable to think about the ways gender discourses get applied to Black female slave bodies in the context of settler colonial power?

The Black female captive has continually served as a muse, a site of interrogation, a mode of critique, and a site of knowledge production within Black feminist thought.<sup>52</sup> Slavery has most often been the location and regime of regulation from which we theorized the formation of the Black female's body, gender and sexuality. I want to maintain focus on this location and regime of regulation, while also simultaneously bringing into focus the landscape and productive power of settler colonialism. How can placing the Black female body on this landscape illumine the other discourses that travel with gender when applied to Black female bodies? What does Black female productive and reproductive capacity mean for settler colonialism?

### **The Gendered Coordinates of Slavery**

A number of Black feminist scholars and theorists have argued that the repressive and productive power of slavery produced Black female slaves as the very outer limits of humanity. They inhabited the space of flesh, the realm of fungibility, increase and expansion. Slavery relegated them to the space of non-being-ness.<sup>53</sup> While indicting slavery for the production of non-humans, Black feminist also changed the way the study of gender was approached in the field of Women and Gender Studies. Gender, specifically the category of woman, no longer became a stable category of analysis.

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<sup>52</sup> For example, Linda Brent/Harriet Jacobs has been a figure of scholarly study by numerous Black women scholars including Katherine McKittrick. Additionally, generic enslaved archetypes like Mammy have been prevalent in Black feminist scholarship. Though not a Slave in the Western Hemisphere, Saartjie Baartman has also been included within the genealogy of captive and enslaved Black women.

<sup>53</sup> Sylvia Wynter argues that the Black experiences a lack of mode of human being in relation to the human. The "Nigger is Chaos." See *The Ceremony Must Be Found*, p. 36

Situated within the power of slavery and New World violence, gender becomes a discourse of power that in fact removes some bodies out of the category woman and outside of the human family. We need to think about “gender-as-genealogy” in order to understand the ways that various human bodies have been positioned and un-positioned as women or gendered beings.

Gender, as a discourse in the context of the New World, functions in numerous ways. In the case of the Settler-Master class in the New World, gender functions as a discourse of humanness. Having gender, specifically manhood and womanhood make the Settler-Master human. Blacks and Natives are not men or women. Blacks and Natives are reproductive and productive units, or some other non-human category, within liberal western settler and colonial systems of classification. While certainly white women are not equal humans, they are still humans in relation to Native peoples and Black peoples. Conferring gender upon Black flesh that had the capacity to reproduce was an act of naming gender difference as a site for the potential increase in property. The Black flesh that could reproduce would be called female in order to name her property-making capacity. This reproductive capacity is the only thing she had in common with white women, not white women’s humanity.

Traditionally, Black feminists have focused on the imposition of gender on the Black flesh of the captive with reproductive capacity in order to generate more slaves. For example, Spillers, Morgan and Hartman’s work can help us focus on the ways the calling forth of gender or its application to the Black reproductive body is about the increase in a sentient form of property. Referencing the way that gender functions as a discourse of subjugation and property expansion, Hartman writes, “In the confines of

chattel slavery, gender is discernible primarily in terms of the uses of conveyances of property, calculations of sentience, evaluations of injury, and determinations of punishment.”<sup>54</sup> Gender emerges as a discourse to discuss just how conveyable the Black body as property is. How responsive is it? How culpable is it? And how flexible is it? Discussing gender’s relationship to Black fungibility Hartman goes on to state,

The captive female does not possess gender as much as she is possessed by gender—that is, by the way of a particular investment in and use of the body. What ‘woman’ designates in the context of captivity is not to be explicated in terms of domesticity or protection but in terms of the disavowed violence of slave law, the sanctity of property and the necessity of absolute submission, the pathologizing of the black body, the restriction of black sentience, the multifarious use of property, and the precarious status of the slave within the public sphere.<sup>55</sup>

Hartman’s introduction of fungibility and accumulation as a constitutive component of the slave is groundbreaking. It allows for a discussion of the ways that the slave body, specifically the gendered slave body, continually makes property even beyond its reproductive capacity to produce slave children. For Hartman, fungibility in respect to the Black female slave body means much more than her capacity to produce slave children as sellable property. The Black body, specifically the Black female slave body can be used in any way that is imaginable (and unimaginable) by the master.

Black and Native women scholars have often referred to gender as a mode of colonial domination.<sup>56</sup> Gender functions as a discourse of violence on the landscapes of the frontier and the plantation for Native and Black women. The settler colonial category

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<sup>54</sup> Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, p. 102

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, p. 100

<sup>56</sup> According to Maria Lugones, colonization introduced many genders and gender itself as a mode of organization, ordering relations for production, property, cosmology and ways of knowing. Lugones goes on to cite the work of Oyeronke Oyewumi and Paula Gunn Allen, Black and Native women theorists in order to provide alternative frames for the organization of social relations that operate outside of Western, colonial formations of gender. Maria Lugones, “Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System,” *Hypatia*, 23.1 (Winter 2007), p. 193

of female, specifically Native or Black female, references a genocide-able and rape-able body. The settler colonial discursive process of naming a Native body as a female body ensured sexual violation and death. The violent process of naming a Black slave body as female ushered in the process of making a body a rape-able form of non-human reproductive property. Again, Hartman argues, Black women do not possess gender but are possessed by gender.<sup>57</sup> For Black female bodies, gender hails violence, specifically a violence that puts them beyond the limits of the liberal category of the human. Black women and the discourse of gender that they are interpellated by is merely an enactment of property, not a humanizing move.

### **Simultaneously: The Gendered Coordinates of Slavery and Settler Colonialism**

The production—or calling forth—of Black female gender within the context of the settlement/plantation becomes a discourse for the making and enactment of a kind of property that we do not spend a lot of time theorizing. Black female bodies, like the blue-handed slave women in Dash's movie, function as a form of property-plus. Beyond their productive and reproductive capacity they have spatial capacity. Black women cultivate (plow, till, fence, plant) the land and make the settlement/plantation appear as a bounded unit of sellable and taxable agriculture. Black women also reproduce children who become forms of commodity and workers who can continue to work on the land to expand the settlement/plantation. Black women as a form of property-plus produce: the settlement/plantation, children as commodities and expanders of the settlement/plantation-plot, and bodies that mark the plantation space as non-Native space. Black women's property capacity is one that makes Settler-Master spaces and creates the

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<sup>57</sup> Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, p. 100

boundaries of the human. The creation of Black female gender by the Settler-Master works to produce a spatial unit of conquest, enslavement, and an exclusionary form of humanism through the black female body.

Constructions of gender and sexuality based on the body necessarily emerge in a moment in which the settler needs space, specifically land. Body centric gender works in tandem with the visual practices of surveying the land.<sup>58</sup> As the Settler, who would also become a Master, visualized the possibilities of their territory, he/she/they were simultaneously surveying, visualizing and assessing the possibilities of the Black bodies they would own. The Black body and its productive and reproductive components would also be read/visualized as spatial units on “virgin” land. While Dash did not intend this for her work, her optic can help us see the way that the Settler-Master viewed the land, slave bodies and slave reproduction. Dash’s characters’ blue hands on one level work to make the body hyper visible. With this optic of the blue hands, we can see the calling forth/hailing of gender as the reproduction of the settlement/plantation at the level of the body. This is just one order of sight that Dash makes possible. We will continue to explore the more liberatory dimensions of sight that Dash uses to break down violent western epistemes.

Black female bodies as gendered and sexualized formation are spatial processes within the context of New World settlement. In early 18<sup>th</sup> century South Carolina and Virginia representations of Black women as savages and bodies occupying a liminal position began to emerge. Black bodily liminality was discursively imagined and

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<sup>58</sup> Oyeronke Oyewumi identifies biological determinism as the filter through which knowledge is produced in the West. Oyewumi calls this kind of thinking and knowledge production “body-reasoning.” See *The Invention of Women: Making An African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p.5

constructed due to the needs of labor and reproduction but also a result of the new relationship that Black women would have with the land in the New World.

The Black female body as a new form on the landscape in the low country and the Caribbean had to be reconciled to their actual role as workers and the natural surroundings in West Africa. While the female body had been constructed as strong, capable of work and naturally fecund; the reality was that Black women did not labor under the conditions of slavery when they were in West Africa. They were also not laborers in the way that they would become on plantations. Europeans' need for free labor shaped the inner eyes of the first Europeans who would view Black bodies leading them to construct Black female forms as natural laborers on foreign plantation landscapes. European traders and explorers produced colonial travel writings that narrated Black female bodies as naturally fit for plantation work in the colonies. Lignon, one of the original Settlers of Barbados, first observed Black women in his travels to West Africa. When he saw them again for the first time on plantations in Barbados he had a hard time recognizing them in the new context:

Lignon struggled to situate Black women as workers. Their innate unfamiliarity as laborers caused him to cast about for a useful metaphor. He compares African people to vegetation; now they are only passively and abstractly beautiful as blocks of color.<sup>59</sup>

A gap existed between the colonial imagination's construction of Black women as agricultural labors that could easily breed and the reality that West African Black women were unfamiliar with the land and the labor required on the plantation. In order to close the gap, a new metaphor was needed. The metaphor is a space of slippage where one

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<sup>59</sup> Morgan, *Laboring Women*, p. 48

thing can become another.<sup>60</sup> Within this slippage, Black women can become nature to fill in the gap. In the context of this discursive gap where metaphors of nature are used to make sense of the presence of bodies new to the landscape, I return to Dash's filmic character Nana Peazant.

While Dash is certainly not using Lignon's imperial surveying eyes, Dash's cinematic imagination does provide a visual of the ways that the Settler-Master intended to discursively fix the Black female slave body to the land. Lignon's vision which turned Black female bodies into beautiful blocks of color became a way of establishing a relationship between Black female bodies and the land and Black female bodies and human bodies. Dash's blue stained female slaves as an optic provide us with an opportunity to engage in some rigorous theoretical work. Dash's character's indigo stained or blue-black flesh represents ontological difference of a new order. The states of being/non-being presented for us on the screen by Dash, though unintentionally, is the essential human/non-human difference that Lignon and other Settler-Masters were invested in producing.

The essential difference that Nana Peazant's blue-stained hands, and Lignon's block of colors that matched vegetation represent expand how we are able to talk about ontology. If we think about Black female bodies that are stained with, or are already a part of the land, we can argue that ontological positions are created through the multiple axes of race, gender, space and the land. The body's relationship to space, specifically a forced relationship to land, is a field of representational and repressive power that needs to be examined further. The indigo-stained hands (blue-blackness)

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<sup>60</sup>Radhika Mohanram, *Black Body: Women, Colonialism, and Space*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999)

function as a visible sign of the violence and a new spatial relationship to land that makes the slave a form of non-human property.

The indigo-blue Black female body is a spatial body. She is a symbol of space or property in its most malleable and unstable state. As a new order of difference she exceeds mere racial and sexual variation. Her ultimate difference also comes about due to the fact that it is spatialized and embedded in the settler geography of expansion and increase. The Black female slave body's spatial coordinates, stained indigo, do not align with those of other humans.

The captive body gendered female is an important process and formation to track. The process of making the Black female captive body coterminous with the land is particularly important to track as a spatial process that helps solidify taxonomies on settler colonial landscapes. Expansion, specifically spatial expansion, is an ongoing project of settler colonialism that shapes processes of racial, gender and sexual formation. Gender, specifically Black female slave gender, as visualized by Dash, is as much a product of the settling and making of space as it is about reproducing other Black slaves. Dash's blue-handed bodies provide us with an opportunity to think about how the settlement/plantation can produce a hybrid body that functions as a regime of representation through which gender formation works.

Discourses of sexuality, specifically sexual deviance, also work at the site of Black female slave bodies. The Black female slave body embedded within the sexualized landscape of settler colonialism is a special case. As a hybrid body, Nana Peasant's and other Black female's plant and flesh bodies could also have discourses of deviant sexualities placed upon them. Black female bodies can merge/mate with plants and

create the commodity dye. The fecundity of plant reproduction/sexuality can now be plotted onto the landscape of the Black female body. In the tropics, specifically the Caribbean the discourse of sexual promiscuity, fertility and abundance was applied to the natural landscape, specifically new and exotic plant life. Black female gender as a hybrid plant-body assumes another level of non-normative and non-human sexual excess when understood within the context of the conquest and settlement of land.

Within the context of slavery, it is equally important to mark Black bodies as examples of non-human sexual difference and deviance. Hartman finds that sexualized Black bodies were interpellated by the law as unnamable and at times unintelligible.<sup>61</sup>

According to George's attorney [George is a slave accused of rape], the sexual arrangements of the captive community were so different from those of the dominant order that they were beyond the reach of the law and best left to the regulations of slave owners...as sexual subjects they were beyond the pale of law and outside the boundaries of the decent and nameable."<sup>62</sup>

Existing as bodies outside of what the law and the dominant Settler-Master's boundaries deem "decent and nameable" relegates the Black gendered and sexual body to a realm of the illegible and inhuman. This unnamable gender and sexual difference is a violent eviction of Black female and Black bodies from the boundaries of humanity. The discourse of gender and sexuality as it often appears in the law is a way of creating a spatial order within the settlement/plantation regime of the US. Black female slave bodies as hybrid, plant-human species, further increase the unnameability of the Black gender and sexual difference.

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<sup>61</sup> In *Scenes of Subjection*, Hartman revisits the 19<sup>th</sup> century court records and mines the transcripts of rape trials, p. 96

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*

An inside and outside of settler humanity must be discursively and materially created. This outside and inside is often violently enforced through various discourses that reference the body's relationship to the land within settler colonial regimes of domination. Within practices of settling the land, the Black female slave body becomes a state of unending flux and malleability much like the soil. Thus it can be used by the settler to increase the space of the settlement/plantation-plot, his/her wealth in crop commodities and bodies. Hortense Spillers argues that under the violent conditions of the New World socio-political order of conquest, the captive body loses "at least gender difference in the outcome, and the female body and male body become a territory of cultural and political maneuver, not at all gender-related, gender specific."<sup>63</sup> Black captives represent a malleability so complete that Spillers likens Black flesh to land or "territory." When framed by conquest, Black female slave bodies are transformed into pliable and plow-able spaces that fulfill the needs of the Settler-Master to expand their territory.

For a while, when turning over the hands and looking into the indigo stained palms of Nana Peasant, this territory of Black flux was all that I saw. I had gained access to a visual moment, a punctum or rupture that exposed the intersectional and intertwined processes of the colonial power of settlement and slavery. I could now penetrate the bundle of violence that constituted modernity. At the heart of this entanglement I could see that the power of settler colonialism produced the slave, and the power of slavery also produced the genocided Native. Both forms of power enabled the settler and master, or Settler-Master to create space and self-actualize. However, there are other orders and

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<sup>63</sup> Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," p. 67

depths of sight that indigo offers. Dash's flash of blue enables one to gain knowledge of the paradox of indigo which also represents the paradox of modernity. In indigo I can see what New World violence produces and also what it cannot contain. Indigo that has bled through the bodies of former female slaves shows me what bodily formations the violence of the Western hemisphere has produced, however indigo also reveals what kinds of bodies refuse to be contained by (settler) colonial taxonomies.

### **Decolonizing Sight, Decolonizing Gender**

Dash's epistemology includes a simultaneous and contradictory form of sight. Her sight is a range of optic power that can operate both inside and outside of the colonial epistemology of sight. With this simultaneous and multitudinous sight, Dash can do more than just reveal the violent colonial processes of dehumanization. While she can show us the perspective of Settler-Master's beholding and surveying eye that sees bodies, land and property in the same glance, Dash can also hold the same bodies and land in our line of sight in order to crack our eyes and show us something else. The same indigo-stained hands contain something hidden in their blueness. Catherine McKinley's four year sojourn documented in her memoir and historical narrative, *Indigo: In Search of the Color that Seduced the World*, was a journey to "find of indigo what was hidden."<sup>64</sup> In order for McKinley to find what was hidden of indigo, what about the color consumed her, she had to undergo a transformation. She had to understand the reasons for her obsession with indigo before she could come to understand its role in her life and the lives of others in the African diaspora.

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<sup>64</sup> Catherine McKinley, *Indigo: In Search of the Color that Seduced the World*, (New York: Bloomsbury, 2011), p. 183

Towards the end of McKinley's four year pursuit of the meaning of indigo, she received wisdom from her adopted Aunt Eurama in Ghana who was helping her along her journey. McKinley describes her breakthrough when she explains that "I understood now Eurama's riddles: Blue is black. Blue is life, mourning, joy, all at once. Life and death have exquisite symmetry. The symmetry is held in the color blue." Dash's use of indigo in *Daughters of the Dust* catalyses a similar decolonization of one's sight. In order to perceive the symmetry, or the multivalent nature of indigo we must think about the perception of sight differently. Decolonization requires that we think about sight differently not pluck out our eyes. According to Renee Paulani Louis, "decolonizing [...] is not about the total rejection of Western theory, research or knowledge. It's about changing focus."<sup>65</sup> Linda Tuhiwai Smith argues similarly that it is not a total rejection of the West but "rather it is about centering our concerns and world views and then coming to know [...] from our own perspectives and for our own purposes."<sup>66</sup>

In order to decolonize our sight, we need to think about how sight works. We must allow for the possibility of a passive eye. The western, imperial eye is primarily an active eye that reads, scans and surveys from an all knowing vantage point of authority. The active eye mimics the all-seeing and all-knowing eye of God. Cultural landscapes scholar, D.W. Meinig presents ten human viewpoints or vantage points that describe the way that humans interpret the landscape with their eyes. Of the ten, two of the vantage points rely on penetrating eyes that pierce the surface of the earth. As penetrative masculine eyes, they read the land as a complex system and as a wealth generating

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<sup>65</sup> Renee Pualani Louis, "Can You Hear Us Now? *Voices from the Margin*," p. 131

<sup>66</sup> Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, (New York: Palgrave, 1999) p. 152

commodity.<sup>67</sup> This notion of the eye as a penetrating force that reads and deconstructs the landscape is a gendered construction. It is a masculine eye; not the eye that Catherine McKinley wants to develop on her sojourn. The eye that McKinley had to develop was an eye that could at times be passive.

The beauty of the taglemust moving in the tide, knotting and unfurling, was mesmerizing. Indigo was a part of that Atlantic. If there was spirit at work, or an act of devotion to be made, mine would be bound to that history—my own and that of the people I was seeking. I hadn't made this journey simply to be a collector, but I needed indigo in my eye.<sup>68</sup>

Mesmerized by the indigo garment in the water, McKinley connects indigo to the Atlantic, spirit, history and possession. For a moment, McKinley inverts the process we typically imagine as viewing. Rather than looking out with the eye to see indigo, McKinley pleads to have indigo in her eye. For McKinley, the eye, specifically a non-imperial eye, can be penetrated. The natural elements can invade and change the eye. This is the opposite of the imperial eye that projects its desires and mindscape out. The imperial eye is an inviolable eye of an inviolable human subject. The natural world does not alter it or possess it, the eye possesses the natural landscape. However, McKinley's cornea needs to be possessed by indigo. McKinley's eye is penetrable. She needs to catch indigo as if she were catching the spirit. McKinley realizes at the end of her journey that she cannot possess indigo, she must be transformed by it. McKinley does not return from her trip with a beholding eye, but with an eye possessed by indigo. Her Aunt Eurama tells

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67 D.W. Meinig, "The Beholding Eye: Ten Versions of the Same Scene," in *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays*, ed. D.W. Meinig (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979)

68 McKinley, *Indigo*, p. 60

Catherine that she has a spirit that begs for blue. Auntie Eurama warns, “Blue-blue! Is all you think of.”<sup>69</sup>

Developing the capacity for your eye to be passive, and be possessed or catch indigo in it, is not the only step to decolonizing one’s sight. Understanding that the capacity to see does not stem from the power of the eye alone, or even the brain and the eye together, is another realization that one must accept. Sight happens due to a combination of senses. Oyeronke Oyewumi argues that in Yoruba cosmology the senses work together.<sup>70</sup> Sight is not privileged as the site of knowledge; rather it is a complex array of the senses that need to be marshaled in order to make sense of the social world. In the epigraph, I referenced Dash’s understanding of this multisensory way of navigating the world. Dash’s character Ben is well aware that movement and the kinetics of the body (feeling) is required to activate sight in the context of *komp se*. He states, “Once you feel de rhythm, you mind tell you how to see!”<sup>71</sup> Feeling directs the mind which directs the eyes.

Seeing is a process of synthesizing multiple senses. Seeing is a recognition of the whole self and all of its capacity and ways of knowing. This is a radical disjuncture in the way that we think about sight and cognition. Decolonization requires a sight that can see, discern and be open to the multiple things that are occurring within oneself and others. Decolonized sight, along with its other senses, seeks out healing. What we also need to pay attention to when we look at Nana Pezant’s indigo stained hands was the healing work that was occurring. While I noted this briefly and moved onto the settler

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid, p. 26

<sup>70</sup> Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women*, p. 14

<sup>71</sup> Dash, *Daughters of the Dust: A Novel*, p. 165

colonial violence, what McKinley calls the symmetry of indigo, and what I call the paradox of indigo was lost on me. The indigo referenced the life and recuperative work of the ex-slave as much as it indexed the violence and dehumanization.

The montage of blue handed people in the beginning of the *Daughters of the Dust*, brings attention to women attending to the needs of the flesh. The fleshly and erotic self care, the braiding of hair, cleaning wax from a baby's ear, pressing clothing, and preparing food all reference an attention to and love for the Black body. Within the context of an anti-Black world, caring for the body is a radical act for an ex-slave. However, it never works in a singular way. The body is a multitudinous site. Even the act of caring for the body through recuperating it implicitly references the violence it is healing from. In *Scenes of Subjection*, Hartman elucidates on what the recuperated slave body can reveal and make possible.

Thus history is illuminated not only by the recitation of the litany of horrors that characterized the "commercial deportation of Africans," but also by performance practices that serve as a means of redressing the pained body and restaging the event of rupture or breach that engendered "the other side". The (counter) investment in the body as a site of need, desire, and pleasure and the constancy of unmet needs, repressed desires, and the shortcomings of pleasure are articulated in the very endeavor to heal the flesh and redress the pained body.<sup>72</sup>

For Hartman, even moments when the pained body is being cared for (Dash's montages of the erotic activity of the hands) serve as moments that draw us back to the underside of modernity. However, when we are able to view violence at the same moment that we are able to see the agency of the slave and the recuperation of the body, we are not destroyed or paralyzed. This is the power of simultaneous vision. We are allowed to see and understand both parts of the paradox without being subsumed by the sentimentalism of

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<sup>72</sup> Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, p. 75

romanticism or the horror of gratuitous violence. We can see multiple truths at one time in the recuperated body.

The recuperated bodies of the ex-slave women in Dash's montage enable simultaneous vision for the viewer allowing one to see, perceive and intuit on multiple levels. Dash's choice to stain her actors' hands blue was made in order to reference a variety of seen and unseen realms and meanings. Indigo has other meanings, but these other meanings must be accessed through other cosmologies and their respective epistemologies. In Dash's book, *Daughters of the Dust: The Making of An African American Woman's Film*, which chronicles the making of the film, Dash tells of multiple moments in the film when Yoruba cosmology was being evoked. Dash worked with composer John Barnes to score the film. Barnes evoked the sounds of West Africa at times and specifically wrote a closing theme for the movie entitled "Elegba Theme". The lyrics to the closing theme were "Ago Elegba, show the way Elegba."<sup>73</sup> Dash was explicitly referencing the cosmology through the actors she casts and the roles they served in the narrative.

The pages of the original screenplay are made available in Dash's "*The Making of an African American Woman's Film*." Dash's margin notes are found throughout the pages of the script. In several places in block capital letters, Dash scribbled the coded meanings of her characters. The key characters of the movie represented Yoruba orishas. Each character, like the orishas who ruled over certain natural elements, are signified by certain colors and had specific roles in the community. On page one of the screenplay, Dash wrote NANA PEAZANT=OBATALA. In these same handwritten notes on pages

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<sup>73</sup> Dash, *The Making of An African American Women's Film*, p. 16

2, 12, 25, 33 and 42 we find out that Yellow Mary is Yemaya, Trula is Oshun, Eli is Ogun, the Unborn Child is Elegba, and Eula is Oya Yansa.<sup>74</sup> As these references are only explicitly revealed in the screenplay's margin notes, the references remain implicit in the film.

The film is coded. As a densely layered experience, people need to read and decipher the film on multiple levels. Not all have access to the film's various meanings and frames of reference. I learned at a symposium celebrating the 20 year anniversary of the film from Julie Dash and indigo artist Arianne King Comer that indigo had a range of meanings within Yoruba culture.<sup>75</sup> My facile reading of indigo as simply referencing forms of settler colonial and slave making violence was a part of the story but far from the true essence. Indigo within Yoruba communities references gendered work, status, spiritual competencies and capacities. On McKinley's trip to the Yoruba art village, Osun-Oshogbo Sacred Grove, the writer explains how indigo work and the gender system are related in Yoruba culture. McKinley writes,

In Yoruba, everything has a spiritual significance. Even the most rudimentary work is guided by the realm of the spirits, and so as one works, one pays tribute. The goddess of Iya Mapo is the patroness of all exclusive women's work, trades like dyeing, pottery and soap making. She is the deity of sex. She guides all things erotic. She guides conception and birth. She guides the tricky realm of the indigo dye pot, and the hands of women and girls who design cloths, perform the intense preparation for dyeing, and undertake the many steps to finish a cloth.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid, p. 75-107

<sup>75</sup> I attended the symposium, "We Carry These Memories Inside of We'" held at the Avery Research Center in Charleston in South Carolina in September of 2011. The symposium commemorated the making of film *Daughters of the Dust* and celebrated its 20 year anniversary.

<sup>76</sup> McKinley, *Indigo*, p. 173

As explained by McKinley, the realm of the indigo pot is guided by the goddess Iya Mapo. The deity of sex and “all things erotic” is also the deity of the indigo work gendered female or women’s work.

I want to concentrate on the erotic for a moment, and diverge a bit from the gendered reading that McKinley and perhaps others give to indigo work as erotic women’s work. This reading of indigo as erotic women’s work aligns with the way the working hands function in Dash’s montage. All of the indigo stained hands are performing the gendered work associated with domestic space. They are cleaning, preparing food and caring for children and other female bodies. This is an important read. Angeletta Gourdine, who analyzes the film’s representations of the black body, specifically through the wardrobe choices that Dash made for the characters, argues that indigo work was gendered work. Gourdine remarks on the various meanings of Nana Peasant’s indigo stained hands.

Nana’s dyed hands emblemize blackwomen’s labor under the yoke of slavery, their active participation in the consumer world, as most black women on slave plantations were experts spinners, weavers, knitters, and dressmakers...This stain is particularly female, for women not only planted the cotton but also crafted the cloth from which they crafted their clothing. Nana’s hands, then, reveal blackwomen’s participation in the consumer cloth economy, partially enabled by the abundance of trees used for dyeing cloth on the coastal Sea Islands.<sup>77</sup>

The indigo stain references multiple realms of the textile market and Black women’s labor within it. However, naming women’s work, specifically women who work with indigo, as sacred and erotic in the way that Dash and McKinley do, infuses it with power and agency. This is important to do. However, I want to reframe the meaning of the erotic and subsequently reconceptualize how we think about the power of the erotic. By

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<sup>77</sup> Angeletta K. M. Gourdine, Fashioning the Body [as] Politic in Julie Dash’s *Daughters of the Dust*, *African American Review*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (Autumn, 2001), pp. 499-511, p. 503

drawing on Audre Lorde's notion of the erotic, specifically the kind of power it enables women to access, I want to think about how the erotic power of indigo work can destabilize our naturalization and acceptance of western constructions of gender. In the 1984 essay, "Uses of the Erotic," Lorde speaks about the erotic as an active position or space between two states and a powerful form of inertia that can move us to another place; into our strongest feelings.

The erotic is a measure between the beginning of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings.<sup>78</sup>

Lorde's erotic power can lead into chaos. That chaos can help us access our strongest feelings, and our truest selves which Lorde argues women are taught to fear. Chaos according to Lorde can also take us closer to knowledge and transformation. Lorde talked more extensively about this descent into chaos in her address to the conference participants at New York University in 1979. In this address titled, "The Masters Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," Lorde provides a strident critique of the racism and homophobia that excluded Black and Lesbian women from feminist conversations and organizing in the 1970s. Arguing for the productive tension of difference, Lorde challenges the conference participants to allow themselves to take a plunge into the depths of chaos.

Within the interdependence of mutual (non-dominant) differences lies that security which enables us to descend into the chaos of knowledge and return with true visions of our future, along with the concomitant power to effect those changes which can bring that future into being.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 1984, Berkeley: The Crossing Press, p. 87

<sup>79</sup> Audre Lorde, "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house," in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women of Color* eds. Cherie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua (New York: Kitchen Table Press, 1983), p. 96

Erotic chaos is a concept that is crucial to decolonization. I focus on the power of the erotic to take us into the space of chaos because chaos radically disorients us.

Disorientation forces new vantage points upon us. Hanging from the ceiling requires new eyes, new equilibrium and new navigational skills. I want to use Lorde's erotic route into chaos as a way of further destabilizing the western concept of gender. I want to revisit the way that McKinley historicizes and frames indigo work as sacred women's work in the Yoruba culture. Drawing upon Oyeronke Oyewumi's text, *The Invention of Women*, I want to further destabilize what Oyewumi would call our sense of gender.

Taking Lorde's erotic journey into chaos in order to meet up with Oyewumi's deconstruction of western gender constructions, I ask if indigo can offer us a road out of the territory of western gender concepts? Rather than read indigo as McKinley does as women's work, can indigo reference gender chaos? Stated another way, rather than have indigo reference coherent gender categories like African woman or goddess could indigo reference a non-coherent personhood or being-ness? Lorde's jettisoning of the ordered and rational in favor of the chaotic and Oyewumi's work to make body reasoning strange can help us navigate our way out of the regulatory regime of western gender constructions. I want to consider how Oyewumi's deconstruction and disengagement with western body reasoning and gender construction can help me rethink gender when I make sense of Nana Peasant's indigo stained hands.

Oyewumi argues that "gender was not an organizing principle in Yoruba society prior to colonization by the West."<sup>80</sup> Further, the Yoruba world-sense, rather than view, is

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<sup>80</sup> Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women*, p. 31

not one that is ordered around sight and therefore the body.<sup>81</sup> Body-reasoning requires a biologization of the social world and focus on the body. The body is at the core of western constructions of gender. In the Yoruba world-sense, humans experience the physical, social and metaphysical world through a combination of senses. If we read Nana Peasant as Obatala, then we have to succumb to some of the chaos that Obatala's body causes western body-centric sight. Obatala is the creator of the world and humanity. Specifically, Obatala breaks up the water with land making the earth habitable. Obatala can express themselves as an ana-male or ana-female.<sup>82</sup> In western terms Obatala is both male and female.<sup>83</sup> Obatala can show up in a feminine form or a masculine form, wearing the gendered conventions required of the gendered context. Nana Peasant as a reference for Obatala in Dash's movie can also reference gender chaos and confusion. One would have to be looking for or aware of the Yoruba references in order to catch this.

Oyewumi explains that the Yoruba "frame of reference was based more on a combination of senses anchored by the auditory."<sup>84</sup> Thus the surveying of bodies and the placing of them into biologized, binarized and hierarchical categories of man and woman did not occur within the Yoruba culture until colonization. While there were physiological distinctions made, specifically when reproduction became an issue, there were no social categories (man/woman) based on bodily distinctions that put humans into hierarchies. Gender is a cultural, historical and social construction that varies from

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid, p. 3

<sup>82</sup> These are the terms that Oyeronke uses to index differentiation at the body as they pertain to reproductive functions. She does not use the terms male or female because they already carry the baggage of western gender binaries and hierarchies.

<sup>83</sup> <http://www.orishanet.org/ocha.html>, accessed on 10/24/2012. Orisha Net Articles.

<sup>84</sup> Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women*, p. 30

society to society. “Gender is not a property of an individual or a body in and of itself by itself.”<sup>85</sup> Much like Hartman and Spillers who argue that gender was imposed on the female slave body, Oyewumi argues that gender is not about the body but is used to order the “social processes of everyday life” and is embedded into almost every social institution.<sup>86</sup> In order to help us think outside the orders, social processes and quotidian power of gender construction Oyewumi provides us with a glimpse of the pre-colonial Yoruba social order. The pre-colonial Yoruba world-sense organized social relations around human relationality and seniority, or relative age.<sup>87</sup> Therefore, power, privilege and position changed over time and were relative depending on the age of others in any given social situation.

With this reading of Yoruba society in mind, I appreciate the way that Dash is trying to convey and create a multi-sensory and multi-temporal experience for the viewers. When we see and experience Nana Peasant on screen, she is accompanied by a score played in the key of A. The theme song that composer Barnes created for Nana Peasant was done in the key of Aquarius, “representing the age that was imminent for Nana’s family.”<sup>88</sup> According to Oyewumi, for the Yoruba and other African societies sound is very important. The apprehension of reality involves more than perception. Apprehending the world is about “a particular presence in the world—a world conceived of as a whole in which all things are linked together. It concerns the many worlds human beings inhabit; it does not privilege the physical world over the metaphysical.”<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid, p. 39

<sup>86</sup> Ibid

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, p. 31

<sup>88</sup> Dash, *The Making of an African American Woman’s Film*, p. 16

<sup>89</sup> Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women*, p.14

The way that Dash linked the physical world to the spirit world, and the past to the future, effectively decolonizes our senses and forces a form of disorientation. Different spaces and temporal periods crowd the screen all at once. Slow motion was used by Dash and her cinematographer to create a palimpsestic sense of time. When we see the Unborn Child run across the sands of the shoreline she does so in slow motion. Film scholar Laura Gaither explains that Dash depicts both the Unborn Child and the slave ancestors in slow motion because: “they too are outside the present narrative time.”<sup>90</sup> Dash’s simultaneous vision also helps us apprehend the whole presence/essence of the characters. We experience all of the sounds, the smells, the feelings and non-representable elements of the film.

Rather than just see, one must also sense and feel what colors like indigo mean. As Oyewumi argues, “A concentration on vision as the primary mode of comprehending reality promotes what can be seen over that which is not apparent to the eye; it misses the other levels and the nuances of existence.”<sup>91</sup> Like McKinley, we need to “find of indigo what was hidden.”<sup>92</sup> Indigo cannot be known or experienced in the realm of the sight only. What is hidden about indigo cannot be known by sight alone. In fact, sight will impede your ability to know or apprehend what indigo can tell us, specifically about gender.

Can indigo as a multisensory experience take us away from the body? Can indigo work to impede or obscure our vision and reliance on sight in order to reference other ways of knowing? I argue that indigo has both the capacity to make the body visible and

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<sup>90</sup> Laura Gaither, Close-up and Slow Motion in Julie Dash’s *Daughters of the Dust*, *The Howard Journal of Communications*, 7:103-112, 1996, p. 109

<sup>91</sup> Oyewumi, p. 14

<sup>92</sup> McKinley, *Indigo*, p. 183

hide the body when placed on the hands of the actor Cora Lee Day who plays Nana Peazant. For a moment, I want to focus on its power to hide the body. Indigo placed on top of the skin has the power of opacity and creates chaos for the eye, specifically the active and all knowing imperial eye. As McKinley pursued indigo, she provided her own account of the capacity of indigo to confound the eye. McKinley states, “Indigo is not really a color, it is not cloth, I realized. It is only the tangible intangible. The attempt to capture beauty, to hold the elusive, the fine layer of skin between the two.”<sup>93</sup> Indigo is a veil or skin between the tangible and intangible. For McKinley, indigo is an attempt to hold the elusive.

If indigo is only a veil between the tangible and the intangible then how might we read the body veiled or stained indigo? If indigo acts as a veil, could it be veiling or hiding the body in scenes where we see it staining hands and body parts? I want to change indigo’s part of speech and make it a verb. I want indigo to function as an active process of making something opaque. Rather than function to further corporealize the body and make visible, indigo functions to create a layer between the body and the eye. Gourdine argues that the very first full body image of Nana, and for that matter any Black woman in the film, is one of a woman fully clothed in an indigo dress washing in the river. This is a scene and context in which one would expect nakedness.<sup>94</sup> Gourdine reads this as an attempt by Nana Peazant and other Black women to cloak or shroud themselves from “invasive gazes.”<sup>95</sup> Indigo-ing or obscuring the hands of Nana Peazant and other female ex-slaves veils the body and confounds the all knowing epistemology of

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid, p. 81

<sup>94</sup> Gourdine, p. 503

<sup>95</sup> Ibid

sight that the Settler-Master relies on to survey bodies and land. By making the black body opaque and non-transparent it cannot be easily known, objectified and turned into property. Indigo calls forth opacity and visual chaos.

Blue calls forth a decolonized cosmology. Blueness announces to the ears, mouth, nose, eyes and spirit other ways of knowing. Blue can also usher in other times, spaces and worlds. Indigo-blue is a meeting place, a border. McKinley writes of her knowledge of this.

I was reminded again of the real power of the metaphor of cloth and especially indigo: that it merely materializes the very thin layer between what is seen and unseen, between what can be grasped and what can only be suggested, between the living and the spirit world. I was for the first time not able to assume my own protection. I was not the stranger with the notebook. I was no further from death than anyone.<sup>96</sup>

Living world and the spirit world touch at the location of indigo. Nana Peazant, indigo stained, was often the space where the Peazant ancestors and future descendants met. Nana Peazant is a location where the divine and the human touch. Land and human also touch and merge at the site of her hands. We can understand the natural world and the human world, indican plant and human skin as one. Various indigenous and non-Western cosmologies posit the plant and natural world as a relative of the human. Nana Peazant is a chaotic space of blurred lines that confound human, spatial and temporal coordinates that institute hierarchies and exclusions. Surely gender, as a western category that imposes hierarchical and binary order on the body cannot function in this way at the site/sight of Nana Peazant's body.

The slave body violently made female, or a site of hyper fungibility, marked and stained in the hue of settler colonial indigo is also a site that can unravel and undo violent

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<sup>96</sup> McKinley, *Indigo*, p. 81

forms of property making gender. Indigo as a way of obscuring vision presents a space of incoherence and blurred boundaries. It is a space of fluidity, human-nature hybridity, flux, time travel, spatial disorganization and reorganization all at once. Nana's indigo is a site of transport, across waters, across times, across spaces. What we learn from the collapsing boundaries of Nana Peasant's body is that the body is not stable and coherent. The body is not the site of gender universally. Dash's engagement with Yoruba cosmology allows us to see that Nana's hands and body do not take us to gender truth. And sight is not knowledge or truth.

Dash's decolonized cinematic vision enables the viewer to apprehend and understand the complex relationships that often occur beyond the field of vision. Momentarily removing us from the crudely ordered Cartesian field, we are transported to a place where spaces, times and multiple forms of power are permitted to collide. Slavery and settler colonialism touch, merge, shape and structure the kinds of repressive and productive power that create ontological and spatial difference. Toni Cade Bambara credits Dash with attempting to "heal our imperialized eyes."<sup>97</sup> Using decolonized vision and looking with a fuller range of sensorial apprehension allows us to see that the Black slave is as much a product of settler colonial power as it is a product of slavery. The settled-slave that is a product of settler colonialism is only perceptible within conceptions of space that emerge from other epistemological frameworks.

In analyzing the oppositional and decolonial cinematic work of Dash, Cade Bambara draws our attention to the way that Dash explodes the Western "Hollywood

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<sup>97</sup> Toni Cade Bambara, "Preface" in *The Making of An African American Woman's Film*, p. xi

protocol.”<sup>98</sup> Dash uses “dual narration and multiple point-of-view camerawork, rather than a hero-dominated perspective.”<sup>99</sup> Additionally, Dash’s eschewing of a master narrative in favor of a non-linear, multilayered unfolding—one more in keeping with the storytelling traditions that inform African cinema—also allows for an oppositional notion of space to emerge.<sup>100</sup> Bambara notes the following about the way that Dash’s spatial sensibilities counter hegemonic notions of space and geography,

Dash’s demystified and democratic treatment of space positions Daughters in progressive world film culture movements that bolster socially responsible cinema—Cuban, Caribbean, African, Philipino/Philopina, Cine Nuova, USA multicultural Independent. In Daughters, the emphasis is on shared space (wide-angled and deep focus shots in which no one becomes backdrop to anyone else’s drama) rather than dominated space (foregrounded hero in sharp focus, other Othered in background blur); on social space rather than idealized space (as in Westerns); on delineated space that encourages a contiguous-reality reading rather than on masked space in which, through close-ups and framing, the spectator is encouraged to believe that conflicts are solely psychological not, say systemic, hence can be resolved by a shrink, a lawyer, or a gun, but not to say, through societal transformation.<sup>101</sup>

A new vision, with new eyes, has to be attained before we can imagine societal transformation. New eyes see new connections. New eyes can perceive the ways that the structure of genocide constitutes and is constituted by slavery and its afterlife. Dash helps us acquire this sight by creating and privileging “shared space.” The bodies and landscapes that slavery and settler colonialism produce are initially hard to perceive and virtually invisible within traditional analytical, theoretical and methodological frames.

Dash’s shared space creates a spatial analytic frame and landscape that changes our inner eyes. In this chapter, I have introduced the hybrid body of the settled-slave and

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<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, p. xiii

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*

the hybrid space of settlement/plantation as new units of analysis. I have also proposed the decolonization of sight through the use of alternative epistemologies that emerge from a Black woman's decolonial cinematic vision. I intend for these units of analysis and new ways of apprehending to guide us as we re-imagine ourselves and the landscapes that we exist within.

In the next chapter, we travel to the home of Settler-Master Eliza Lucas Pinckney in order to take a closer look at the hybrid spatial formation of the settlement/plantation. On this landscape we examine the ways the built environment, and the embodied and material practices of producing indigo create the structural position of the Settler-Master. The settler and master are intimate friends and often the same person. We also closely scrutinize settlement as a spatial and subject producing process. We ask how the control and settlement of space enables the emergence of a perpetually self-actualizing subject. This transcendent Settler-Master subject is only possible through the actual death of the Native, the social death of the Black and the use of land and bodies as a launching pad into a state of transcendence.

### Chapter Three: Elizabeth/Eliza: Settled-Slave and Settler-Master

Ontological capacity equals time marked by the power of chronology, and space marked by the power of place.<sup>1</sup>

--Frank Wilderson, 2010

“Place, home and roots are described as fundamental human needs: ‘to have roots in a place is to have a secure point from which to look out on the world, a firm grasp of one’s own position in the order of things.’<sup>2</sup>

--Tim Cresswell, 2002

Wrote to father... “Concerning settleing a plantation to the North with the Woppo slaves, &c., &c.”<sup>3</sup>

--Eliza Lucas, February 3<sup>rd</sup> 1742/3

To produce space, specifically as place, is fundamentally a process of self actualization. This chapter examines the production of place as simultaneously the creation of ontological difference. The specific processes of place-making that this chapter attends to are the multiple and interdependent practices, performances and discourses that structure settlement. What we understand as settlement will be redefined in this chapter. In order to reconceptualize settlement in a way that engages the production of Blackness amidst the epic struggle between White Settlers and Native peoples, settlement will have to be understood within expanding vectors of analysis. The cultural and material landscapes of Black female gender formation provide us with the locations and vantage points from which to begin this re-theorization of settlement.

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Wilderson, *Red, White and Black: Cinema and Structures of U.S. Antagonisms*, p. 280

<sup>2</sup> Tim Cresswell, “Theorizing Place”, in *Mobilizing Place, Placing Mobility: The Politics of Representation in a Globalized World*, eds. G. Verstraete and T. Cresswell (New York: Rodopi, 2001), p. 14, Tim Cresswell cites the work of Relph in order to talk about space, and more specifically place as an organizing concept that emerges from a humanistic tradition.

<sup>3</sup> In February of 1743, Eliza Lucas enters into her journal and letterbook that she has written to her father General Lucas about the settling of their family plantation on the Wappoo Creek in Charleston, South Carolina. Elise Pinckney, *The Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney 1739-1762* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1972)

Starting at the palms of Nana Peazant's hands and tracing the indigo blue that maps the valleys and tributaries that line them we are led back to Nana's ancestor Elizabeth Peazant. In the novel, *Daughters of the Dust*, that follows the film of the same name, Julie Dash introduces us to the Peazant family's matrilineal ancestor Elizabeth Ayodele Peazant. Elizabeth Peazant was acknowledged by the Peazant family as "the first of us to walk this lan."<sup>4</sup> In West Africa as a young girl, Ayodele (Elizabeth Peazant) was a skilled indigo worker like her mother. During the transatlantic slave trade, indigo and workers with knowledge of indigo are valuable commodities. Ayodele is captured and sold to the "Pinchney family" of Barbados who are British settlers and slavers.<sup>5</sup>

Dash's Pinchney family, specifically "Miz Pinchney" who had been trying "to raise indigo for a long time, but not having no luck," resembles Eliza Lucas Pinckney who is memorialized in U.S history as a heroine who saves the colonial economy of the low country. At times Eliza Lucas is also interpolated into the story of the founding of South Carolina and the nation. Eliza Lucas Pinckney's letters, recipe book and memoir all become archival materials that help historians construct the myth that Pinckney "single-handedly introduced Carolinians to the culture and manufacture of indigo."<sup>6</sup> Eliza Lucas Pinckney becomes an icon of rugged individualism, agricultural competency and a gendered embodiment of American autochthony. Pinckney's writings become enshrined as an example of the essence of an exceptional American protestant work ethic and

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<sup>4</sup> Julie Dash, *Daughters of the Dust: A Novel*, p. 87

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p.90

<sup>6</sup> David Coon, "Eliza Lucas Pinckney and the Reintroduction of Indigo Culture in South Carolina," *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 42, No.1 (Feb., 1976), pp. 61-76, 67. Coon credits folklorists and historians like David Ramsay who writes the History of South Carolina, from its First Settlement in 1670 to the year 1808 for the creation of narratives that attribute the cultivation of cash crops like rice and indigo to sole individuals rather than to the collective and regional efforts of an agricultural community.

temperament which tames and settles the land of the nascent settler colonial nation. Her constitution and achievement is equally important because it resides in the innocence of a teenage girl. This teenage girl represents the hopes, aspirations and accomplishments of a nation that needs to understand itself as innocent.

Interestingly, Dash appropriates the archive of Eliza Lucas Pinckney, “Miz Pinckney,” in her novel, *Daughters of the Dust*, and alters it in order to provide a corrective to the regional and national mythmaking practices surrounding Pinckney. She disrupts the archive by inserting African labor and knowledge of indigo into the story of how indigo gets introduced to the low country and nation. Dash’s appropriation of the archive for her own use is instructive. Due to the way Dash plays with and further manipulates the fictive nature of the archive we can look at the settler nation’s narratives about settlement in a new way. Dash’s insertion of African labor into the process of the cultivation and manufacture of indigo is significant for a number of reasons. This retelling of colonial and American histories reveals the hidden labor, knowledge and expertise of slaves that made the region wealthy. This reading of the archive also exposes its limitations. Archival materials are constituted by limits and erasures that Dash’s work reveals. Within Eliza Lucas Pinckney’s processed and edited *Letterbook*, the actual labor that goes into the production of labor is made invisible. We are offered accounts that read “We made very little indigo this year.”<sup>7</sup> As Saidiya Hartman attests, the archives of slavery are constituted by silences, erasure, omissions and things that are in fact un-representable. I want to focus on the hidden labor for a moment. Various scholars and historians have argued that “Negro slaves were often experienced indigo

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<sup>7</sup> On September 15, 1743 Eliza Lucas pens a letter to her father General George Lucas.

makers.”<sup>8</sup> David Coon argues that Eliza’s father, George Lucas “attempted to get a Negro from Montserrat skilled in indigo manufacture, and in South Carolina slaves provided the labor for, and sometimes supervised whole operations.”<sup>9</sup>

This rewriting of agricultural history to bring Black expertise and labor into the frame achieves three things. First, it exposes the limits of white agency and subjectivity and renders visible the Black bodies, Black knowledge and Black labor required for “white” inventions like indigo. Secondly, these revelations illumine and sharpen the constitutive limits of the archive. Finally, they work to fill in its omissions and reveal more about the process of settlement. In fact, Dash’s reworking of this treasured American archive can help us reconceptualize settlement.

### **Redefining Settlement:**

Settlement within the disciplines of colonial history, US history, Native Studies and the emerging field of settler colonial studies is often defined through the space and time of contact. The first moments of European contact with the lands of the New World and the Native people of the hemisphere give us our spatial and temporal frame for the origins of settlement.<sup>10</sup> Dash’s reorganization of the Eliza Lucas Pinckney archive allows us to reorganize the spatial and temporal frames of settlement. For Dash, settlement is

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<sup>8</sup> Coon, “Eliza Lucas Pinckney and the Reintroduction of Indigo Culture in South Carolina”, p. 76

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Settlement has been defined broadly and narrowly depending on the literature. Andrew Sluyter’s investigation of colonial landscape transformation provides a broad definition of settlement that includes both indigenous peoples’ and colonizers’ alterations and modifications to the land (planting, farming, building, etc.). Other definitions are more narrow. For some scholars, settlement requires a usurpation of the land by settlers. Linda Tihwai Smith argues that settlement involves an “intricate apparatus of colonial control.” Permanent settlement tends to define settlement within the field of settler colonial studies. For Lorenzo Veracini, unlike the migrant, the Settler comes to stay. In this chapter, settlement will be recast as a series of relationships and more importantly a consolidation of the ontological position of the Human-Settler. This exclusive category of existence requires the elimination of the Native and the negation of the Black in order to establish a unique relationship to land and space.

reorganized along similar coordinates as Sylvia Wynter's frame for conquest. In her novel, Dash takes us back to West Africa to give us some context and explains how the cultivation of indigo that would become a part of the process of settling the land in the British colonies is a protracted process that in fact starts before arrival on these shores.

In the novel, Dash takes us to West Africa and introduces us to Ayodele (Elizabeth Peasant) when she is a twelve year old girl.

Twelfth year come, Ayodele in the indigo fields with mama, learning all she able bout growing indigo and making it into paste to be sent to de market. It was a long an difficult process, but she patient, an after her first successful batch, they call her 'My Indigo Girl' as her mother did.<sup>11</sup>

The expertise that Ayodele gains as a child makes her valuable to Arab and European slave traders.<sup>12</sup> Eventually Ayodele is then sold to the "Pinchney"<sup>13</sup> family and is forced to tame the soil and plant in order to cultivate indigo in Charleston on the Wappoo plantation.

Nobody know how, but some way the mistress found out that Ayodele knew how to grow indigo. Maybe she see this piece of cloth that Ayodele bring with her colored with indigo. So mistress gave her some seedlings an a small piece of land to work. The mistress told the Boss Man that Ayodele was only to work that bit of land. Oooh, he not like that one bit, but her would not hear nothing else. Well, Ayodele did all right, an the mistress very pleased. All the white men, the master, that planter from Jamaica they brought in, the Boss Man, they fit to be tied. They spent a lot of money bringing that man over here, and he sposed to be the expert, an he was white. Ayodele was just a girl and she was black.<sup>14</sup>

Settling the land by cultivating indigo required Black bodies from Africa. While Native genocide and the theft of Native land is at the core of settlement, the transport of Black bodies and the knowledge that those bodies have is also a part of settlement. The spatial

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<sup>11</sup> Dash, *The Making of An African American Woman's Film*, p. 88

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 89

<sup>13</sup> "Pinchney" is the character Elizabeth Peasant's "Gullah" pronunciation of the family name Pinckney as she narrates the family history in Dash's novel, *Daughters of the Dust*.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 90

process of settlement includes the theft and use of Black bodies from across the Atlantic. Settlement straddles the Atlantic Ocean and exceeds the White-Settler/Native conflict.

This is not an appeal to expand the category of the settler, as I have argued before Black slaves and descendants of slaves are not settlers. However, the processes which make Black bodies fungible flesh, a form of terra nullius, and embed their bodies in the land as settled-slaves needs to be theorized as modalities of settlement. Settlement needs to be retheorized along the contours of the bodies that it renders materially and socially dead. Scholarship from Marxist geographies, cultural landscape studies, anthropology and the emerging field of settler colonial studies is useful for helping us think about space, however, it does not help us think about the ways that the process of settlement also materializes Blackness as an ontological position. Native studies and Black studies enable a discussion of how the production of Settler and Master or Settler-Master subjectivity comes about due to its parasitic relationship to Native death and Black fungibility/accumulation (social death). When we think about the Settler-Master as parasitic we can also begin to think about their process of settlement as one that also requires the making of ontological categories occupied by the dead. The process of settlement allows the Settler-Master to become a human with spatial coordinates because the Native dies and the Black becomes a non-being (a settled-slave).<sup>15</sup>

Settlement is more than transforming the land. It is more than the teleological process of weary white people making a home and Native people naturally disappearing over time. Settlement is an assemblage of technologies and processes of makings and un-makings. Its processes require the making and unmaking of bodies, subject positions,

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<sup>15</sup> Wilderson, *Red, Black and White*, p. 231

space, place and claims to various forms of autonomy, self actualization and transcendence. In *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*, Lorenzo Veracini, a founding scholar of the emerging field of settler colonial studies describes the process of settlement as a process that enables the “unfettered mobility” of the settler.<sup>16</sup> While abject others within settler colonial nations are “principally characterized by restrained mobility” the settler experiences the capacity for “unfettered mobility.” This description of the kind of state of existence that settlement allows the settler is instructive. While Veracini’s description moves us closer to a discussion of states of being, I want to reframe Veracini’s description and introduce a few more elements to the equation.

Settlement as an intricate, dynamic and contradictory relationship to Native bodies, Black bodies and the land/nature. Settlement structures the Settler’s relationship to the Native, the Black and nature as a relation of negation. Settlement also creates complex ontological positions that are constituted by both states of stasis and flux. What I mean by this is that some bodies (Native and Black) are relegated to a permanent position of flux. Native bodies are always slipping into death, Black bodies are always sliding into states of fungibility and accumulation. The flux and instability of the Black and the Native enable the Settler to experience a self actualizing state of both libratory stability and transcendent autonomy. The ontological positions of the Native (slipping into death) and the Black (sliding into fungibility and accumulation) are positions of fixed-flux. As Wilderson argues these positions do not occupy the universal liberal orienting and humanizing frames of time and space. They are fixed and rooted in a place of elimination and expanding use for the settler’s unending pursuit of self actualization.

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<sup>16</sup> See Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), p. 27-28

By settling, or gaining an exclusive claim to time and space, the Settler is able to simultaneously become a stable, coherent and autonomous human subject who occupies space while they also experience hyper mobility, transcendence and self directed transformation. The Settler moves back and forth at will between states of rootedness and mobility, stability and postmodern (self determined) constructedness. The Settlers' unfettered movement between these contradictory spaces and states is predicated on the "fixed-flux" of Native and Black bodies. Fixed-flux is the underside of the Settler's unfettered mobility and self actualization. It is always being susceptible to having the world flipped upside down at the whim of another (the Settler). Settlement functions like a violent form of deconstruction.

Settlement as a gratuitously violent project that kills the Native and accumulates the Black also reorganizes discourse. The relationship that exists between the signifier and signified for concepts like autochthony and indigeneity and words like clearing under conditions of settlement become shifting ground beneath our feet.<sup>17</sup> The prior meanings held by the terms and words autochthonous, indigenous and clearing are destabilized and then completely evacuated due to the material and discursive muscle of settlement. At the site of the clearing, Settlers are able to become autochthonous and indigenous at the same time.

Frank Wilderson helps us think about the kind of discursive and material violence that occurs within what he calls the "Settler/Master/Human's grammatical structure."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> See England, S. and Anderson, M. (?). Authentic African Culture in Honduras: Afro-Central Americans Challenge Honduran Indo-Hispanic Mestizaje. Presentation Paper, September 24-27, 200-. <http://168.96.200.17/ar/libros/lasa98/England-Anderson.pdf>. In this article, England and Anderson make a distinction between autochthony and indigeneity in Honduras.

<sup>18</sup> Wilderson, p. 207

Within this grammatical structure, Wilderson argues that there is a disavowal of the violence of genocide in the way the settler narrates the formation of the US. On one level, the disavowal occurs through the settler's preferred part of speech. Clearing is only spoken of as a noun in the Settler/Master/Human's grammatical structure. Clearing is never used as a verb in the human's grammatical structure. Wilderson draws our attention to its use: "Clearing, in the Settler/Savage" relation, has two grammatical structures, one a noun and the other as a verb. But the Western only recognizes clearing as a noun. But prior to the clearing's fragile infancy, that is before its cinematic legacy as a newborn place name, it labored not across the land as a noun but as a verb on the body of the "Savage," speaking civil society's essential status as an effect for genocide."<sup>19</sup>

This discursive displacement represents an actual displacement. As the Settler/Master/Human renders the clearing a static place, void of settler violence and absent of indigenous bodies and relations to the land, the Settler also indigenizes themselves to this abstract space. The Settler is allowed to merge with the land as they root themselves. They become autochthonous people that "sprang up from the land."<sup>20</sup> Settlers are now the group of humans that establish a right/righteous relationship with the land. Settlers proclaim themselves the new indigenous population. The original indigenous peoples are stripped of their indigeneity and rendered dead. Within the

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> England, S. and Anderson, M. (?). Authentic African Culture in Honduras: Afro-Central Americans Challenge Honduran Indo-Hispanic Mestizaje. Presentation Paper, September 24-27, 200-. <http://168.96.200.17/ar/libros/lasa98/England-Anderson.pdf>. In this article, England and Anderson make a distinction between autochthony and indigeneity in Honduras. The performance of autochthony hinges on a relationship to land—a springing up from the land—while indigeneity is determined by shared ancestry or blood with indigenous peoples. One can be autochthonous—having a relationship to land—while not being indigenous. I make the distinction here, because I want to pay attention to how Settlers perform autochthony and indigeneity.

process of settlement, the indigenous people become embedded in or are literally buried as the dead within the land. The Settler then assumes a new autochthonous identity and emerges from the earth anew.

Even when the Settler indigenizes or roots themselves into the land; they do not become stuck there like Native peoples. In her book, *Black Body: Women, Colonialism and Space*, Radhika Mohanram spends time explaining how enlightenment notions of the Indigene and European binary operate.<sup>21</sup> The body conceived as incarcerated by nature is partially achieved by the discursive construction of the native as a “person who is born and thus belongs to a certain place,” and is in fact over determined by that place.<sup>22</sup> The European on the other hand can be of a place but is not incarcerated by it like the Native. Their settler “indigeneity” offers them “unfettered mobility” as well as unfettered self actualization. Native people do not acquire this through their indigenous status. Upon encountering the settler (who becomes indigenous) the Native experiences their indigeneity as non-existence and death. The clearing also shapes Blackness as it carves out the settlement-plantation.

The clearing in its verb form certainly labored across the bodies of Native people. However, the clearing also worked on and transformed the bodies of Blacks. The Black body is turned into the Settled-slave. Nana and Elizabeth Peasant are Settled-slaves whose bodies evince the way that the process of settling “cleared” Blacks of all spatial coordinates that could make them human during this process of making the settlement/plantation. Blacks become mere ‘states of flux,’ and the atomic potential for space. At the site of the clearing, both a spatial and ontological production, Black bodies

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<sup>21</sup> Mohanram, *Black Body: Women, Colonialism, and Space*, p. 11

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

are the raw material and precursor to space. While Black bodies are geographic and necessary to the production of space they are not geographic subjects that humanly inhabit space at the site of the clearing.<sup>23</sup> As geographic—dark—matter and material under settlement they make space possible but cannot occupy it. Existing in a continual state of liminality and change Black femaleness is a place making unit but not in place.

Place is where humanness resides. According to Tim Cresswell, place and its links to humanness, morality and identity are a part of a humanistic project.<sup>24</sup> For the humanist undertaking geography, “ontological priority was given to the human immersion in place rather than the abstractions of geometric space.”<sup>25</sup> The humanist concept of place is accompanied by the baggage of morality, identity, authenticity and exclusion.<sup>26</sup> Within modern thought systems, there is a tendency to locate people with certain identities in certain places. There is also a tendency within this metaphysical framework to imagine “mobile people in wholly negative ways.”<sup>27</sup> Bodies on the move or sentient beings in a state of “fixed-flux” who slip into death like the Native or slide and transform as fungible flesh have no place and are considered suspect within this worldview.

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<sup>23</sup> McKittrick argues that Black subjects, specifically Black women are geographic subjects. Willerson on the other hand argues throughout *Red, White and Black* that Blacks have no spatial coordinates or place for that matter. I however, hold these two thinkers understandings of Black peoples relationship to space in tension. I argue that Blacks are crucial to the production of Settler space, however can not occupy it on the Settler’s terms.

<sup>24</sup> Tim Cresswell, “Introduction” in *Mobilizing Place, Placing Mobility: The Politics of Representation in a Globalized World*, p. 12 Cresswell argues that since antiquity, western philosophy has enshrined space as universal and abstract. People, bodies and the particular aspects of mere place did not belong there. That is until the 1970s when “humanistic geographers” attempted to re-people space and focus on the “geographical nature of being-in-the-world.”

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14 Drawing upon the work of Lisa Malkki, Cresswell argues that a value on place is part of a “sedentary metaphysics.”

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

Through humanist articulations and re-theorizations of place, the universal and abstract notion of space becomes humanized and exclusionary admitting only a select group of people. Making a place is also about making a home.<sup>28</sup> Place (and space) as home was functioning within imperialist endeavors of the enlightenment far before human geographers of the 1970s named it as such. As a geographer, Tuan has focused a great deal of attention on the extent to which people have attempted to “create order and homeliness out of the apparent chaos of raw nature.”<sup>29</sup> In fact “the concept of place is central to our understanding of how people turn nature into culture by making it their home.”<sup>30</sup> What happens when this humanist endeavor of turning nature/chaos into culture/order/home meets up with the imperialist endeavor?

Sylvia Wynter argues that both the Native and the Black are considered states of non-Reason and chaos within Enlightenment humanism. Under imperialism, both the bodies and the lands of Native and Black people were states of chaos that needed to be ordered. While Tuan’s configuration of place and the transformation of raw nature into a home for humankind does not have the violent and exclusionary form of the human in mind, my reconfiguration of the place of settlement does. The landscapes of settlement, when they appear to the eye as a tranquil pasture with a log cabin or people sun bathing on a beach conceal the violent processes hidden in the clearing.

One way of revealing what is hidden is through rethinking what a landscape is and how it functions. Richard Schein presents an interpretation of landscape as a process.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p. 12 Homes as spaces have often indexed homogenous and exclusive places. Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan has argued that geography “is the study of earth as the Home of Man.”

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p. 13

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

In fact, Schein argues that landscape is always in the “process of becoming.”<sup>31</sup> Another aspect of Schein’s theorization of the landscape that is productive is that he construes the landscapes as having material and epistemological value. The epistemology of the landscape disciplines those who come into contact with it. The disciplinary element of landscape is embedded in the fact that the material aspect of the landscape is seen, and presents itself as linear and objective.<sup>32</sup> The landscape is in fact not self evident but duplicitous.<sup>33</sup> Likewise settlement as a process and what it achieves even in its materiality (clearing, settlement-plantation) is not self-evident but multivalent and at times counter intuitive.

What is hidden is that settlement is not just the making of a physical location for the Settler; rather, what is concealed is the simultaneous process of the Settler rooting in order to launch. Settlement is the subjugation and sinking/fixing of others into a state of flux (death, fungibility) in order for the Settler to transcend into a state of humanness. As the ultimate self actualizing human, the Settler can actually overcome the particularity of place (body, gender, race, abject sexuality) and launch into universal and abstract space (humanness). To be human in Frank Wilderson’s terms is to have “cartographic capacity.”<sup>34</sup> “Spatial and temporal capacity is so immanent on the field of Whiteness that the effects and permutations of its ensemble of questions and the kinds of White bodies that can mobilize this universe of combinations are seemingly infinite as well.”<sup>35</sup> To be a

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<sup>31</sup> Richard Schein, “Conceptual Framework for Interpreting an American Scene,” in *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol. 87, No. 4, 1997, p. 662

<sup>32</sup> Schein, p. 667

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, p. 660

<sup>34</sup> Wilderson, 181

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 297

Savage or to be Black is to exist in the realm of no time and space.<sup>36</sup> An apt visual for what happens when the Settler (noun) settles (verb) both people and land is one of a propelling long jumper. A long jumper is a subject who plants in order to launch oneself into space. This process of disciplining bodies, land and the viewers' eye is hard to always perceive.

One of the ways that landscapes come into view and also obscure themselves is through the representational work of archives. Archives often stand as material records, locations, buildings, people, narratives and discourses where we are often told that truth can be found. Schein's description of a cultural landscape as "discourse materialized" opens up the possibility of reading the archive, specifically Eliza Lucas Pinckney's archive as a discourse that "touch[es] ground."<sup>37</sup> I would like to unsettle and disrupt the ways that the Eliza Lucas Pinckney archive creates a landscape of settlement that veils the ways that place/non-place and human/non-human ontologies are being created at her Wappoo, Waccamaw and Garden Hill settlement plantations. I also want to expose the way that she is made to function outside of the category of the Settler/Master. Many historians can remark on the rather pristine and harmonious depictions of her as a slave master. Few remark on the fact that she had great stakes in and supported the death of the Cherokee in the Indian Wars. And there are almost no analyses of the ways that both her Master and Settler status constituted one another and required the negation of both the Native and the Black in order to make her a human.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 195

<sup>37</sup> Schien, 666

## **An Archive of Settlement**

I return to our beloved teenager, Eliza. However, I take a different route. Rather than move in a linear direction, I back into her archive. I also enter her sacred letterbook at the gaps, silences and the spaces of the unutterable. As I flip through these pages I take my direction from the hands of Elizabeth Peasant that point to the gaps in the text. Elizabeth Peasant haunts the Eliza Pinckney or “Pinchney” archive. (Elizabeth Peasant’s Gullah tongue even changes Eliza Lucas’ married name from Pinckney to Pinchney.) As a body and a story that hovers about the archive, she reveals multiple stories about how the archive works to tell a story about the nascent nation. The stories I am most interested in concern the ways that the violence of settlement falls off the pages, and the ways that Blackness is produced by settlement and in turn structures settlement.

When we approach an archive’s narrative structure by listening to the silences and feeling for the presence of missing bodies and voices we can witness the ways that Nana and Elizabeth were settled in order for Eliza Lucas to become a settler. We need to hear about the unique relationships that Eliza Lucas Pinckney and Elizabeth Peasant shared to land, specifically the cultivation of indigo to understand how their structural positions were carved into the social structure and into the land. The excisions of this archive happen at the level of the social rather than at the level of the interior and the individual. Humanists have often had to use the work of creative writers and artists to fill in the gaps in the archives of probate records, official documents and state records. The voices of marginalized and the subaltern are often recovered through these humanistic efforts.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* is an example of this recovery process. The voice, interior life and perhaps radical notion of love of the Black female fugitive slave and mother, Margaret Garner is made audible through the Nobel Laureate’s novel.

Dash's novel is used in this chapter to recover the hidden, but at the level of the structural/social, rather than the individual. While I do not attempt to recover the individual or collective voices of the multiple and nameless "negros," "Slaves," "Servants," "Cherokees," and "Savages," I do try and recover what goes unmentioned about the ways that settler colonial relations structured how Whites related to Blacks and Natives as they were settling the land. What appeared in the Eliza Lucas Pinckney archive about how Settler/Master/Human were considering their place on the land? What went unspoken when the land was being settled? Dash's depiction of Elizabeth Peasant and Eliza Lucas "Pinchney"/Pinckney's relationship to the process of cultivating the indigo plant tells us a lot about how the settler colonial social order tried to fix people's relationship to the landscape and their proximity to or distance from the category of human. The Peasant family's saga to tame a plot of land of their own also reveals the unique relationships that Black descendants of slaves have to land in the "New World." Finally, St. Julien Last Child and his family's relationship or union with the Peasant family and other Blacks tells us about the unique conditions of possibility that existed for a Red-Black "coalition." Dash unsettles an iconic American figure's archive in ways that help us rethink settlement, place, belonging and coalitional politics.

In order to unsettle and approach the Eliza Lucas Pinckney archive in a way that is revelatory, we need to actually dress it up. It needs to be appropriately adorned so that its epic proportions can be acknowledged. Eliza Lucas Pinckney's archive is far too shy, too demure and tightly corseted. Her archive is far too edited and processed to adequately credit her with helping to secure the ontological position of the Settler-Master. All she is given credit for in American colonial mythology is the cultivation of indigo,

saving the low country's economy and exemplifying the transformative process that is becoming an American through the land. While she is credited with taking part in the enormous project of bringing the Western Hemisphere into modernity, she is not given accolades for helping to launch whiteness into an unending state of self actualization. There is no conversation about the kind of parasitic being she had to become in order to become a Settler and an American. She and her archive are under dressed for the occasion. Modernity is accessorized by death. It is an indigo silk dress worn with deep crimson blood droplet shaped earrings, necklaces made of flesh, and a spritz or two of that odiferous perfume, death.

The undeniable odor of death may have been left out by Eliza's herself or omitted from her letters by the numerous people and institutions that made her letters public. A direct descendent Elise Pinckney worked with History professor Marvin Zahniser to compile and edit the volume of letters. The "well edited" letters are divided into three parts: "Early Letters from Carolina: 1739-1746," "Letters from England: 1753-1757," and "Letters from Carolina: 1758-1762."<sup>39</sup> The volume also contains approximately 200 footnotes. The letterbook is currently owned by the South Carolina Historical Society. Any possible mentions of the death of slaves working the indigo or the gratuitous violence of the settlers killing the Cherokee by Eliza Lucas Pinckney were surely scrutinized carefully by her descendant Elise, Professor Zahniser, and other interested parties. Reviewer Sam S. Baskett of Michigan State refers to the processing of the

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<sup>39</sup> Hugh Lefler, Review of *The Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney, 1739-1762*. Edited by Elise Pinckney. Editorial assistance by Marvin Zahniser, Introduction by Walter M. Whitehill. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972) in the *Florida Historical Quarterly* 1974., p. 185-186

archive as one of “painstaking editing.”<sup>40</sup> While we cannot ascertain for sure what was processed or excised from the Eliza Lucas Pinckney archive, we do have a hard time reading for how the slave was settled, the Settler-Master made human, and the Native disappeared. The need to create a mythical figure from a mythical time resulted in a letterbook that omitted the details of the coarse and brutal daily transactions that Eliza Lucas Pinckney made regarding the Black flesh and Native land she owned. However, a counter-archive, like Dash’s novel and film can reveal how this ontological and world-making form of modern violence occurred through the mundane and everyday processes of settling the land.

Death and danger were a part of the daily routine that was the practice of settling land through the cultivation of the indigo plant, particularly the process of turning indigo into dye cakes. In Dash’s novel, the Peazants know that indigo is a very dangerous plant. Nana Peasant tells her granddaughter Elizabeth (ancestor of Ayodele/Elizabeth) about the relationship that women had to the land and crops like indigo in West Africa before they arrived in the New World. Speaking of the daughters in the Peasant ancestral line, “Each of us daughters grew only the crops that she knew best. I’m not sure what the others had, maybe okra, cotton or pumpkins, but Ayodele’s mama must have been very quick for she was the only one who grew the indigo.”<sup>41</sup> As Nana tells her granddaughter Elizabeth II (great, great, great granddaughter of Elizabeth/Ayodele) this story, Elizabeth II also remembers that “Nana say indigo dangerous plant to mess with an very poisonous. So

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<sup>40</sup> Sam S. Baskett, Review of *The Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney: 1739-1762* by Eliza Lucas Pinckney: Elise Pinckney. *The South Carolina Historical Magazine*, Vol. 73, No. 3 (Jul., 1972), pp. 159-160, p. 160

<sup>41</sup> Dash, *Daughters of the Dust: A Novel*, p. 88

you see, she [Ayodele/Elizabeth] must been plenty good.”<sup>42</sup> The risk of death to the slaves directly working with the indigo as well as to residents of the Lucas plantation was not acknowledged or recorded in the letterbook.<sup>43</sup> Eliza Lucas Pinckney dies in 1793 of cancer.

While we do know the reason for Eliza’s death, we do not know the cause of each of the slaves that worked the indigo on her plantation. Almost no description is given of the dangers of the process involved in turning the indican plant into a dye cake. The letterbook includes a simple rendering of the process of making dye cakes. In the rendering, Black males slaves who seem to be expressionless or perhaps even slightly contented with the product, make and stack dye cakes. Additionally, indigo just seems to simply appear (or not) on the plantation as it is reported on by Eliza to her father General Lucas. In an entry in her letterbook dated September 15, 1743 Eliza recounts the following activities.

*Sept. 15, 1743*

*Wrote to my father a very long letter informing him I had received his relating the whole of that unfortunate and ill conserted expedition at Lagaira. About plantation affairs: We made very little Indigo this year---the reasons why. [...]About settleing (sic) the Woppo slaves. Acknowledged the receipt of his letter dated at Port Cavalla with the paper of all the transactions there and at Lagaira inclosed<sup>44</sup>.*

Eliza’s relative detachment from the actual process of cultivating indigo and from managing the slaves doing the labor is consistently conveyed throughout the letterbook.

The only moments where the letter reads as if she directly supervised or managed the

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Eliza Lucas Pinckney dies in 1793 in Philadelphia of cancer. Cancer is what scholars of slavery in the region now call the disease that killed many of the slaves who worked on indigo plantations.

<sup>44</sup> Eliza Lucas Pinckney, *The Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney: 1739-1762*, edited by Elise Pinckney (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972)p. 69

Black bodies on the settlement-plantation is when she gives overseers directions about moving or specifically “settling” slaves. There is also an account of her walking about the “garden” (read settlement-plantation). Her moment in the garden and brief engagement with or surveillance of the slaves and landscape is one of the most quoted passages of the letterbook. While most scholars of her archive refer to this text as a way to reference her benevolence to her slaves who she taught to read, I direct attention to it for other reasons. I need not make her a brutal slaveowner, but I do need to analyze her as a master who had a particular orientation to the earth, its crops and the process of settlement. She had a unique vantage point and spatial location in her relation to her slaves who dealt directly with the earth.

In her often cited letter to Miss Bartlett, that is thought to be written between [c.March-April, 1742] she writes to her acquaintance,

*In general then I rise at five o 'Clock in the morning, read till Seven, than take a walk in the garden or field, see that the Servants are at their respective business, then to breakfast. The first hour after breakfast is spent at my musick, the next is constantly employed in recovering something I have learned least for want of practice it should be quite lost, such as French and short hand. After that I devote the rest of the time till I dress for dinner to our little Polly and two black girls who I teach to read, and if I have my papa's approbation (my Mama's I have for) I intend [them] for school mistres's for the rest of the Negroe children—another scheme you see.<sup>45</sup>*

In the footnote that accompanies this entry in the letterbook, the annotation suggests that Eliza Lucas Pinckney was invested in not only educating negroes but also negro teachers. The footnote states that this belief and practice was advanced or progressive for the time<sup>46</sup>. The editorial team made extensive efforts to provide the necessary historical context to situate Eliza Lucas Pinckney as a “good” and kind slave master. However, her

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p. 34

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

role in the process of cultivating indigo for which she is most notable and leaves the greatest legacy to her nation is not elaborated on in this archive. What we do know from the archive is that she rose early and took a walk in the “garden or field” to see that the servants were attending to their respective business. She went to “see that the Servants are at their respective business.”<sup>47</sup> While we can not speculate what her use of the verb “see” really entailed, we do know that she was overseeing how busy her slaves were. Eliza has a specific relationship to the “garden or field” (read settlement-plantation). She walks through and surveys.

Eliza’s subject position is one of moving through space and observing the process, certainly of indigo production of which she is concerned, that the Servants (slaves) were busy doing. This structural and hierarchical vantage point is one of not only all knowing surveyor with a totalizing eye, but one of also an engineer overseeing the work of the briocoleur.<sup>48</sup> Levi Strauss articulates this relationship as one of the position of the universal mind versus the position of the body or embodied.<sup>49</sup> Elizabeth is portrayed as the universal mind that creates the scheme for cultivating the crop while the Slave is the body that works with the actual plant. For this particular gendered position of the Settler/Master/Human the process of settlement requires envisioning, imagining and speaking/writing one’s intentions while the enslaved and settled body establishes a

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> I offer a caveat here and concede that the power of the Settler/Eliza Lucas Pinckney is not total. Slaves certainly do enact various forms of agency. This focus of this project however, is a discussion and rethinking of larger ontological and world ordering structural positions like Settler/Slave/Savage. For literature on the diffuse and competing nature of power between Slaves and Master on plantations see the work of the following scholars: Psyche A. Williams-Forsom. *Building houses out of chicken legs: Black women, food, and power*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006). Robert Paynter and Randall H. McGuire, "The Archaeology of Inequality: Material Culture, Domination, and Resistance," in Paynter & McGuire, *Archaeology of Inequality* (1991): 1-27; Dell Upton, "White and Black Landscapes in Eighteenth Century Virginia," in *Material Life in America, 1600-1860*, ed. St. George (1988);

<sup>49</sup> Mohanram, *Black Bodies, Space and Colonialism*

relationship with the land. The enslaved body has a relationship and actual links to the land in this case. While the slave becomes autochthonous (one with nature/soil) in this situation, Eliza gets to claim indigeneity.

Scholars, patriots and Americans alike refer to Eliza Lucas Pinckney as a woman who was one with the land and thus American.

Eliza Lucas Pinckney, entirely human, was never weak, as these letters make clear; and they also offer the reason: although first preferring English civilities to the circumstances of Carolina, where ‘my lot has fallen,’ she never withheld herself, and gradually, and eventually completely she found herself possessed by the New Land; and she thus becomes through these largely artless autobiographical writings a kind of American heroine, helping to define for herself and her successors this new person, the American.<sup>50</sup>

Eliza’s autochthony or possession by the New Land is achieved by proxy. The Black Settled-Slave remains embedded in or merged with nature and the settler maintains a safe distance from nature while claiming Black (forced autochthony) and Native (autochthony and indigeneity) embeddedness for themselves. If we take a look at Dash’s filmic depiction of the noxious place of indigo processing, we can also see why autochthony by proxy was a preferred situation particularly as it relates to indigo dye cultivation. This part of the settlement-plantation was a place where Black bodies are turned into hybrid plant-flesh mutants. It is a murky and foggy place where it is difficult to make out the lines between flesh and earth, and more importantly between the human and nature. This is the location where ahuman Blackness is produced on the settlement-plantation.

Dash depicts this anarchic, nethermost and far-off region of the settlement-plantation through Nana Peazant who wears the indigo stains of this non-humanness on her hands. Early in the film, we encounter a scene where Nana sits in a chair weaving a

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<sup>50</sup> Baskett, “Review of Eliza Lucas Pinckney Letterbook,” p. 159

sweetwater basket. Her old tin of memories rests in her lap. We have access to her inner thoughts which tell us “dis da worse place for barnin (being born) when hit slavery times.”<sup>51</sup> As we hear Nana Peazant damn this place, as the worst place to be born during slavery, we see on screen an indigo vat that is embedded in the ground. There is a bright blue opaque liquid that bubbles and foams in the cauldron like vat. Two sets of hands are in the vat of blue liquid. One set of hands fully stained the same color as the soupy substance squeezes a piece of cloth that releases blue liquid into the vat. A second set of hands closer to the screen and viewer dips a piece of blue cloth in and out of the dye. We hear Nana Peazant’s voice again. Nana remarks on her own body, “Mi hands scarred wit blue from da poisonous indigo dye what built up all dem plantations from swamp land.”<sup>52</sup>

Though Eliza Lucas Pinckney would have not encountered any blue handed slaves on her plantation, she did claim to walk about the “garden or fields” to see what her slaves were doing. She would have had to have walked through the murky, pungent and noxious part of the settlement-plantation in order to monitor indigo production and report back to her father. Indigo processing was often sequestered to a region away from the residential area of the settlement-plantation because of the smell and the flies that it attracted.<sup>53</sup> This spatial segregation also represents a way of marking racial, gender and essential difference. This ontological difference is best articulated if we analyze the depiction of the relationship between Ayodele/Elizabeth Peazant and Eliza Lucas “Pinckney” in Dash’s novel. I want to use the respective relationship that they both have

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<sup>51</sup> Dash, *Daughters of the Dust*, DVD time code 30:53

<sup>52</sup> My transcription of what I hear in the audio at (30:53) is different than the lines that appear in the screenplay.

<sup>53</sup> Terry Sharrer, “The Indigo Bonanza in South Carolina, 1740-90”, *Technology and Culture*, Volume.12, No.3 (Jul, 1971), p. 452

to the noxious dehumanizing process of making indigo, a practice of settlement, in order to explore their relationship as one premised on negation and human self actualization.

### **Elizabeth/Eliza: Chaos and Humanity**

Elizabeth is Eliza's edge. Elizabeth is the outer most space, the transition point where humanness meets nature. Sylvia Wynter argues that the Black represents chaos and non-being in liberal postulations of the human. Ayodele/Elizabeth Peasant must exist in proximity to the fermentation and decay of the indican plant in order for Eliza Lucas Pinchney to become a transcendent human. Eliza Lucas Pinchney is a parasite that eats Elizabeth. As a Settler-Master she walks through the murky space of the indigo processing quarter of the plantation and goes back to the house to have breakfast. As a human, she is a knower of the process of transforming the indican plant into indigo and then into a dye cake; but she knows this process at a safe distance. Her knowledge is derived from a God's eye-view. Her epistemic vantage point and way of knowing about indigo, enough to report the yield to her father, are of a different epistemic vantage point than Elizabeth's.

Elizabeth has knowledge of the cultivation of indigo at multiple levels, but particularly at the level of the body. Indigo bleeds into her body and the bodies of her descendants. She and Nana Peasant know indigo at a cognitive, embodied and spiritual level. Their blue stained bodies are not bounded, autonomous and separate from the indican plant or the indigo dye. They are at times one with, embedded and settled in the land. They can become the land. Black female gender in the process of making indigo, forced to settle the land, has a boundless violable body and therefore no spatial coordinates or place. As a placeless female body she has no human gender. Eliza Lucas

Pinckney now has a void from which to emerge and know her humanness, her womanliness. She knows she is a woman because she is not (an) Elizabeth.

While Eliza Lucas Pinckney may have a penetrable body in comparison to white men, she is not penetrable, violable and without spatial coordinates in the way that Elizabeth is. Elizabeth is penetrable at a different order and scale. Elizabeth's non human gender has no boundaries and can be polluted. As Spillers and Hartman argue, Black female slave gender is called forth as a discourse of malleability and fungibility. According to Hartman, applying gender to the captive or "en-gendering race" provides us with an opportunity to look at a specific form of subjectification.<sup>54</sup> Instead of trying to define the category "woman," Hartman suggests that we do some other kind of work. If we think of the hailing forth of woman as an active process that describes a form of power rather than gender as a subject-woman we may get further. Hartman asks the following questions:

What happens if we assume that the female subject serves as a general case for explicating social death, property relations, and the pained and punitive construction of blackness? What would be made possible if, rather than assuming the subject, we began our inquiry with a description of subjectification that did not attempt to name or interpret anything but to simply describe its surfaces? [...] Could we, in fact, release the category of woman from its fixity and white normativity and likewise examine racial subjection in articulation with engenderment.<sup>55</sup>

As we explored in chapter one, gender for the Black female slave does not make her another kind of female/woman human. Gender is a form of racial subjection whose power produces a range of states of being. We can come to imagine Eliza Lucas Pinckney as a woman and Settler/Master/Human woman through the engendering or

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<sup>54</sup> Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, p. 96

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, p. 100

dehumanization of her fictional slave (Elizabeth) and actual female slaves. We can watch as the Settler-Master and Settled-Slave are made.

### **Who is the Settler?**

Eliza Lucas Pinckney becomes a settler, or as Frank Wilderson argues a White settler/master/human, through the non-humanness or the lack of the other. For Wilderson, “Ontological Whiteness is secured not through its cultural, economic, or gendered identities but by the fact that it cannot be known (positioned) by genocide or by accumulation and fungibility.”<sup>56</sup> In fact, whiteness needs these ontological positions of non-being (genocide and fungibility/accumulation) in order for it to exist. “Whiteness is parasitic because it monumentalized its subjective capacity, its lush cartography, in direct proportion to the wasteland of Black incapacity.”<sup>57</sup> Further, the “banality of Settler ontology (family, sexuality, spirituality, civic practice) is structured by, and indebted to, the gratuitousness of “Savage” genocide.”<sup>58</sup> Wilderson asks the Settler/Human “How does Native absence elaborate your (white, latino, asian) presence?”<sup>59</sup> How someone “elaborates” their presence is fundamental to understanding ontological capacity; specifically the capacity that the Settler has to be and continually self actualize.

The capacity to self actualize or “elaborate your presence” through the negation of others is what I want to consider when thinking about Black people’s relationship to Native peoples, White Settlers and the land, specifically the process of settling the land. What relationship does the Slave have to the Settler/Master, the Native and the land? This was one of the questions that brought me to this project. In the latter portion of the

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<sup>56</sup> Wilderson, p. 215

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p. 45

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p. 161

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

chapter, I want to explore this question through understanding Black people's relationship to settling the land, or making a home place on the land. Through the examples of Ayodele/Elizabeth, Nana Peazant and other slaves on settlement-plantations, I have argued that Black people are made non-human or dehumanized through the process of settling the plantation. While the process of settlement (making of the plantation-plot, cultivating indigo) does not require the genocide of Black people like it does the Native, the process does require that they become forms of fungible property. All processes of settlement within slavery require that the Black body make itself malleable, fungible and useful to the process of settlement. At times, they become a-human plant-flesh hybrids or are embedded in the land in other ways. On a number of occasions Eliza Lucas Pinckney talks about her plans to settle slaves or settling a plantation with slaves. Slaves are not referred to as settlers in her letterbook.

The grammar or parts of speech used in Eliza Lucas Pinckney's letterbook suggest that we rethink who could be a settler in this particular historical moment. Lucas Pinckney's epistles would suggest that the settler is a white subject position that neither the Native nor the Black can occupy. In a letter that she sends to Mrs. Onslow in November of 1759, Pinckney reports on the news coming from the frontlines of the Indian War in Cherokee territory. In an excerpt to Madam Onslow, she trepidatiously shares the grim news of murders of whites.

*The news of it must reach you before this letter, as perhaps the news of our being engaged here in an Indian Warr, which from the goodness of your heart must be some allay to the former good news. As to my own part, unconnected with those that are very dear to me, I have nither hopes nor fears, so perfectly stupid with regard to anything that may happen to my self (sic) am I, that I am more like a thing petrified past felling than one in fear of losing their scalp. However, 'tis a very serious affair and I hope for the sake of my own children and friends in*

*particular as well as the people in general that the Almighty will protect us in safety and give success to our Gov's Endeavours to attain a firm and lasting peace. He is thought to have both courage and conduct, and both are very necessary in a Commander, especially against these savage Enemys. He set out last week for the Cherokee nation to demand satisfaction at the head of an army for the Cruel murders they have committed on our back settlers. What the Event will be Heaven only knows. We hope a good and lasting peace. Adieu, Dr. Madm. Believe me to be with great truth. Yr. most afte. And o.h.St. E. Pinckney<sup>60</sup>*

For Eliza Lucas Pinckney, settlers, specifically the back settlers she refers to in her letter to Mrs. Onslow are white. Pinckney uses the possessive noun our as a modifier and way of establishing her own, Ms. Onlow's, and other Carolinians relationship to the white settler. According to Pinckney, the Settler is ours or is one of us. Clearly in relationship to the Cherokee, whom the settler's army is at war with, the Native is considered a "savage Enemy."<sup>61</sup> While the Settler/Native binary is clearly constructed in the Pinckney archive, what can be made of the settler's relationship to the Black? Also how do we parse the relationship that Blacks have to settlement as a spatial and ontological practice?

I return to a discursive analysis conducted at the level that Frank Wilderson is concerned with in his attempt to deconstruct the grammatical structure of white violence in the US. Paying attention to how the words "settle" and "settling" appear in relationship to Black bodies in Pinickney's letters brings us closer to an understanding of the relationship that Black bodies have to the spatial and ontological position of the settler. In a letter to her father written in February of either 1743 or 1744 she writes about the progress made regarding the Wappoo plantation. She writes that she "wrote to

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<sup>60</sup> Eliza Lucas Pinckney, *Letterbook*, p. 127-8

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128

father” and the content of the letter was “Concerning settleing a plantation to the North with the Woppo slaves, &c., &c.”<sup>62</sup>

Grammatically, Pinckney is able to link the process of settlement with the space of the plantation. Again, the plantation or the “slave estate” where Blackness is produced and disciplined is directly related to the appropriation and transformation of Cherokee land into the plantation-plot. This landscape where both forms of power can be perceived and understood as co-constituting one another is the space that I have called the settlement-plantation throughout. Pinckney’s grammatical structure also suggests that one settles a plantation “with the Woppo slaves.”<sup>63</sup> Slaves are used to settle the plantation but they are never referred to in this passage or throughout the letterbook as Settlers. They are required to make the place of Settlers but do not occupy the ontological position of Settlers. Black bodies make property in a variety of forms; children, indigo, crops, plantation-plots and etc. In the process of settling the plantation slaves are forced to reify their status as fungible property by producing another form of property (the settlement-plantation) which becomes the space of the slave’s captivity and the Settler’s self actualization.

In a letter written by Pinckney on September 15, 1743, we see a slightly different use of the verb to settle. In this passage to her father, we see that the slave rather than the land is settled. She writes, “Wrote to my father a very long letter informing him I had received his [letter] relating the whole of that unfortunate and ill conserted expedition at Laguira. About plantation affairs: We made very little Indigo this year—the reasons why.[...]About settleing the Woppo slaves. Acknowledged the receipt of his letter dated

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<sup>62</sup> Eliza Lucas Pinckney, *Letterbook*, p. 58

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

at Port Cavalla with the paper of all the transactions there and at Laguira inclosed.”<sup>64</sup>

Like the land that the Settler steals and transforms for their own use the Black body becomes another form of terra nullius to transport, transform, and increase. Black bodies become material/flesh to settle like the land. They are not Settlers.

### **Ambivalent and Impossible Settlers**

Julie Dash depicts Black life on the land in the Sea Islands in an indelible way. One can often feel sea wind, salt and sand on the skin when encountering her work. A lush grove of oaks canopy the imagination as we travel with her characters on the low country’s dirt roads. Both in her film and novel she creates an imaginative realm where Black bodies have fraught and tempestuous relationships to land. The land is both breathtaking and welcoming yet holds a history that prevents its full embrace. Dash’s characters strive for an autochthonous link to the land and an indigenous relationship to place; however, the history of slavery prevents these kinds of bonds. We become vividly aware of this barrier to land possession and claims to settlement in the novel. The impossibility of settlement for members of the Peazant family, or Black people, can be read through Lucy Peazant’s struggle with cultivating a piece of land for herself, her fiancé and their unborn children. Lucy is a young woman who represents the future of the Peazant family and their frustrated attempts to settle and become Settlers on the land.

There is no denying that the desire to settle a place was strong in Lucy. She longed to cultivate a plot of land for her family. Lucy imagines owning the plot of land as the fulfillment of a promise made to Blacks during Reconstruction. Owning land, cultivating or settling it becomes a dream of hers; it becomes the possibility of taking

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69

hold of a white settler tradition of place-making in the United States. Owning land becomes a way to finally belong. Lucy tells her cousin Amelia about the land that she has acquired from a Black family, the Wilkersons. The Union Army gave the Wilkerson family the land after the Civil War.

No, dey got deir forty acres. Trinity Wilkerson was de cook for de Sykes Family. Dey won de plantation. When de war come, dey run, an Trinity stay an cook for de Yankees. Come de end of de War, dey give her forty acres, an her get de best land she fin. Her get de piece where de road run. Her got easy water, creek go cross de back. Her know de land. Her born right here.” Lucy spoke with admiration. “Dat meadow, it rich land. Grass grow so thick and green. I know I can get two, three of de yield I get from Daddy’s land.”<sup>65</sup>

Receivership through reparations has often been viewed as a just way of accumulating land by Blacks. The Freedman’s Bureau considered “forty acres and a mule” ample restitution for the injury of enslavement. Property is circulated back into forms of freedom. As Saidiya Hartman argues, unfreedom is resuscitated through notions of freedom post emancipation.<sup>66</sup>

Reparations in the form of property in the context of a settler colonial nation where Native people are meant to disappear and Black people are made fungible by Settler-Masters makes Lucy’s acquisition problematic. For a moment, Lucy is able to embrace this sense of self actualization through ownership. I would even argue that she tries to assume the speculative gaze of a surveying settler. “Lucy knelt and grabbed a fist full of soil, inspecting it. ‘Dis here de bit we buyin. I burnt this back last summer fore you got here. Clear out all dem weeds, crazy grass, an young trees. It come long real good.’ She shook de dirt from her hand and stepped back to straighten the harness on the

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<sup>65</sup> Dash, *Daughters of the Dust: A Novel*, p. 225

<sup>66</sup> Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*

mule.”<sup>67</sup> Lucy even succumbs to the protestant work ethic that informs the settler colonial ideal that the land must be altered or cultivated as a form of property in order to possess it. Running her hand along the spine of her mule Homer, Lucy proclaims, “You aint getting nuttin till you put in a day work!”<sup>68</sup>

It is evident that Black people were in a position to buy and cultivate land. Many Black people did on the Sea Islands. What is debatable is whether Black people can assume an ontological position of self actualization and autonomy based upon this relationship to land and development. As Lucy is cultivating her plot of land, she finds a grisly discovery that forecloses the possibility of her settling and occupying this piece of land. Lucy finds a body. “Lucy collapsed against her, unable to hold her head up. Trembling violently, Lucy pointed back to where the mule waited patiently for her return. ‘It evil! It evil back dere!’ She bent over clutching her stomach.”<sup>69</sup> Lucy finds the remains of a slave buried in the plot of land. It is a mutilated slave shackled and chained to the plot of land it was forced to work.

[Amelia] stared at the spot, then kneeled down and looked at an object that the plow had uncovered. She felt her heart begin to pound as she brushed the dirt from a pair of rusted shackles, a chain running from the ground. Despite her misgivings, she grabbed a jagged-edged stick that lay in the furrow and began to dig. As she continued to burrow into the earth, her eyes filled with tears as she recognized a human leg bone. Dropping the stick, she jerked away and walked to the front of the plow and saw, at last, what had sent Lucy spinning. A piece of skull was impaled on the front blade; a jaw bone with several teeth lay in the scattered earth. She backed away and ran over to Lucy, who was curled on the ground, crying. She pulled Lucy up, slipped her arm around her waist and half carried her home.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Dash, *Daughters of the Dust: A Novel*, p. 225

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 227

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

This scene represents the destruction or at least deferral of the Black “Settler” dream. Lucy, and other Blacks I will argue, must have inevitably faced the realization that Black people experienced physical and social death as the land, specifically the settlement-plantation was being settled. While the slave in this case did not die of cancer and other ailments caused by the poisonous process of indigo cultivation they died chained to the life sucking work of making a place for the Settler-Master.

Black scholars and thinkers could read the bodies of slaves’ entombment within the land, and the slave whose hands are stained with indigo in multiple ways. Often Black people’s blood, sweat, tears, bodily fluids and waste that are said to have nourished the soil are read as scatological performances of Black autochthony. Black people nourished or fertilized the land. This bodily material in the land allows Blacks to perform a oneness with the land. In Dash’s novel, an elder and spiritual leader on the Islands tells Amelia to honor the slave found chained to the plot of land. “Go on, gal. Let dem saltwater tears wash down and cleanse dem. Ain’t nobody cry for dem for years. Dey lay out in dat field for nobody knew how long. Dat why dat field so rich with de earth. Our elders give it dey life-blood. Dey give to we what was took from dem. She gestured for Amelia to spread the bones.”<sup>71</sup> These notions of Black autochthony are racial narratives that are kept in circulation by the cultural production of Black people.

The storyteller, particularly the African American novelist has had a significant role in the construction of the Black subject who has either indigenous blood in their veins or is autochthonous to the land. Toni Morrison’s novels have been the subject of scholarly attention due to her characters’ invocations of a relationship with the land and

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid, p. 241

native ancestors.<sup>72</sup> These invocations of Native blood and autochthonous roots serve as rhetorical devices that work to reify Black people's relationship and sense of belonging to the American landscape and nation-space.

Kimberly Ruffin examined Ntozake Shange's work to explore the role of geography in the development of Shange's characters. In her reflections on Shange's 1982 novel *Sassafrass, Cypress and Indigo* (all indigenous plants in that region of the South which function as the names of the main characters) she focuses on the character Indigo's deep connection to the South. Ruffin writes, "Shange's description of Indigo is that she has 'the South in her,' sometimes in excessive amounts. Shange writes, 'The South in her, the land and the salt winds, moved her through Charleston's streets as if she were a mobile sapling with the gait of a well-loved colored woman whose lover was the horizon in any direction...she made herself, her world, from all that she came from.'"<sup>73</sup> In this passage we get a rich image of how Black autochthony is established rhetorically and discursively in the folkways and cultural productions of African Americans in the US South.

Indigo is "fantastically and sensually" merged with the natural environment of Charleston, South Carolina.<sup>74</sup> The cultural, literary and imaginary traditions of Black people allow for Blacks to both embed themselves in the land and become bodies that the land can embed itself in as well. The land and nature is in Shange's character Indigo, by virtue of her name and also in the imagery of her moving through the streets like a

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<sup>72</sup> Virginia Kennedy, "Native Americans, African Americans and the Space that is America: Indian Presence in the Fiction of Toni Morrison," in *Crossing Waters, Crossing Worlds: The African Diaspora in Indian Country*, eds. Tiya Miles and Sharon Holland (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 196-217.

<sup>73</sup> Kimberly Ruffin, "In a Realm of Monuments and Water" in *Black Geographies*, eds. Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods, (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2007), p. 110

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

“mobile sapling.”<sup>75</sup> Dash’s characters whose hands are stained with indigo can also function as this autochthonous subject as the earth permanently colors or seeps into the epidermis. The epidermis represents a key site in Fanonian conceptualizations of how the corporeal schema (particularly the skin) functions in determining “the Black’s” racial identity. If the skin is part human and part earth, then the Black subject with the earth embedded in them becomes an autochthonous Black. Black racial formation in the U.S. is constituted by space and geography. Producing a racial concept of oneself in a way that establishes roots (through indigeneity or autochthony) in a place may work to provide a temporary effect of providing some stability and agency to a rootless diasporan subject.

While this move toward autochthony can certainly be read as agentive within the terms of existence in settler colonial states; I would like to consider that it maintains settler colonial relations that render Native people invisible and relies on Black displacement. Even when Black people on the Island in Dash’s novel own land it is tenuous. Throughout the novel, Dash creates the speculating white pioneer as a looming figure and threat to the Gullah culture and Black land ownership. Her protagonist is a Black female anthropologist who must secure funding for her research on her Gullah family and their culture. The benefactor of her ethnographic research turns out to be a speculator who is said to have “an interest in the land down there; he’s been talking about another summer home.”<sup>76</sup>

As an artist, Dash is aware of the impending threat to the Gullah culture by greedy speculators and is aware that the persistence of the culture is in part tied to the

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Dash, *Daughters of the Dust: A novel*, p. 31

relationship that Gullah people have to the Islands, the coast and the Sea. Other community and cultural preservation activists in the Gullah community have long tied the rights to land to the preservation of culture. The Gullah community has had to struggle for a right to place for a long time. While for some Blacks the desire to own land can certainly be tied to a quest for citizenship and a desire to be like the settler colonizer, for many Blacks a relationship with a plot of land is also about survival. In the novel, the character Eli attests to the fact that all the Blacks on the Island owned land due to survival. Eli admits to his own need for land, “But everyone on the Island owned their land, and with eight mouths to feed, he could not risk depending only on his smithing.”<sup>77</sup> Work for Blacks was not always reliable or possible outside of exploitation by whites. Land ownership provided an opportunity for Blacks to live off the land and feed their families if they could not secure enough work. And it was an alternative to working for Whites post emancipation.

Queen Qwep (Marquetta Goodwine), a Gullah activist, has been struggling against the displacement of the Gullah people due to a process she calls, destructionment.<sup>78</sup> Destructionment is a neologism that implicates “development” and its neoliberal promises of economic empowerment in the destruction of Gullah people and the displacement of poor Blacks who live on the Islands. This struggle over land tenure is one that Blacks continually face in settler colonial states. Settler colonial relations has made it imperative for people to own land or establish a relation to land as property in

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid, p. 229

<sup>78</sup> Marquetta Goodwine(Queen Quet). *The Legacy of Ibo Landing: Gullah Roots of African American Culture*. Atlanta: Clarity Press, 1998.

order to survive. In this way, they are certainly implicated in relationships to land that maintain a genocidal project against Native peoples. However, Black people's relationship to both land ownership and Native people remains different than white/settlers' relationships to land and Native peoples. Ongoing struggles against gentrification and disasters like Hurricane Katrina, which displaced thousands of Black people from New Orleans, continue to reveal the tenuous relationship that Blacks have to land tenure. Black attempts at place-making come short of the dream and act of settlement that can offer unfettered self actualization in the way that it does for settlers.

Given that the Black dream of settlement is a dream deferred, I want to consider what resting in the space of placelessness, rootlessness or "no place" can offer us in terms of a radical subjectivity.<sup>79</sup> In Dash's novel, Lucy makes the decision that she cannot go back and settle the plot of land: "Lucy turned from the window and flatly stated, 'I caint go back on dat land!..I know dat Miz Emma Julia say it all right, dat de evil been cleared from dat place, but it hurt me just to think about it !' She blurted out. 'I caint go back.'<sup>80</sup> The trauma of both settler colonialism and slavery haunt the land for Lucy. The horror of slavery for Lucy is structured by the processes of settling the land. Slavery and settler colonialism co-constitute one another. Lucy must turn away from not only settling the land, but also must relinquish her former relationship as a property owner. It was the owning of Black bodies as property on land that was considered property, that was lethal.

While, my own reading of Lucy's arc in the novel does not necessarily represent Dash's authorial intentions, the epistemic and ontological weight of this scene exceeds the narrative structure and intent of Dash's novel. This scene allows us to focus on the

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<sup>79</sup> Wilderson, p. 279

<sup>80</sup> Dash, *Daughters of the Dust: A novel*, p. 248

dehumanizing and traumatizing aspects of settler colonial relations of settlement and property that might make Black people reconsider their relationship to land, property, citizenship and belonging in settler colonial states. In the novel, the plot of land ends up blooming with flowers after a proper burial is given to the felled slave. This could be a foretelling of Lucy's return to this land. However, Lucy and her fiancé Charlie do not answer the question as to whether they will go back and cultivate the plot of land. The issue is left unresolved and we are left wondering. What role will this plot of land play in Lucy and her family's future?

As the Peasant family tries to self actualize, the "slave estate" keeps resurfacing or springing up from the ground. The Peasants exist in the forever space of slavery. Frank Wilderson argues that filmmakers who were a part of the LA Rebellion in the 1970s, like Dash, were among a cadre of artists who could make the slaves grammar of violence appear on the screen. Wilderson muses,

Witness Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*. What prevents this film from having the life sucked out of it by some grandiose pabulum proclaiming its "universal" message (e.g., the "universal" message of immigration and all its trials and tribulation) is that *Daughters of the Dust* makes the spectator painfully aware that what is essential about the journey being contemplated and argued over by various members of the family is the impossibility of reducing it to an analogy. Certainly all immigrants all over the world leave one country (or one place) for another. But only Black folks migrate from one place to the next while remaining on the same plantation.<sup>81</sup>

I argue that slavery and settler colonial power are terminal and ongoing in the US. I also argue that slavery and settler colonialism as ongoing forms of death-making power make the Black and Native alliances in Julie Dash's novel and film possible. Dash creates a

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid, p. 140

world where Black and Native people articulate and embody “grammar[s] of suffering” that can be in dialogue with one another.<sup>82</sup>

However, the moments when the Native (Savage) and the Black (Slave) share the time and place of “no time and space” are only under certain conditions.<sup>83</sup> Only during moments when the “ontological death of the Slave and the Savage” are of primary concern to both communities can the Native and the Black be in dialogue.<sup>84</sup> When Native people are struggling against their genocide and articulating genocide as the primary and elemental violence that needs to be eradicated, as opposed to the Native’s need for the recognition of sovereignty, is the moment where possibilities for dialogue are created.”<sup>85</sup> This moment appears on the screen in Dash’s depictions of Black and Native peoples as interlocutors who discuss their survival with one another.

### **An Elsewhere: Coalitional Landscapes**

St. Julien Last Child has had a particular appeal to the African American heterosexual female viewer of Dash’s film. M. Cochise Anderson, the Chickasaw and Choctaw actor and educator, who played St. Julien Last Child, admitted that the film greatly improved his love life. For years he would often be approached by African American women following the release and screening of the film. I attended a symposium commemorating the twenty-year anniversary of the release of the film in

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, p. 195

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, p. 6

<sup>85</sup> This possibility is present in the Native’s “genocidal modality.” Widerson argues that “the genocidal modality of the “Savage” grammar of suffering articulates itself quite well within the two modalities of the Slave’s grammar of suffering, accumulation and fungibilityIbid., p. 28

Charleston, South Carolina where Anderson was in attendance.<sup>86</sup> When Anderson was introduced, several African American women attendees whistled in order to affirm his sex appeal twenty years later. St. Julien Last Child's most memorable scene is during the final minutes of the film when he rides into the frame on a horse and Iona Peazant jumps on the horse and rides away with him. Alongside the first affective register that projects St. Julien Last Child as the embodiment of the hetero-patriarchal fantasy of the shining prince coming to rescue his lover and love itself, St. Julien is also the embodiment of a Native person seeking the possibility of ethical relations between Black and Native peoples.

St. Julien, the Last Child of the Cherokee Nation, inhabits a space of death and possibility that moves towards dialogue and perhaps coalition with Blackness. I imagine that a part of his appeal registers on a level that is not always perceptible to African American women and Black people in general. St. Julien Last Child offers a depiction of a Native person betraying the possibility of recognition through sovereignty and a notion of the "nation" that betrays the Slave. On a level accessible to cognitive processing, St. Julien Last Child fulfills many of the long-held hopes for Black and Native alliance.

St Julien Last child's very name indexes the genocide of his people. He is a walking reminder of Native genocide, the Trail of Tears as well as the members of the Cherokee nation who decided not to enslave Blacks and demand recognition within the Eurocentric discourse of nationhood. St. Julien Last Child does not articulate a need for the recovery of land or a Cherokee people through a nation. He does not seek to become civilized through adopting slavery. He does not seek a coherent cartography of the

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<sup>86</sup> Anderson spoke on a plenary at the symposium "We Carry These Memories Inside of We" on September 17, 2011.

human. Instead, he marries a Black woman and becomes a part of the Black community of the socially dead. St. Julien Last Child in a sense becomes Black. Wilderson in this introduction to *Red, White and Black* defines his notion of freedom. He contends, “in allowing the notion of freedom to attain the ethical purity of its ontological status, one would have to lose one’s Human coordinates and become Black. Which is to say one would have to die.”<sup>87</sup>

In Dash’s novel, we are reacquainted with St. Julien Last Child and are introduced to his relations who move around the Hiwassee Valley throughout the year and convene on the Island seasonally. Dash recreates a moment when the Last Childs return to the land they call Chicora. At an evening ceremony, the Last Childs tell their people’s story.

One woman spoke as the others chanted in low tones. We are the Last Childs. The last free children of the Cherokee nation. We Last Childs a strong people, a stubborn people who turn our back on the white man’s march and follow the ways shown by our ancestors who hid from the Spanish and the white soliders who came after them. We come from five generations and call places name, Edisto, John’s Island, Dafusky, Tybee, Warsaw, Ossabaw, Sapelo, and Okefeno-Ocmulgee, Oconee, and the mighty Altamaha River. We have gone in many directions to seek our own way, but always we return to this land for our renewal. Once again we are together in this season of cold to send prayer and thanks to our ancestors who brought us this land. Let us join together to tell the story of our people, and may you draw strength and courage from this land we call ‘Chicora.’<sup>88</sup>

The story enables us to meditate on the choices that many Cherokee faced particularly when it came to relating to Black people. Iona also represents the choices that certain Black people made in relation to Native peoples.

Recounting her own love for St. Julien Last Child, Iona makes her individual narrative a collective one about Black survival. Iona utters,

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<sup>87</sup> Wilderson, p. 23

<sup>88</sup> Dash, *Daughters of the Dust* : A novel, p. 187

It only natural. Dat me an Julien be together. It de way de ancient people an de captive live with each other from de very first. De old stores tell bout how de buckra come cross de water wit captives, gonna make de ancien people captives. How de anciens and de captives share what lil dey got, learn each odder ways, take de good from both. How de buckra rain down so much misery an sickness dat de captive took to run and de ancien show dem de way. Dey look for safe place an fight til de dead to keep de buckra from stealin dem back. De ancient an de captive build dey life together, clear de land, plant de crop, raise de children to be strong. An when de buckra send de army to chase de ancien from de land, de ancient an de captive run to Florida, some escape to Mexico, an some wind up out dere in Oklahoma. But Julien family never quit de lan.<sup>89</sup>

I do not want to be deluded by the romantic and sentimental veneer of this nuptial. Black and Native coalition and alliance are always fraught. They often happen in zones and territories that are hard to travel to and often forged under conditions of duress. They are the space of no other options most of the time. A love story is not usually the mode of recalling these alliances. More often than not, Black people strive to become citizens and try to settle the land and make a place for themselves pushing the genocidal machine along. Native people often find it necessary and strategic to seek recognition from the Settler nation, elaborating a discourse of nation-ness that Blacks, specifically African Americans, find impossible to access.<sup>90</sup>

Throughout this project, I try to identify moments and spaces where Black and Native people can share a grammar, not analogize their struggles, and perhaps call forth a space of radical entanglement where Black and Native survival depend on one another. The protagonist of Dash' novel, Amelia, had to travel "back into the swamp where her Aunt Iona lived."<sup>91</sup> Her Aunt Iona and St. Julien Last Child's union could only take

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid, p. 173-174

<sup>90</sup> Zainab Amadahy and Bonita Lawrence. "Indigenous Peoples and Black People in Canada: Settlers or Allies?." In *Breaching the colonial contract*, eds. Arlo Kemp (Springer: Netherlands, 2009) pp. 105-136.

<sup>91</sup> Dash, *Daughters of the Dust: A novel*, p. 161

place back in the swamp, a “place of unusual beauty and mystery.”<sup>92</sup> One could not walk there and the voyage on water was not easy. In the boat on the way to her Aunt Iona and St. Julien Last Child’s place Amelia thinks to herself that “she could not imagine how her Aunt had lived back here.”<sup>93</sup> In part two of this project, we will develop the grammar, identify the sightlines and acquire the senses needed to imagine living another way, in the “back here” places.

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162

## **Chapter Four: Moynihan's Matriarchs: Black Feminine Chaos on Settler**

### **Landscapes**

In this chapter, I think through what it may mean to read the Moynihan Report as a spatial document that reproduces settler colonial normalizing power. I identify the Moynihan Report as an anomalous geography of settler colonialism. By anomalous, I mean geographies and landscapes that are imagined to be over determined by discourses on Blackness and therefore not recognized as spaces produced by settler colonial normalizing power. I argue that settler colonialism as a discourse (and new discipline) excises Black bodies from settler colonial landscapes (the frontier, homestead, reservation), settler colonial analytics (conquest/genocide) and settler colonial bodies (Natives and White/settlers). I challenge this sequestering of Blackness from the spaces and analytics of settler colonialism by arguing that the production of Blackness, specifically Black female bodies, is integral to settler society. As I have stated earlier, the construction of the Black female slave body as essential difference is as much a product of the settler's imagination as it is the slave master's.<sup>1</sup>

In part one of this dissertation, I established that the Black female body functions as a metaphor for unending increase in bodies, land and space during slavery. Under antebellum slavery the Black female body is a site where we can observe anti-Black racism (as fungibility) and settler colonial power touching. The Settler-Master needs the Black female body in order to imagine their land, property in flesh and their own spatial

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<sup>1</sup> Settler colonial power which works through the institutions, everyday cultures and spatial practices of slavery creates the plantation as a key spatial unit of Black captivity and Native disappearance. Settler colonialism's use of the slave body to make settled space (the plantation) also produces Black bodies as property. Post emancipation, settler colonialism seeks to eliminate the Black body from the settler's landscape. Settler colonialism, post emancipation, seeks to eliminate the Black body. Black bodies are contained (mass incarceration), killed and on rare occasion assimilated into settler civil society.

coordinates expanding.<sup>2</sup> However, the Black female body post emancipation represents chaos. As an unruly body that has left the space of the settlement-plantation and roams the earth, the Black female is a body out of place.

In this chapter of my dissertation, I also focus on the chaos that the Black female body and her increase the “Black family” cause in the Moynihan Report and for settler colonial space making practices.<sup>3</sup> I track the figure of the Black matriarch as she is surveilled and regulated by the discursive power of the Moynihan Report. The Black matriarch appears as a chaos inducing body that disrupts the heteronormative institution of the family and the settler order it helps produce. I contend that the report’s discursive construction of failed black female gender and sexuality, failed Black families and what Lorenzo Veracini would call “non-improvable” people is an attempt to naturalize the settler colonial order.<sup>4</sup> The Moynihan Report, like all projects of settler colonialism, must place Blackness. Settler colonialism must manage Black people and Black spaces. Patrick Wolfe argues that settler colonialism is a structure that becomes more and more

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<sup>2</sup> Frank Wilderson argues that spatial coordinates are only offered to the Human/Settler/Master or white subject. As the Slave and the Native are not supposed to exist, one is socially dead and the other is constituted by genocide, they do not have spatial coordinates. At times the Half-Human “savage” who articulate themselves as human through a discourse of sovereignty can have access to spatial coordinates. See Wilderson, *Red, White and Black*.

<sup>3</sup> I put “Black family” in quotation marks because it functions as a contested term in this project. Family does not function as a self-evident term. This dissertation questions whether family as a organizing category encompasses Black people. Frank Wilderson argues that family is a form of social organization that Black people can only temporarily inhabit as “borrowed institutionality” in order to try and make themselves legible in civil society. See Wilderson, *Red, White and Black*. The institutionality of the family belongs to whites. Moynihan is deploying the epistemologies and tools of sociology in order to visualize or make Black households, which Hill Collins argues he conflates with families<sup>3</sup>, visible and knowable in order to ask the question: Can Black people be assimilated into the social and spatial formation of the family? Note that this is only a question. It is important that Hill Collins bring our attention to the fact that there is a conflation occurring. We cannot presume that there is such a thing as a Black family at this point. Based upon the first census taken in 1790, the question posed by Moynihan in 1965 and the analysis of Kay Lindsey in 1970, incorporation into the social formation of the family for Black people is still not a reality. This social and spatial position still cannot be occupied by Black people.

<sup>4</sup> Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010)

complex over time. As it adapts it will need to incorporate various modes of power.

Wolfe states that,

When invasion is recognized as a structure rather than an event, its history does not stop when it moves from the era of frontier homicide. Rather, narrating that history involves charting the continuities, discontinuities, adjustments, and departures whereby a logic that initially informed frontier killing transmutes into different modalities, discourses and institutional formations as it undergirds the historical development and complexification of settler society.<sup>5</sup>

Drawing upon Wolfe's work, I argue that we need to theorize when settler colonialism's modalities, discourses, and institutional formations concern themselves with Black femaleness. This concern or management of Blackness does not necessarily happen in a linear fashion with the first target being Native bodies and then onward.

I intend to sharpen and complicate analyses of settler colonialism through an illumination of the anti-Black modalities through which settler colonial normalizing power works. I focus specifically on the way the Black matriarch becomes a site for rehabilitation. She is a space to fix and order for the maintenance of the settler colonial order. Scholars' focus on the report's surveillance of Black gender, sexuality, and child rearing while necessary, conceals the way that the report's productive power is informed by and also structures settler colonial power. In order to reveal the ways that the biopolitical management of Black females, "families" and ghetto life is constitutive of settler colonial formations, I draw upon critical geography, settler colonial studies, Native feminist analyses and Black women's spatial analyses. Drawing upon Katherine McKittrick, I think of Black women's spatial analyses and geographies as processes of

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<sup>5</sup> Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the elimination of the native," *Journal of Genocide Research*, 8.4 (2006), p. 402

mapping the social order, naming imagined and real spaces and creating places where Black women's desires can be pursued.<sup>6</sup>

### **Black Feminist Analytics of Space**

In order to make spatial and temporal links between the space and time of genocide (which continues) and the space and time of slavery (and ongoing anti-Black racism), I employ palimpsestic methods which can attend to a number of different spaces and different historical moments at once. I use the work of Jacqui Alexander<sup>7</sup> and the work of cultural landscape scholar Richard Schein to help guide me through this method of time and space scrambling. Schein argues that in order to truly understand how landscape matters one must theorize not only the “place of the cultural landscape in the social relations and spatial arrangements of daily life” but also “how a particular, identifiable cultural landscape in this place is related and connected to landscapes and social processes in other places.”<sup>8</sup> This call to understand how landscapes are connected and related to one another gives me the confidence that the theoretical risks I am taking in attempting to connect “Black” landscapes like the plantation, the Black matriarch and the disorganized family to property, conquest, and Native genocide are worthwhile, necessary and politically useful.

An important intervention that Schein makes is the development of a critique of Pierce Lewis's conceptualization of the landscape as a “series of sedimentary layers of social accretion”, or time periods layered on top of one another. This layering creates the

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<sup>6</sup> Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women's Cartographies of Struggle*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory and the Sacred*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005)

<sup>8</sup> Richard Schein, “Conceptual Framework for Interpreting an American Scene,” in *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol. 87, No. 4, 1997, p. 662

effect of linear time. Schein argues that it may be more useful to “begin by viewing the landscape as a palimpsest rather than a cultural strata” or linear time.<sup>9</sup> By using the palimpsest, Schein enables a conceptualization of landscapes as spaces of “erasure and overwriting” where different scripts can co-exist. The palimpsest assumes that there is an intermingling and interplay of different historical eras as well as historical and contemporary actors.

The co-existence of settler colonialism and slavery as distinct forms of productive and repressive power that construct one another is what I will attempt to reveal using counter epistemologies that subvert the linear, positivist and settler colonial vantage point. Settler colonial epistemologies and vantage point (sight) separate the time and space of (ongoing) conquest from the time and space of (ongoing) anti-Black racism. Jacqui Alexander’s elaboration of the palimpsest, in *Pedagogies of Crossing*, as an analytic from which to think about colonial notions of time and space have been used to close the chasm created by the ideological notion of distance. Distance functions as a colonial ideology of time and space that makes different forms of colonial power seem distant, unrelated, and incommensurable.<sup>10</sup> If the coloniality of slavery and settler colonialism are viewed as distant and therefore unrelated, this viewpoint frustrates efforts to develop frames to analyze them together and understand their relationship to one another. Alexander has developed a decolonial framework which allows me to bring colonial tropes of Black non-normativity like the “matriarch”, and the “disorganized family” into proximity and relationship to settler colonial tropes of normativity like the

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, p. 190-191

“patriarch”, the stable “white family,” and property. Elaborating on the palimpsest as a mode of thinking and analyzing power, Alexander argues that

Time is scrambled and palimpsestic, in all the Worlds, with the pre-modern, the modern, the postmodern and the paramodern coexisting globally. But it is not only the global coexistence of different technologies of time telling that is of concern to us here. The central idea is that of the palimpsest—a parchment that has been inscribed two or three times, the previous text having been imperfectly erased and remaining and therefore still partially visible...The idea of the “new” structured through the “old” scrambled, palimpsestic character of time, both jettisons the truncated distance of linear time and dislodges the impulse for incommensurability, which the ideology of distance creates.<sup>11</sup>

Alexander’s decolonization of the ordering of time and space compels us to take seriously the way the inscriptions of settler colonialism remain visible within anti-Black racism and the ways that anti-Black racism’s trace can be perceived in settler colonial discourses. In addition to Alexander’s palimpsest, I rely on Black feminist analyses that enable a new way of thinking about notions of female gender, property, family organization, tropes of disorganization and their relationship to the settler nation. My Black feminist analyses will be read for the ways that they enable an examination of the production of space. The sources that I have chosen explicitly link the Moynihan Report’s spatial and social metaphors to conquest, Native genocide, slavery and various practices of settlement that create settler space, settler and non-settler subjectivities.

I use the anthology, *The Black Woman: An Anthology* as a primary source that allows me to do some of the decolonizing work that Alexander encourages. I conduct a spatial analysis of the sociological unit and cultural formation of the family and link it to settler colonial normativity through the geographic practices found in *The Black Woman*. The geographic praxes of *The Black Woman* emerge from an “Afrafemme view of the

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid

world.”<sup>12</sup> This world view “emerges as a sensibility, not as an ism. Its awareness explores first the interiority of an in-the-head, in-the-heart; in-the-gut region of a discovery called the self. It refuses the assumptions and terminology of colonial, capitalist, racist and gendered versions of reality; linguistically, its aspirations include the subversion of terms that reduce the ever-widening dimensions of the self (see all contributions to the anthology).”<sup>13</sup> Through the use of Black women’s geographic sensibilities that emerge from regions “in-the-head, in-the-heart, in-the-gut,” we can try and recover other ways of knowing in order to make sense of and refuse the geographies of settler colonialism. Beginning with the interiority, or the in-the-[blank] regions of the self is a direct engagement with epistemic concerns. We can begin to pose the question, how do our inner eyes and other faculties organize our sight?

I want to use Toni Cade Bambara’s regions of the “in-the-head/heart/gut” to extend upon McKittrick’s theorization of Black women’s oppositional geographic knowledge. I propose a revised version of Black women’s geographic expressions and consider geographic sensibility. Like McKittrick I appreciate the way that Glissant’s poetics of landscapes enable a geographic practice that foregrounds “saying, theorizing, feeling, knowing, writing, and imaging place.”<sup>14</sup> I embrace this epistemology and process of producing space because it is a practice that even subaltern subjects can access. This kind of epistemology and practice of making space embraces the geographic knowledge production of colonized Black women and Native women, which I incorporate in later chapters.

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<sup>12</sup> Toni Cade Bambara, *The Black Woman: An Anthology*, (New York: Palgrave, 1970), p. xi-xii

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>14</sup> McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, p. xxi

I treat *The Black Woman* as a text that presents Black women's narrations of the social processes and power relations that create the category Black woman, Black matriarch, Black family, white family, stability, and disorganization. These social processes produce spatial metaphors and discourses that become materialized as landscapes. As Katherine McKittrick asserts, Black women's geographies are "sayable" and I understand the landscape as being articulated by people. For example, Kay Lindsey's essay "The Black Woman as a Woman" helps us unmap what McKittrick calls the where of racial-sexual difference.<sup>15</sup> The "where of racial sexual difference"<sup>16</sup> as a social process of constructing human difference and value is a concealed process of space making. In other words, the production of human difference is also a production of spatial difference. As we will see, Lindsey articulates a Black feminist spatial analytic that situates Black people's proximity to or distance from the institution of the family, property and the state within the context of Native genocide, land theft by settlers, and the making of property. Kay's essay enables a palimpsestic notion of space and time that further elaborates the ways that anti-Black racism and settler colonialism work with and through one another. Before we move on to Lindsey's incisive critique of the family and theorization of the production of space in the settler nation, I want to introduce my second primary source, the Moynihan Report.

### **The Moynihan Report**

The Moynihan Report, if understood as a form of Foucauldian productive power, sought to make Black families visible and produce them as objects of knowledge. In 1965, sociologist and Assistant Secretary of Labor Daniel Patrick Moynihan with the

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<sup>15</sup> McKittrick, p. xi

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

assistance of a committee of scholars and policy makers released their study *The Negro Family: A Case for National Action*, popularly known as the Moynihan Report. Many historians and social scientists contextualize the drafting of this document within the historical moment when the Civil Rights movement was taking up the tactics, politics and cultural features of Black Power.<sup>17</sup> Black Power had developed a distinct cultural, visual, embodied, erotic, sensorial, and physical landscape of its own which created anxiety in the white population. The drafting of the report is bracketed by the 1964 rebellion in Harlem, NY that precedes it and the 1965 Watts rebellion that follows a month after the release of the Report.

Black urban rebellion was a threat to white civil society and the built landscape of the settler nation throughout the 1960s. When the report was released, Moynihan and white families were living in fear of the social and spatial practice of ghetto rebellions. In the last sentence of the introduction to the report, Moynihan cautions the nation that if the results of racial liberalism do not lead to “equality of results” then “there will be no social peace in the United States for generations.”<sup>18</sup> The Moynihan Report was as much a response to Black radicalism, urban rebellions and white fear as it was a liberal response to Black poverty. While the report was being drafted, white civil society and its white families watched trepidaciously for rebellion smoke to rise in the horizon and

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<sup>17</sup> I do not want to suggest that the civil rights movement transformed into the Black power movement. I do not use the word transformed, as Black power has been posited as existing within the continuum of the civil rights movement. I do not want to posit a cleavage or complete break between civil rights and Black power. Black Power did create a particular kind of anxiety in the white population and was developing a distinct cultural, visual, embodied, erotic, sensorial and physical landscape of its own.

<sup>18</sup> Lee Rainwater and William Yancey, *Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy*. A Transaction Social Science and Public Policy Report including the full text of *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* by Daniel Patrick Moynihan, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1967), p. 3

consume the settler landscape in flames. Later we will explore how the Black matriarch came to embody the spatial chaos of the burning ghetto.

### **The Moynihan Report as a Spatial Document**

Since I approach this chapter as a deconstruction of settler colonial discourses, I have also chosen to analyze discourse as my method for explaining the production of space. I am able to spatialize or think about the Moynihan Report as a landscape primarily through the work of Katherine McKittrick and Richard Schein. Both McKittrick and Schein enable an understanding of the social processes of producing space as ones that constantly need to be reproduced and repeated in order to take on the effect of space or an inert order. Schein argues that landscapes are “always in the process of becoming.”<sup>19</sup> Schein theorizes landscapes as “discourse materialized.”<sup>20</sup> Schein’s concept of the landscape is useful for an investigation of the Moynihan Report as an ongoing production of discourses about anti-Black racism and settler colonial power. The landscape is a “particular place” which is constructed by individuals while also constricting individuals. Another aspect of Schein’s work that holds promise is his theory that the production of landscapes is both material and epistemological.<sup>21</sup> My own point of entry for doing a settler colonial discourse analysis has been to think about and critique the epistemological limits of the vantage point of sight. I have been trying to disrupt one of the visual orders of settler colonialism which tells us that we cannot imagine—or visualize—Black people on its landscapes. Schein also talks about the disciplinary element of landscape that presents itself as linear and objective due to the

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<sup>19</sup> Schein, “A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting an American Scene,” p. 667

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 666

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 662

fact that the landscape can be seen<sup>22</sup> We primarily use our eyes to make sense of landscapes which tricks us into thinking that what we see is what we get. Similar to Schein, I am interested in exposing the hidden rules of what we experience as material and transparent.

Katherine McKittrick's approach to theorizing space also helps us escape the "epistemological trap" of thinking about landscapes and space as self-evident and transparent. Discourses of racial and sexual difference, or the creation of the "Other," are always implicated in the production of space according to McKittrick. There is an interplay between the production of human difference and the production of space. How we come to know human difference informs how we experience space. How we construct and experience space informs how we produce human difference. McKittrick argues that,

This naturalization of "difference" is, in part, bolstered by the ideological weight of transparent space, the idea that space "just is," and the illusion that the external world is readily knowable and not in need of evaluation, and that what we see is true. If *who* we see is tied up with *where* we see through truthful, commonsensical narrative then the placement of subaltern bodies deceptively hardens spatial binaries, in turn suggesting that some bodies belong, some bodies do not belong, and some bodies are out of place. For black women, then, geographic domination is worked out through reading and managing their specific racial-sexual bodies.<sup>23</sup>

In this essay, I argue that we scrutinize the naturalization of difference and spaces through paying attention to the management and placement of Black bodies. The Moynihan Report names, defines and produces a number of raced, gendered and sexualized spatial metaphors and locations. Many of these spatial metaphors and actual places are imbued with racial sexual difference when read in the context of this report.

Some of the metaphors and locations that appear in the report include: the "income gap,"

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> McKittrick, p. xv

“economic position of the negro,” “suburbia,” “Harlem, Detroit, Chicago, the North,” “the South,” “ghetto,” “alienation,” “the nation’s business,” “family structures,” “white family,” and “the negro family.” These metaphors for space and locations in the document also reference structural positions and the relative proximity or distance that Black female bodies and racialized groups have to normative social categories.

As Katherine McKittrick argues, a “placement of subaltern bodies” occurs at the same time that a “hardening of spatial binaries” is created. The spatial metaphors and locations in the Moynihan Report map a “commonsensical narrative” of bodies and spaces. Spaces like the white family and the Negro family are presented as bounded, natural and timeless. Spatial tropes like stability (whiteness) and disorganization (black femaleness) are presented as oppositional spatial concepts and modes of organization that index normative and non-normative subjects and their respective locations. More importantly these spaces and spatial terms are positioned by the report as existing outside of settler colonial power. While disavowing the settler colonial order, the Moynihan Report also treats the spaces in the report as “just is,” concealing power laden social processes. Social processes that produce Blackness as non-normative and outside of the settler colonial discourse, and framing Blackness only within a discourse of slavery, creates the effect of separating people and the terrains of anti-Black racism and settler colonial power.

The “just is/are” spaces that I want to call attention to are social processes that create normative and non-normative (body-space) categories, social locations and

spaces.<sup>24</sup> These social processes and spaces are the Negro family, Black matriarchs, white family, stability, and disorganization. I draw attention to them in order to historicize their production and reveal what historical processes are being concealed through their apparent coherence. McKittrick explains the way that concealment as a social and spatial practice functions.

Concealment, marginalization, boundaries are important social processes. We make concealment happen; it is not natural but rather names and organizes where racial-sexual differentiation occurs.<sup>25</sup>

The “where” of racial-sexual difference is what we need to attend to, particularly the locations where multiple processes of differentiation occur and overlap with one another.

As recently theorized by Andrea Smith, settler colonialism is a subjectless discourse and form of power that is pervasive and therefore shares space with Black bodies.<sup>26</sup> As settler colonial domination “touches everyone,” settler colonial power must continually produce “natural” social and spatial positions for Black female bodies. Black women’s geographic subjectivities, sensibilities and epistemologies of space create a framework from which it is possible to imagine and analyze how and where settler colonial heteronormalizing power shapes anti-Black racism. An important social process that I want to bring into view, or make perceptible within our range of geographic sensibilities, is the way that settler colonial power can be registered through Black women’s ways of

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<sup>24</sup> McKittrick argues that the Black female body or body-space is integral to the production of space. Additionally McKittrick argues that body is a location of struggle that is expressed in captivity, regulation and resistance. See McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, p. xxvii-xxviii. Further, McKittrick draws upon the work of M. Nourbese Phillips in order to pursue the issues of body-scale. Body-scale is Black femininity in its seeable or visible form refracted through the lens of racism, sexism and geographic domination. However, body-scale is also the scale and the site at which resistance is enacted. See McKittrick, p. 46

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, p. xi-xii

<sup>26</sup> See Andrea Smith, “Queer Theory and Native Studies: The Heteronormativity of Settler Colonialism” See Andrea Smith, “Queer Theory and Native Studies: The Heteronormativity of Settler Colonialism,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 16.1-2, (Winter 2010), p.44.

articulating/theorizing the production of people, social locations, and space. Drawing upon McKittrick's work, I argue that settler colonialism is one form of spatial domination that targets Black women in North America.

For Black women, then, geographic domination is worked out through reading and managing their specific racial-sexual bodies. This management effectively, but not completely, displaces black geographic knowledge by assuming that black femininity is altogether knowable, unknowing, and expendable: she is seemingly in place by being out of place.<sup>27</sup>

In order to understand the ways that settler colonialism, as a practice of spatial domination, "reads and manages" Black women we will need to overcome one of its conceptual traps/distortions.<sup>28</sup> While settler colonialism is a form of normalizing that power creates bodies, and space; as a logic it also carries the "ideological weight of transparent space," or the idea that space "just is."<sup>29</sup> The spaces of settler colonialism that are perceived to be natural or "just is/are" include: the inert and transparent spaces like the land, the frontier, the family, the accumulation of capital, the Native and the Settler.

These naturalized spaces are informed by a Settler/Native binary. The spaces created by this racial binary erase Black female bodies. The creation of these naturalized/"just is" spaces simultaneously depend on the productive and reproductive labor of Black women as well as her erasure. The practice of settlement requires the placement of Blackness as well. Within this settler colonial visual order, the settlement and the plantation are cordoned off from one another. They are presented in space as having no relationship to one another. The landscape of the settlement does not contain

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<sup>27</sup> McKittrick, p. xv

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*

any trace or evidence of the ways that Black female bodies were made to labor or become ontological spaces of fungibility in order to produce it not just as a settlement, but as a settlement-plantation. As we can see, the management of the Black female body also occurs through processes of erasure. Forms of settler colonial power that produce and regulate Black female bodies (Slaves, prisoners) vanish within the normative spaces and analytics of settler colonialism.

I argue that Black women's "oppositional geographies" or geographic sensibilities enable a discursive analysis of the Moynihan Report that destabilizes the dominant epistemologies that produce subjects and inert spaces in the document. More importantly they show us how multiple forms of space making and people making power can be charted together. These counter epistemologies can help us make new geographic sense of the Moynihan report.

### **Moynihan and Discourses of the Family as Settler Normativity**

In the opening paragraph of Chapter Two of the Moynihan Report, entitled "*The Negro Family*," the report takes on the challenge of making the "Black family" visible and knowable to white America. In this chapter, Moynihan tries to "survey" or get the Negro family within the sight line of white America. Doing this makes it possible for the Negro family to be known (mapped). A truth needs to be produced.

At the heart of the deterioration of the fabric of Negro society is the deterioration of the Negro family. It is the fundamental source of the weakness of the Negro community at the present time. There is probably no single fact of Negro American life so little understood by whites. The Negro situation is commonly perceived by whites in terms of *visible manifestations*[my emphasis] of discrimination and poverty, in part because Negro protest is directed against such obstacles, and in part, no doubt, because these are facts which involve the actions and attitudes of the white community as well. It is more difficult, however, for whites to perceive the effect that centuries of exploitation have had on the fabric

of Negro society itself. *Here the consequences of the historic injustices done to Negro Americans are silent and hidden from view. But here is where[my emphasis] the true injury has occurred: unless this damage is repaired, all the effort to end discrimination and poverty and injustice will come too little. The role of the family in shaping character and ability is so pervasive as to be easily overlooked [emphasis mine].* The family is the basic social unit of American life; it is the basic socializing unit.<sup>30</sup>

Moynihan names discrimination and poverty, Negro protest, actions and attitudes of the white community as visible, knowable, and worth examination. However, the consequences of centuries of exploitation and historic injustices are referred to as “silent and hidden from view.”<sup>31</sup> While Moynihan appears to make an attempt to reveal these historic injustices and consequences of centuries of exploitation in chapter three of the report entitled “The Roots of the Problem,” he stops short. While Moynihan certainly argues that the slave is reduced to chattel and not afforded humanness, Moynihan does not pursue a discussion of this process of negation as the very process required to make the white family.<sup>32</sup> While we can argue that Moynihan’s failure to examine the white, the Black, the white family and the Negro family in relational terms is due to the scope of the study or a lack of political will, Spillers would direct us to another reason.

Due to the way that ethnicity functions in the report and within the liberal discourse of the times there was no discursive opening for an analysis of the ways that the white Settler family becomes possible only through the negation of the Black household and Native peoples. According to Spillers, “Under the Moynihan rule, “ethnicity” itself

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<sup>30</sup> Moynihan, Daniel Patrick “The Negro Family: The Case For National Action”, Office of Policy Planning and Research. United States Department of Labor, 1967, p.5

<sup>31</sup> Ibid

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 15

identifies a total objectification of human and cultural motives.”<sup>33</sup> Negro families and white families function in bounded and hard opposition to one another. They are also timeless and static and have no relation to one another. “Apparently spontaneous, these “actants” [White and Black families] are wholly generated, with neither past nor future as tribal currents moving out of time. Moynihan’s “Families” are always in a pure present and always tense. “Ethnicity” in this case freezes in meaning, takes on constancy, assumes the look and the affect of the Eternal.”<sup>34</sup> The centuries long process of making the Negro and the Negro family the negation of the White family is not acknowledged by civil society or Moynihan, and therefore cannot be perceived or tracked in the report.

Slavery and conquest as dynamic, historical and ongoing processes of negation that ethnicize or racialize people are impossible to register in this report. Ethnicity is a hard, uninteruptable process that cannot be prevented. Ethnicity is turned into a “consequence” in the report. As a consequence it functions as an end point; just an inert sociological variable to be studied. The ethnicity invoked in the Moynihan report, according to Spillers, is a “powerful stillness” that “embodies nothing more than a mode of memorial time.”<sup>35</sup> Essential ethnic difference is not a social process, it merely exists and shows up as a consequence. The historical and ongoing processes of genocide and slavery that made whites, Blacks and Natives in relation to one another, specifically the negation of Black and Native people, is impossible to perceive with Moynihan’s epistemic frame.

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<sup>33</sup> Hortense Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book”, *Diacritics*, Vol. 17, No. 2, Summer 1987, p. 66

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*

The making of the white family through the genocide of the Native and the enslavement of the Black over the centuries is bracketed out of the “here” in the report. Within the same “here,” there is no trace of a Native family. That kind of family is an impossibility. These centuries long social processes do not have spatial coordinates that can be brought into the places and locations of the report. They are flat and conveniently lacking in depth, space and measurable time. The “here” to which Moynihan directs his gaze is an interesting discursive construction. Moynihan encourages white America to look (perceive) here and *know*. In my reading I construe “Here” as Moynihan’s attempt to name, locate and delimit the site of examination and scrutiny to the non relational and isolated social unit of the family. Specifically, we are to direct our attention to the Negro family as an isolated, dysfunctional and static consequence.

It is *here*, at the location of the family as where the true injury has occurred and damage has been done. The term damage indicates that we are now in the private realm of pathology where the individual and the family unit must be addressed/fixed. Moynihan named the problems of the Negro family “the tangle of pathology.”<sup>36</sup> By imposing the measurable unit of the family onto Black bodies, a pathologized Black private-public space is constructed for examination. The Black family as a unit of pathology hides its centuries’ long production of the white family through its own negation thus always producing a diagnosis of Black impairment. Within the Moynihan Report, the parasitic nature of the white Settler family which depends on conquest and slavery is not untangled and exposed as a constitutive element of the family as a sociological unit of analysis.

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, p. 29

## **The Family as a Settler Colonial Space Making Unit**

In the report, Daniel Patrick Moynihan called the family the “basic social unit of American life.”<sup>37</sup> As a basic social unit or building block of American life, it is a corner stone of the larger structure, the nation. The family as a metonym for the nation evokes home, blood, lineage and belonging. I would like to investigate the ways that these naturalized terms that evoke benign and even harmonious presence throughout the Report are troubled by activist and Pacifica Radio host Kay Lindsey. While there are many critiques that trouble the categories of deviance and non-compliance created by the Moynihan Report, I chose Lindsey’s reflection because it explicitly links the family to state formation, the conquest of territory and the building of empire. It also troubles Black people’s relationship to the family as a social formation. It is my goal to theorize the discourses and spatial practices of family formation in settler colonial states. I am particularly interested in understanding the kinds of family formations that can be incorporated into the settler colonial nation state and become a technology of settlement. Lindsey’s critiques of this social formation provoke a rethinking of white families’, poor Black families’ and Black middle class families’ relationship to land, property, the state, and one another.

In this section, I will revisit the way that Kay Lindsey deconstructed the “family” as an institution—or basic social unit of American life in her essay. In the process of developing a Black feminist analytic of space, Lindsey challenges Moynihan’s mapping of the private and public realm onto Black people and Black women. Lindsey’s elaboration of the family’s relationship to land, property, slaves, and conquest will be

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, p. 7

examined to understand how the family becomes a unit of space, or a space making practice. I will also use Lindsey's work to describe and theorize how key discourses on the family, property and the state are mobilized or materialized in order to create an American settler colonial landscape.

Many scholars of settler colonialism have argued that families, particularly its reproductive capacity, are critical to settler colonial states. In *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*, Lorenzo Veracini argues that some theoretical approaches within settler colonial studies put an "emphasis on the coloniser's permanence" and (the possibility of reproducing familial patterns is one fundamental defining feature of settler colonial regimes).<sup>38</sup> The family is also an important discursive and material site for Lindsey's interrogation of state formation and US empire building. While she does not use the language of settler society, she does examine similar analytical units. Lindsey traces the evolution of gender formation, reproduction, the separation of sexes, the family and its role in conquest and enslavement. Lindsey writes, "The family and the land on which it lived and cultivated its crops became the man's property, man moved on to the seizure of the land of others and his prisoners of war became his slaves. Upon this base, the state evolved and empires were created."<sup>39</sup> For Lindsey, the family is the basic social unit of property creation and of the imperial state.

Lindsey connects family, land, slaves, property, state and empire in order to situate the family within various forms of historical, state and settler colonial violence. Analytically, Lindsey merges the family with land, slaves, property, conquest and the state in order to construct it as one geopolitical unit or an assemblage (family-land-

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<sup>38</sup> Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*, p. 13

<sup>39</sup> Bambara. *The Black Woman*, p. 104

slaves-property-state-empire). In this move, Lindsey also counters Marxist and Althusserian notions of the state that proliferated in the 1970s in both academic circles and Leftist movements. For Lindsey, the state is not a “thing” that exists outside of the everyday lives, actions and desires of people. In fact, for Lindsey, state power resides in the intimate spaces and mundane interactions of family members. The family as the analytical geopolitical unit or assemblage of “women-children-land-slaves” is a form of property that can be accumulated. Specifically property can be accumulated through conquest of Native people and the theft of Native people’s land. Family formation becomes a process/technology of accumulating property and space making within settler colonial states. The family is a spatial unit read through the geographic sensibilities of Lindsey.

In the process of conquest, slavery is also initiated as a family and state project. Within Lindsey’s analytical frame family formation, property accumulation, state formation, conquest and slavery travel as a unit. Spatially this geopolitical formation defies the traditional logics and Cartesianism of western geography. In Lindsey’s new geography, the private spaces of the family (property, slaves, and *the economy*) and the public spaces of state militarism, genocide and land theft (Homestead Act 1862) occupy the same space. However, conquest and the white family as semi-public spaces that constitute the state are completely omitted from the Moynihan Report’s geographies. In the report, conquest is not mentioned and the family and the state exist in separate realms. For Lindsey, the family is a social and spatial formation that functions as a modality of conquest. Through an investigation of the formation of the family one can also sense/see where conquest and slavery come together.

While Lindsey's "theory" that patriarchy produced other forms of domination (sexual division of labor, capitalism, slavery, racism and colonialism) echoes a telos similar to that of Marxist feminists, for Lindsey, patriarchy is not transhistorical, transcultural or universal. She is talking about patriarchy and the family as distinctly Western formations. In fact, Black families often fail at assimilating into patriarchal American formations, particularly the institution of the family. Lindsey states that,

The family, as a white institution, has been held up to Blacks as a desirable but somehow unattainable goal, at least not in the pure form that whites have created. Witness the Black middle class or pseudo-escapees into the mainstream. This group has assumed many of the institutional postures of the oppressor, including the so-called intact family, but even here we find a fantastically high divorce rate and frustration on this domestic level has increased dissension between individual Black men and women, when it should instead be a signal that something is radically wrong with the model they have chosen to imitate.<sup>40</sup>

According to Lindsey, the family is a white institution. Much like gender categories, Black manhood, Black womanhood, the family is a colonial form of domination that emerges from Europe.<sup>41</sup> The family as a patriarchal unit of property, enslavement and conquest is not a priori to Black existence and in fact Black people fail in their attempts at replicating the formation. In the Moynihan Report, there is an attempt to redeem some assimilable Blacks, otherwise known as the Black middle class family. In fact, drawing upon the work of E. Franklin Frazier, Moynihan depicts the Black middle class family as extremely assimilable, in fact "more patriarchal and protective of its children than the general run of such families."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Bambara, p.105

<sup>41</sup> Many contributors from *The Black Woman: The Anthology* argues for a critical read, deconstruction and sometimes dismantling of the institution of the family as a social formation.

<sup>42</sup> Moynihan, p.29

Given the chance, the middle class Black family can ‘do patriarchy’ even better than its white peers. Moynihan relies heavily upon the writings of middle class Blacks (Frazier, Height, Spencer, Rustin) and at time reproduces their optimism about the possibility and promise of successfully integrated/assimilated Black middle class subjects who can become model citizen (settlers). Through the successful settler colonial mimicry of patriarchal family formation the middle class Black family comes within proximity to the category of the human family. However, this family is always in jeopardy of crumbling and succumbing to the tangle of pathology as they are always too close to the ghetto due to segregation. The poor Black female headed household is a corrupting and polluting element. The Black and poor female headed household is an element from which the Black middle class wishing to become human must flee. Kay Lindsey calls the Black middle class ‘escapees’ who are trying to move into the mainstream but are failing.<sup>43</sup> And Lindsey predicts failure rather than redemption for the Black middle class. Within the logics of racial liberalism, the assimilation of “improved” middle class Blacks into the settler nation is presented as an option. While the Moynihan Report pursues this possibility, others including Lindsey resist this call.

Lindsey calls for the entire model to be challenged, actually destroyed, rather than succumb to the institution. Instead of proposing individually or household derived challenges to address the patriarchal tyranny (now heteronormativity) of the family, Lindsey calls on Black women and the Black community to overturn the family as an institution. During the late 1960s and 70s within leftist circles calls were often made for the destruction of the state and its institutions. As a Pacifica Radio personality who was

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<sup>43</sup> Bambara, p. 105

familiar with and perhaps aligned with these radical politics, Lindsey's clarion call is not surprising.

We have an obligation as Black women to project ourselves into the revolution to destroy these institutions which not only oppress Blacks but women as well, for if these institutions continue to flourish, they will be used against us in the continuing battle of mind over body.<sup>44</sup>

The institution of the family is constructed as a weapon that will be used in the "battle of mind over body." Lindsey imagines the construction of the family as an organizing logic of control and domination. The family can be used to reproduce, or in Lindsey's words, "perpetuate", the state. The family is not a private space or a private matter for Lindsey. Its forms, practices, reproductive capacity, and accumulation of property (people and land) are public, semi-public, semi-private, private (and realms that exceed these) enactments of power, specifically state power. "The family has been used by the white agency to perpetuate the state, and Blacks have been used as extensions of the white family, as the prisoners of war enslaved to do the dirty work of the family, i.e. the state. If the family as an institution were destroyed, the state would be destroyed."<sup>45</sup> We need to deconstruct the family, particularly its naturalization as a social formation and its veiled role in genocide, settlement, and slavery.

### **Historicizing the Formation of the Family in the Settler Colonial US**

While the destruction of the family will not occur here, a deconstruction of the family as an institution will. An erosion of the presumed stability of the white family in America should be attempted to destabilize its naturalization. Exposing its naturalization can also illumine the ways that the institution of the family and its attendant discourses

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p. 108

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p. 105-6

create the effect of space as well as policies that make or materialize exclusive spaces. The exclusive space of the nuclear family as a private space of settler subjects is a recent construction in the history of the settler colonial US. The nuclear family as the normative settler family formation is a recent development (within last 200 years) despite the historical and ideological weight it carries which renders it timeless and universal.

In the book, *The Reshaping of Everyday Life, 1790-1840*, Jack Larkin give us access to some of the primary sources that he uses to paint a picture of everyday life in the young nation of the United States. Larkin's archival data presents us with evidence that the family has not always existed as we currently know it. The modern family is a historical formation that comes into existence over time and due to people's changing relationship to industry, labor and other societal and cultural shifts. As late as 1820, the family was constituted by a motley gathering of people, sets of contractual relationships and commitments that we may not recognize today as the family or would at least call it by a different name. In the following excerpt, Larkin analyzes a letter written in 1820 by Chloe Peck to her sister. Larkin then references a second letter written by Chloe Peck's husband, Everard Peck, at a later date. The letters that Larkin introduces provide us with a small glimpse into the everyday life of a white middling and propertied "family" in Rochester, New York in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Just after Chloe Peck was married in Rochester, New York, in 1820, she wrote to her sister of "our family, which consists of 7 persons." Living and eating together in the Peck's establishment were the newly wedded couple and five unrelated men and boys—the journeymen and apprentices of Everard Peck's bookbinding shop. Today "family" denotes people bound together by marriage and kinship, and "household" describes a group residing and taking their meals together, but early nineteenth-century Americans almost invariably echoed Chloe suggesting their sense of the household's functional unity.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Jack Larkin, *The Reshaping of Everyday Life, 1790-1840*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), p.9-10

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, family did not connote the private, closed and bounded space of conjugal and blood relations. The family and the household were at times synonymous. The household which could contain slaves, servants, workers and others was often conflated with the family. The household's labor and economic activity ensured the survival of all in the domestic unit. Given the level of dependency of the white middling class and other whites on the apprentices, servants and slaves that contributed to their household, we find an acknowledgement of this interdependence and sentimentalism in the linguistic structure of Pecks. The people in the Peck's household who ensure the survival and existence of the Pecks become their family. The patriarch's letter gives us a glimpse of the linguistic convergence of household and family.

Assuming the patriarchal authority that traditionally went to the households' male head, Peck a few years later wrote of his strong sense of responsibility for "the welfare of those connected with us, and the harmony and good of our family In the years around 1800, the household's scale and organization still utterly dominated the ordinary business of life. Americans worked as well as lived in families that were tied to farms, artisans' shops and stores. With their sharing meals, sleeping quarters and often beds, households were the primary settings for production as well as consumption.<sup>47</sup>

Larkin's depiction of a 19<sup>th</sup> century family in New York through letters and the ways that people describe their lives offers us material from which to deconstruct the institution of the family. We can see that the family was tied to national economic processes and industry. The family did not function in a sphere that was separate from the national economy. As Lindsey argues in her own essay, the family is an institution that is tied to many other social formations, people and spaces. The family is not a bounded and separate realm. The family is constituted by and constitutes other social formations and

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid

spaces. More specifically, the family is integral to conquest, settlement and slavery. Though family formations varied and not all families/households had the same relationship to conquest, settlement and slavery none of the families of 19<sup>th</sup> century functioned independently of the economic processes that were tied to the plantations, land theft, trade and slavery. Larkin writes,

American families, even in what travelers called “this land of equality” and democratic manners, spanned a vast economic range. In the topmost ranks were the households of the most successful urban merchants, large plantation owners, some “great farmers” in the North and a few professional men. They ranged downward from “middling farmers”, storekeepers and successful artisans to smaller, hard-pressed “common” farmers and “mechanics” landless laborers and slaves.<sup>48</sup>

We see that in the passage above Larkin adds slaves as a household formation. Here I would argue that Larkin is making a distinction between and among the kinds of economic formations that households/families constituted. We see that in a later passage Larkin notes that slaves were not considered or counted as families for the purposes of national data collection. The very first census in 1790 does not count slaves living collectively as families or even households. I argue that the classification “family” was and is a racially coded category that marks some people as belonging to the human family and places some people outside of the human family. Larkin explains the way that the census defined family in 1790,

The federal censuses between 1790 and 1840 reveal that the households of free Americans, crammed with children (*slaves were not enumerated by family group*) [emphasis mine] averaged close to six persons apiece. The national average [household size] dropped only slowly until 1850. Since that time, reflecting a long and pervasive decline in childbearing and shifts in living arrangements, American households have steadily become much smaller; the 1980 census reported an average household size of 2.7.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, p.10

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, p.11

In the passage above, I added emphasis to Larkin's parenthetical statement that slaves were not enumerated by family group. They were not counted within the human category of family, nor were they considered a human settler colonial space making unit, in the way settler families were. Certainly, they could be considered space making units as tools, technology and Settled-Slaves. However, they are outside of an important category and marker of humanness and settler humanness. The enslaved, or Black people, do not function as liberal autonomous social and space making formations that can make settled space and transcendent settler subjectivities for the settler colonial nation states. Lindsey argues, using her Black female geographic sensibilities, that the family is a white institution and a spatial social formation of conquest and slavery that Black bodies are excluded from. The exclusion that Lindsey brings our attention to is an important aspect of Black female geographic knowledge.

Identifying some of the spatial themes black women draw attention to indicates how traditional geographies continually arrange uneven spatial practices. This unevenness, which is predicated on the logic of visualization and seeable body-flesh, is underlined by continuities and ruptures: black femininities that continually call into question the possibilities and limitations of space and place.<sup>50</sup>

Traditional geographies tend to establish cognitive frames through social units and concepts like the family. These social units and organizing concepts also construct space. The family as a social unit is also a spatial unit. As a social unit they tend to be exclusive, in this case excluding Blacks. As a spatial unit, particularly when social forms enact property, they are also exclusive. Kay Lindsey reveals the ways that the family as a

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<sup>50</sup> McKittrick, p. 52

social and spatial unit excludes Blacks, and produces as McKittrick states “uneven spatial practices.”<sup>51</sup>

### **The Family as Improvability, Normativity and Settler Stability/Permanence**

In *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*, Veracini tracks some of the discourses that circulate within settler colonial power relations. Veracini also takes the time to delineate or map who belongs where within the settler colonial body politic. Veracini actually creates a two dimensional grid with x and y axes to spatialize this discursive and social positioning<sup>52</sup>. Veracini argues that one of the ideologies reproduced within narratives of settler colonialism is the constant production of settler normativity and non-settler alterity. Settler normativity is narrated into being through tropes and discourses of “residency, suitable reproduction, possession,” family and improvability.<sup>53</sup> These discourses become materialized as spaces. Spaces of inclusion represented by settler normativity/improvability, citizenship and belonging are juxtaposed to spaces of exclusion represented by non-settler alterity/non-improvability, foreignness, placelessness and disorganized households or families. Using Kay Lindsey’s analysis of the family along with Veracini’s discursive analysis of settler colonial tropes of normativity that work through family formations, I will analyze the report’s production of failed Black female gender and failed Black families.

According to Veracini, Blacks and other non-settler migrants represent “exogenous others” that are non-improvable and non-settler subjects. Spaces that they create and live in are to be destroyed and removed from the settler landscape. Discourses

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid

<sup>52</sup> Veracini, p. 19-29

<sup>53</sup> Veracini, p. 13

about non-improvable people are at the same time a production of space. As a spatial practice, Veracini argues that the

settler colonial situation is generally understood as an inherently dynamic circumstance where indigenous and exogenous others progressively disappear in a variety of ways: extermination, expulsion, incarceration containment, and assimilation for indigenous peoples (or a combination of their elements), restriction and selection assimilation for subaltern exogenous others.<sup>54</sup>

Determining who is exterminable, expellable, containable, and assimilable (all spatial processes) occurs through the production of discourses surrounding improvability.

The family functions as a site for the accumulation of wealth in the form of property and as an important locus/location from which the frontier can be created. As Lindsey has indicated it is a mobile social and spatial unit that makes contact with the unknown (people and land) through conquest. It produces settler normativity and non-settler alterity. Veracini cites Thomas Jefferson's definition of *Animus manendi* or citizenship and inclusion into the nation. *Animus manendi* is a discursive construction in which citizenship is articulated through settlement and relationships to space. People who could be considered citizen-settlers had to meet the following criteria: permanent intention of living in the nation.<sup>55</sup> Permanent intention of living in the nation could include the following, "either having resided a certain time, or having a family, or having property, any or all of them." Those who appeared to be settled, which was determined based on their residency, suitable reproduction and possession (of property) could be incorporated into the nation.<sup>56</sup> Possession in English common law was synonymous with

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, p. 16

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*

settlement and private ownership.<sup>57</sup> The discourses of residency, suitable reproduction and possession function as power relations and social processes that create subjects and space.

Residency, suitable reproduction, and possession are racial-sexual categories and classifications as well as spatial acts. Residency was never possible for Native people, who were not perceived to have sufficiently cultivated the land which rendered the territory of Turtle Island *terra nullius* (empty land). Residency also requires the ability to suitably reproduce and possess property. Native people are always already constituted as diminishing or dying and therefore cannot reside, reproduce or possess land/property in this Jeffersonian configuration. As racial and sexual categories, Native people do not fit within this discursive construction of the citizen-settler.

Blacks/slaves are also precluded from this social classification, contract and spatial practice due to their own racial-sexual social and spatial location. Blacks as sellable and movable commodities do not reside in places. Slaves also do not count as families. Black reproduction is economic, non-conjugal and not suitable within this Jeffersonian configuration. Finally the impossibility of Black possession of the self or any other form of property prevents Blacks from entering into any contracts, particularly the settler contract. Under Jefferson's reiteration of the terms of the contract within British common law, occupation or settlement had to occur to create a new society of citizens. Natives and Blacks were not considered citizens of the new civil society that was being created through a series of contracts, and spatial acts of possession that declare ownership of land and the self as property.

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<sup>57</sup> Carole Pateman, "The Settler Contract" in *Contracts and Domination*, eds. Charles Mills and Carole Pateman, (Malden: Polity Press, 2007)

The settler contract requires the spatial enactment of occupation/settlement; however, each settler society determines what occupation/settlement means. How real or actual possession is established depends on the laws of the country.<sup>58</sup> During Jefferson's administration, the reproduction of the settler contract (which has to be rehearsed over and over again) requires the family. The family is an enactment of residency and possession. Residency can be established through the rooting of the citizen in the land via his family. Reproduce or plant a family tree in your plot of land to enact property and possession is a method of establishing residency. During this particular reproduction and recitation of the settler contract, Jefferson establishes the heteronormative family as central to proving possession.

Historicizing family formation and its relationship to the production of the settler contract and settler space is critical for reading the Moynihan Report as a spatial document. The family functions as a key space-making unit in the US. The family as a discourse, specifically its function as the site of heteronormative or suitable reproduction, is also a target of biopolitical management. Settler normative families must be made to live and non-settler populations, or "households" are subject to abjection and perhaps death. At times conditionally "improvable" quasi family formations, like the Black middle class, become case studies and units of population that are considered for assimilation. According to Veracini, "settler colonialism is about domestication, 'population economy' is used here to refer to recurring settler anxieties pertaining to the need to biologically manage their respective domestic domains."<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Pateman, "The Settler Contract", p. 41

<sup>59</sup> Veracini, p. 16

Non-settler alterities are managed through a range of disciplinary measures. Kay Lindsey reminds us that the disciplinary power of the welfare state has access to the internal domestic space of Black women (or the Black matriarch's house). One of the geographies of settler colonialism that can be mapped in the Moynihan Report is the terrain of the welfare state. Many of the essays, poems, transcripts, and short stories in the anthology *The Black Woman* link welfare and its discourses to colonial, capitalist, racist, and sexist power. In three different essays, four authors, Clark, Bond, Perry, and Patton explicitly reference the Moynihan Report. These authors link the report and welfare to a form of disciplinary power that is directed at Black women in the United States. While Lindsey does not specifically address the Moynihan Report, she does interrogate the construction of the family and names the "white agency" and its agent the "welfare check" as the disciplinary and productive form of power that seek to penetrate, to know, taxonomize and to regulate female headed Black households. The productive power of the liberal welfare state also seeks to test out whether Black populations can approximate a family. The family falsely understood as liberal, stable, self sufficient and autonomous produces a discourse of liberal self sufficiency. The Moynihan Report also reproduces the liberal (soon to be neo-liberal) ethos of self sufficiency.

In the report, Moynihan is deploying the epistemologies and tools of sociology in order to make Black households, knowable in order to ask a question. Can Black people be assimilated into the social and spatial formation of the family? And note that this is only a question for Moynihan. Patricia Hill Collins argues that he erroneously conflates

the Black household with the Black family.<sup>60</sup> We cannot presume that there is such a thing as a Black family in 1965 when the report is drafted. Based upon the first census taken in 1790, the question posed by Moynihan in 1965 and the analysis of Kay Lindsey in 1970 would suggest that incorporation into the social formation of the family for Black people is still not a reality. This social and spatial position still cannot be occupied by Black people. Frank Wilderson argues in *Red, White and Black*, that the Black home or Black domesticity is “absolutely vulnerable.”<sup>61</sup> According to Wilderson, the Black who is devoid of human contemporaries “is a void beyond Human recognition and incorporation” and therefore cannot constitute a family.<sup>62</sup> The ways that Blacks become legible and incorporated into the grammatical structures of humans (whites) is through various forms of “borrowed institutionality” like family, community, worker, or anything but Black socially dead which is the Black’s reality.

The family according to liberal humanism is constructed as an inviolable and autonomous unit closed to the intervention and violence of the state. However, in *The Black Woman*, several contributors chronicle incidents where Welfare case managers literally enter the Black “home.” The check that is disbursed organizes and dictates household consumption. It is only given to the family after regular verifications of the household composition. All of the forms of panoptic disciplinary power make the Black household a visible and penetrable space. Penetrable black households stand in juxtaposition to white families. White families are constructed as private and impenetrable spaces that protect settlers from the excesses of state power which

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<sup>60</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, “A Comparison of Two Works on Black Family Life,” *Signs: Common Grounds and Crossroads: Race, Ethnicity and Class in Women’s Lives*, 14.4 (Summer, 1989), p. 875-884

<sup>61</sup> Wilderson, p. 127

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, p. 126

simultaneously works to obscure the white families' role in making state power. However, black households are penetrable spaces that the state enters, obliterating any possibility of private space. In this way, Black households fall outside of liberal humanist discourses that posit humans (and human families) as autonomous and inviolable, particularly from state abuses.<sup>63</sup> I argue that as recent as 1996, we have evidence in the form of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), also known as Welfare Reform, that the Black household is precluded from functioning as a family. The Black household under the 1996 Welfare Reform Act is violable and vulnerable to the intervention of the state.

In addition to the management of Black households through the penetration of the domestic spaces of black people by the [welfare] state, strategies of “extermination, expulsion, [and] incarceration” are also spatial practices used for managing “indigenous peoples and exogenous others” like Blacks.<sup>64</sup> The segregated (exiled) spaces of the Black ghetto are referred to in the Moynihan Report as the urban ghetto, slum areas, Negro slums, Harlem, Detroit, Chicago, Philadelphia and Washington, DC and in an unusual settler colonial slippage the urban frontier.<sup>65</sup> The use of the term urban frontier unwittingly maps Blackness onto the settler colonial landscape of conquest and Native genocide.

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<sup>63</sup> Frank Wilderson argues that the Black home or Black domesticity is “absolutely vulnerable.” Additionally, Wilderson reasons that “the Black is a void beyond Human recognition and incorporation.” The ways that Blacks become legible and incorporated into the grammatical structures of humans (whites) is through various forms of “borrowed institutionality” like family, community, worker, or anything but Black or socially dead which is the Black’s reality. See Frank Wilderson, *Red, White and Black: Cinema and the Structure of US Antagonisms*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 127

<sup>64</sup> Veracini, p. 16

<sup>65</sup> Moynihan Report,

The emergence of suburbia, another spatial term and location in the Moynihan Report, as a white space works to position and produce the ghetto as non-white or Black space. Two oppositional racialized spaces exist in the Moynihan Report, the ghetto and the suburbs. The space of Black people (the ghetto) is a space of disorganization and chaos on multiple levels. I assert that the perceived spatial disorganization of the negro family, specifically its gender chaos, the disorganized ghetto and the lingering possibility of eternal social unrest created a nervous landscape for Moynihan and the white settler nation<sup>66</sup>. I argue that disorganization as circulating trope in this document is and was laden with the anxieties of white America about Black rebellions.

### **Moynihan's Matriarchs: Tropes of Disorganization and the Haunt of Rebellion**

In this chapter, I introduce the urban rebellion as an imagined, real, and reoccurring spatial practice that at a minimum disorganizes and at its most potent destroys the settler colonial symbolic spatial order. While we image the rebellion as an event that occurs outside of the domestic space, I want to reframe and respatialize the rebellion as an enactment of social and spatial disorganization that happens on multiple levels in Black ghettos. As a form of multi-scalar social and spatial disorganization, the rebellion has been posited by social scientists, particularly those contributing to the Kerner Commission Report, as a result of the disorganized home of the Black

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<sup>66</sup> Denis Byrne argues for the term nervous landscapes which helps him theorize the space of the settler nation state Australia. The settler colonial landscape of Australia is a racially marked landscape though ordered is unstable and contested. The Aboriginal peoples of Australia are always subverting the racial and spatial order which requires the settler order to readjust and continually anticipate and fear rebellion. I use Byrne's term nervous landscape found in the article, "Nervous Landscapes: Race and Space in Australia," *Journal of Social Archaeology*, June 2003, vol. 3, no. 2, p. 169-193.

matriarch.<sup>67</sup> In the way that the rebellion haunts the Moynihan Report, the Moynihan Report's Black matriarch is the specter that haunts the 1968 Kerner Commission and other analyses of Black rebellion. The trope of disorganization is a spatialized discourse and metaphor that describes the Black matriarch's gender, sexuality, reproduction, children, household and my extension her ghetto and the rebellion space she lights on fire.

Disorganization and asymmetry as geographic and aesthetic principles of Black geographies is what I want to focus on to theorize the counter settler colonial spatial arrangements of Black gender, sexuality and Black space.<sup>68</sup> A number of Black feminist scholars have interrogated woman as a category and attempted to destabilize it. Several have argued that it does not incorporate Black female gender and others have even called it a colonial category. I return again to the anthology *The Black Woman* in order to revisit arguments and analyses of womanhood, gender, gender roles, and their

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<sup>67</sup> The Kerner Commission named for Illinois Governor Otto Kerner was convened in 1967 to study the phenomenon of Black urban unrest in the mid-late 1960s. One of the theses that emerged from the report was that poor parenting skills on the part of single Black mothers was a factor to consider when trying to understand why Black youth resorted to rebellions as a form of politics in the 1960s.

<sup>68</sup> Elsa Barkley Brown pushes me to rethink how I am identifying and registering an acknowledgement of the colonial in African American Studies and African American political discourse in general. I have often only registered a critique of the colonial within African American thought (as opposed to Black Caribbean, Continental African ) when African Americans explicitly named themselves as engaging in anti-colonial struggle. I often found this language in *The Black Woman*, which was really exciting to for me. However this discourse emerges at a specific time. Additionally, the way that similar power relations are talked about changes over time. In Barkley Brown's article I found ways to register discussions of colonial domination and attempts to subvert it through discussions of difference. Barkley Brown challenges similar assertions of colonial power that post colonial and decolonial scholars do when she calls for an acknowledgement of non-linear, asymmetrical and simultaneity in Black cultural aesthetics. While she never uses the language that this is decolonial work (the space of asymmetry and simultaneity) she does show us how it works to disrupt liberal, linear (and colonial) histories of women in the US. Additionally, she forces us to think about our intersubjectivity. Intersubjectivity, particularly the need to see the underside of modernity which is coloniality (violent subjugation) is the primary project of decolonial work. Modernity is always produced in relation to others' subjugation. See Elsa Barkley Brown, "What Has Happened Here: The Politics of Difference in Women's History and Feminist Politics", *Feminist Studies*, Vol.18, No. 2 (Summer 1992)

relationship to processes of disciplining Black women, Black families, and the African diaspora. A number of Black women whose writings appear in *The Black Woman* make the claim that categories like Man, Woman, and Family are colonial constructions (see Bambara, Lindsey, etc). Many of these writers draw upon Black diasporan women's intellectual traditions of naming gender hierarchies as foreign to the African cosmology.

The African cosmology, and worldview has been invoked within Black diasporic women's thought for a long time in order to think outside of the social regulation and disciplinary regimes that Western gender imposes.<sup>69</sup> This reach back to African ways of thinking and organizing the social world (a Black diasporan construction) is a decolonial practice that I want to revisit within Black women's intellectual/political traditions. This tradition of naming gender and family as constructed is an important tradition that has the potential to unsettle some of the foundational concepts and organizing principles of settler colonial social relations and space making. A precolonial society without the imposition of western manhood and womanhood becomes a point of reference for many of the Black women who write back to the welfare system, the state, and settler colonial America in the anthology. This challenge to the notions of European manhood and womanhood is also a challenge to the coloniality of western gender.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Functions as a short hand for the kinds of African American and diasporan people's constructions of the space, time, and cultures of West Africa prior to colonization and the Trans Atlantic slave trade.

<sup>70</sup> This move to critique western womanhood and manhood is not a complete jettisoning of gender as a concept in the writings in this essay. They do not go as far as questioning the category itself as a universal socially constructed concept for explaining social organization—particularly in precolonial Africa. Note that African womanhood and manhood are created by the contributors to the anthology; they do not give up on gender as an organizing category or frame for the organization of the social work. Oyeronke Oyewumi provides a socio-linguistic study of Yuroba culture in order to challenge the notion that gender and body reasoning is always present as a discourse or frame for organizing the social world. See Oyeronke Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women: Making An African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

Moving past constructions of manhood and womanhood, the roles that they construct for Black people and the ways that they limit Black liberation is an issue of survival for the contributors to *The Black Woman*. Greg Thomas's *The Sexual Demon of Colonial Power* has enabled a new and promising re-reading of Toni Cade Bambara's essay, "On the Issue of Roles" in *The Black Woman*. Thomas allows us to see the way that Cade Bambara is calling for the dismantling of European categories of womanhood and manhood. I agree with Thomas that Cade Bambara makes it possible for Black people to question the very categories of manhood and womanhood that organize bodies, politics and the social world. Cade Bambara argues that "perhaps we need to let go of all notions of manhood and femininity and concentrate on Blackhood."<sup>71</sup> Cade Bambara calls for the fashioning of an identity and a self outside of the categories of manhood and womanhood. "Perhaps an androgynous self via commitment to the struggle" is what Black people need at this moment.<sup>72</sup>

Cade Bambara also makes a return to precolonial societies to help do the hard work of "purging"<sup>73</sup> ourselves of these colonial categories. Bambara first turns to Africa in order to help the Black American purge themselves of normative gender constructions. Reflecting on the space of pre colonial West Africa, Bambara states the following, "And I am convinced, at least in my readings of African societies, that prior to the European obsession of property as a basis for social organization, and prior to the introduction of Christianity, a religion fraught with male anxiety and vilification of women, communities were cooperative." Bambara seeks to recuperate cooperative and egalitarian Black

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<sup>71</sup> Toni Cade Bambara, "On the Issues of Roles" in *The Black Woman: An Anthology*, (New York: Washington Square Press, 1970), p. 126

<sup>72</sup> Ibid

<sup>73</sup> Ibid

communities. Bambara also seeks a destabilization of the ontological categories that western manhood and womanhood construct. Referencing a time in Africa prior to colonization, Bambara directs our attention to the fact that “there were no hard and fixed assignments based on gender, no rigid and hysterical separation based on sexual taboos.”<sup>74</sup> Western gender confines African women as well other colonized people.

Bambara also references the indigenous peoples of the Americas in order to talk about the imposition of colonial notions of gender, specifically the construction of a debased womanhood into their social structures. Writing of the indigenous peoples of the Americas, Cade Bambara writes that, “There is nothing to indicate that the Sioux, Seminole, Iroquois or other “Indian” nations felt oppressed or threatened by their women, who had mobility, privileges, a voice in the governing of the commune. There is evidence, however, that the European was confused and alarmed by the equalitarian system of these societies and did much to wreck it, creating wedges between men and women.”<sup>75</sup> Bambara’s interventions here are significant. Bambara while holding onto gender, for there is an African woman and a Native woman, does let go of European womanhood and manhood. Gender as a way of arranging the social world and bodies is still possible.

Though gendered and bodily arrangements are not totally destroyed, the obliteration of western manhood and womanhood enables an acknowledgment of social relations that are not premised on an “obsession with property.” Social relations have been different for Black and Native colonized peoples and can be egalitarian if we have the will to fashion new selves. Her analysis also enables a linking of the construction of

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, p. 127

European colonial gender to property. Her analysis resonates with her co-contributor Kay Lindsey's analysis of the family and its relationship to property and conquest. Cade Bambara links notions of property to the construction of colonial gender, patriarchy and the nuclear family that was imposed on African people during colonialism. "The cooperative community under the matriarchal system was disrupted when the concept of property was introduced to the Motherland. Property led to class division which disrupted the communal society. To guarantee the transmission of property, patrilinear inheritance was adopted. To ensure a clear line of inheritance, the woman's liberty and mobility, especially sexual, was curtailed through monogamy. The nuclear family cut her off from the larger society."<sup>76</sup>

Bambara enables an interrogation of the notion of property, a foundational liberal construction of Enlightenment that produces the social and spatial concept of a settler contract, and links it to family formation. Lindsey's analysis of family formation allows us to see how the construction of women as property and their (re)production of children as property helps give the family, as a modality of conquest, its constitution, cognitive and social structure. The family becomes a property (women-children-land) producing and accumulating machine. Denaturalizing women and children as property who can ensure the patri-*linear* flow of property (land-wealth) disrupts settler colonial power's impulse to create property out of people and land. Undoing or delinking women from the concept of property is important analytical and decolonial work that Bambara and Lindsey achieve. This uncoupling creates a conceptual and spatial disorganization that is dangerous to the settler colonial social and spatial order.

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid

The Black matriarch head of household confounds and disorganizes the gendered landscapes of settler colonialism. Black women, no longer the property of slave owners as technologies of plantation colonial settlement as land clearers and producers of land clearers, become unintelligible to settler colonial space making. Post emancipation, Black women are no longer property that reproduce the settler colonial landscape. Black women must be incorporated into other social formations off the plantation that render them property again. The family is a social formation that turns women into property. The Moynihan Report tries to impose the family onto the Black matriarch's household in order to render women property and produce them as an intelligible form of gender for settler colonial spatial practices. The Black matriarch resists this property making institution.

The settler colonial social and spatial order produces genders, sexualities and family formations that produce property. Normative gender, sexuality and family formations create a heteronormative social and spatial order that is conducive to the production of property. Property is required to occupy and formally own or settle a space according to the terms of what Carole Pateman calls the settler contract.<sup>77</sup> Heteronormative gender relations produce and enable property in multiple forms. Non-heteronormative gender relations confound and prevent the production and accumulation of property. Black matriarchs disorganize and upset the settler colonial and heteronormative thrust toward the production of property.

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<sup>77</sup> A settled colony simultaneously presupposes and extinguishes a terra nullius. Settlers plant themselves in order to create a civil society out of a state of nature, an empty vacant land, where there is no exiting title. All title is created by civil government. Carole Pateman, "The Settler Contract" in *Contract and Domination*, eds. Charles Mills and Carole Pateman, (Malden: Polity Press, 2007), p. 67

The unruly female gender of the Black matriarch no longer functions as property or produces more property. The sexuality of the Black female unwed matriarch is unrestrained Black female sexuality. Black female sexuality that is not restrained and disciplined produces an undisciplined and unruly Black surplus. The children of Black matriarchs, as surplus populations, no longer function as property as they did under enslavement. Not only do Black women's children not function as or make property (clear plantation land) they represent the antithesis of property during the Black Power era. Black children of Black matriarchs are anti-property as they will likely destroy it. The Kerner Commission as well as other sociological studies produced during the 1960s hypothesized that urban unrest was due to poor parenting on the part of Black matriarchs. Black women's sexuality and reproduction work outside of the normative linear progression of the social and spatial orders that are oriented toward producing property. I contend that the Moynihan Report reads Black female sexuality as non-normative and anti-property.

It is through this frame that I reread Scott Morgensen's notion and theorization of "settler sexuality"<sup>78</sup>. In *The Spaces Between Us*, Morgensen argues that the "sexual colonization of Native peoples produced modern sexuality as 'settler sexuality': a white and national heteronormativity formed by regulating Native sexuality and gender while appearing to supplant them with the sexual modernity of settlers."<sup>79</sup> Under conquest and colonization, Native peoples and racialized subjects (like Black people) are subject to the regulation of the sexual modernity of settlers. Morgensen goes on to argue that "colonial

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<sup>78</sup> Scott Lauria Morgensen, *Spaces Between Us: Queer Settler Colonialism and Indigenous Decolonization*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), p. 31

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*

heteropatriarchy queered Native peoples and all racialized subject populations for the elimination and regulation by the biopolitics of settler colonialism.”<sup>80</sup> Scott Morgensen’s intervention into the historical telling of modern sexuality as well as white queer subjectivity is essential. However, it is imperative to bring anti-Black racism within the frame of settler colonialism. According to Morgensen all racialized subjects are queered. I agree that my Black female matriarchs are queered albeit in ways that need to be delineated and specified and not lumped into people of color frameworks. I also embrace the frame of Cathy Cohen who posits “welfare queens” as non-heteronormative or queer due to their perceived unruly sexuality and reproduction (non-productive) that is represented as burdening the state.<sup>81</sup> Kevin Mumford also reads the report using a Black queer mode of critique. Mumford attends to Moynihan’s anxieties buried in the report and reveals a fear of the capacity for matriarchs, specifically the Black Matriarch, to raise effeminate boys. While Mumford mentions an unresolved incongruity between the rebellious black man/rioter who we tend to read as heterosexual and the emasculated/effeminate male raised by the Black matriarch; I would argue that the Black Matriarch’s queer Black child causes a threat to both the gender and spatial order.<sup>82</sup> Certainly, gay Black men—and Black lesbians—participated in the rebellions. The Black Matriarch of the Moynihan Report can be read or queered in the ways that Morgensen, Cohen and Mumford suggest.

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid

<sup>81</sup> Cathy Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?” *GLQ*, 3(1997)

<sup>82</sup> Kevin Mumford, “Untangling Pathology: The Moynihan Report and Homosexual Damage, 1965-1975,” *The Journal of Policy History*, Vol. 24, No. 1, 2012, p. 62

I also argue that the Black matriarchs of the Moynihan Report are queered along the lines of the in/ability to create property which is crucial to the maintenance of the settler colonial social and spatial order. Black matriarchs are queer/ed in this historical moment because their gender and sexuality work against the creation of property which I argue is also a function of settler sexuality. Non-normative or queer gender and sexuality for the purposes of this project run along the axes of the logics and production of property. The biopolitical management of Black populations, which should be distinguished from other racialized populations for analytical precision, is wholly wrapped up in the possibility of producing property in multiple forms. Queerness or non-normative gender and sexuality within settler colonial states should also be analyzed alongside of and within the logics of property. Normative settler gender and sexuality make property—as people, commodities, land, and possession of land—possible.<sup>83</sup>

Property should be understood as material, social, ideological, utopic and a site of desire. Property is as much about the future as it is the past. In fact, property at times conceals the past, particularly the conditions of possibility that made it possible. Property required the elimination of the Native people and enslavement of Black people. I want to make sure that property is not understood as inert in the context of this project.

Property certainly represents a visible landscape. However, I would like to take up the landscape of property as one that is always in, what Richard Schein would say, the

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<sup>83</sup> I will acknowledge and rigorously theorize the different discourses that produce normative and non-normative or deviant bodies in each chapter of my dissertation. While the Black bodies in the Moynihan report do not produce property and become queer through that lack or deviancy, they do produce property as slaves. As slaves their deviant gender and sexuality is produced through a non-normative relationship to land, nature making them non-human. My main argument is that discourses of gender and sexuality for Blacks function outside of the humanizing work that it does for whites. Whites are often made human or at least intelligible with a given set of rights of grievances through the discourses of gender and sexuality.

process of becoming. Property as a landscape (including people) also functions as “discourse materialized.”<sup>84</sup> According to Nicolas Blomley who provides a more Marxian account of its existence and purpose, property is an enactment of power. The specific enactment of power is the power to exclude.

In addition to the power of property to exclude is the power of property to mark a conceptual space of ownership, race, and nation. Property is made through processes of occupation and settlement. Property in the forms of occupation and settlement are ongoing social processes (contractual, legal, corporeal, symbolic) that must be reproduced and reiterated in order to establish sovereignty. According to Carole Pateman, “sovereignty can be gained through occupation or settlement.”<sup>85</sup> The appearance of settlement through property works through the visual field and three dimensionality of urban space. The urban space of the ghetto, which many sociologists and theorists posited as an internal colony, is composed of buildings (property) that were owned by whites. The buildings, urban infrastructure (telephone poles, fire hydrants) and other artifacts (street signs with colonial names, stop signs) ordered the world of Black people. These forms of property also functioned as symbols of settler colonial space. They marked the space as owned by settlers.

The landscape of the rebellion in this project emerges as a spatial practice and space that functions as a counter geography to the urban geographies of settler colonialism. I see rebellion space as a reoccurring imaginative and actual space. Its temporal and spatial logic is anti-modernist and disruptive of what Kwame Holmes

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<sup>84</sup> Schein, 663

<sup>85</sup> Pateman, p. 41

would say is the linearity of urban development.<sup>86</sup> Burning buildings defy the logic and spatial practice of settler colonial occupation. The rebellion as a space and space making tradition is one that I want to link to the Black female body, specifically the Black matriarch as a trope for spatial confusion. She defies property as an alternatively gendered, sexual, and anti-property figure. In the next chapter, I locate my own Black female body and others as sites of chaos in people of color coalition work and on settler colonial landscapes of Canada and the US.

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<sup>86</sup> In his talk on the U Street Corridor in DC on April X, 2012..Kwame Holmes proposed an application of Halberstam's queer time to think about the ways that Black neighborhoods deemed "blighted" (deviant, queer) functioned outside of the temporal frame of modernity and urban development. I found this notion of queer time or non-linear time suggestive and thought of applying it to rebellion space-time. See Halberstam, Judith Halberstam. *In a queer time and place: Transgender bodies, subcultural lives*. (New York: NYU Press, 2005)

## **Chapter Five: In Order to Free the Land, You Must Abolish the Prison**

Ritual, as noted elsewhere, means transforming something from one state or condition to another...<sup>1</sup>

--Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop*

Thus, the cycle of action, reflection, and practice as Sacred praxis embodied marks an important reversal of the thinking as knowledge paradigm. In the realm of the secular, the material is conceived of as tangible while the spiritual is either nonexistent or invisible. In the realm of the Sacred, however, the invisible constitutes its presence by a provocation of sorts, by provoking our attention. We see its effects, which enable us to know it must be there. By perceiving what it does, we recognize its being and by what it does we learn what it is. We do not see Wind, but we can see the vortex it creates in a tornado. We see its capacity to uproot things that seem to be securely grounded, such as trees; its capacity to strip down, unclothe, remove that which draws the sap; such as leaves; its capacity to dislodge what is buried in the bowels of the earth.<sup>2</sup>

--Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*

**Marika** : What will happen to Black people under Native sovereignty, particularly Black prisoners? Will Native people incarcerate Blacks when they are in control?

**Christine**: Well in order to free the land, we can't have prisons erected on them, right?

**Abi**: Yeah, abolishing and demolishing prisons has to be a part of any decolonizing work.<sup>3</sup>

*INCITE Toronto, Ceremony/Dialogue in 2007*

*I remember first how it smelled; the moment when we all arrived at the same location. I taste the smoky fullness of sage gathering at the end of the stalagmites in my sinus cavities. The pungency turns from smoke to liquid, condenses, collects itself then slides and drips onto a spot in the back of my throat. I remember watching Marika lean forward/speak, then Christine lift her head from her hand/speak, then Abi look at both of them/speak as the smoke arched its back, twirled, unlocked hands with other smoke*

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<sup>1</sup> Paula Gunn Allen. *The sacred hoop: Recovering the feminine in American Indian traditions*. Beacon Press, 1992, p.29

<sup>2</sup> Alexander. *Pedagogies of Crossing*, p. 307

<sup>3</sup> Excerpt of a dialogue that took place at an INCITE Toronto gathering in 2007.

*particles, broke away, unfurled and dissipated. We all waited, kept watch, breathed, hoped for a wave and for a moment finally, just floated.*

*How strange it was to have the moment greet us and meet us this way.*

*Happening as smoke rose, floating into nasal passage and changing form in the back of a throat. How could it happen the way smoke does; when we had labored for it so long. We resented this process, at times resented one another, not knowing it then we would call it quits in less than a year. Doing ceremony work, sacred work in order to live in and make meaning from the space of impasse was hard work. Work that bruised all of us, scarred some of us and transformed us all; for at least a moment. However, a moment is hard to measure. The time of it, the shape of it, the space of it is perceived differently depending on the person.*

*For some of us, the moment was only powerful enough to last the length of the ritual. For some of us, it lasted for weeks. Some of us attest to it brushing our faces from time to time out of nowhere. As for me, I held onto the moment and have not let go yet. I wanted to take on its urgent and gut-wrenching responsibility and until the impulse or call had subsided. I choose to remember it. I remember it for this project. I remember it, to be my best self, as Nadine reminds me. I remember it to guide my ethical journey as a Black person living in this hemisphere and in the world. I hang onto the moment we invoked with the sage, the smoke, thanking our ancestors, thanking the Creator, thanking one another, writing poems, birthing two-women plays and enacting and bringing forth ceremony with each other. As we engaged in regular ritual with one another we brought forth moments of possibility.*

Ceremony work, or working a ceremony is necessarily linked to the body. The praxis of the Black and Native female body work is also spatial work. I will return to its links to space later. Ceremony and the knowledge or what Jacqui Alexander names as a “shift in consciousness” requires the body.<sup>4</sup> Invoking a shift in consciousness is described by Alexander as the “self in intimate concert with the Sacred.”<sup>5</sup> While my own understanding and definition of the Sacred in this chapter is particular, it is not inaccessible.<sup>6</sup> Within the context of INCITE work, I imagine and theorize the Sacred as knowledge gained or a way of knowing—epistemology—that recognizes an intimate connection to the other people with whom you are conducting the ceremony.

The sacred in the context of this chapter functions as the knowledge or knowing that your survival as a Black woman is inseparable from her survival as a Native woman. This knowledge of interconnection is also not accessed alone. Knowledge cannot always be gained through systematic reasoning. Western thought patterns and problem solving strategies are at times insufficient. This kind of knowledge cannot be accessed from a book. This knowledge is co-produced and requires other bodies to access it. Further, I want people to think about the appearance of or my invocation of the Sacred as way of describing a movement through impasse. A way of translating this “Sacred” experience to people would be to have the reader think about it as the ability to understand or

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<sup>4</sup> Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, p. 307

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> I am challenged to think about whether my own use of the Sacred is “translatable” due to the work of Michelle Rowley who responds to the pedagogic potential of Alexander’s deployment of the Sacred in *Pedagogies*. In the essay, “Rethinking Interdisciplinarity: Meditations on the Sacred Possibilities of an Erotic Feminist Pedagogy.” *Small Axe* 24, (2007), p. 144, Rowley asks Alexander to consider if ‘her discussion of the cosmological possibilities of this practice of the Sacred seems to defy translatability unless there is a proselytizing effect; that is to say, unless the researcher/writer becomes similarly immersed in a set of similar (not identical) forms or practices.’

connect with people when you did not think it was possible. Another way of describing the Sacred is a moment when you meet the limits of reason or your capacity to be empathetic yet somehow—perhaps inexplicable—you are able to still connect with the other.

*What we made possible was an imaginary of Black and Native decolonization. Black freedom was articulated as a condition of statelessness, yet possibility and fulfillment. We created the space to envision the radical possibility of Native sovereignty outside of western notions of the “nation,” “state,” and “nation-state.” In the unlikely spaces of two basement apartments, a fifth floor walk up, a north facing corner apartment on West Bloor, we remapped the hemisphere on Black and Native women’s terms. New names were adopted, old notions of innocence and guilt were reframed, and bold notions of relationality and entanglement were forged in ways that challenge coalitional politics. We forged a new analytic, where our experiences touched. We looked at each other through the smoke and proclaimed: In order to free the land, we must abolish the prison. Abolition of genocide and Black social death are intimately and inevitably tied.*

### ***Practice/Method***

In this chapter, I recollect, remember and re-inhabit my work with INCITE Toronto from 2006-2008 in order to theorize and honor it. I use my journal entries, free writings, and email exchanges between group members along with the ephemera from the group’s creative work to stir these memories and bring them to the surface. As I revisit this work, I pay attention to the ways that Black women’s bodies, my own included, claim a space of flux, refusal and un-belonging in order to re-imagine their relationship to

one another, the land, settler colonial nation-states and decolonial politics. In order to track this Black female state of flux, I look for it in ritual and ceremonial work. Ceremony unsettles the body, Western epistemologies, and notions of time and space. The labor of ceremony requires a simultaneous reclamation and surrender of the body to a collective agreement to enter into chaos. Chaos allows us to enter into a Lordean space of erotic possibilities where bodies transfer experiences and come into contact with the sacred together.

The form of autobiographical writing that I engage in order to recall this chaos of decolonial work is often referred to as auto ethnography within academic fields. Despite debates and ongoing suspicion about its rigor and legitimacy as a research method, the practice has gained currency in many fields in the humanities and social sciences. It is particularly popular in fields like Women's and Gender Studies, American Studies, Performance Studies and other fields that seek to challenge dominant power relations. Scholars in these fields have adapted various ethnographic methods including auto ethnography and carved out a space they call critical ethnography.<sup>7</sup> Scholars who claim to be committed to a post colonial critique or to an anti-colonial praxis like anthropologists Kathryn Besio and David Butz endorse autoethnography as a practice

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<sup>7</sup> See Dwight Conguergood 2002, 1985. "Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research." *TDR: The Drama Review* 46, no. 2 (2002): 145-56., "Performing as a Moral Act: Ethical Dimensions of the Ethnography of Performance." *Literature in Performance* 5.2 (1985): 1-13. See D. Soyini Madison, 2007, 2005, "The Dialogic Performative in Critical Ethnography." *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 26:4, 320-324, *Critical Ethnography: Methods Ethics, and Performance*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2005), Tami Spry. "Performing Autoethnography: An Embodied Methodological Praxis." *Qualitative Inquiry* 7, no. 6 (2001): 706-732.

with ambivalent optimism. Besio and Butz quip, “autoethnography—it’s great, but it can’t do everything.”<sup>8</sup>

In its more critical iterations, ethnography and autoethnography have been used meaningfully in post colonial studies, feminist geography and other critical fields.<sup>9</sup> Some of this scholarship has directly challenged epistemic claims to universal vantage points and forms of knowledge that emerge from Enlightenment thought.<sup>10</sup> Based on Besio and Butz’s endorsement, autoethnography should be an agile method that can subvert the power relations that brought the practice into formation and continue to plague it.

Autoethnography should also prove to be a helpful companion in my attempts to unmap and re-write geographies based on Cartesian dualisms and imperial subject positions that seek to discipline land, bodies, time and space. While my method of remembering and re-inhabiting the work of INCITE resonates with some of the disciplinary, analytic and political concerns of a so-called post colonial auto ethnographic practice my writing and theory building does not share ethnography’s or auto ethnography’s origins, form, or intentions.

At times what I am doing appears remarkably similar, and sometimes almost identical to some practices of autoethnography. My practice is certainly in conversation

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<sup>8</sup>Kathryn Besio and David Butz. "Autoethnography: a limited endorsement." *The Professional Geographer* 56, no. 3 (2004): 432-433. Besio and Butz focus their attention on “how to make ethnography a progressive and integral part of postcolonial research” rather than critique its limits. In Besio’s and Butz’s respective practices of autoethnography, both scholars seek to move “into the realm of anticolonial praxis” and believe that autoethnography can help them achieve this end. Besio specifically muses that “I am drawn to ethnography—‘the writing of culture’ because ethnography utilizes an epistemological position that prioritizes the particularity and context-dependent nature of knowledge. For more innovative uses in geography and cultural landscapes scholarship see, Mary Corbin Sies, "Toward a Performance Theory of the Suburban Ideal, 1877-1917," in *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 4, (1991); 197-207;

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, p. 432

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*

with autoethnography's desire to disrupt hegemonic power relations and makes similar epistemic challenges. However, in this practice of writing about and theorizing an experience diverges from the path of ethnography. I briefly reflect on the emergent field of critical ethnography in order to explore the points of divergence.

### ***Is this Ethnography?***

Throughout this project, I have been stretching my mind and tongue around new language and terms to think about the co-imbrication of settler colonialism and slavery on the Black female body. As a way of grappling with language and the conceptual frames that it instantiates and forecloses, I want to interrogate what an imposition of the discourse of ethnography as well as its baggage does to knowledge production that seeks to work outside of its grasp. I am not calling for the destruction of ethnography some academic and political projects continue to find it useful.<sup>11</sup> However is everything that looks like or has resonances with ethnography necessarily ethnographic? Is how I am choosing to reflect on and theorize the work of INCITE always already auto ethnography? Does my recollection of INCITE need to be classified? As a scholar committed to a decolonial praxis, these are questions that I am compelled to ask. While I seek to conduct research in a way that confounds the colonizing moves of academic disciplinary, I also realize that I am in conversation with academics. While I want to challenge the way we produce knowledge and think, I also want to be understood. This engagement or talking back to ethnography is a necessary discussion.

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<sup>11</sup> I as a scholar will also continue to find it useful however, I am questioning whether naming the particular method that I use in this chapter, for this specific kind of ceremonial/political work, should or can be called autoethnography.

I am particularly interested in having a conversation with scholars engaged in critical ethnography. More specifically, I am interested in their claims to have distanced themselves from the colonial legacy of the practice or in some instances claims to having decolonized the practice. Since both critical ethnographers and I are familiar with critiques like James Clifford's that ethnography is a science of "culture collecting," I will not rehearse all of the critiques of the field.<sup>12</sup> Rather what I will do is investigate the space of alterity and difference that critical ethnographers like Conguergood, Spry and others claim. I am interested in how these claims of alterity may still be working through forms of disciplinarity, closed epistemological systems, and coloniality. I will distinguish how my own work departs from these epistemic vantage points and alliances with colonial knowledge production. Ultimately, I ask the question, why must critical work in performance studies, ethnography, art, and action based research name itself ethnography?

The major interventions in the field of critical ethnography are articulated as commitments to embodied practices, a politics of solidarity (outside turned into inside), and an incoherent self/I that does not claim a universal epistemic vantage point or grand theory/truth. I agree that these things are often achieved by the scholars committed to the practice of critical ethnography however, these disruptions and breaks with colonial knowledge production also have genealogies that do not begin, end, or intersect with ethnography. Let us begin with the way that the critical in ethnography takes up embodiment.

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<sup>12</sup> James Clifford, "The Predicament of Culture", p. 231 (1988)

## **Embodiment:**

Tami Spry, a committed practitioner of critical ethnography, specifically the incorporation of performance studies into the practice of ethnography, emphasizes the way that the body is privileged as a site of knowledge production. As the locus of knowledge production, the body becomes a way to orient oneself to culture, research, the un/known self, and other people. In her 2006 article, “Text and Performance Performances: A ‘Performative–I’ Co-presence: Embodying the Ethnographic Turn in Performance and the Performative Turn in Ethnography,” Spry thanks her discipline for allowing her to bring her body and experience as well as others’ bodies and experiences into her research. Proudly, Spry ingratiate herself to the ways that performance studies has created an opening in the practice of ethnography for the body to enter and be taken seriously. As she thanks the field of performance studies and its liaison with ethnography, she also honors D. Soyini Madison for her contributions. “I am thankful for the disciplinary wisdom to view lived experience through theories of embodiment, because it was only in trusting the embodied knowledge that [in the words of D. Soyini Madison] ‘I am a un/learning body in the process of feeling’ that I began to heal.”<sup>13</sup>

Accessing the embodied knowledge of the self and others is critical to the healing process. Both her sentiment and nod to scholar, performance artist, and activist D. Soyini Madison are appropriate. However, I am interested in scrutinizing the way that Spry and other performance studies theorists like Dwight Conguergood tend to back into the body and its theoretical capacity through their discipline. Again, the epistemological entry

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<sup>13</sup> Tami Spry. "A “performative–I” copresence: Embodying the ethnographic turn in performance and the performative turn in ethnography." *Text and Performance Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (2006): 339-346., p. 341

point of figuring out or getting back in touch with the body, while meaningful, through making amending academic disciplines is an interesting entry point. In my own work to recollect the embodied experiences that I and members of INCITE had between 2006 and 2008, I take a different route. The body, for the Black and Native women of INCITE is indispensable to the work of ceremony. In order to enact ceremony the body must be used, in fact the body initiates the ceremony. The body initiates the ceremony and initiates knowledge. Knowledge—as a disciplinary space—does not invite the body to take part. A further and more in depth analysis of this will be taken up later when I anatomize one of INCITE’s ceremonies.

**Politics of Solidarity:**

The reverence for Conguergood and his intervening method of “co-performative witnessing” has enabled scholars to have a new relationship to the cultures and people with whom they are both interested in learning about and building relationships. The anxiety produced by the power relations that are established during ethnographic encounters has troubled many self critical academics committed to social justice. Conguergood’s investment in developing relationships built upon reciprocity has provided performance artists and ethnographers alike with a new way to approach and orient themselves to communities that they enter as outsiders. Tami Spry, a student of Conquergood speaks graciously about the possibility of working ethically and conscientiously with the assistance of her teacher’s approach.

Conquergood describes a “hermeneutics of experience, relocation, copresence, humility, and vulnerability” where knowledge is located, engaged, and “forged from solidarity with, not separation from, the people.” Within this relocation of understanding, the observer or the participant-observer is subsumed and

transformed by the complexity of civic interests and the local effort of ‘coperformative witnessing.’<sup>14</sup>

Co-performative witnessing resists the ethnographic impulse of objectifying and collecting peoples and cultures.<sup>15</sup> In 2006, D. Soyini Madison, reflects on Conquergood’s praxis of co-performative witnessing. Of co-performative witnessing Madison testifies that it is “what it means to be radically engaged and committed, body-to-body, in the field...a politics of the body deeply in action with Others.”<sup>16</sup> The work of performance artists like Conquergood, Madison and Spry is also dedicated to overcoming the imperial dualism that posits a knowing I/Self and an objectified other. In another essay on the possibility of the performative within the field of ethnography, Madison attests to the kind of mutuality and reciprocity between the bodies (researcher and Other) that meet. Speaking specifically of the “dialogic performative,” Madison claims that the approach is “charged by a desire for a generative and embodied reciprocity, sometimes with pleasure and sometimes with pain. It is a mutual creation of something different and something more from the meeting of bodies in their contexts.”<sup>17</sup>

For Madison, there is not just an establishment of more equitable and less uneven power relations—embodied reciprocity—but also the possibility of a creative moment. Madison as a scholar and activist has been at the forefront of creating meaningful scholarship and art with the many communities that she has worked with around the globe. Her work and others in the field attests to the possibilities inherent in the meeting between an informed performance studies approach and ethnographic methods. I do

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 343

<sup>15</sup> James Clifford,

<sup>16</sup> D. Soyini Madison, “Co-Performative Witnessing,” *Cultural Studies*, 21:6, 826-831, p. 826

<sup>17</sup> D. Soyini Madison, “The Dialogic Performative in Critical Ethnography,” p. 320

believe that as a practitioner of dialogic and other performative methods that Madison and others do subvert and at times dismantle colonizing aspects of the discipline of anthropology and its attendant practice, ethnography.

While the tendency for ethnography to produce an exoticized other may be able to be overcome, critical ethnography still has not shaken off disciplinarity. Emerging due to imperial and colonial enterprise, anthropology and ethnography have inherited coloniality's complex of disciplinary power as one of their structuring logics. Linda Tuhiwai Smith argues that one of the ways that the disciplinary power of colonialism works is through knowledge production's reliance on Western academic disciplinarity. Smith has us consider that "The concept of discipline is even more interesting when we think about it not simply as a way of organizing systems of knowledge but also as a way of organizing people or bodies. Discipline is also partitioned, individuals separated and space compartmentalized, this allowed for efficient supervision and for simultaneous distinctions to be made between individuals."<sup>18</sup> Disciplinarity relies on a Cartesian mapping system that bounds bodies, space, and ideas in ways that promote individuation, liberalism, and the facile conversion of bodies and land into commodities for exchange. The most insidious element of disciplinarity and its "deepest memory" is that of the "sheer brutality meted out to generations of indigenous communities."<sup>19</sup>

I am not convinced that critical ethnography, particularly as practiced by Madison and others participates directly in this violence however, the fact that their work is achieved both within disciplines and inter-disciplinarily means that it is constructing walls and dualisms that it always has to overcome. Ethnography as a discipline produces

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<sup>18</sup> Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, p. 68

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*

an “Other” to be studied. As a field relying on Cartesian dualisms like I/Other, there is always a boundary that must be crossed or a wall to be scaled to bridge the distance between the construction of difference. The ethnographer, critical, performative, or other always faces a barrier to the coveted body-to-body engagement on ethical terms. The very discipline creates an inside and an outside, a space that must be traversed to gain understanding.

My movement, spatial orientation, and relationship to the “field” is different from that of the ethnographer. I do not move from the outside in; I am always inside. There are forms of ethnography, like autoethnography, that also take this approach, in that the ethnographer studies the self, reflects on their own participation in a group, and contest the insider/outsider binary.<sup>20</sup> However, these researchers still identify with the ethnographer and the field of ethnography. My epistemic frame and recollections of INCITE never began from a position of an outside researcher. The experience that I am recalling was never intended to produce research, understand the other, or observe a process or culture in which I am constituted as an outsider. There is no outside.

For the activist scholar, revisiting and theorizing the “field of their activism,” there is no separation between the observer/participant-observer/native/other—there is no “Other”. We could say that in my recollection/memory/honoring that I am tracking INCITE as a dialogic performance. However, this would be to inscribe academic disciplinary logics on a living practice that preceded and exceeds this form of academic

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<sup>20</sup> See the work of Elizabeth Etorre. "Gender, older female bodies and autoethnography: Finding my feminist voice by telling my illness story." In *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol. 28, no. 6, pp. 535-546. Pergamon, 2005.

disciplining. Ultimately, I am the participant and the ceremony. I am not observing but re-inhabiting a time-space.

### **Incoherent “I/Self”:**

Destabilizing and calling attention to the constructed nature of the stable and intact human subject is a project of post structuralist and post modernist thought from which critical ethnography and performance studies emerge. As a critical approach to ethnographic research, Spry calls attention to the remaking of the “I” or the Self into fragmented, contradictory, and unstable positionality. For Spry, “a performative-I positionality is concerned less about identity construction and more about constructing a representation of the ‘incoherent,’ fragmented, conflictual effects of the co performance, of the co presence between selves and others in contexts.”<sup>21</sup> Spry argues further that autoethnography and performance ethnography which unmask itself as a narrative of the self enables one to “critique the situatedness of self.”<sup>22</sup> This post structuralist and post modernist move away from a situated, stable, and knowable subject of the enlightenment is a productive shift for this brand of ethnography. Calling a subject into a space of incoherence and constructedness is certainly a way to disrupt colonial hierarchies that provide the stable subject with a God’s eye view from which to view or construct and represent the “Other.”

However, if we are located in the position of the “Other,” is our vantage point one of moving from a state of a stable and coherent subject to an incoherent and unstable one? I certainly would not argue that I always occupy the vantage point of an objectified and researched other as an academic. I would however like to consider that in the context

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<sup>21</sup> Spry, “A “performative-I” copresence,” p. 344

<sup>22</sup> Spry, “Performing Autoethnography,” p. 710

of this project, I am paying attention to my own, other Black women's and Native women's states of flux, chaos, and movement. These states of flux, incoherence, ahuman-ness, and non-subject statuses are ones that are both violently imposed and chosen as political positions. Again, I would argue that the stable, autonomous, and coherent subject-ethnographer of the enlightenment is not a positionality that Black and Native women ever assumed.

These interventionist moves made in post structural, and post modernist theories which encourage and invite fragmentation, contingency, and even subjectless-ness are repositionings undertaken by those with the privilege of already being subjects. Andrea Smith argues in "Queer Theory and Native Studies: The Homonormativity of Settler Colonialism" that the move to subjectlessness also privileges the ontological position of white settlers (which includes white LGBT Settlers) who are already construed as human within a liberal humanist framework. Native people are still "subjects awaiting humanity."<sup>23</sup> Similarly Hortense Spillers argues in 1983 that Black people did not constitute bodies within the context of "New World" violence and humanism. Spillers argues that the Black "female body and the male body become a territory of cultural and political maneuver."<sup>24</sup> Specifically, Black female flesh does not become a subject like white females do within the violent "New World" humanistic order.

Throughout this chapter, I am interested in Black female bodies and Native female bodies that acknowledge their positionality as one of flux and chaos. I venture to tell the story of myself and other Black women in the Toronto INCITE groups who

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<sup>23</sup> Andrea Smith, "Queer Theory and Native Studies," p. 42

<sup>24</sup> Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book", p. 67

acknowledge and accept an historical and violently imposed position of flux and statelessness in the promises of citizenship and stability. I also recount the story of a Native woman who still awaits a human subject position yet hastens her steps because the forms of sovereignty and nation-hood that promise full humanity are insufficient. For the category of the human is still too violently exclusive for her to embrace. These stories are ones of desire and hopefulness that co-exist alongside a necessary politics of refusal. Epistemologically, there is a substantial difference (an ontological one) between refusing to inhabit the subject position of the coherent human and the methodological, yet sincere political practice of taking up fragmentation as a way to critique a situated White self that Spry engages in as a performance ethnographer.

As a storyteller in this chapter, I will be remembering and recounting how Black and Native women's willingness to move, embrace a state of flux and chaos changes the space of the settler nation-state, notions of nation, sovereignty, and home. I also remember how it reconfigures what we imagine as coalitional politics. My story also explores an ethics or politics of refusal as a position of power and agency rather than as a state of perpetual lack.

### **Logistics: Storytelling and Memory Work**

While I have actively refused some of the epistemic frames of ethnography, I am in agreement with some of the practices as it pertains to respecting the well being and confidentiality of the friends and activists whose lives intersect with mine and thus appear in this story/memory. Over the past five years as I have shared this work in the form of conference papers and presentations, I have continually sought approval from the members of INCITE Toronto. Prior to my making this an academic project, in a 2007

email where the group discussed how we would move forward after discontinuing the work, we talked about the ethics involved in sharing our experiences. We agreed that we all shared the experience as a group and as individuals and should be able to talk about our unique experiences as and when we wished. Though agreement was reached in the email, I still chose to share work in which I mentioned the group each time I made a public presentation. I have done the same over the course of this dissertation.

As a personal and political choice, I also decided that I did not want to subject my friends to a human subject consent process. As activists who are attempting to enact and live out a decolonial praxis, I did not want to unnecessarily have them conform to consent forms inherited from colonial research practices. In *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Linda Tuhiwai Smith discusses the limitations of well intentioned ethical research protocols like the Institutional Review Board's (IRB) process of gaining consent. "Indigenous groups argue that legal definitions of ethics are framed in ways which contain the Western sense of the individual and of individualized property. Community and indigenous rights or views in this area are generally not recognized and not respected."<sup>25</sup> To impose IRB protocol onto our work would be not be meaningful to INCITE's ethical frame and would be construed by some members as disrespectful.

Further, my memories, recollections and excerpts from my journals do not constitute research. Thus they are not subjected to protocols required under the IRB. Elizabeth Ettore, who writes about her own experiences with illness and care, does so in the form of an autoethnography. While she had to recount experiences, or engage in what she called "emotional recall," that included the memories of interactions with

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<sup>25</sup> Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, p. 118

others, she did not have to seek ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee.<sup>26</sup> The source of her data was “personal diaries.”<sup>27</sup> Similarly, I use recollections, my own diary; and free writing to tell a story.

Finally, the experiences that I recall were not conceived of or even considered a research project at the time that they occurred. This distinction remains one of the primary ways in which I distinguish my work from that of ethnographers. The people I had these experiences with and now remember were never research subjects. As I still maintain a relationship with all of these women, at anytime I make myself open to their willingness or unwillingness to have certain parts of my experience with them edited, changed, or omitted completely from my work. Thus this story will always be subject to flux and change.

### **Black Body: Where Are You From?**

Before moving to Toronto in 2006, I reached out to a scholar-activist I knew working in the city in order to inquire about the activist community in Toronto and ask specifically if there was an INCITE chapter.<sup>28</sup> Via email, she introduced me to two Black women in Toronto who were heavily involved in prison abolition work in the city. When I finally got the chance to meet them in person on my trip to the city over the summer to find housing, I was immediately “schooled”<sup>29</sup> about Black positionality in the space of

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<sup>26</sup> Ettore, p. 537

<sup>27</sup> Similar to Ettore’s research, “There are no research participants as outlined by the remit of Research Ethics Committee nor anyone identified as a conventional respondent from whom gaining consent is required. Thus seeking ethical approval is not necessary. Ettore, p. 537.

<sup>28</sup> INCITE is a national/international organization committed to ending violence. The organization is structured around the work of various chapters, organizations, collectives and affiliates of women of color working at a local level to eradicate violence in their communities. INCITE works to develop an analysis of interpersonal, state and other forms of violence. INCITE Toronto was a chapter of INCITE from 2006-2008. <http://www.incite-national.org/index.php?s=35>. Accessed April 9, 2013

<sup>29</sup> Vernacular/slang for educated.

Canada. I innocently asked both of the women “Where are you all from?” I was curious about all of the different places within the Diaspora that Black folks might have arrived from. After hearing my innocent question, both of them looked at each other and paused. Had I fucked up already? One of them turned to me and said, “from here.”

Ok, I replied and decided not to push the issue. The sista who responded from here seemed slightly annoyed but no biggie, I thought. I explained that I was from outside of Philadelphia and that my parents were both from Georgia, one from Camilla and one from Savannah, on the coast. Once we moved past placing ourselves geographically the conversation progressed more smoothly. We agreed to stay in touch and definitely meet for a more formal conversation in the fall about forming a local INCITE chapter. Both of them had traveled to New Orleans to work with an INCITE chapter there on a post-Katrina project. We all agreed that the INCITE model was compelling and wanted to talk about what could happen in the context of Toronto.

When I returned to Toronto a few weeks later to begin the fall semester, I began paying attention to how Black folks talked about where they were from. The politics of place, specifically origin, seemed to have a significance that I was not used to in a U.S. context. As Black folks, particularly “regular Blacks,” it was common to be interested in people who had stories of migration and could tell a compelling story about their roots.<sup>30</sup> It is common to hear Black people have casual conversations about being “jus Black,” or “regular Black,” or when your people coming from Georgia, Mississippi, and North

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<sup>30</sup> I use regular Black in its colloquial use. In the context of the U.S., Black people who are either not immigrants or descended from immigrants from the Caribbean or the continent of Africa often refer to themselves as “regular” or “jus/t” Black. This marks African Americans as distinct from Black immigrants who are conferred with ethnicity and national culture. In this same colloquial lexicon, Black immigrants are often referred to as exotic Black or special Black.

Carolina. It was also common to hear people proudly place their origins in Guyana, Trinidad or Nigeria in order to mark themselves as Black people who had migrated here. However, in Canada, I became aware that the act of naming yourself as having arrived from another place worked to secure Canada as a white Settler state. White people were usually the people who asked the question “where are you from” as a way of othering racialized people. To answer, “From here,” in response to that question on one level worked as a way to push back against the assumed Nativeness of white people. The politics of ambiguity and a tenuous claim to “here” was one of the ways that Black and other non-Native racialized people resisted white supremacist nativist claims to Canada.

Walking along St. Clair Avenue West from the grocery store one warm day an inebriated white-looking man yells at me, “Go back to where you came from?” Racist white people in the U.S. might call me a “Black bitch,” nigger or some other racialized and sexualized epithet but they never place me outside of the geographic boundaries of the US. Blacks are a natural part of the U.S. landscape. Hawaiian scholar Lisa Kahaleole Hall has argued that due to the Black-white binary that is used to talk about race in the United States “African Americans become symbolically indigenous” while all other non-Black people of color are viewed as foreign.<sup>31</sup> Beginning to understand the politics of place in the context of Toronto, specifically for Black folks, who were assumed to be from elsewhere, most likely the Caribbean I yelled back to the man “You go the “\$%#@” back to where you came from.” Where Black people came from needed at times to be a “here” that contested white claims to the space. This “here” however, was not a rooted,

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<sup>31</sup> Lisa Kahaleole Hall. “Strategies of Erasure: U.S. Colonialism and Native Hawaiian Feminism,” *Native Feminisms Engage American Studies. American Quarterly*, Volume 8, Number 2. (June 2008), pp. 273-280, p. 275

patriotic, nationalist or nativist claim to space. It was a claiming of a place in order to destabilize that space.

### **A Politics of Flux:**

My own body's geographic coordinates, relationships to Black people, the African Diaspora, Native people, white settlers and the nations of the US and Canada would change over the two year period of time that I spent in Toronto. Many of the things, associations, assumptions and politics that I held and thought I held dear were called into question and made unstable. I remember that on the one year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina I was really "homesick." I desperately wanted to be with "my people," other "African Americans" or regular Black folks from the US, that is. I craved their collective attention on the people and space of New Orleans—now dispersed as the Mississippi's Delta's diasporic community. I longed for the increased political activity around Black displacement, incarceration, poverty, and attacks by the state. I longed to participate in commemorative ceremonies and actions and be inspired by the work, art, and analysis emerging from this experience of being Black and forever displaced in the US.

As I became a part of the Black community in Toronto, I realized that I would have to develop a different relationship African Americans and the largely Afro-Caribbean community in Toronto. I learned the personal and political value of being a part of the Black community in the place where you currently exist. I remember that as a political statement, I began not revealing that I was from the U.S. when white people asked me where I was from. I learned from other Black people in Canada, that naming where you were from in response to white people enabled the naturalization of white

people as Native Canadians and racialized people (with the exception of Native people) as foreigners. Further, for the first time in my life, I experience the small privilege of being a special or foreign Black with the privilege of Black ethnicity. I did not truly realize that African Americans had ethnicity until I realized that African Americans were perceived as less bitter and less politically problematic than Blacks from the Caribbean. African Americans were perceived as finding Canada a pleasant respite from US racism. We did not make everything about race while we were there. After all we (Blacks from the U.S.) escaped there from US slavery, escaped there to dodge being drafted, and generally moved to Canada to escape U.S. racial terror. We tended not to complain, unlike the “domestic” Black folks from the Caribbean, specifically those “damn Jamaicans.”

After realizing this, I refrained from correcting white people who would ask me “Canada must be so different from Jamaica [or the Caribbean], isn’t it?” “Did you grow up in the Caribbean?” “You don’t have an accent, where are you originally from in the Caribbean?” I stumbled through some of my initial responses. I was developing responses that would put the focus on White people’s own foreignness to this landmass or divert attention from me and onto Canadian white supremacy. I would say that my best response was, “Yes, Canada is very different from the Caribbean, I don’t know how you all live with all of the rampant white racism and violence.” With this response, I acknowledged I was a body in flux, and this mattered politically. Being Black in Toronto required that I take up “Black domestic” issues of police violence, incarceration, and anti-Black zero tolerance policies in schools, and foreignness. In this way, my body becomes a site of flux and confusion that is politically productive.

In addition to taking up a new and temporary Black identity, I also had to grapple with the Black communities' problem of being on Native land yet governed, policed and regulated by the Canadian nation-state. How we related to Native people was a political question that was on the table at every Black activist meeting that I attended. This was dramatically different from the way I participated in and experienced Black politics in the US. This difference was more an issue of geography and context. When I arrived in Toronto in late summer of 2006, almost every day I would walk up a street with various sized gatherings where the Six Nations flag was waving above the heads of the crowd. I stood in the crowd with and at times marched with members of the Six Nations community calling for support of the Native community's standoff with white settlers and developers at Caledonia. I had never lived in a city with such a visible and vibrant Native activist community before. After having this experience, how could I go back to a Black activist community and Black politics in the US without a strident critique of genocide, land theft and white settler colonialism? I certainly did not need this analysis of white settler colonialism to replace Black politics and practice rooted in resisting slavery and its afterlife, but I did need to allow it to bleed into these politics and inform them.

When the first call was put out to talk about forming an INCITE group, the announcement was sent to several women of color activists in the city. Native women, Black women, Palestinian women and Mixed race women expressed interest in coming together as an INCITE chapter. Relatively quickly we would become a group of solely Black and Native women. As we framed our analysis of interpersonal and state violence, an understanding of the state as one that committed and perpetuated genocide against Native peoples became essential to our work. One of the moments that helped us solidify

our commitment to ending genocide and eventually supporting Native sovereignty was a 2006 conference called “Diasporic Hegemonies: Race, Gender, Sexuality and the Politics of Feminist Transnationalism.”

### **Black Settler?**

Huh? Did Bonita Lawrence really just come out of her mouth and call Black people settlers? What a curious conjunction. I had never heard it uttered until now. Murmurings occurred all over the auditorium at McAdoo where the concluding conference plenary was being held. I remember that throughout the conference participants, whose work primarily focused on the African Diaspora, struggled to articulate the precise tensions, antagonisms, ideologies, betrayals, alliances and possibilities that structured the relationship between Black and Native people in the Americas. The few native scholars in the room were finding it increasingly frustrating that Black and other scholars focused on the diasporic routes, landings and homespaces and gender, sexuality and subjectivity but could not name Black diasporic relationships to Native peoples and settler colonial nation-states. While not the main theme of the conference, a tangential engagement with indigeneity was attempted by some of the conference organizers. Few of these scholars of the Black diaspora had devoted much attention to indigeneity, particularly Amerindian and indigenous peoples, in their work.

Bonita Lawrence had already been developing a way of talking about racialized immigrants’ relationship to Indigenous peoples and the Canadian nation-state. In her article “Decolonizing Anti-Racism,” Lawrence and Enakshi Dua argued that immigrants of color in Canada should be considered “Settlers” on Indigenous land.<sup>32</sup> In what I think

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<sup>32</sup> Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua. “Decolonizing Antiracism.” *Social Justice* 32, no. 4 (2005):120-143.

was partly due to the lack of available language as well as a reluctance on the part of Blacks to rigorously theorize their own complicity in maintaining settler colonial relations in Canada, Lawrence found it necessary to name the complex relations between Blacks and Native people in Canada as ones structured through the indigenous/settler binary. During the concluding panel of the conference, Bonita Lawrence would call Black people in Canada and on Turtle Island “Black Settlers.”

The term “Black Settler” would soon consume the time and energy of a number of scholars, activists, and members of the community during the period that I resided in Toronto. In late fall of 2006, partially in response to the Diasporic Hegemonies conference, INCITE Toronto which was comprised of Black and Native women at the time began to focus their political work on strengthening Black/Native solidarity. We explicitly named ourselves a Black and Native group. We ultimately advocated for Native sovereignty and the decolonization of our world. Our analysis of colonial, state and interpersonal violence was shaped by the experiences of four women that identified as Black (Afro-Trinidadian at times mulatta, Ethiopian and half white, Cape Coloured South African and Black US born) and one Annishanaabe woman.

I remember that our hemispheric identities became more salient to our political work than our previously acknowledged national identities or prior affiliations with amorphous categories like Women of Color. We understood that INCITE imagined itself as a national formation that worked with and supported “women of color” groups and “radical feminist of color” organizing to end violence.<sup>33</sup> While INCITE privileged a “Women of Color” identification, our chapter privileged hemispheric Blackness and

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<sup>33</sup> <http://www.incite-national.org/index.php?s=35>.

Indigeneity as the frames from which we would conceptualize and address violence. In this way we were pushing back against the sometimes amorphous “Woman of Color” organizing model.<sup>34</sup> Due to our group’s composition, conferences like “Diasporic Hegemonies,” and the ways that settler colonialism shapes people of color politics in Canada we focused on the ways that Native communities and Black communities were violently targeted by the white settler colonial regimes on Turtle Island.<sup>35</sup>

With regard to language, we moved fluidly between the terms colonial, settler colonial, and white settler state to explain social relations in what we now know as Canada and the U.S. Though settler colonial studies has become a “new” and emerging field of study that has argued for a distinct field, as a group we were developing an analysis of settler colonial relations with the language developed by Native feminists, Black feminists, and Women of Color feminists.<sup>36</sup> I am taking the time to state this because much of the “new” field of settler colonial studies’ attention to gender, sexuality, white settler subject formation, Native subject formation, nation-state formation, and

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<sup>34</sup> Our Black and Native women’s emphasis was also a result of the composition of our group. Later in the process, after we reflected on our group’s composition did we begin to have conversations about what a Woman of Color frame as opposed to a Black and Native women’s perspective could offer our group. In Zainab Amadahy and Bonita Lawrence’s article, “Indigenous Peoples and Black People in Canada: Settlers or Allies?” In *Breaching the colonial contract*, “our work is mentioned and we are referred to as a Black and Indigenous. ‘Another development worth mentioning has been the fall 2006 formation of a Toronto chapter of INCITE comprised of Black and Indigenous women devoted to exploring relationships between the two communities on Turtle Island. Up to now their discussions have been internal but it will be interesting to see how the group evolves and how its activism will be impacted.’ See p. 130

<sup>35</sup> Turtle Island is the Anishinaabe name for the landmass of North America. Following the lead of the Anishinaabe and Native women activists that were a part of the INCITE Toronto Chapter (2006-2008), members of INCITE Toronto began referring to North America as Turtle Island. We did this in order to acknowledge the name that the Original or First People’s of the region of the Great Lakes (Ontario, Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin) had given the landmass. This deliberate use of an Anishinaabe name for the landmass helped the INCITE group enact a form of decolonial politics by changing our language in a way that denaturalized the linguistic link between the colonial name Canada and the landmass located in the Northern region of the Americas.

<sup>36</sup> See <http://settlercolonialstudies.org/about-this-blog/>

geography are issues that INCITE was able to think about using the scholarship and ongoing theorization of Native, Black, and other Women of Color. Moving fluidly between terms like colonialism and settler colonialism is an indication of a desire to talk across difference rather than seal off and bound colonialism and settler colonialism into disciplinary territories.

During our meetings we read the work of authors like Bonita Lawrence, Andrea Smith, Hunani Kay Trask, Lee Maracle, Verna St. Denis, Sandy Grande and others who moved back and forth between the terms colonialism and settler colonialism.

Recognizing that many people of color experienced colonialism, albeit in different forms which require differentiation at certain moments, a shared language that encouraged coalition was often used.<sup>37</sup> While settler colonial studies argues for an “analytical distinction,” I also argue that it erases and then makes proprietary claims to thinking and analysis that has already occurred in Native Studies, specifically within the field of Native feminist studies.<sup>38</sup> While I am engaging in a project of analytical precision and clarity in this work as it pertains to Black people’s relationship to settler colonialism, the analysis that I have developed throughout this project emerges from the activism, cultural work, thinking, and scholarship of Native and Black women. I do not claim a new field of study. This analysis emerges from and situates itself within the decolonial praxis of

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<sup>37</sup> Cite your literature review.

<sup>38</sup> Lorenzo Veracini. “Settler Colonialism’: Career of a Concept.” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* ahead-of-print (2013): 1-21, in this article as well as in his other writings Veracini calls for an analytic distinction between colonialism and settler colonialism. Rooting his argument in a discursive analysis of texts on colonialism emerging from Europe and other white settler nations, Veracini proceeds to argue that “settler colonialism” as a category of analysis could only have emerged in the second half of the twentieth century. While a microlevel scrutinization to analytic categories and units of analysis is appropriate, I argue that this scholarship distances itself from the longer scholarly tradition of Native Studies and at times works to disavow Native analyses and theories of settlers, settlement and settler/colonialism.

Native and Black women that predate INCITE and come after INCITE. While settler colonial studies can certainly offer theoretical and analytical insights it is not the starting point for INCITE's work or this project's theoretical contributions.<sup>39</sup>

Decolonial Praxis requires a rigorous examination of thought. As a group, our language, particularly the everyday terms that we used to reference identity, place/space, and power were scrutinized. Reflecting back on the process, this became a helpful rather than paralyzing exercise. When we reference the place where we all gathered, rather than name it Canada, we acknowledged the space as Turtle Island. Now that I think about it, as we reclaimed the space that we lived on as Turtle Island, it also facilitated our fluid movement into hemispheric identities like First Nations and hemispheric Blackness. This would help when we, as Black women, would have to talk about what it would mean to give up on places like Trinidad and Tobago, the United States, Ethiopia, and South Africa as concepts and locations of belonging and identity. Our decolonizing work also called us into a commitment to radical relationality.

A core component of our decolonizing work focused on personal and collective healing which required us to think, theorize, and act relationally. Chandra Mohanty asserts that to think relationally, “means that we understand race, class, gender, nation, sexuality, and colonialism not just in terms of static, embodied categories but in terms of histories and experiences that tie us together—that are fundamentally interwoven into our

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<sup>39</sup> As the field of settler colonial studies emerges around 2010, INCITE was not familiar with its seminal works, key thinkers and formative theories. Further as a decolonial project, this dissertation relies on scholarship and theoretical traditions that do not constantly reify continental theory, specifically a genealogy that begins with Michel Foucault.

lives.”<sup>40</sup> Further, in order to *act* relationally, we need to “think relationally about questions of power, equality, and justice, the need to be inclusive in our thinking, and the necessity of our thinking and organizing being contextual, and deeply rooted in questions of history and experience.”<sup>41</sup>

During our talking circles we thought through our interwoven histories and experiences without putting on what Amadahy and Lawrence would call “postures of innocence.”<sup>42</sup> Ongoing Black settlement, participation in both the theft of Native lands and maintenance of the settler colonial regime in Canada and the US were discussed. We also discussed histories of Black enslavement by the Five Civilized tribes in the Southern—or US—portion of Turtle Island as well as the current anti-Black racism exhibited by Native Nations like the Cherokee, who in 2007 were revoking the tribal membership of Black-Cherokee descendents. INCITE Toronto explicitly explored the ways that colonial logics and modes of domination can use Blacks to carry out the genocide of native people and use Native people to participate in the discursive and material construction of Black bodies as commodities used for the accumulation of capital.<sup>43</sup>

Given the kind of work we were doing with one another, I rarely, if ever recall, the one Anishinaabe member of our group using the term “Black Settler.” While I am pretty sure that Christine did not agree with the term completely and had little use for the

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<sup>40</sup> Chandra Mohanty, *Feminism Without Border: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 190

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191

<sup>42</sup> Lawrence and Amadahy, *Settlers or Allies?*, p. 178

<sup>43</sup> At the time we were also reading Andrea Smith’s essay “Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy.”

term our work was not about creating static identity categories. It was about moving toward a new vision for ourselves, the way we related to one another; and how we lived on the planet. It was the first time many of us had ever had the opportunity to imagine what Native sovereignty could look like and what decolonization could mean for our lives. Our work was about the embrace of instability and change. Decolonization is about transformation.

Interestingly enough, a year after I left the city, I read an article co-authored by Bonita Lawrence and Zainab Amadahy. In “Settlers or Allies: Indigenous Peoples and Black Peoples in Canada,” Lawrence retracts her statement about Black people being settlers. Amadahy and Lawrence worked collaboratively as a Black and a Native scholar in an attempt to stretch and meet one another after many difficult conversations across the city about Black-Native relations. This collaborative and self reflexive piece allows the readers to witness both women’s personal and political transformations. Additionally, the authors call for a return to traditions of Black and Native anti-colonial alliances on Turtle Island. In this article, we see Lawrence’s position on the Black settler shift. While writing, Lawrence concedes that

for groups of peoples [...] forcibly transplanted from their own lands and enslaved on other peoples’ lands--as Africans were in the Americas—does not make enslaved peoples true ‘settlers.’ Nevertheless, [Blacks] have, as free people, been involved in some form of settlement process.’ Lawrence also goes on to state that, ‘for all peoples forced to live on other people’s lands, a crucial question becomes what relationships they will establish with the indigenous peoples of that land whose survival is also under siege. Ultimately, to fail to negotiate a mutually supportive relationship is to risk truly becoming ‘settlers,’ complicit in the extermination of those whose lands they occupy.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Amadahy and Lawrence, “Settlers or Allies,” p. 120

While I certainly agree that Black people need to acknowledge complicity with settler colonial states, I do not agree with Lawrence that Black people are ever at the risk of becoming Settlers. As I have argued throughout this project, Black people who were enslaved on this hemisphere have a very unique relationship to the process of settlement which is unlike Settlers and migrants—forced, coerced or by choice—who come here. Blackness is a very specific structural and world ordering position made possible through Conquest that cannot inhabit a Settler ontology. However, Blackness does not escape complicity. The reason why I can so confidently argue that one not need identify with a Settler identity in order to feel responsible for abolishing genocide is based on the work of INCITE. This complicity in the extermination of indigenous people is what Black women in the Toronto INCITE group committed themselves to without identifying as Settlers.

I was committed to developing a Black political praxis that incorporated the end of Native genocide even prior to hearing the term “Black Settler.” The term “Black Settler” represented discursive evidence of a conceptual block. In this project, I search for a new grammar to talk about myself at the space of the blood stained clearing so I can be cleared about my positionality. When I become clearer about where I stand and where I need to move, I become better at formulating a response to both genocide and anti-Black racism.

### **Shifting Ground: Further Notes on Decolonization**

*By the summer of 2007 INCITE Toronto had been meeting for more than a year now. On several occasions we had talked about discontinuing our work. This particular summer day as we prepared to gather in my fifth floor walk up on Vaughn Street, I was*

*afraid this would be our last meeting. I think I feared this every time we met. Again we sat on the floor. Tense, Christine lit the sage, fanned it for a second and began her prayers and supplications to the Creator. The smoke began to rise.*

*I could feel all that had transpired over the past 19 months. I slouched at my place in the circle. I was heavy. We had read everything we could think of reading on decolonization. We went on retreats. We created collective writings, journals, art work. We decided to refrain from political “busy work” and waging campaigns that made us look productive and instead focused on healing. We admitted that we did not know what we were doing. We asked for help. We came up with solutions, spoke honestly to one another. We avoided one another, became disillusioned, postponed meetings and came back together. We processed our feelings as a group. We processed our feelings in one-on-one sessions.*

*Eventually we were forced into the realm of the creative. In February 2007, I participated in an “A is for Orange” writing workshop and performance and turned some of my own experiences with the group into prose/poetry. In May 2008, Marika and Christine produced “Hazards of Occupation” a two woman play about Black and Native women on Turtle Island. Seven months into 2007 we had re-inspired one another about our work and tired one another out. We found ourselves once again making one more attempt, nervous that it would be the last. We didn’t trust, never trusted that anything had shifted. What had changed? Maybe something that we could not and had not been able to perceive was happening, had been happening all along.*

*I followed the pattern of the smoke.*

*The smoke was movement, shifts, connections, our bodies, breath, energy, heat, bending over the shapes of things we could not see. It had followed our movements, our fluctuations, our restlessness. We lit the sage, thanked the creator and our ancestors and prayed for guidance all over the city. We performed the ceremony in my basement when I lived at the intersection of St. Clair West and Dufferin Rd. We performed the ceremony as we gathered together at Marika's basement apartment when she used to live off of Dufferin Rd and Dundas Streets. We performed the ceremony at Abi's when she moved to Keele Street from Brampton. We performed the ceremony in Larissa's quaint home a few blocks from the Eglinton West Station. Christine would come in from Petersburg to meet us and perform the ceremony there in those places. First Nations ceremony smoke meets West African, East African and Southern African ceremony smoke. We made the smoky places and sacred places that Jacqui Alexander calls the basements of immigrants.*

In *Pedagogies of Crossing*, Alexander tracks the movement of West African cosmological systems four hundred years after slavery.

Four centuries later, destined for the teeming metropolises of North America---New York, Boston, Chicago---these systems effected another migration, another cosmic meeting, this time forced underground to inhabit the most curious of dwelling places: the basement of immigrant homes. But the naming of place is somewhat misleading in light of the omnipresence of the Sacred, since naming implies that the Sacred has been cordoned off, managed, and made partial to a chosen geography...<sup>45</sup>

As Alexander suggests, the omnipresence of the Sacred makes it difficult to manage, place, and constrain by geography. Further, the sacred becomes hard to detect. People cannot always tell when an omnipresent force is present, because it is always there. We pretend as if it is gone and then must reappear. We do not attend to the ways that we stop

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<sup>45</sup> Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, p. 291

moving with it. The movement of smoke reminds me of notions of ceremonial time. In *Sacred Hoop*, Paula Gunn Allen attempts to translate the notion of ceremonial time (Indian time) into terms that western thinkers can understand. Ceremonial time is an understanding of temporality as balanced, integrated, timeless, achronological and moving with humans.<sup>46</sup> Given the placelessness and timelessness of ceremony and the sacred, why did we, why did I expect to see and know the transformative power of the sacred in the here and now time? Why would we expect to only be able to register it as an “Ah Ha!” moment of light bulb rationality?

*What was happening at the level of fine and subtle gestures, lips forming words, tugs at tufts of hair, the waving of hands over smoke, squatting, sweating at our upper lips and breathing was the generation of energy and inertia. The body needs to do something; with other bodies it needs to act in order to access sacred knowledge.*

Alexander recounts her and other Afro descended women’s bodily acts to bring the self closer to the Sacred.

In practice, the daily living of the Sacred idea in action occurs in the most simple acts of recognition, such as pouring libations for and greeting the Lwa; attending to them on the days of the week that bear their signature; feeding ancestors first with the same meal before we ourselves as a way of placing the purpose of our existence back with its source, as a gesture of mutual exchange and as a way of giving thanks and asking to be sustained; building an altar to mark Sacred ground and focus energies within the home, constructing a place to work, to touch down, discard and pull in, and practice reciprocity; and participating in collective ceremony. It is in this dailiness that instigates the necessary shifts in consciousness, which are being produced because each act, and each moment of reflection of that act, brings a new a deepened meaning of self in intimate concert with the Sacred.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Paula Gunn Allen, *Sacred Hoop*, p. 150

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

*We had done so much bodily work during our time with one another. So much of our work required our bodily labor to access the sacred/knowledge of connection to one another. What kinds of shifts occurred in the play “Hazards of Occupation” during the moments when Marika and Christine held one another, sang to another, rocked one another’s hips in their hands. How did the shifts that occurred between them during their creative labor shift and rock this moment of the ceremony? We had come to that issue of Native sovereignty again. What would it look like? How would it feel? Marika and Christine talked to one another across the circle. We had come to that uncertain place again. A place representing the crossroads for Black and Native people who dare to discuss decolonizing the nation, sovereignty and belonging.*

We had agreed, Native sovereignty must be achieved to end Native genocide. However, we had just begun to conceive of and envision what Native sovereignty would look like. Right now, it was being loosely defined as Native governance or a time when Native peoples would be in charge. This created anxiety for the Black women in the room. Black people in settler colonial states often imagine themselves as facing a no win situation under the current order or under Native sovereignty. Amadahy and Lawrence’s dialogue in the article “Settlers or Allies? Indigenous Peoples and Black People in Canada” written in 2009 echoes many of the tensions and anxieties that resided in INCITE’s work. Much of our anxiety rested with this lingering notion of the nation-state that hung around.

Untangling oneself from settler colonialism’s genocide machine requires an honest assessment of our respective investments in and reliance on the nation-state as a site of restitution in the case of Blacks and as an organizing concept for visions of Native

sovereignty. Amadahy and Lawrence argue that Black “struggles for an equitable distribution of resources within or among nation-states that form a part of anti-racist and diasporic struggles of Black peoples can be critiqued from indigenist points of view for internalizing colonial concepts of how peoples relate to land, resources, and wealth. There is no indigenous framework around which such struggles are carried out.”<sup>48</sup> Conversely they argue, “if indigenous sovereigntists expect Black community support of nation-to-nation negotiation processes regarding land, resources, and reparations, we have to recognize how Blacks become completely disempowered in that process. Through such a process, indigenous nations inherently (and begrudgingly) acknowledge Canada’s nation-hood. But black people have no power or even validity in the Canadian or US nation-state.”<sup>49</sup>

Amadahy and Lawrence argue that Black and racialized people “who may have little real allegiance to the Canadian settler state but have no option for their survival but to fight for increasing power within it” are not provided with a viable alternative within visions of Native sovereignty as they stand.<sup>50</sup> This leaves Black people residing on Native land in a tight conundrum. *Marika looks at Christine.*

***Marika :** What will happen to Black people under Native sovereignty, particularly Black prisoners? Will Native people incarcerate Blacks when they are in control?*

***Christine:** Well in order to free the land, we can’t have prisons erected on them, right?*

***Abi:** Yeah, abolishing and demolishing prisons has to be a part of any decolonizing work...<sup>51</sup>*

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<sup>48</sup> Amadahy and Lawrence, p. 123

<sup>49</sup> Ibid

<sup>50</sup> Ibid

<sup>51</sup> I recreate the dialogue I remember taking place at our meeting/ceremony where we faced and moved through a space of impasse. Recollection of June/July 2007 meeting in my apartment.

*Smoke bends, dives, dissipates and another arm of smoke unfurls shifting more air. I cannot explain in detail how we came to this place other than that. Perhaps an apt and available description is an epistemology of smoke and the elements.*

### **An Epistemology of Smoke:**

*We could not think/reason ourselves out of the conundrum that in order to be Black citizens or to be a sovereign Native nation required one another's deaths (material and social). We had to work through the fear of our ancestors and our own. This struggle had been waged many times before us. The element of smoke had to move in between us and through us. Smoke moved through nostrils, hair, mucus membranes of eyes, in pores and out, across tongues, into lungs. We needed to breathe the smoke in so we could move forward with each other, past our distrust. Past a slave ancestor's resentment at his Cherokee owner; "Why did you adopt that white man's system, rip out my soul, make me the dog of the hemisphere and sold my children?" Smoke...Past the outrage of a Comanche woman who curses a Black "Buffalo Solider" and screams "Why have you slain my only child?" Smoke...*

*The smoke of sage and incense during the ceremony had always registered a sacred space for me. It tracked a process outside of me however, I never imagined until reflecting on our work in this way that it could also track movements within us. Smoke not only danced to the wind and particles in the room but to the psychic and emotional shifts of the people enacting the ceremony. We use the smoke of the sage in order to register the movement of the spirit. The smoke moves with the spirit both moving our consciousness and being moved by it. Alexander argues that elements or forces of nature often gather at crossroads and difficult places.*

energies or forces: they are forces of nature, “the metaphysic of that which is elemental” Wind. Water. Fire. *[I add Smoke]*. Thunder. Lightning. Volcano. The Cosmic geography of Sky. Earth. Trees. Forest. Park. Mountain. River. Ocean. Rocks. Stones. They each have their own consciousness. They cluster at those places that the imagination fills with movement, upheaval, and contradiction: the crossroads, the railroads track, and the cemetery...<sup>52</sup>

I also argue that they also cluster at the space of impasse, disagreement, mistrust and the possibility of coalition. I think of smoke as representing the unseen spirit that one can't see but can feel its effects. In the second epigraph that opens this chapter, Jacqui Alexander compares the Sacred, what I call spirit, to the wind. The only trace that it has been present is sometimes the evidence of an uprooted tree. As I track the smoke of our ceremony space, I also follow an epistemic shift. A shift from a reliance on the sole power of reasoning with one another to a requisite invoking of the sacred in order to shift our own and one another's consciousness.

I want to take spirit, specifically the presence of ancestors and guides during ceremony seriously. I want to consider the presence of the ancestors in order to deal with ceremonial time. I also attempt to deal with the ancestors and ceremonial time in ways that do not fetishize “spirit talk” as a mysterious and impenetrable subjugated knowledge of the subaltern. I want to deal with it as a viable epistemology and way of knowing, making sense of and orienting oneself in the world. The fact that the spirits of a former female slave, a Native woman who watched the slaughter of her child and the spirit of a Seminole descended from Black and Native who bridged the divide could all be in the room challenges our notions of time and space or time-space. On one level to accept this as true would require that we reconceptualize time.

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<sup>52</sup> Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, p. 294

Paula Gunn Allen who has been critiqued for a brand of Native essentialism has argued as other non-western thinkers have that Native time is non-linear. In fact, Native time is timeless.<sup>53</sup> Timelessness is the place where one is whole. It is a place of achronicity in which “the individual and the universe are tight.”<sup>54</sup> In this state of timelessness, in ceremonial and in Indian time, the ancestors can move along with us during a ceremony. In the ceremony, space is not linear and time is not sequential.<sup>55</sup>

Gunn Allen, uses a hoop dancer as an analogy to explain the spherical movement of time and the cyclical nature of time.<sup>56</sup> “Dancing in the midst of turning, whirling hoops is a means of transcending the limits of chronological time and its traumatizing disease causing effects. Chronological time denies that an individual is one with the surroundings. The hoop dancer dances within what encircles him, demonstrating how the people live in motion within the circling spirals of time and space.”<sup>57</sup> In the beginning of this chapter, I described my surprise at the sense of ease and facility at which I experienced a dramatic shift in the course of our group’s consciousness. The anxiety and the weightiness of the question “what will happen to Black people under Native sovereignty” that anticipated the response, “I don’t know, perhaps die” is met with vulnerability and reciprocity. The response is that Native sovereignty as we have imagined it until this moment will have to transform itself. In fact, we can re-imagine it now.

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<sup>53</sup> Gunn Allen, *Sacred Hoop*, p. 150

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150

The transformative power of the ceremony and ritual, particularly the states of flux that people move through and survive, is in part due to the way ceremonial time works. Gunn Allen helps explain what I felt as a sense of facility and ease—or the fact that someone did not have to die, go crazy, become overwhelmed by the presence of ancestors, or fall apart to get there—that “ceremonial time is constituted by psychic integration.”<sup>58</sup> Ceremonial time can often be “balanced, integrated and empowering.”<sup>59</sup> The fears, anxieties, and attempts at alliance and healing that our ancestors had attempted before us were with us in the fifth floor apartment where we sat that summer day.

Describing her own experience of integrated ceremonial time, Jacqui Alexander talks about the time shifting power that the embodied work of inhabiting the sacred invites.

I am learning that the embodiment of the Sacred dislocates clock time, meaning linearity, which is different than living in the past or being bound by tradition. The feeling conveyed that afternoon of La Negra’s announcement was one of being somewhat lost in time, of time standing still, the encounter with time...time becomes a moment, an instant, experienced in the now, but also a space crammed with moments of wisdom about a series of events already having inhabited different moments, or with the intention of inhabiting them, while all occurring simultaneously in this instant, in this space, as well as in other instants and spaces of which we are not immediately aware. Spirit energy both travels in Time and travels differently through linear time, so that there is no distance between space and time that it is unable to navigate. Thus, linear time does not exist because energy simply does not obey the human idiom.<sup>60</sup>

Alexander and Gunn Allen’s meditations on time are important for me to analyze for a number of reasons. They are both able to articulate the presence of spirit and its significance in catalyzing transformative change. The ways that they articulate their understanding of ceremony and the sacred are elucidated in ways that make us take them

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Alexander, *Pedagogies*, p. 309

seriously as frames for making sense of the world. For me they give ceremony and the sacred the analytical weight of western notions of time and space. The seriousness in which they treat them and in which I analyze them position them as counter epistemologies to time specifically. Counter epistemologies particularly as they relate to and push back against western notions of linear time are essential to the development of decolonial theory.

### **Decolonial Time**

Decolonizing time helps me un-sync myself not only from the march of western chronology but also from western post structural critiques of enlightenment thought. Often our critiques of hegemonic western thought end up reifying western theory. Post colonial studies which often attempts to speak back to coloniality often speaks back through the voice of Foucault (see Stoler).<sup>61</sup> Michel Foucault's work animates a good deal of work in settler colonial studies, particularly as it pertains to how settler relations persist through time and space. During my initial attempts to locate Black subjectivity in settler colonial relations, I relied too heavily on the Foucauldian analytics of attending to genealogies of power.<sup>62</sup> The way that I previously explained how settler colonialism, specifically invasion, could show up in spaces that we understood as over determined by Blackness was through the Foucauldian inflected theories of Patrick Wolfe.

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<sup>61</sup> Ann Laura Stoler. *Race and the education of desire: Foucault's history of sexuality and the colonial order of things*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995). Also see, Allaine Cerwonka. *Native to the Nation: disciplining landscapes and bodies in Australia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004. I would even argue that Edward Said's Classic text *Orientalism* is indebted to Foucault in order to realize its colonial discourse analysis. See Edward Said. *Orientalism*. (New York: Vintage, 1979)

<sup>62</sup> See Ramon Grosfoguel. "The Epistemic Decolonial Turn: Beyond political-economy paradigms 1." *Cultural studies* 21, no. 2-3 (2007): 211-223 in this essay Grosfoguel argues that post colonial scholars particularly from South Asia limit the radical potential of their critique because they critique Eurocentrism using the epistemology of Europe. They rely on Gramsci, Foucault and Derrida to challenge Europe. A more radical critique could emerge from subaltern communities.

Patrick Wolfe's work is valuable for a number of reasons. I continue to use his work when necessary. However, I was seduced by the flexibility of Wolfe's invasion as structure thesis in a way that prevented me from seeing this flexibility, particularly its temporal/spatial elasticity, elsewhere. Presentation after presentation I would quote without a caveat the following passage from Wolfe's essay "Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native."

When invasion is recognized as a structure rather than an event, its history does not stop—or, more to the point, become trivial---when it moves from the era of frontier homicide. Rather, narrating that history involves charting the continuities, discontinuities, adjustments, and departures whereby a logic that initially informed frontier killing transmutes into different modalities, discourses and institutional formations as it undergirds the historical development and complexification of settler society.<sup>63</sup>

This passage is brilliantly crafted and illumines settler colonialism's dynamism, particularly its "continuities, discontinuities, adjustments and departures." These "continuities, discontinuities, adjustments and departures" provided me with the precise language to use and the precise places to begin to look for Black female bodies on settler colonial landscapes. I would often argue using Wolfe's logic that settler colonial power which "initially informed frontier killing transmutes into different modalities, discourses and institutional formations" in order to explain the way that the power of settler colonialism moved through linear time. I argued like Wolfe that we must acknowledge settler colonialism's capacity to deploy other disciplinary regimes, forms of violence and other bodies for its multiple projects. Like Wolfe and like Foucault, I was tracking power (genocide, land theft, social death of the slave) though diffuse and elusive through linear

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<sup>63</sup> Patrick Wolfe, Settler Colonialism and the elimination of the native. *Journal of Genocide Research*, 8(4), (2006), p. 402

time and space, Wolfe also relies on the logic of the structure—another legacy of linear time and teleological progression—to describe the way invasion occurs. In accord with Wolfe, I was asking, how did settler colonialism show up when it moved from “the era of frontier homicide?”

How did settler colonialism show up there, then here and over there became my question and my analytic of time and space when I relied on Wolfe. However, Gunn Allen and Alexander’s notion of time is not linear and power does not move through a structure that can become external to or function outside of demarcated eras (frontier homicide). Time, space, power and people move together. The slave was always moving within the time and space of settler colonial relations with the settler and the Native. The slave, the Native and the settler all have different relationships to time and space. They also deploy time and space differently. Further, settler colonial power did not have to take on the modality of slavery to propel itself through time and space and become relevant to the Black. The Black subject moved within and was constituted by settler colonial relations and its multiple forms of death and time space. Likewise slavery constitutes settler colonial power. Frontier homicide and settler colonialism did not make an adjustment or departure in order to shape and constitute Black life. Time, space, people and power move together. They are connected and moving in space.

Unfortunately, Native and Black women’s epistemologies and worldviews are viewed as particular and embodied experiences that could not possibly have a broad enough application to be considered social thought and certainly not theory. The era of frontier homicide is still with all of us. It is in the room during an INCITE ceremony and all the people, spirits, smoke and energy in that room must contend with it. I really

appreciate the work that Alexander has done to develop a methodology for reconceptualizing time, specifically forms of colonial time. Alexander argues that we need to develop analytic and pedagogical tools that are palimpsestic in nature.

Time is scrambled and palimpsestic, in all the Worlds, with the pre-modern, the modern, the postmodern and the paramodern coexisting globally. But it is not only the global coexistence of different technologies of time telling that is of concern to us here. The central idea is that of the palimpsest—a parchment that has been inscribed two or three times, the previous text having been imperfectly erased and remaining and therefore still partially visible...The idea of the “new” structured through the “old” scrambled, palimpsestic character of time, both jettisons the truncated distance of linear time and dislodges the impulse for incommensurability, which the ideology of distance creates. It thus rescrambles the “here and now” and the “then and there” to a “here and there” and “then and now” and makes visible what Payal Banerjee calls the ideological traffic between and among formations that are otherwise positioned as dissimilar. Using the social formations we have designated as colonial, neocolonial and neo-imperial is not to suggest a logical teleology in which one form of state morphs into the other. Instead, we want to hold onto the historical specificity through which those various social relations are constituted at that same time that we examine the continuity and disjunctures of practices within and among various state formations. These practices are neither frozen nor neatly circumscribed within temporalities that never collide or even meet.<sup>64</sup>

I quote Alexander at length, because using the palimpsest as an analytic of time, we can rethink linear time and the linearity of Wolfe’s structure of invasion. Wolfe describes invasion as a type of power that transmutes or morphs over time and through institutions and discourses. When time is scrambled and palimpsestic, power exists in the “then and now” and can be found both “here and there.” I certainly do not want to position Wolfe’s method of tracking the way power moves through time as in opposition to Black and Native women’s notions of time and power. Wolfe’s linear time and his structure allow him to render settler colonial power, specifically invasion, visible in the present similar to the ways that Black and Native women’s notions of time and space allow. However,

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<sup>64</sup> Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 190-191

Wolfe does not allow us to reconceptualize time and he does not direct us to an epistemological frame outside of the West.

I want to shift our epistemological vantage point to non-Western or decolonial methods to rethink power, time and space. The palimpsest and ceremonial time also require that we attend to historical specificity and the ways that power looks different depending on the context (time-space); however there are important emphases that point to a different epistemological frame. The structure and linearity of power still persist in Wolfe's theorem. There are discreet and bounded eras that the structure must overcome or bridge. For Alexander and Gunn eras do not end. Alexander in particular pays attention to social formations or colonialisms that emerge under certain contexts (time-spaces); however, they always remain as a trace, modality, discourse, and form that emerging social formations draw from. *Our ancestors' whispers in my fifth floor apartment were always informing the Native-Black feminist formations we were giving birth to in the summer of 2007.*

While I emphasize the importance of spirit, it is important that it is not fetishized. Within a decolonial praxis spirit works alongside of reason. We respect each mode and its way of negotiating the world while we watch for each of their respective limits. Spirit was certainly needed in order for the Black and Native women of INCITE to take the leaps of faith that they did to re-imagine a decolonized world.

### **Leaping into Chaos**

Some would call it faith. What would make Black women consider giving up on post independence Trinidad/Tobago, Ethiopia, South Africa, U.S. based Black nationalist yearnings for reparations and land in North America when there is nowhere else to go?

What would compel Black women to consider becoming what Saidiya Hartman would call stateless?<sup>65</sup> Black women in the INCITE group faced the reality that working with Native communities to dream and create a vision of indigenous sovereignty may present us with better options for survival than our current investments in gaining rights from the Canadian or US nation-states.

While this place may seem forlorn and desolate for the Black subject, there is a historical context for this kind of alliance building. In the final section of their article, Lawrence and Amadahy leave us with the story of the Rotinosoni, indigenous people under siege by colonialism and Black slaves escaping to the North as an example of historic alliances. In the early phases of colonial expansion in the northern part of Turtle Island, Black and Native communities had an invested interest in building alliances because “the colonial project threatened the very existence of both Black and Indigenous people.”<sup>66</sup>

The Rotinosoni helped slaves escaping to the North. Black slaves became new members of Bear, Wolf and Turtle clans of the Rotinosoni.<sup>67</sup> In the Rotinosoni communities, Blacks were viewed as members who “injected new life, new blood, and new ideas into nations threatened with extinction by European diseases and genocidal policies.”<sup>68</sup> In the southern portion of Turtle Island, that bears of the colonial name the United States, the story of the Seminole “nation” recounts a similar Native-Black alliance. Survival often requires the refashioning of identities and the formation of new

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<sup>65</sup> Saidiya Hartman. *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007)

<sup>66</sup> Lawrence and Amadahy, *Settlers or Allies?*, p. 127

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127

communities. This story begs the question, to whom do we run for cover from the nation-state? The work of Native-Black formations, specifically Native-Black feminist formations like Toronto INCITE may provide some of the answers to this question.

Within INCITE's Black-Native feminist formation, Blackness and Nativeness become positions of motion. Our analytics and politics do not reproduce what Sandy Grande would call the "theory of property holders" found in "whitestream feminisms."<sup>69</sup> Within our Black-Native formation, Black feminist hemispheric politics claim a statelessness and Native women conceptualize sovereignty outside of western notions of the nation-state and a "politics of recognition."<sup>70</sup> Practicing a radical relationality and taking up an ethics of mutual care the possibility of uprooting oneself, adjusting and refashioning our desires in order to make sure that we all survive is possible. In fact, it is preferred. Coming into this knowledge and this politic is a struggle and it emerges from a frightening place, the Lordean space of chaos. Lorde often references the transformative space of chaos. In her keynote speech at the National Third World Gay and Lesbian Conference in 1979, Lorde tells her audience.

The ignorance will end when each of us begins to seek out and trust the knowledge deep inside of us, when we dare to go into that chaos which exists before understanding and come back with new tools for action and change. For it is from within that deep knowledge that our visions are fueled, and it is our vision which lays the groundwork for our actions and our future.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Sandy Grande. *Red Pedagogy: Native American Social and Political Thought*. (Lanham, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2004), p.148

<sup>70</sup> Andrea Smith, "Indigeneity, Settler Colonialism and White Supremacy," *Racial Formation in the Twenty-First Century*. Editors Daniel Martinez Hosang, LaBennett, Oneka, and Pulido, Laura. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), p. 77. Smith distinguishes between Native politics that rely on recognition and Native politics that reject a politics of recognition for a commitment to dismantling settler colonialism. She states, "When one seeks recognition, one defines indigenous struggle as exclusionary as possible so that claims to the state can be based on unique and special status. In contrast, if one seeks to actually dismantle settler colonialism; one defines indigenous struggle broadly; in order to build a movement of sufficient power to challenge the system.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, p. 207

Chaos is a productive space it inspires new action and new space. Black issues and Native issues lose their boundaries, at times merge and appear anew. “In order to free the land, you must abolish the prison.” In these new chaotic and decolonized spaces, borders recede and a new permeable and porous Black feminist politics reveals itself. Black women are called to lose their spatial coordinates once more. Giving up on “post colonial” Ethiopia, South Africa, Trinidad and post-race/post civil rights U.S. is a disorienting project. Blackness resides in a hemisphere connected by the erosion of national borders.

A Black feminist politics that is always considering its own freedom alongside Native self determination and decolonization is also possible. Native feminism and the various forms of sovereignty that are committed to abolishing anti-Black racism as an indispensable part of decolonization also a possibility. This Black-Native feminist formation constitutes a new space where new geographies are possible. The body constitutes a ceremonial space which reached beyond the bounds of reason into a space “before understanding” produced a new analytic and ethic.<sup>72</sup> The US and Canada disappear into a landmass and place called Turtle Island, and the Caribbean becomes a neighborhood off of the Island.<sup>73</sup> INCITE becomes the site of a new Black-Native woman political formation that questions the settler colonialisms, imperial/colonial feminisms and their genealogies. Black women, Native women and other women of

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> TJ Bryan’s blog <http://darkdaughta.blogspot.com/2007/02/settler-colonial-realizations-take-ii.html>. In TJ Bryan’s blog she recounts her shifting understanding of her relationship to her “home” Barbados after understanding the ways that the emergence of nation-states in the Caribbean enact a form of genocide against Native peoples. Among one of the many ways that she tries to discursively challenge settler colonial power in the hemisphere is to name the Caribbean as a “neighborhood off the mainland” in lieu of nation-state names inherited from settler colonial and colonial forms of power.

color must struggle for analytic and political clarity about the ways that settler colonial power structures their relationships to one another. Women of Color may be a category to claim in some circumstances and one to refuse in others.

INCITE also becomes a part of a longer history of the struggles of Black and Indigenous people who sought out new forms of sociality that opposed the violence of genocide and slavery. The Rotinosoni and the Seminole give birth to Black-Native formations like INCITE. As a new formation committed to decolonization, I think that INCITE challenges both notions of feminist politics and what we imagine coalition to be. In the concluding chapter, I discuss a politics of refusal and a commitment to flux as modes of critique and decolonial praxes that challenge us to rethink radical politics and coalition.

## *Chapter Six: Of Water and Land*

Yemaya, that broad expanse of Ocean, who lives on sea and on land has pushed past modernity's mode of reason and taken up temporary sojourn on the insides of this artificial enclosure, come to accept, to cleanse, to bless, to remind us that in the same way the breaking of the waves does not compromise the integrity of the Ocean, so too anything broken in our lives cannot compromise that cosmic flow to wholeness. The body cannot but surrender in order to make way for this tidal flow. And this, too, necessitates practice...<sup>1</sup>

Land is not the traditional element used to analogize Black fungibility or think about moving, exchangeable and unstable Black diasporan subjectivity. Rarely does land evoke the kind of flexibility, elusiveness and trickster like qualities that Black diasporan bodies symbolize in the Western Hemisphere. Water, most often the Ocean, has been our faithful metaphor.<sup>2</sup> Throughout this project, I have been thinking about the question, what becomes of our metaphor of flux when our waves hit the shore? What happens when Blackness docks, gets twisted and entangled in settlement, encounters the Native and a new self on dry land? This project has been a conjuring of these coordinates.

Black politics became complicated for me as I had to think about myself in relation to forms of power and discursive structures in which I was not familiar. As the Black female bodies in this dissertation have demonstrated through their chaotic choreography across settler colonial landscapes, Black femininity remains a site of flux. Slavery and settler colonial power need fungible bodies in order to reinvigorate their thrust towards producing property in various forms. Blackness remains fungible, accumulated and a site of malleability, like water, even on the most arid tracks of land.

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<sup>1</sup> Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, p. 322

<sup>2</sup> See the following texts: Paul Gilroy. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), Dionne Brand. *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to belonging*. (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2012), Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley. "Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic: Queer Imaginings of the Middle Passage." *GLQ*, 14, no. 2/3 (2008): 191.

Black femininity in flux is the most robust analytic framework and politic available to *In the Clearing*.

While traversing settler colonial landscapes, Black femininity in flux as an analytic from which to theorize the co-constituting nature of settler colonial and slave making power encountered a friend for a part of that journey. Native feminist theories and praxes of decolonization joined her on the journey for at least part of the way. They rejoiced, argued, stopped, sat on the side of the road, made ceremony, invited new/old understandings, and gave each other a new name that they would use to greet one another when they met again. The new names, grammar, analytic units, inter and transdisciplinary routes that this journey has taken have implications for critical theory and political activism.

This study makes several contributions. Chapter Two proposes a new way to view the space of the plantation, and the Black female slave body. The settlement-plantation and the Settled-Slave offer us new vocabulary and new analytical frames. In Chapter Three processes of settlement and the figure of the Settler are redefined and re-theorized. Discussing Black situatedness in settler colonial states requires precision. While the term “Black Settler” is abandoned in this project, there is no embrace of a posture of innocence or denial. Innocence is not a viable frame in this hemisphere. We must all struggle for a better way, not struggle towards and innocence that we will never find.

Part two of this study focused on the contemporary manifestations of settler colonial relations and anti-Black racism in the settler states of the U.S. and Canada. Chapter Four theorized the ways that attempts to rehabilitate the Black Matriarch and the

Black family are not solely manifestations of anti-Black racism. Black women's gender, sexuality and social formations that do not conform to the property-making mandate threaten settler colonial heteronormative gender-sexual formations. Chapter Five emphasizes the value of flexible and temporally bound feminist formations. These new and sometimes divergent feminist projects and visions are necessary for decolonizing social relations in settler colonial states. Fluctuations, chaotic and daring death drops into spaces of the unknown are necessary and essential calisthenics that must be taken up by Black/Feminist Studies, Native/Feminist Studies and American Studies. While being in a state of flux requires much it also generously provides.

### **Flux: Like a Slave Slipping onto Shore**

A question often asked by the Black diasporan subject is: does this state of always being in flux, remaining rootless, stateless and without home or land require too much of Blackness? A brilliant colleague of mind earnestly and compellingly asked me to think about the fact that my work continually constructs a Black female subject that "is always searching for another mode of being."<sup>3</sup> What does this kind of subjectivity require of the Black female subject? Is there ever a resting place for her? This is an important question. Why must Blackness always be in or represent a space of transgression? Why can't it simply just survive? Is not survival radical enough in and of itself?

In *The Witch's Flight*, Kara Keeling poses a similar argument. Reflecting on the film *Sankofa*, Keeling argues that some versions of Black cultural nationalism reproduce narrow or exclusionary versions of the human that seeks to assert Black humanity

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<sup>3</sup> Darius Bost asked me to think about the consequences of this kind of subjectivity for the Black slave, and the Black female slave specifically. Is this the kind of existence that I wanted to relegate Black femininity to? Could the Black female subject ever be innocent in this project? Even in slavery they are in some way implicated in the Native's genocide.

through Black bodies that risk their lives for freedom. Keeling is interested in thinking about what “alternatives to the human exist” in the slaves who simply survived. Keeling argues that “black common sense contains not only an account of black rebellions and resistance but also record of the slaves’ survival achieved precisely by consenting to aspects of their enslavement.”<sup>4</sup> I agree with Keeling. Further, I contend that flux is not an unfortunate or tragic positionality. It is ultimately a positionality of survival and enables possibilities for other kinds of futures. I turn to some thinking that Audre Lorde did about Black Americans and Black people of the Americas as it pertained to the absence of land, and a landing space.

In her October 10, 1984 journal entry Lorde is remembering Germany and the Afro-European women that she met there. She turns back to the enduring and collective haunt of the Black diaspora. She reflects on what it means for have no land, no resting place,

As an African American woman, I feel the tragedy of being an oppressed hyphenated person in America, of having no land to be our primary teacher. And this distorts us in so many ways. Yet there is a vital part we play as Black people in the liberation consciousness of every freedom seeking people upon this globe, no matter what they say they think about us as Black Americans. And whatever our differences are that make for difficulty in communication between us and other oppressed peoples, as Afro-Americans we must recognize the promise we represent for some new social synthesis that the world had not yet experienced.<sup>5</sup>

I remember engaging in a recent conversation about the ways that having no land or having land shapes Black diasporic desire. The question or anxiety at the core of this conversation was; is land or more specifically the desire for a land of your own necessary

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4 See Kara Keeling. *The Witch’s Flight: The Cinematic, the Black Femme and the Image of Common Sense*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 63

5 Audre Lorde. “Burst of Light.” in *I Am Your Sister: Collected and Unpublished Writings of Audre Lorde*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 95

in order to develop a healthy sense of self as a Black diasporan subject? Can the terms in which we express our humanity be legible outside of notions of land as property, nation and therefore our human (exclusive and racialized) home?

I think that being able to catch the flow of change is incredibly healthy and necessary for withstanding the violent uncertainty that modernity introduces into our lives. The strength and grace required to change one's circumstances and most importantly ones desires sometimes on a dime is nothing short of divine. One of Black women's most heralded theologians Octavia Butler professed the gospel of change, "God is Change" through the Earthseed's founder and leader Lauren Oya Olamina in the Parables series.<sup>6</sup> The experience of being in flux, of constantly unraveling the self, of undoing oneself (in order to redo the self), of never settling, packing up belongings time and time again because this camp ground won't do can't do—is a unique and valid way of being. A Black subjectivity which chooses to be (it is not essential or innate in all Blacks) self conscious, self-critical and always searching for a more just way of being has inspired a number of critical theories and Black social movements. Black women who claim statelessness and lose their mothers as ways of breaking the stranglehold of fictive origin stories is a powerful analytic.<sup>7</sup>

So powerful and compelling that it has brought Western theories' critiques of themselves into dialogue with Black Studies analytics of flux and refusal. Judith/Jack Halberstam's politics of failure or refusal admittedly take inspiration from Hartman's maternal loss and homelessness. Halberstam confesses, "beginning with the injunction 'Lose your mother' and building toward a conclusion that will advocate a complete

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6 Octavia Butler. *Parable of the Talents*. (New York: Warner Books, 1998), p. 3

7 Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, 2006

dismantling of self, I explore a feminist politics that issues not from a doing, but from an undoing.”<sup>8</sup> When western critiques of itself like queer theory begin to talk about “undoing” they attempt to bring themselves into conversation with Black and Native women’s theory as well as other decolonial forms of theory and praxis. While Halberstam situates queer theory’s politics of failure and refusal within a shared tradition of Black Feminist, post colonial and other radical politics, Halberstam does make an important qualification and distinction. Even though queer theory is a critical theory that resists some of the violent normalizing features Western thought, queer theory does not share genealogies of anti-colonial and anti-racist thought and praxis. Halberstam makes the following clarification, “The politics of refusal emerges in its most potent form from anticolonial and antiracist texts and challenges colonial authority by absolutely rejecting the role of colonized within what Walter Mignolo, citing Anibal Quijano, has called “a coloniality of power.”<sup>9</sup>

What is important to understand about this Black feminine politics of flux and refusal which lines up with Native women’s decolonial praxis is that it is not innate or essential to being Black. Being in flux certainly emerges from an ontological position of fungibility on the settlement-plantation, but it is sustained as a powerful political positionality through a commitment to building ethical and affirming relationships. The choice to be unsettled, to rest nowhere comfortably is also a choice to be vulnerable and relational.<sup>10</sup> This positionality emerges out of an ethics of mutuality and interdependence.

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8 (Judith/Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011),p. 124

9 Ibid., p. 126

10 According to McKittrick, liberatory geographies “ invoke a politics of place which calls into question how geographic liberation is not a matter of carving out a place, or a comfortable situatedness, or

It is not a position of self denial, asceticism and forlorn deprivation. This choice to remain fluid and in relationship is lived out by the Black and Native women of the Toronto INCITE group. What was at stake for Black women of INCITE in envisioning and fighting for Native sovereignty was the possibility of incarceration and loss of one's bearings? Everything was at stake, yet there was also so much more to gain. The analytic uttered at the crossroads to create a bridge at the space of impasse, "In order to free the land, we must abolish the prison" was as much a statement about beginnings as it was endings.

Fred Moten and Stefano Harney offer the following musings on abolition. "What is, so to speak, the object of abolition? Not so much the abolition of prisons but the abolition of a society that could have prisons, that could have slavery, that could have the wage, and therefore not abolition as the elimination of anything but abolition as the founding of a new society."<sup>11</sup> Black women within the decolonized space of the INCITE ceremony could accept an invitation into a new and always changing notion of Native sovereignty that removed all inflections of Western nation-states' conceptions of "nation" and "sovereignty." A vision of Native sovereignty that was not organized around a "politics of recognition" held promise.<sup>12</sup> Native sovereignty's "Nation" and "Sovereignty" that at times carried intonations and connotations of property (Black fungibility) and possession inherited from negotiations with settler finally rang new in the

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ownership" See Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and Cartographies of Struggle*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2006), p. 106

11 Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, "The University and the Undercommons: Seven Theses" *Social Text*, 79 (Vol. 22, No. 22), Summer 2004, p. 101-115 p. 114)

12 Andrea Smith, "Indigeneity, Settler Colonialism and White Supremacy," *Racial Formation in the Twenty-First Century*. Editors Daniel Martinez Hosang, LaBennett, Oneka, and Pulido, Laura. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), p. 77.

ear. Black statelessness yet simultaneous belonging within a vision of Native sovereignty without the baggage of property became the decolonial horizon. Similar to Moten and Harney's vision for a new history of American Studies, INCITE's vision saw a future society and existence where "property [is] unknown."<sup>13</sup>

Where INCITE Toronto ended is the perfect place to revive a conversation about coalition. INCITE's failure, both in its politics of flux, refusal and unbecoming, and in its actual dissolution are instructive for thinking about what coalition can and cannot achieve. The poster from the two woman show "Hazards of Occupation" is a piece of ephemera from our work that I hold dear. It represents a moment where we thought that alliance was possible. We thought that where Women of Color politics had often failed in settler colonial states, perhaps a more astute and contextually specific Native and Black women politics would prevail. However, it would not. We would eventually fail.<sup>14</sup>

When I think about INCITE's "failure" six years later I think about it differently. Perhaps it was just the end of a wonderful relationship. Perhaps it was just the end of our time. Perhaps that is precisely how coalition is supposed to work. And our coalition worked in ways that were affirming, powerful, pedagogical and lasting for its members and the other political work that we have gone on to do. Our coalitional space emerged, twirled and then dissipated like smoke. Two communities, from two foundational ontological positions on this landmass were forced together as they have often been. We made something new as others before us had done. We existed for the time necessary

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13 Moten and Harney, p. 114

14 As a group we stopped meeting in the early summer of 2008. However, we had an official conversation via email in February 2009. In that email we discussed the ways we would go about telling INCITE National, other women in the city and admitting to ourselves that we were done.

and will show up in histories, myths and memories like this one.<sup>15</sup> We ended with a better understanding of the work we had not yet accomplished and still needed to do. Coalitions are temporary in nature, and do not solely mark histories of success and accomplishment.

What we learned can also be instructive for critics and those pessimistic about coalition politics; particularly the ways that coalitions often deny and subsequently reproduce anti-Black racism. This ambivalence is often expressed by those who think of themselves as Afro-pessimists. Jared Sexton's ambivalence emerges not from the intent of those committed to coalition but because of the reliance on comparison and shared struggles as a meeting place and point of departure. Sexton argues, "The problem is not so much the principled or strategic interest in a global solidarity but rather the tactical translation of such sentiments into arrangements of alliance and the guiding assumptions on which the alliance is based."<sup>16</sup> People of color tend to analogize their experiences and liken them to "slavery." Colonialism, imperialism, anti-immigrant sentiment and slavery/anti-black racism are all alike. This comparative model and analysis rather than a relational analysis is what hinders coalition and makes coalition susceptible to anti-black racism.<sup>17</sup> I will admit that INCITE started off this way.

In the beginning, we asked the question, "How does the violence of settler colonialism impact both Black and Native women?" This premise assumed that the structural position of the Black and the Native female were the same or at least could be

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15 Our work has been cited and referenced in the article "Settlers or Allies" as an example of Black and Native coalition work in Canada.

16 Jared Sexton, "People of Color Blindness: Notes on the Afterlife of Slavery" *Social Text*, 103, Summer 2010)p. 47

17 Ibid.

analogous and comparable. We did not ask, “How do the violence of slavery, its afterlife, and settler colonialism impact Black and Native women; and when might these forms of violence inform one another?” If I had been writing this PhD at the time, I may have asked “How is the violence of Conquest which is constituted by slavery and anti-Black racism impacting our lives as Native and Black women?” One of the limitations of nonblack people of color politics is the way that conditional experiences of violence are compared to gratuitous form of violence.<sup>18</sup> Quoting Jared Sexton, “If the oppression of nonblack people of color in, and perhaps beyond, the United States seems conditional to the historic instance and functions at a more restricted empirical scope, antiblackness seems invariant and limitless (which does not mean that the former is somehow negligible and short-lived or that the latter is exhaustive and unchanging).”<sup>19</sup>

I agree with Sexton’s statement here, and I share his anxiety. However, I think that Sexton omits a critical and foundational form of “invariant and limitless” violence which is the violence of genocide.

Frank Wilderson, a colleague of Jared Sexton and fellow Afro-pessimist, would argue that the US comes into existence through the “ontological death of the Slave and the Savage.”<sup>20</sup> I would make a slight adjustment to Sexton’s thesis and argue that Native people fall outside of the people of color group that he critiques. Certainly, Native people can take on an anti-black politic however they do not do it from the same structural position in which nonblack and nonnative people of color enact it. Given the unique structural positions from which Black and Native people experience the world it is

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18 Wilderson

19 Sexton, “People of Color Blindness”, p. 47

20 Wilderson, *Red, White and Black*, p. 6

important to acknowledge the way that INCITE positioned themselves as a Black and Native women's formation. People of Color was not a sufficient position from which to begin a conversation about ontological death and the possibility of coalition. As Black and Native people who experienced multiple forms of actual and social death on an ongoing basis we had to confront genocide and the afterlife of slavery explicitly and on an ongoing basis. It was always in the room. What about genocide? What about the prison and Black death?

Sexton insists that, "What is lost for the study of nonblack nonwhite existence is a proper analysis of the true scale and nature of its material and symbolic power relative to the category of blackness."<sup>21</sup> I insist that the "scale and nature" of Blackness and Nativeness inform all analyses of violence in the US and settler states around the world. It is at the place of death and the desire for resurrecting a new society that Black and Native women met. INCITE created a discursive space of possibility. We created a space where the Slave and the Savage shared a grammar of suffering, genocide and fungibility.

Lorde has shared similar feelings as I and the other Black landless and motherless women of INCITE. In 1985, Lorde found herself sitting (as we often were) with other Black women to consider Native American women's lives.

Sitting with Black women from all over the earth has made me think a great deal about what it means to be indigenous, and what my relationship as a Black woman in North America is to the land-rights struggles of the indigenous peoples of this land, to Native American Indian women, and how we can translate that consciousness into a new level of working together. In other words, how can we use each other's differences in our common battles for a livable future?<sup>22</sup>

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21 Sexton, "People of Color Blindness", p. 48

22 Audre Lorde, *I Am Your Sister*, p. 109

Lorde's journal entry evokes the kind of ethics that I am seeking in this project. I want to fully acknowledge the horrifying truth of our different structural positions as Black and Native people in this hemisphere. I wish to see how these differences in the daily ways we die create the conditions of possibility for this nation and other nation-states in the Americas. In other words how do our respective deaths make other people's processes of self-actualization possible? The specific ways in which we die and are violently entangled in each other's murders is important to know. It holds the key to understanding how we might live. I want a future.

I am compelled by the kinds of futures that Black women all over the world are making, and making with Native communities in mind. My friend, Zainab Amadahy, a Black and Cherokee activist and artist, tells me of a place in southern Ontario where a livable future is possible. In southern Ontario, a community and a future has been attempted. A collective of queer, straight, and other identifying Black women artists a part of a group called Moyo Wa Africa bought some land. They raised children there, established sustainable food systems and created other sustainable ways of relating to the land themselves and Native communities. At some point, they decided to give the title of the land back to the Native people of that territory. They changed their relationship to property, to Native people and themselves. This is one of the many futures of which this project dreams. My understanding of Black feminine flux is similar to this story. It is a quest to always being open to having your desires transform. To change one's taste buds. To let die hard commitments to home, place, nation, and roots die so you can experience

what you never knew you wanted but now realize that you love. This project desires other kinds of futures.

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